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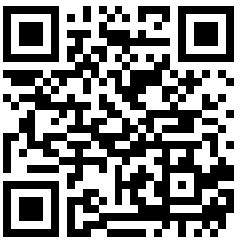

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72.
Week ending
October 17,
1903.

SHORT STORIES

PRICE
1D.

"I SNATCHED THE DOCUMENT AND THE NOTES, AND, RUSHING ACROSS THE ROOM, SLAMMED THE DOOR, LOCKING IT BEHIND ME. THEN I FLED!"

(A Thrilling Incident from our New Series, which Begins To-day. See inside.)

Kaputine

THE SAFE REMEDY FOR

Headache and Neuralgia.

CURES IN TEN MINUTES

Kaputine is not a single crude drug such as has been condemned as dangerous by the Medical Press, but is composed of several approved ingredients, having the full confidence of the Medical profession. The SAFE Remedy.

Kaputine is the only preparation of its kind used in British and Foreign Hospitals and infirmaries. Proof positive of its superior and sterling qualities.

Write to KAPUTINE, Huddersfield, for Samples Free.

Packets of 18 doses 1/1½;

Samples 1d. each.

Kindly mention this paper.

J. G. GRAVES'

J. G. Graves' Handsome Watch Catalogue, showing hundreds of designs, is sent Post Free. Ask for No. 1 Catalogue.

WATCHES

THE 'EXPRESS' (Reg.) English Lever, 50/-

BRITISH Manufacture throughout,

Keyless or Keywinding, is the finest value ever produced. Sent on receipt of a deposit of 5/- and your promise to complete the purchase in nine more monthly instalments of 5/-. *Important Advantages offered to Cash Purchasers.*

AGENTS WANTED. WRITE FOR TERMS.

J. G. GRAVES, 69 Division St., Sheffield.

BALDNESS.

A French Specialist who has devoted his life to the study of Hair Diseases, having cured thousands of almost hopeless cases, will send a FREE TRIAL PACKET of a genuine inexpensive treatment to all who write enclosing 2 stamps. New Hair grows in 4 to 10 Days.

Mr. O. R —— writes: "Your small sample has done me more good in a week than another much advertised remedy did in 6 months."

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2½% DEPOSIT ACCOUNTS repayable on demand. 2½%

The BIRKBECK ALMANACK, with full particulars, post free.

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Every article in new condition.

SPECIAL BARGAINS UNREDEEMED.

A full list sent post free on application.

SAVE £ d S

13/6 Gent's magnificent 18-ct. Gold-cased Chronograph Stop Watch, jewelled movement, perfect timekeeper, 10 years' written warranty; also fashionable curb (pocket to pocket) double Albert same quality (stamped and guaranteed), with handsome seal attached; three together.

12/6 Lady's handsome 18-carat gold-cased Keyless Watch, jewelled movement; exact timekeeper, 10 years' warranty; also fashionable long watch-guard, same quality (stamped and guaranteed) elegant West-End pattern the two together.

14/9 Furs.—Magnificent Alexandra Dagmar necklet and muff; beautiful real Russian sable hair, worth 4 guineas, not been worn; sacrifice for 14 9; approval willingly.

19/6 Genuine Italian Mandoline, by Stridente, Naples; fine tone; 21 ribbed, real rosewood, pearl and tortoiseshell inlaid, in sadd er-made case; approval.

8/9 Feather Boas; bankrupt stock; spec al bargains: real Ostrich Feather Boas, beautifully curly; perfectly new, in box; colours: grey and white, black and white and natural.

10/6 Lustrous diamond and ruby Half-hoop Ring, set with 5 matchless doublet rubies and 8 real diamonds; solid gold, hall-marked.

7/6 Curb Chain Bracelet, with paddock and safety chain; 18-carat, rolled gold (stamped and guaranteed), in velvet case.

6/9 Brooch; very handsome 18-carat rolled gold, 3 swallows in flight; set lovely turquoise and pearls in case.

21/- Lady's solid gold Keyless Watch, jewelled in 10 rubies, beautifully engraved case, splendid time-keeper; 10 years' written warranty; week's free trial.

8/6 Fashionable Long Neck-chain; genuine 18-carat rolled gold (stamped), beautifully finished; very choice d sign.

9/6 Organ Toned Melodeon; magnificent 26/- ir st ument. 12-fold bellows (metal bound), 3 sets steel bronze reeds, and 4 acting stops, including Tremolo and Diapason action; rich powerful tone, perfect order.

9/6 Nicklet with Heart Pendant, very pretty Princess of Wales rope pattern; heart set with pearls and turquoise.

12/6 Magnificent 5-row Pearl Collarette; finest quality, mounted with four bars of lustrous Orient diamonds, in velvet-lined case.

Any of the above articles sent on approval willingly.

R. H. DAVIS, Pawnbroker and Jeweller, 284 Brixton Road, London, S.W.

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MRS. GEO. FULLER, *who saved her husband.*

There is a cure for Drunkenness which has shed its radiance into thousands of hitherto desolate homes. It does its work so silently and surely that while the devoted wife, sister, or brother looks on, the drunkard is reclaimed, even against his will or without his knowledge or co-operation.

This famous remedy has guided many a young man to sobriety and into the high road of fortune, and has saved the father, the brother, and the son.

If you send name and address to the Ward Chemical Company, 51 Century House, Regent St., London, W., they will post enough of the remedy free to show how it is used in tea, coffee, or food.

Mrs. George Fuller says:—"*I am only too thankful my husband never now wishes for intoxicating liquor. I gave him Antidipso in his tea and coffee, and it has quite cured him.*" With the

FREE TRIAL

Packet will be sent books and testimonials from hundreds who have been cured, and everything needed to save those near and dear to you. Don't neglect to write to-day.

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49/6 BEDDING & DRAPERY

6/- DEPOSIT 1/6 WEEKLY

This Bale contains Pair Full-sized heavy Whitney Blankets, 1 quilt, red and white, blue and white; White Honeycomb Marcella or Red Twill your choice; Pair Full-size White Twill Sheets, 2 Pillow Cases, 1 Bolster Case, 5 Toilet Mats, 1 Toilet Cover, 2 Turkish Towels, Pair Fine Lace Curtains, 1 White Table Cloth, 1 Fringed Damask Table Cover, 6 Dusters, 2 Tea Cloths—28 Articles 49/6. How to pay. Send 6/- only, we send Bale, carriage paid for approval; balance can be paid in six monthly payments of 6/-, and one of 7/6. If you pay balance on receipt, send only 38/6, saving 5/-. Address below.

55 ARTICLES FOR 25/- ON CREDIT.

Our Gigantic Parcel contains 6 Table Knives and Forks, 6 Dessert Knives and Forks, 12 Tea Spoons, 6 Dessert Spoons, 6 Egg Spoons, 1 pair Sugar Tongs, 2 Table Spoons, 2 Mustard Spoons, and 2 Salt Spoons. We send, carriage paid, on receipt of 3s.; balance 1s. weekly.

PRUDENTIAL FURNISHING STORES, 150-150L Seven Sisters Rd., Holloway, N.

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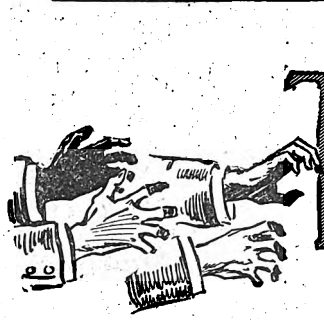
Exciting, New Series. **Starts To-day.**



The Pursuit of Sara

It was under very ordinary conditions that I, Sara Gillespie, entered the employ of Messrs. Templeton & Co., General Agents, of St. Helens, E.C. I broke off my connection with the firm under circumstances fraught with such menace to myself, such peril to the man I loved, that the recollection sends a chill to my heart, a shudder through my blood, recalls a vivid sense of danger.

The firm had advertised for an expert typine and shorthand writer at a good salary. I answered the advertisement, interviewed the senior partner, and secured the appointment. I had reason, I thought, to congratulate myself on my success. The hours were easy, the work light, and the salary £2 a week—larger than I had expected. I was earning very little at the time and caught eagerly at the chance of making more money. I had no one but myself to consult; my people were dead, my sweetheart, Noel Masterman, abroad. I had but my own judgment to rely on. That the judgment of nineteen is not infallible I discovered to my cost.

The office was a large and handsomely appointed one, with good, solid-looking furniture, the regulation Turkey carpet, massive desks, and a brand-new typewriter.

The firm, it appeared, were agents for all kinds of things, and all sorts of people, and their clients were to be found in every part of the world! Their correspondence was necessarily a heavy one, and the number of letters I had to type increased daily.

Mr. Templeton, the senior partner, before mentioned, instructed me in my duties. He was a middle-aged man with a fresh colour, a bald head, and neat-looking grey whiskers. He showed an unusually large expanse of shirt-front, which, with his carefully knotted tie, and handsome diamond pin, gave him an appearance of benevolent opulence that was most impressive.

He struck me as a very kind old gentleman indeed, the first day I saw him. I had reason later to alter my opinion.

I did not see much of the other members of the firm, Mr. Harrington Shackell and Rigby Starr respectively. As a rule they didn't turn up at the office until late in the afternoon, when the work was finished and it was time for me to go. Mr. Shackell was a broad-shouldered giant, square-jawed, steel-eyed, with a taciturn, at times morose, manner. He was a great contrast to the junior partner in more ways than one. Slight and fair, with a pink-and-white skin, blue eyes and curling lashes, Rigby Starr was invariably cheerful, and on the best of terms with himself and all the world.

Mr. Templeton, unlike the others, was very regular in his attendance. Punctually at half-past ten, with immaculate shirt-front and neatly brushed whiskers, he seated himself at his desk and proceeded to dictate the answers to his correspondence. The letters I had to type were not very interesting, they mostly consisted of price lists and quotations from the share market. We never seemed to get orders from our clients, their requirements seemed limited by the lists before mentioned.

Mr. Templeton appeared to take a kindly interest in me, and between whiles encouraged me to talk freely of my affairs. He was very sympathetic about Noel, and patted my shoulder in a fatherly sort of fashion when I told him my sweetheart was abroad. One afternoon he got quite confidential.

"He is a doctor, you say, Miss Gillespie? It ought not to be difficult for a promising young fellow like that to get an opening in England."

"He has no capital," I answered, sighing. "It's worse than useless for a doctor to start a practice without some hundreds to fall back upon."

"I don't think he should have left England all the same; it's not fair to you. Yes, I mean it, Miss Gillespie; he should have had more consideration."

"You mustn't blame him, Mr. Templeton," I said eagerly. "Noel couldn't help himself. He was brought up by his uncle, Sir Francis Masterman, who was awfully good to him. All his expenses at hospital were paid, and it was arranged that a practice should be purchased. When—when——" I paused, flushing under my employer's scrutiny—"Noel met me——" I said in a low voice.

"And fell desperately in love, eh? Quite understandable, Miss Gillespie. If I were twenty years younger I should do the same thing myself."

"But Sir Francis had other views for his nephew," I

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continued. "He opposed the idea of our marriage bitterly, and at last gave Noel to understand that if he persisted in the engagement he must expect no further assistance."

"Whereon Noel promptly left his uncle's house, eh?" Mr. Templeton smiled, benevolently.

"Yes. Do you think it was wrong of him?"

"I think, my dear young lady," the senior partner spoke emphatically, "it was the wisest and the bravest thing he could have done."

"Thank you," I said, touched by his sympathy.

"And what is Mr. Noel doing now, if I may ask the question?"

"He's travelling with an old school friend who is in bad health."

"Medical companion, eh? Dear, dear, what a pity I didn't know of this before. I had a letter only the other day from a physician practising in the Midlands, who asked me to look out for an assistant. I should think Dr. Masterman would suit him exactly. You must bring him back to England, Miss Gillespie, and we'll find him something to do."

"It's most kind of you," I murmured; "thank you very much indeed."

"Not at all, not at all. I assure you it's a positive pleasure to me to help young people." He beamed refulgently, the very incarnation of middle-aged benevolence.

"It's an unfortunate thing for a young fellow to be obliged to quarrel with his family," he went on after a pause. "Does Dr. Masterman correspond with his cousins at all?"

"Sir Francis has only one son," I replied. "His name is Herbert; he and Noel are great friends; they still write to each other."

"Most comforting to you, my dear young lady, that it should be so. Sir Francis is a very wealthy man, I believe; failing his son, your sweetheart would, I suppose, inherit the property?"

"I suppose so," I returned surprised. "I never thought of that."

"Dear me, I daresay not. And now"—he turned suddenly to his desk—"we must get to work. There are some letters here which it is important should catch the country post. Please type them at once. You copy all your letters?" He glanced at me sharply, and, a little disconcerted at his change of manner, I murmured that I made a point of doing so.

I remembered the question later, and realised how completely I had been befooled. There was nothing in the routine of the office faintly suggestive of any but ordinary business proceedings; a steady-going, old-fashioned concern, I thought it, and regarded Mr. Templeton as a model of industry and perseverance.

That afternoon Rigby Starr and Mr. Shackell arrived about four o'clock. By this time I was aware of the reason for their absence from the office. The two partners, it appeared, were canvassing for orders during the morning, and called in to report progress of an afternoon!

I encountered the pair in the corridor. I was going out to post the letters, one of which I noted was addressed to the physician whom Mr. Templeton had mentioned. Doubtless the letter contained a reference to Noel; I felt very grateful to the firm of Templeton & Co., and returned Rigby's greeting with a pleasant smile.

It was a fine afternoon, and I felt tempted to prolong my absence from the office. I felt light-hearted and happy beyond expression at the thought that Noel and I might soon be re-united. What a fortunate thing it was that I had seen the firm's advertisement in the paper! What a lucky thing that Mr. Templeton had engaged me. Who would have thought that so ordinary an occurrence would have brought about such wonderful results? I was so busy planning out the future that I forgot to notice how the time was slipping by, and it gave me quite a shock when a neighbouring clock struck five.

For a moment I hesitated as to whether I should return to the office at all that afternoon. My work was practically over, and no one was likely to reproach me for my absence. I remembered, however, that I had left my coat behind, and that Noel's last letter was in the pocket. I hastened back at once eager to regain its possession. I opened the office door softly and stood somewhat timidly upon the threshold; for a moment I thought the room was empty. The sound of voices convinced me of my mistake. Behind the screen that stood between Mr. Templeton's desk and the door, the three partners were engaged in conversation. The screen was large and so arranged that the desk was hidden from view on that side of the room.

I did not wish to disturb their talk, so stepped quietly towards the cupboard where my coat was hanging and slipped it over my arm. I had regained the door and was about to close it behind me, when Shackell's voice, raised above its usual tone, arrested my attention.

"It will be the biggest thing on record if we pull it off," he said exultantly.

"There's no reason why we shouldn't," said the senior partner softly. "The scheme is beautifully simple. The old man can't last very long. Once he's dead the young one will return to England. As the nephew of the deceased gentleman he will inherit the property—failing the son. There will be, in effect, but one life between him and the money."

"And that," said Rigby slowly, "won't be a long life!" He laughed as he spoke, a curious sort of laugh that gave me an odd feeling of repulsion. I closed the door and hurried from the building vaguely disquieted. I pondered long as to what Rigby could have meant by that strange speech, but could arrive at no solution. My thoughts indeed were distracted from the problem by the discovery that Noel's letter was no longer in my pocket. I was absolutely certain that I had left it in my coat, and felt greatly concerned at its loss.

Next morning I found Mr. Templeton at the office when I arrived. He greeted me with a kindly smile, and asked if I had lost anything of value.

"There, there," I won't tease you," he said, "here's your letter, Miss Gillespie. I found it on the table by the typewriter. It's very pleasant to have such letters, I know, but you shouldn't read them in the office hours, it interferes with work."

I was much too abashed by the reproof to protest against the accusation. I never read Noel's letters in the office, they were much too precious. Neither, and of this I was sure, had I taken the epistle from my pocket. It must, I supposed, have dropped from my coat.

Later, I arrived at a different conclusion.

"So your sweetheart's at Nice," said Mr. Templeton, after a pause. "I couldn't help seeing the address, you know," he added, with a ponderous attempt at playfulness. "How does he like the place?"

"Very much, thank you," I said stiffly.

The senior partner made no further comment on the matter, but late that afternoon I noticed on his desk a letter addressed to a man of the name of Martin at the Poste Restante, Nice. It struck me at the time as peculiar he should have written that day to the very place where Noel was staying, but I look on it as a strange coincidence no more.

For the next week things went on as usual at St. Helens. Mr. Templeton did not again allude to an appointment for Noel, and the hope his hint had roused in me gradually died away. One afternoon I felt especially miserable. I sat at the table staring blankly at the typewriter. My heart was aching for my boy; it seemed as though we should be separated for ever. Even if he did return he might no longer care for me.

I remembered that one of the clerks at my last situation had summed me up as "a red-haired girl with a large mouth and green eyes." I had not minded the description at the time, now it appeared horribly truthful. I decided that I was too ugly for Noel to admire, and was tempted to shed a few tears for my lack of beauty, when the door opened and, yes, Noel himself appeared.

Somehow or other I avoided the typewriter and the tables that stood between us, and rushed, I confess it, rushed to

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his side. I forgot the office, the senior partner, my work, forgot everything but that my boy was with me, his arms about me, his dear face close to mine.

When I had regained possession of my faculties, I became conscious of Mr. Templeton's amused regard. He rose nobly to the occasion, however, and insisted I should take leave of absence for the remainder of the day. Noel took a fancy to him at once, and seemed very glad that I was working with such kindly people.

After we'd left the building he told me what had brought him so suddenly to England.

"I had a wire from my cousin Herbert," he explained. "Sir Francis has had a paralytic stroke and is not expected to live. I went straight to the house in Eaton Square, hoping he would see and recognise me, but I fear there is no chance of his regaining consciousness."

"You must not stay away from him for my sake, Noel. You ought to return to the house at once. Let us take a cab and drive there quickly."

"But when we reached the square we found it was too late. The Baronet was dead! And Herbert, his son, reigned in his place.

As I learnt the news, the words that I had overheard in the office came back to me.

"The old man can't last very long. When he's dead the young one will return to England. Between him and the property there's but one life. And that won't be a long one."

"Noel," I said impulsively, "Noel, is your cousin Eric delicate at all?"

"Very far from it," he answered. "Why do you ask?"

I murmured some excuse, and dropped the matter. It was absurd to suppose there could be any connection between Herbert and the man whom Rigby said *would not live long.*

After Sir Francis' death events came very quickly.

Mr. Templeton, in the course of business, had a doctor's practice offered him for sale. He spoke to Noel about it, and suggested he should try to make some arrangements for the purchase. A thousand pounds was the sum required. A large price, but my lover said none too much to pay as the doctor's connection was a large one. Close on the suggestion came the reading of the late Baronet's will, and, to our delight, we found that the old gentleman had relented at the last moment and left Noel a thousand pounds!

"I'm glad he thought kindly of me," said my lover. "I owe him very much."

"You'll be able to buy the practice, Noel?" I said excitedly. "It seems too good to come true."

That evening Noel took me round to Eaton Square to see Sir Herbert. I liked the latter immensely. He was a tall, fair man, with a very charming manner, and a great friendship for his cousin.

"I suppose you two will set up housekeeping directly," he said, laughing. "Are you going to start a practice, Noel?"

"I'm in treaty for one already," he answered. "Messrs. Templeton and Co., the firm where Sara is engaged as typine, have a splendid thing in view."

"You couldn't do better than follow their advice. If they recommend it, you may be sure it's a good thing. I've had some dealings with the firm myself. I found them very decent people. As a matter of fact, I was hard up about a year ago. I'd over-run the constable a bit, and I didn't care to ask my father for assistance. Templeton and Co. let me have an advance of five thousand, and only charged 3 per cent. for the transaction."

"Didn't they want any security?" asked Noel, surprised.

"A merely nominal one. I had to insure my life in their favour. I forget how much the policy was made out for, fifteen thousand, I think."

Impulsively I started to my feet

Sara jumped to her feet. "That valet is Harrington Shackell, my employer," she cried.

"Do you mean, Sir Herbert, that if you died Mr. Templeton would have fifteen thousand pounds?"

"Something like that," he answered, smiling. "You don't credit the firm with bloodthirsty designs, do you, Miss Gillespie?"

"N—no, of course not," I answered, ashamed of my interference. "It seemed a strange sort of transaction, that's why I asked."

"It's not unusual," he replied. "However, I'll call up to-morrow, redeem the debt, and consign my life policy to the flames. Does that reassure you?"

"I'm not really alarmed," I answered, laughing. All the same I felt a vague uneasiness; I was half-inclined to repeat that conversation I had overheard. And yet how foolish such conduct would appear! I really had no cause to distrust Templeton and Co.

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We stayed quite late at Eaton Square. Herbert was delighted to have his cousin back again, and seemed as if he could not bear to part with him. Just as we were going, he remembered a certain pearl necklace belonging to his mother, which he said would just suit me.

"I'll ring for my valet, he knows where it is. I won't keep you waiting long, Miss Gillespie."

The valet at this juncture appeared, and was dispatched for the trinket. Some few minutes later he returned, a small casket in his hand.

He was a tall, square-shouldered man, with a grim, clean-shaven face. As he stood under the electric light his face seemed curiously familiar.

With a cry I started to my feet, and, pointing to him I cried:

"That man is Harrington Shackell, one of my employers!"

"My dear Sara, what are you thinking of?" said Noel. "Mr. Shackell has a moustache. It's merely a chance resemblance"—and he motioned to the valet's face, innocent of beard or moustache.

"How silly of me," I said, with a gasp. I looked the apology I was too nervous to make.

"Now you come to mention it, Watkins is rather like Shackell," said Herbert. "Capital man, Watkins," he added, "been with me over a year."

The valet signified his appreciation of the compliment with a profound bow, deposited the casket in my hands, and left the room.

The necklace was very exquisite, and in my enthusiasm for my pretty present, all thought of Watkins and his strange likeness to Mr. Templeton's partner left my mind.

Next morning I was at the office early. The arrangements for the purchase of the practice were to be concluded, and I was all excitement till the thing was settled.

Noel arrived looking very handsome, in his light-tweed travelling suit.

"I've had bad news, my dear," he said. Then glancing round the office—Templeton had gone out—he slipped his arm about my waist.

"I'm obliged to leave England, dearest, now at once. I've had a wire from the hotel at Nice to say that my patient is dangerously ill. I can't leave him to the mercy of strangers; he's been a very good pal to me."

"But, Noel, what about the practice? To-day is the last moment. You must decide to-day. It would be a dreadful thing if it should slip through your fingers." I paused, a mist in my eyes. If the practise were secured it would mean that Noel and I could get married almost immediately. If not, there would be months, perhaps years of weary waiting, years in which he might get tired of a girl with red hair and green eyes.

"It's a most unfortunate thing that you should have to leave to-day, Mr. Masterman," said Templeton, when the case was explained. "Of course you're bound to go; still, it's unfortunate."

"Can't you conclude the purchase in my absence?" said Noel. "I can sign any papers that are necessary, giving you authority to act on my behalf. As for the money, I've arranged for that already. My cousin has given me a cheque for a thousand pounds pending the settlement of my uncle's property."

"It's hardly according to form," said Mr. Templeton, "I'd rather you signed the agreement yourself. Still, as the matter's urgent I'd better do as you request. The money is to be paid to-morrow morning, Mr. Masterman. You enter into possession of the house and practice any time within the next three months."

"Quite so, quite so," said Noel. "I'm quite satisfied that it's worth the money, and I shall be glad if you'll see the business through for me. Here is the cheque," he pushed the paper towards the senior partner. "If you'll give me a receipt for the amount and draw up the document that empowers you to act for me, I shall be obliged."

Slowly and carefully Mr. Templeton wrote out the receipt and handed it to Noel.

"There's a lawyer a few doors down the passage," he said. "If you don't mind, I'll engage him to draw up the paper. It's as well to do things according to rule and regulation."

The senior partner disappeared, returning with his friend the solicitor.

"If you'll put your name, Mr. Masterman, at the foot of this paper, I shall be able to act on your behalf."

Noel took the paper and carelessly scrawled his signature.

"Have you read it, sir?" asked Templeton.

My lover nodded.

"It's precious full of legal terms," he said, laughing, "any one would think I was a landed proprietor by the fashion in which you allude to my 'estate'."

"Mere phraseology," said Templeton, "a thousand pounds is not to be despised."

The solicitor, having witnessed the signing of the all-important document withdrew. Mr. Templeton considerately followed his example.

"Good-bye, sweetheart," said my dear one. "I shall be back again soon, and then we shall be together always."

A last kiss, a last pressure of the hand, and he was gone!

Before we met again many things, dark, strange and terrible had come to pass.

Shortly after Noel's departure, Mr. Templeton went out and I was left alone in the office.

"I may not be back till late in the afternoon, Miss Gillespie," he said. "Don't trouble to wait for me. You can leave as soon as you're through with those letters."

I thanked him and set to work with a will. My correspondence took longer than I had anticipated, however, and it was just on five before I had finished.

With a sigh of relief I covered up the typewriter and put on my hat and coat. At the last moment I remembered that I had left a book of Noel's in a small room opening out of the office. I call it a room, but in reality it was little more than a large cupboard. One could hardly turn round without knocking the walls, and it was impossible to move unless the door was closed. I had some trouble in finding the book; it had got stowed away on the top shelf. Just as I came across it, somebody entered the outer office. I glanced round the crack of the door and saw Mr. Templeton, followed by Rigby Starr.

"Well," said the latter in a quick, impatient voice, "how have things gone?"

"Up to the present perfectly. Look!" As he spoke the senior partner laid a packet on the table.

"Bank notes, eh?" said Rigby, seizing on the crisp bits of paper. "Two, four, six—why, you have got the whole thousand, Templeton?"

The other nodded.

"A thousand, aye, and twenty times that sum to come. The scheme has gone without a hitch. Noel Masterman called here this morning on his way to Nice. He was wired for by his friend."

"What a lucky thing the telegram arrived. Came in the nick of time."

The other nodded.

"Yes, it has saved us some trouble; as it is he'll be there safely out of the way for some weeks. He left me his cheque for the purchase of the practice, and what practically amounts to a power of attorney, authorising me to deal with his estate. Just imagine, Rigby—his estate!"

There was a triumph in his voice, a suggestion of evil in his laugh that alarmed me. My heart beat heavily, my breath came hard and short. I strained my ears to catch what followed.

"It's a great coup," said Rigby. "I suppose," he glanced half fearfully at Templeton. "I suppose matters will go smoothly to the finish?"

"That's all right, we can trust Shackell to finish the job." He laughed as he spoke, and for the first time I realised that his mouth was cruel. The thin lips curved away from the pointed yellow teeth, the eyes glistened. I crouched close to the door and listened ever with apprehension.

"At the moment, then," said Rigby, "we are waiting——"

Templeton raised his hand.

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"Listen!" he said.

Down the long corridor there sounded footsteps, hurried, eager. Nearer and nearer came the tread, and as the feet approached, the fear that clutched my heart grew keener, stronger. All the vague dread, the apprehension of the last few weeks were centred in that instant, on the man that even now stood at the door—a messenger of evil tidings.

"Shackell!" cried Rigby with a start. The boyish face seemed suddenly grown old, the pink and white complexion changed to the leaden hue of fear. "What news?" he stammered.

"Sit down." The senior partner thrust his back into his chair. "Well, what has happened?" and he faced the tall, square-shouldered giant with resolution.

"I've done the job," said Shackell slowly.

"He's dead?" Rigby's eyes seemed starting from their sockets.

"As a door nail."

"You're quite sure?"

With an oath he turned upon the boy.

"Confound you, leave me alone," he snarled. "I tell you that Herbert Masterman is dead."

Herbert Masterman! For a moment my brain refused to grasp the news. Only last night I had seen him, spoken to him. I recalled his voice, his laugh, the words that he had said. It was not true, it could not be true. A darkness came before my eyes, a horrible tightness clutched my throat. If I could scream! Dear Heaven, if only I could scream!

"How did you do it?" Rigby's voice trembled, he was not such a hardened criminal as the other.

Shackell leant back and stretched his arms with a sigh of satisfaction.

"As we arranged," he answered. "Templeton and I discussed the thing last week. There's a well staircase at Eaton Square built of stone. The flight of stairs that leads to Sir Herbert's suite of rooms is a long one, some twenty stairs from top to bottom. It happened that the carpets were taken up to-day for cleaning purposes, so that the stone was left exposed. As usual I left the house at four o'clock this afternoon, returning by the back entrance some ten minutes later. Sir Herbert was still in his room. I fastened a wire across the stairs, slender and strong, and quite invisible to the baronet, who suffers from short sight. Then I retired into my bedroom, next to Sir Herbert's. I heard him cross the landing, run down the stairs, and then"—Harrington Shackell paused—"Sir Herbert caught his foot, stumbled and fell with a crash, the whole length of the stairs, striking his head against the stones. When they picked him up he was—done for."

"The wire?" said Rigby, moistening his dry lips, "did you remove the wire?"

"I'm not a fool," was the reply. "I'm not likely to risk my neck. I whipped the wire out of sight, slipped upstairs and out through the attic window on to the leads. From there I climbed into the next house, an empty one. I left there an hour ago, and came here by a devious route."

"I suppose there's no chance of your being recognised as Sir Herbert's valet?"

"Not the ghost of one. The only person who ever noticed the likeness was that red-haired fool of Templeton's. She'll have to be got out of the way very shortly," he added grimly.

"I'll look after that," said the senior partner. "She's been very useful up to the present."

"By Jove," cried Shackell suddenly, "the papers have got hold of it already. They're crying the news!"

Hastening across the room he flung the window open wide.

"Terrible death of a Baronet! Sir Herbert Masterman killed!" The harsh voice of the newsboy echoed through the place.

Terrible death of a Baronet—the words beat upon my brain. The horror that had filled me gave place to a sudden sense of personal danger. At any moment those men might discover my whereabouts. They might hear me, see me, and then—— I closed my eyes and tried vainly to regain my self-control. If they knew I was there—within a few feet of them, my fate was sealed.

I must have lost consciousness for a while for the next thing I remember hearing was my lover's name.

"From what you say then, Templeton, Noel Masterman—or to give him his right title, Sir Noel, is disposed of for some time?"

"Yes. His friend is seriously ill, too ill to be left. I shall wire him the news of his cousin's death to-night and offer to act in his absence. If he accepts my offer, well and good. If not——" The senior partner smiled. "Martin will see to him," he said softly.

The remembrance of the letter I had seen weeks back addressed to that same Martin flashed across my mind. There had been a plot—a vile plot against Noel from the first. And I—I had aided and abetted it!

"Meanwhile I shall commence operations at once. This document"—he touched the paper Noel had signed—"empowers me to deal with the estate. It is drawn up by a solicitor, who witnessed the signature, and will hold good in any court of law. The position, therefore, is this. Either by fair means or otherwise Masterman will be kept out of England for some time to come. When he returns"—his thin lips curved in a hideous smile—"he will find his fortune vanished and the firm of Templeton & Co. dissolved."

The words roused me from the apathy of terror, benumbing my faculties, deadening my brain. In a flash I realised the danger that threatened Noel. Templeton & Co. were scoundrels, criminals, who would stop at nothing to achieve their ends. They had used me as a tool, a cat's paw, taking advantage of my ignorance and inexperience, they had employed me to cloak their infamy. For a moment I thought I would rush out and raise an alarm, but reflection warned me of the uselessness of such a course. Who would believe my statement? To all appearance Messrs. Templeton & Co. were respectable traders. The charge of murder would be laughed at, the suggestion of conspiracy waived aside.

And yet something must be done at once with the paper, the fatal paper Noel had signed, for my lover's future was practically at their disposal. True, I might warn him, but, and there lay the difficulty, I must first leave the office. Even supposing I got away, they would still retain possession of the document and the bank notes. I might remain hidden safely until they left the office. Then I could ring the bell, the caretaker of the premises would release me, and I could take steps to protect my lover. But if I failed to prove the trio guilty Noel's fortune might disappear; Noel himself be murdered.

It came home to me that the one chance of defeating the gang lay in my *taking the paper with me!*

The very thought sent me sick and dizzy. It was useless and worse than useless to pit my puny strength against these three determined men. Suppose I made good my escape with the paper and the notes; by a wide stretch of fancy I fancied myself safely outside the door. Even then I should be hunted down and killed without mercy—like a rat. I could not appeal to the police—I should have to explain how the notes came into my possession. I could not hope to match Templeton & Co. in cunning.

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And yet slowly but surely the conviction was borne in upon me that I must seize the paper from the table and make a sudden dash for the door. Once outside in the corridor I could make plans. Meantime I dare not let the opportunity escape.

I fought against the voice that told me that I must do the thing. I looked shudderingly through the crack towards the partners and read merciless brutality on the faces of all three.

Templeton, cunning and cold, had brains that would outmatch the cleverest. Shackell—I could not look at him. I saw in fancy the fair head, the kindly face of the man whom he had murdered.

Rigby, though the youngest of the band, I feared and loathed more than all. Under that soft smile, that winning face, there lay a desire for torture. The others swindled, murdered for gain. Rigby took pleasure in the pain that he inflicted—the pleasure of a coward.

For a while they chatted over the events of the day, apportioned the money the insurance company would have to pay as a result of Herbert's murder, discussed the arrangements for the future, divided beforehand Noel's fortune and estate. And I had to listen to them, had to quiet myself, keep back the scream of terror that choked me, the impulse to flee that beat against my resolution and my will.

At last Templeton rose, and lighting a cigar suggested they should adjourn. Now, if ever, was my chance to seize the papers, now if ever was the opportunity to thwart their cruel design. Shackell and Starr seated at the table, had their backs towards me. Templeton on the other side, leaning over to them, did not observe the gradual opening of the door—the door that was between them and the "red-haired fool!" The papers—the bank notes for a thousand pounds and the document that gave the senior partner power over Noel's estate—lay at the corner of the table, at Templeton's right. If I could creep across the room and reach the table unobserved I might——

Shackell broke into a laugh at some murmured joke of Rigby's. I crouched back shivering behind the door. I could not do it, I could not run the risk!

And yet with Noel's fortune, perhaps his life at stake, I dared not hesitate. With the desperation of despair I crept out of my hiding-place and made my way across the room. Nearer and nearer to the table, so close that I hear Shackell's heavy breath, feel the vibration of his laugh!

If he should turn round, if Templeton should look up—I felt in fancy cruel fingers at my throat, strangling my breath, choking my very life.

Closer, by slow degrees, past Shackell; by the back of Rigby's chair, until the papers, the precious papers, came within touch of my hands, within reach of my fingers.

I dare not consider, I dare not hesitate. Blindly I put out my hand, snatched the notes, clutched the document.

An oath from Templeton, a shriek from me, and then, throwing over chairs and table in my mad flight, I rushed across the room, the panting breath of my pursuers close behind.

A stick deftly thrown struck my head and blinded my eyes with pain. Another second and they would be upon me. Would the door never open, the handle never turn? A last convulsive effort and I had opened the door, banged it in the enemy's face, locked it on the other side.

And then, clasping the papers to my heart, down the long corridor I rushed, and out into the street—a fugitive!

(Next week tells of how Sara leaves London to avoid her pursuers, and hides in Bedford, see "Your Editor Chats," on page 495.)

"The Gamble of Life,"
Arthur Applin's Powerful
New Serial Story, starts in
FRIDAY'S "PEARSON'S WEEKLY."
ONE PENNY. EVERYWHERE.

THE POWER OF HEREDITY.

Showing What Can be Done by Love.

ARCHIE was a clerk on £100 a year. He was a good sort, but weak, and his major weakness was a habit of putting money on the wrong horse, a dangerous amusement on £100 a year.

Archie was an orphan. He had been brought up by a maiden aunt, who, on Sundays, with a Bible in her lap, would frequently relate to him the story of his father's ruin, terminating her lecture with a homily on the evils of gambling, and a quotation on the power of heredity. These sermons were both bitter and narrow-minded.

When Archie earned sufficient to exist, he rebelled, and, flying from his aunt and her lectures, sought refuge at lodgings of his own, in a back alley, where Sunday papers were in order, and there he spent his day of rest in gleaning sporting tips.

Now Archie, like the majority of his confrères, got a yearly holiday, when he went to the seaside, but the wrong horse ran away with the money, until a year came when the holiday was perforce curtailed to a week-end. An eventful week-end, however, which ruled the fate of Archie.

It was a glorious, windy day, typical of the watering-place. The beach buzzed with excited trippers, great waves pounded and crunched the shingle, niggers howled coon songs and tummed on their banjos, children with spades and buckets chirped and chattered, the silly nursemaid giggled at the donkey boy, modest spinsters wrestled with their skirts, the ice-cream man shouted down the Punch-and-Judy show, and dogs and gulls joined in the general hubbub, to the droning accompaniment of "Nice day for a sail, sir; Nice boat, good lady." Archie was bored, he flopped on a seat by the sands.

The noise jarred on his nerves. The wind whirled dirty papers past. They reminded him of bills. He threw a pebble at a stout and well-fed dog, which rushed vaguely into a stouter and better fed woman, and upset her.

Archie smiled, then he moralised: "A fellow can't help his weakness, any more than that dog could help charging that woman. It sounds very grand to say 'Fight 'em,' a fellow simply can't, especially when that weakness is his dad's only legacy. I agree with this philosophy 'Heredity is stronger than any influence.' Yes, that sounds like a copy-book; in fact, it's good enough for Huxley or Darwin, or that sort of clever Johnny. The world at large ought to hear it. By Jove! I'll write it in the sand with my stick."

He did so, then went back to the boarding house for tea.

On the way to the house, where the by-street joins the High Street, he saw a crowd collecting, and that vice which bubbles in all women and most men bubbled in Archie, so he became inquisitive.

An old man had swooned, a dirty, unkempt old creature, with a beer-flushed visage. The kind crowd had taken it for a fit, and with typical forethought formed a ring round him to exclude the air. Archie always prided himself on his power of resource, he loved emergencies, and at once became the man of the moment. He elbowed his way through the onlookers, and called loudly for breathing space and brandy. A flask was forthcoming and the effect was electrical. The old man opened his eyes, and seeing the flask, grabbed it. He readily drank the contents; then was assisted to his feet. Archie lingered when the others had dispersed. He gave the old man twopence, which he pocketed with thanks and a hiccough.

After tea, Archie was still bored, but returned to the seat by the sands. There was someone else sitting there, so he took the other end.

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The tide had risen; the trippers seemed less noisy, their mouths, no doubt, too full of shrimps to admit of loud conversation.

Archie looked seawards, successive hoots from an excursion steamer attracted him, the steamer looked so angry, and the little fishing boats ahead, so unconcerned.

He watched the steamer manœuvre between them, then looked down at his epigram in the sand, "Heredity is stronger than any influence save"—he never wrote "save"—"save love." He repeated it aloud. "How on earth—" but a rippling laugh interrupted him from the end of the seat, and he turned to see a dainty little girl in a white muslin dress, hat in lap, and fair hair waving in the wind.

"Bless my soul," ejaculated Archie, then they both blushed and turned away.

The moment was awkward. A stronger and bolder man would have seized the opportunity, but Archie made full-stops with his stick in the sand. He had made an oblate spheroid of full stops round his boot, before Providence came to his rescue. A puff of wind, decreed by the Fates, gently lifted the hat from the girl's lap, and away it went, whisked and trundled, over and over the sands, with dogs, children, and Archie in hot pursuit. The girl smiled—knowingly, perhaps.

Archie raced the black retriever, and beat him on the post, but the black retriever had slobbered on the bow, so Archie returned, a hero, indeed, wiping it with his handkerchief.

It was only a cheap hat, 1s. 11½d. at a recent sale, a hat of the shape that contorts to suit the fashion and a woman's will, but Archie returned with it in safety, carrying it with a care that did credit to a Bond Street milliner, or a mother with her darling mite.

"Thanks," said the girl, as she pushed the pins in, "it nearly went into the sea."

Archie felt more comfortable. He almost wished it in the sea, for he was a good swimmer. Then he sat down, closer than before, and they discussed the place, the weather, and many mundane things, and finally they laughed at the epigram in the sand.

It was dusk when Archie said "Good-night," and by then he had told the whole story of heredity, and she had listened without laughter. They left the epigram in the sand, but neither forgot it.

Next morning he returned to the same seat, a happy, eager, Archie. It was very early, and the gulls and the sun welcomed him, possibly they took his presence for granted. There was the epigram untouched, so Archie sat down, and re-read it twenty times, dwelling more and more on the last two words.

But what was that! A piece of crumpled paper stuck in the letter "e"—a bill, ugh! He had forgotten bills, how dare paper trespass on his holy ground. He picked it up, it was crisp, with a familiar, and yet unfamiliar crispness. Ye gods and little fishes! It was a five pound note.

Archie felt like a thief in the night, nevertheless thrust it into his pocket. Someone was hailing, so with a shamefaced look he turned to find the old man who had had a fit the day before.

"Hullo, joker! Looking for diamonds; found any?"

"Ha! no—er, not exactly. How are you?"

"Tidy enough, thankee, tidy enough for Ascot and the Gold Cup."

"You are a sporting man—a bookie, perhaps," said Archie.

"Aye, I was once, and as 'cute and as straight as the Turf breeds, but I'm poor now, with a big drag on my purse-strings."

"Big family; eh?"

"Bless you, sonnie, no; nothing so troublesome."

"What then?"

"A thirst; a very expensive thirst."

Archie smiled. The old man was proud of his thirst.

"Well, lad, I like you," he continued, "you gave me tuppence yestereen, give me another and I'll return you a billionfold."

Archie smiled again, and gave it to him. The old man's voice came low but more raspy, he moved close to Archie and bent over his ear.

"Got any money?"

"Er—a very little."

"Then pawn your clothes, your life, your soul, my son, and put it all on Rosemary for the Gold Cup. It's a straight 'un!" cried the old man, and with a slow emphasis he added, as he tapped Archie's shoulder and hobbled off, "from a straight chap."

Archie stood in a dream. The old man moved slowly on, jingling his coppers. Then Archie shook himself, and called:

"Can't stop," came the reply, "must get to Ascot."

Archie stared at the sand, the letters there were rising and hitting him. "Go to Ascot," he cried, sinking back on the seat, "Rosemary or the other; I suppose I must choose now and for ever."

An hour later he was walking on the esplanade, the five-pound note felt less crisp, the battle had waned, only muffled and irregular firing drummed in his ears. A white muslin dress turned the corner.

Ah, what would that money buy, a Bond Street hat, a necklace, brooch, or any other glittering gem dear to woman's eyes. "Let Rosemary go hang!" said Archie, as he strode boldly forth to meet the dress.

He returned to hard work on the Monday, leaving a glad heart and a promise behind him. He had told the girl of his lucky find, had sworn that it was hers to spend, but she was immovable. "No," she had said, "you are to keep it, and not until I tell you, are you to spend it. One year from to-day we will meet at this very seat, and until then, Archie, you will not hear from me."

* * *

The year had passed, Archie was returning to the seaside. How sweet the world looked, the birds so happy, the trees so green, even the train drummed contentedly as it bore him nearer, nearer. How hard it had been, and yet in the end, how easy. No bills, no worries, and the same crisp five-pound note.

He turned to the esplanade, his lips were dry and refused to whistle, his heart throbbed like a dynamo.

"I wonder if she really meant it," how many thousand times had he said that in the last year. The answer came back "yes." A white muslin dress by the old seat, and laughing eyes, dimmed, perhaps, with tears. *It was she!*

"So you have really come," she said softly. He was no longer bashful, he took her up in his arms with an honest hug. The niggers' lullaby died with a gasp, the five-pound note got terribly crushed, but Archie did not heed.

"God bless you, little woman," he said huskily, "I have kept my promise."

They sat on the old seat and gazed at the sea.

"Archie," she whispered, "I have other five-pound notes; but they are yours now, dear, ours, Archie. God grant, like this one, they may bring blessings."

And only then did he understand.

"But how on earth," he exclaimed a little later, "did you think that I should find it in the sand?"

She laughed merrily. "Ah, Mr. Philosopher, that needs no telling, when a woman's instinct *knows* that heredity is weaker than love."

Lucy Phair.

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'Twixt the Cup and the Lip.

The Romance of a Fisherman's Bride.

"One more day, darling, and then the union I have so long desired will be effected, and you will be my wife."

The speaker was a tall, bronzed, brown-bearded fisherman, with clear, frank, blue eyes, and a brow that bore evidence of greater intellectuality than the majority of his class. Yet he was but a fisherman, for, though his capabilities were above his station, he loved the sea and the simple life of the fisher-folk, and was contented. The girl whom he addressed was as sweet a type of innocent maidenhood as could be seen on all the broad coast of Sussex—with sunny curls that seemed to court disorder and broke away from the fetters which bound them, with deep, dark violet eyes, that looked into one's own with all the shy fearlessness of innocence, and ripe red lips, to whose sweetness the man at her side could have testified. For he had won her, and, when the golden sun had risen and set and risen again, she was to be his wife. It was dark now, and they sat together on the green slope of a great cliff that overlooked the dark-blue sea.

"The night seems born for happiness," he said, taking the girl's hand in his. "But the weather may change—the waves may rise and the wind roar—but happiness—our happiness—the happiness that comes of perfect love—cannot change."

Muriel Warne looked radiantly up into her lover's face.

"I hope not, dear," she said softly. "But life is not without its cares. Sometimes it seems to me we are in danger of becoming too placid, and need something to wake us up. Trouble is not an unqualified bane. If it teaches us nothing more, the lesson of patience is at least worth learning. And I am not patient. If anything goes wrong, it irritates me, and I generally do something on impulse, which later reason tells me is foolish."

Norman Hurst smiled.

"That is the way we all learn," he said gently. "Experience is the best teacher man ever had, but her lessons are generally the most stern and unrelenting."

"And therefore the longer remembered," replied Muriel.

"Quite so," he said gravely. "But I hope neither you nor I may be judged to be deserving of such lessons."

"I don't know," said Muriel thoughtfully. "I think I am. I am proud and impulsive, and have never known what it is to be thwarted in my life. I could not bear humiliation of any kind—even the humiliation of injury."

"Surely," said the man fondly, "there is none who would injure *you!* Evil is not a stranger to men's hearts, but evil cannot harm you, for innocence is its own safeguard."

"Innocence—yes," replied the girl. "But not when self-will, impatience, and pride of heart distort the judgment, and make one do the things which simple innocence would condemn.

Norman laughed.

"We are becoming quite morbid!" he said. "Let us take a walk along the cliff. The moon is rising and the night is gloriously beautiful."

He leapt to his feet as he spoke and proffered his hand to the girl. Together they went along the margin of the dark cliff, and the darkness soon swallowed them up.

As they disappeared, a man lifted himself from behind a great rock close to where the two had sat. His face was dark, and a scowl made it appear almost malevolent.

"So I am to be the Angel of Destiny, and teach these people patience and fortitude and humility," he said with a sneer. "Quite a new character for me. Not such a bad one either, since the reward will be mine too. So that is how you feel, my lady—'even the humiliation of injury,' eh?—well, so much the better for me! I think I can see my way through this business, and, if the lesson be hard to learn, it will, as you say, be the longer remembered."

He looked once in the direction which the lovers had taken, and then strode rapidly away.

* * * * *

Another night had fallen on the little south-coast fishing village, and the lights twinkled in the many casement windows of the pretty cottages of its inhabitants. But Norman Hurst's assertion that the weather might change had been already verified. The day had been unusually hot, and a storm was even now gathering far out over the sea. Great black clouds were scudding across the murky sky, through which the vivid flash of lightning could be seen by the watchers on the beach. The sea, too, was rising fast, and great, white-crested billows were breaking on the strand. The fishing-boats were hurrying into the bay for shelter from the storm, and the night grew darker and darker.

Within the cottage where she lived, Muriel Warne sat, with her hands folded in her lap, happily thinking of the morrow. She had not seen her lover since the morning, for he had, so he had told her, many things to do in the preparation of their future home. So she would not see him before she met him at the altar.

There was a knock at the door, and she went herself to open it. A tall man stood outside, and he lifted his cap respectfully.

"May I come in?" he said. "There's going to be a storm."

For a moment the girl hesitated. But it would be rude to refuse.

"Yes," she said, as she stepped aside to allow him to enter. "The night looks very threatening, and you will be caught in the rain before you reach home."

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He came in, and Muriel, shutting the door, preceded him into the room, where she had been sitting. A coldly, critical physiognomist would have pronounced Ernest Malcolm a handsome man. Yet, at first sight, few would have shared that opinion. Flawless as were his features, there was an unpleasant shiftiness about the dark eyes and a cruel compressing of the thin lips that repelled one, and stamped the man as untrustworthy. Yet his manner, to Muriel Warne, at any rate, left nothing to be desired. Courteous and polite to a degree, he had so far conquered the instinctive dislike which the girl felt towards him, that she had even come to regard him, in some measure, as her friend. To-night, however, she would have preferred to be alone—alone, to think of the morrow. Once Ernest Malcolm had asked her to be his wife. Her refusal had taken him by surprise, and he had demanded to know its cause. And then she had told him that she loved Norman Hurst and had promised to be his wife, and the man had almost frightened her, so livid and distorted was his face as he heard the news. And then he had turned and gone away without a word.

"How dreadful he looked!" she had said to herself. But the knowledge that she is loved is sweet to a woman, even though she cannot reciprocate it, and Muriel felt sorry for the man and was kinder to him than before.

And now he sat in the little room, with the bright light of the lamp between them, and talked to her with his low, well-modulated voice, until, in spite of her previous preoccupation, she grew interested and talked too. Presently he rose and held out his hand.

"I have come to say good-bye to Miss Warne," he said quietly.

The girl rose also.

"You are not going away?" she asked in surprise.

The man hesitated and gave vent to a little forced laugh.

"I don't know," he said. "I may do, but I am not sure yet. At any rate, it is, I believe, the last time I may address you as Miss Warne."

A deep flush overspread the girl's cheeks as she bowed her head in shy assent. The man's face darkened at the sight, but his voice never changed.

"I trust," he said, with an appearance of deep earnestness, "that the life which is before you may bring you all the happiness you deserve."

The girl's eyes filled with sudden tears.

"That is very kind of you," she said, looking up. "And—and generous," she added, with a blush, as she remembered his defeat.

He took her hand in his, and for a moment was silent. Then there came a loud knocking at the outer door, and the girl started back.

"Who can it be?" she said, and went out into the hall.

A boy was standing outside, and the rain was beginning to fall.

"Is Mr. Malcolm here?" he asked. "I've been looking for him everywhere. I'm to give him this letter." And he held it out to Muriel and looked questioningly up into her face. "Aren't you Miss Warne?" he asked, a sudden light coming into his eyes.

Muriel nodded.

"Then there's a letter for you, too. The same gentleman gave me them both." And he handed the girl the second letter. "Good night, miss. It's terrible wet." And he ran off into the darkness and rain.

Muriel went back into the little room and silently handed her visitor the letter addressed to him. It seemed very strange. Both the envelopes bore the handwriting of her lover, Norman Hurst, and some indefinable fear came into the girl's heart. Simultaneously they tore open their envelopes, and, a moment later, an exclamation burst from Ernest Malcolm's lips. Looking across at Muriel, he saw that her face had become deathly white, while her eyes seemed riveted to the letter she held in her hand. For this is what she read:

"DEAR MISS WARNE,—*I know only too well how greatly surprised, and even indignant, you will be when you get this letter. The truth is, I have been living a double life of late—pretending to be what I am not, and never can be, an honest man—for the sake of winning you. But the utter wickedness of the thing has come home to me before it is too late, and I have determined—cost what it will—to relinquish that which is now within my grasp, and go away. For three years I have been an inveterate gambler, and ruin has only been averted by the help of a friend who has many a time stood between me and exposure. Nor is this all, for there are other things which I cannot even mention. Try to forget me. I am not worthy of you, and, did you but know all, you would recoil from me with loathing, and realise, even more than you now do, the degradation to which my kisses—the kisses of a gambler and a libertine—have subjected you. Finally, then, good-bye. You will never see my face again.*—Yours regretfully,

"NORMAN HURST."

She was recalled to herself by the voice of Ernest Malcolm.

"Miss Warne," he said, in a strangely broken voice. "I am afraid my visit to-night has been ill-timed. At least,

"Go through with it," he said. "You never needed a husband more than you do now. Try *me*, Muriel."

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you will do me the justice of believing that this "—he touched the letter he held in his hand—"was not foreseen. May God comfort you in this, your first great trouble." And he held out his hand.

"Oh, I can't believe it," said Muriel, with a little catch in her throat. "There must be some horrible mistake. And yet——"

"I wish I could support you in that belief," said the man. "But——" And he paused and drew a deep breath.

Presently Muriel lifted her eyes. The look in her face was changing from grief to indignation. The humiliation of her position was asserting herself, and anger blazed up in her cheeks.

"It is his own handwriting," she said resentfully. "There's seems no question about it. Oh, how could he so humiliate me!"

There was a long pause. Then the man said:

"What are you going to do—about—to-morrow?"

Muriel started.

"To-morrow?" she said. "Oh, I had forgotten *that!*"

"Your invitations are out and everything is arranged for the wedding," reminded the man in a low, concentrated voice, while he watched the girl's face attentively. "You will have to explain."

"Oh, I can't!" said Muriel vehemently. "Everyone would laugh at me. I can't, and I won't!" And the violet eyes flashed with angry determination.

"Then go through with it," said the man, coolly.

Muriel looked up in amazement.

"Go through with it?" she repeated, in bewilderment.

Ernest Malcolm took a step towards her and caught both her hands in his.

"Yes," he said firmly. "Go through with it. Show the world that, if one man holds your love so lightly—if one man jilts you and casts you off—there is another, who will count himself honoured and ennobled by a union with you. Do not look so frightened, dear. You never needed a husband more than you do at this moment. And I will see to it that no breath of slander is whispered against you. Try me, Muriel!" And he tried to draw her towards him. But she held back.

"Wait," she said. "Let me think."

For fully ten minutes they stood thus, and then the girl lifted her head.

"I will," she said, with sudden resolution. "But you must get a special license, before twelve o'clock to-morrow."

"I will see to that," said the man. "Now I will bid you good-night, for I know you would prefer to be alone. To-morrow then, at twelve. Remember, you have promised!" And he went out of the house and into the darkness.

A little way off he stopped, heedless of the storm that bellowed overhead, and uttered a low, mirthless laugh.

"Beautiful!" he said. "I am qualifying for an actor or—— But we must get the ceremony over first." And he resumed his walk through the driving rain and returned to his home.

* * * * * *

About an hour before the storm broke over the sea, Norman Hurst, who was walking along the beach, was accosted by the self-same boy who, later on, was the bearer of the two letters to Muriel and Ernest Malcolm. Touching his cap, the boy put a letter into his hand and vanished. Norman tore open the envelope, and, by the light of a ship's lantern hanging to one of the luggers on the beach, read the following epistle:

"Dearest Norman,—*A very extraordinary thing has happened to-day, and I must see you at once. There are reasons, however, why you should not come to the house—reasons which I will presently explain. Please meet me under the last eastern groyne. The spot is lonely, and we shall be free from observation. You will find me there already. Will explain all later. Almost—your true wife,* "Muriel."

Norman Hurst turned the letter over. He looked puzzled and bewildered.

"It seems very queer," he muttered to himself. "But it is Muriel's handwriting, safe enough. What can she want?"

The concluding phrase caught his eye, and a smile of wondrous tenderness crept into his handsome face.

"Ah," he said softly—"almost! Yes, it is not far off now. But I must be off, or she will grow tired of waiting." A great gust of wind swept fiercely over the sea, and he looked alarmedly up at the darkening sky. "By Jove," he muttered, "it is going to be a wild sort of night!"

Pulling his hat down over his eyes, he started, and, within a quarter of an hour, was within hail of the last groyne. The spot was very dark and lonely, and he marvelled within himself that Muriel should have chosen such a place. But he plodded on over the rough shingle, and turned down under the lee of the great black groyne. Down he went, almost to the margin of the sea, but he could discern nothing of Muriel. A boat lay beached close to the groyne, but it appeared empty, and he turned away, intending to retrace his way along the sheltered side of the great sea barrier.

But at that instant he felt his arms caught in a powerful grip from behind, and, before he could collect himself, he was thrown violently to the ground and pinioned, hand and foot, with stout, strong cords. Dazed and bewildered without even the chance to fight for his liberty, he was dragged into the boat, and his adversaries, who were two in number dipped their oars in the rising water and pulled vigorously out to sea. Then, for the first time, Norman Hurst saw that he was in a trap, and vaguely realised that the attack upon himself was in some mysterious way connected with Muriel Warne, and he began to struggle with all the strength that was in his muscular frame. He tore at his bonds with the ferocity of a tiger, but not a strand relaxed. His adversaries had done their work well. Then he turned to the men.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded sternly. "And who, and what, are you? Are you so ashamed of your faces that you hide them beneath your mufflers?"

The men laughed.

"You'll know us soon enough," said one. "*The Merry Trawler* lies out in the 'roads' yonder, and you have got to keep us company for a little while—only a matter of four-and-twenty hours though, so there isn't much to grumble about."

"*The Merry Trawler!*" said Norman, sitting upright in the boat in unfeigned astonishment. "Ernest Malcolm's boat! Then you are——"

"We're his crew," replied the man, "We've left the boy aboard, and, by the look of the weather, we shall have to hurry, or he'll go down with the lugger before we can lower the sails."

"But what is the meaning of it all?" persisted Norman, knitting his brows in sheer bewilderment.

"Well," said the man thoughtfully, "Cap'n didn't tell us to keep our mouths shut, and you can't upset his plans now. The fact is, he's got a kind o' hankering arter Miss Warne—Skipper Warne's daughter—and, as he can't get her the straight way, he's trying a roundabout one. He's

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been learnin' your handwritings lately, and he's no fool at it, I can tell ye. So, to-night, he writes you a letter in Miss Warne's handwritin', and Miss Warne another in your'n, and so——"

"Wrote Miss Warne a letter in my handwriting!" said Norman in amazement. "But what purpose would that answer?"

The men laughed and looked at him humorously.

"Well, we don't know exactly what he said in it," resumed the man who had spoken hitherto. "Something about drinkin' and gamblin' and other things that's worse, and tellin' her you was mad with remorse and had run away."

Norman Hurst uttered a cry of rage and tore anew at the cords which bound him. But all his efforts were in vain, and he sank down exhausted into the bottom of the boat. Presently he lifted his head.

"And where is Malcolm?" he asked.

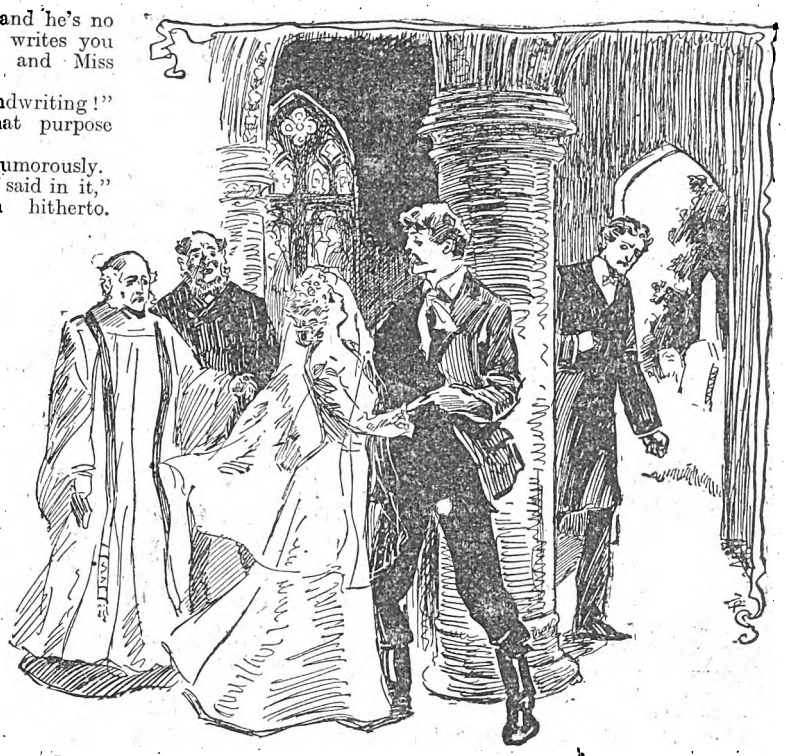
The man grinned and nudged his companion.

"Havin' a nice little chat with the lady, o' course," he said.

Norman groaned and lapsed into silence. And, the next instant, they ran alongside the fishing-lugger, and his two gaolers helped him on board.

They were not a moment too soon.

Even as it was, the rigging snapped and the sails split, and the long timbers creaked and groaned in the hull of the straining lugger. And then the cable that held them at anchor broke under the strain, and the boat lifted her head high in the water and went tearing along with the wind behind her. Flash after flash of vivid light blazed out in the dark heavens, and peal upon peal of deafening thunder roared over the angry sea. Escape was useless now, and the crew, well knowing this, and needing all their energies to keep the boat from foundering, released his bonds and begged him to lend a hand.



Norman Hurst burst into their midst. With a glad cry, Muriel leapt into his arms.

Norman Hurst was known, all along that coast, as a cool and wise commander of such a craft as this, and, as the storm increased in violence, they implored him to take control of the boat. This he willingly and even gladly did, for he saw that the men, however capable as a crew, were powerless to navigate the lugger in such a sea. And he hoped, too, that he might be able to put the boat into port before they had run far along the coast. But, try as he might, he found this task hopeless. The great cliffs towered up along the shore, and he knew he dared not go too near. So port after port was passed, and all he could do was to keep the violently-pitching lugger above water, and hope for the morrow. Sea after sea dashed upon their decks, and the wind shrieked madly through the spars and the remaining rigging. Fear was in the faces of the two men, and, regarding the storm as a punishment for their share in the plot of their captain, they came, like the curs they were, to ask Norman's forgiveness. But he bade them sternly go back to their posts. So passed all that night, and death was very near them.

And then the morning dawned. But the sea still ran high, and it was not until nine o'clock that Norman, worn out with fatigue and hardship, ran the almost water-logged lugger into a little harbour, some forty miles from home.

* * * * * *

It was twelve o'clock, and the streets of the little fishing village were unusually gay. Animated groups stood at the street corners and round the old wooden capstans on the beach, and conversed excitedly together. And there was some reason for their excitement. For the past six months they had understood that Captain Warne's daughter was going to be married to the stalwart handsome, young fisherman, Norman Hurst. And now, on the very dawn of her wedding-day, a rumour had reached them that she had quarrelled with her lover, had sent him about his business, and was determined to go through with the ceremony, substituting in his place the man they all admired but nobody trusted—Ernest Malcolm.

There was quite a crowd round the porch of the little church where the wedding was to be solemnised. Eager faces peered in at the open doors and down the road in expectation of the carriages. And soon they came in sight. But the cheer which they had intended for the bride of Norman Hurst found no place on their lips now. Muriel, dressed very prettily in veil and wreath, alighted from the carriage and went into the church, which was already thronged with curious onlookers. She was very pale, and leant on the arm of her father, as if for support. She seemed to reel as she neared the altar, and, as Ernest Malcolm had not yet arrived, the officiating priest placed the vestry at her disposal. This offer she gladly accepted, and sank into a chair as soon as it was reached.

No notice had as yet been given to the priest that Ernest Malcolm was to be the bridegroom. He had heard the general rumour, but paid no heed to it. The banns had been thrice read out for Norman Hurst and Muriel Warne, and for that ceremony he was prepared. And the girl waited—waited almost in dread—vaguely hoping that Ernest Malcolm would not come, or, if he came, that he would bring the news of his failure to procure the special license which was to take the place of the one now in the priest's hands and make her his wife. All night long she had lain awake, thinking over the step she was about to take. And the more she thought, the more did she regret that rash promise, given in her pride of heart and against her better judgment. And all because

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she had confessedly been too great a coward to face the curious eyes of a multitude. But she had promised now, and to her a promise, even such an one as this, seemed sacred and binding.

Presently there was a stir in the body of the church, and the clergyman opened the door of the vestry. Ernest Malcolm stepped briskly inside and handed the priest a special license. The latter examined it gravely and turned to Muriel.

"Am I to understand," he said slowly, "that this is your will? Remember, there is no retreat when once you have taken your stand."

The girl looked dully up in his face.

"I have promised," she said.

"That is nothing to me," he said quietly. "It is to me you have to answer now—and—to a Higher Power!"

Muriel started.

"To a Higher Power! To God!" she said. "Then I cannot—I dare not do this thing! I was wicked—wicked, ever to have promised. Better a thousand times that I should endure to be humbled, than that I should give my heart, my love, to one man, and myself to another! Oh, set me free from this promise, I entreat you!" And she turned appealingly to Malcolm, who stood, with his arms folded, eyeing her disdainfully.

"And I?" he said mockingly. "It would seem that my humiliation occupies no place in your calculations. A convenient conscience, surely!"

The girl winced, and cowered before the cruel light that had come into his dark eyes. At that instant, a horse's hoofs were heard galloping outside, and the face of Ernest Malcolm turned pale. A moment later, and they heard a stir in the church and the voices of men and women in eager and excited conversation. The priest again opened the door of the vestry, and Norman Hurst, pale and dishevelled from exposure to wind and storm, burst into their midst. With a little glad cry, Muriel leaped into his arms.

"Oh, tell me," she said wildly—"tell me it is all a mistake!"

"Could you ever have doubted me?" he said reproachfully.

"But the letter?" pleaded the girl.

"Yes, I know," said Norman soothingly. "We have been the victims of a foul and dastardly plot."

Remembering the man to whom he owed a heavy and terrible reckoning, he turned suddenly. But Ernest Malcolm had vanished.

"Well," said Norman, "let him go. He will not trouble us more."

And then he turned to the mystified priest and good old Captain Warne, and explained to them all that had happened the preceding night. The congregation assembled in the little church grew very impatient at the delay. But at last the little group filed out of the vestry and approached the altar. Seeing their old favourite in the place of Ernest Malcolm, and momentarily forgetful of the sacredness of the place, they gave vent to a loud cheer. The worthy old priest raised his hand, and silence fell on all present. And then he read the words that bound Norman Hurst and Muriel Warne together for all time, and, though the years have sped by since then, no shadow has ever come to cloud their happiness or diminish the love they bear, the one to the other. And Ernest Malcolm, whose dark face was never again seen in the little fishing-village, experienced the truth of that old adage:

"There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip!"

Walter Mowbray.

A Girl to be Proud of.

Telling of the Rivalry between a Conceited Cad and a True Lover.

"I MEAN to marry a girl I can be proud of!"

Charlie Annesley looked at the speaker with a half twinkle in his eye.

"That sounds a bit priggish," said he.

"I don't know what the word means," said John Talbot-Winterson. He was very insistent upon the double name, and there were two things that invariably upset his dignity. One was to call him Jack, and the other was to omit the hyphen. But he was a very dignified person indeed.

"Mabel Masters is all very well," he went on to say, lighting a fresh cigarette carelessly.

"Mabel is the best girl I ever knew," exclaimed his friend, flaming up, "and you're not good enough to tie her shoe-lace."

John Talbot-Winterson smiled superciliously.

"I always thought," he said, "that you were love-sick in that quarter, Charlie. Now I know it."

"Bosh!" ejaculated his friend; but he coloured a little all the same.

"What can she do? She doesn't paint, ride, golf, play, or sing. She's an absolute nonentity."

"If you were not such an impossible man to pick a quarrel with," said Charlie, "I should certainly do so. I often feel, old man, that it would give me the greatest pleasure in life to kick you!"

Mr. Winterson smiled imperturbably. He might, or perhaps he might not, have known that there were many others who would have been delighted to kick him for his insufferable conceit.

"My dear Charlie," he remarked placidly, "life is too short to quarrel with any but one's enemies, and I don't believe I have one in the world. And I don't mind telling you that Mabel would accept me to-morrow, if I proposed to her."

"Do you think so?"

"I do. But I don't intend to."

"A month ago you were madly in love with her."

"Dear boy, a month to a man of my age is a very long time."

Charlie Annesley clenched his fists and ground his teeth. Often and often he wondered why he still both called and considered this man his friend. They had not a single taste in common, beyond that of—a month ago—admiring the same girl. But even in this matter their method of showing their admiration differed as widely as the Poles. John Talbot-Winterson patronised her, while Annesley, even more than he would admit, perhaps more than he knew, loved and worshipped her. He saw qualities in her that Winterson, with all his knowledge of the world, was absolutely blind to.

"She is rich," he remarked.

"Her father is," said Charlie curtly. There was a curious twinge at his heart as he spoke. Perhaps it was jealousy, for

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Talbot-Winterson was handsome and well connected, and he himself was plain and a nobody. Winterson was what is known as an accomplished man. He did a lot of things indifferently well, but in a manner calculated to, and which did, win him the admiration of the fairer sex. Charlie Annesley could do nothing. And he knew that in the world in which Mabel Masters moved Winterson was a fixed planet, while he was a very minor star indeed.

He had heard Miss Masters speak of Winterson. To her, no doubt, his conceit would appear cleverness, his priggish affectation the result of birth and good breeding. He knew she admired him, for she had told him so, in feminine unconsciousness that the words had been as so many daggers in poor Annesley's heart. What chance had he against so bright and shining a light as his friend? He was not exactly jealous of him, but there was that twinge of pain there all the same.

"Rather nice," said Winterson, with a languid air. "I half think I shall change my mind."

Annesley grunted. Some men would have sneered, but Charlie was not of that kind. He was almost too easy in disposition, especially where Mr. Talbot-Winterson was concerned. "Once a friend, always a friend," was his motto. A man with a little more determination would have kicked such a "friend" as Winterson long ago, and have resolved to have nothing more to do with him, and would have kept his resolve into the bargain.

When Winterson went, Charlie Annesley went back to his studio and began to paint furiously. But after a time he threw down palette and brush and lit another pipe in disgust.

"What right have I to think of her?" he said to himself, savagely, "a poor nobody of an artist in a shabby velvet coat and slippers down at heel. There's Winterson—beg his pardon, Talbot-Winterson—with his two thousand a year. And he says she is not a girl to be proud of! Oh, he's an ass—a full-blooded, concert-pitch, consummate ass! On his own showing, he knows everything, and yet he cannot see that she is a girl that even a duke could be proud of! She would make a most delicious duchess, and if I were a duke I'd make her one. If she'd have me!" said Charlie ruefully.

"I won't smoke any more. I'll go round, and—and get those sketches I left there last week!"

It was the moth and the candle, of course. Poor Charlie Annesley could no more keep away from the Masters' house in Westbourne Square than the foolish fluttering insect can avoid the glare of the light. He had only known Mabel Masters a little while, so was scarcely aware as yet of his own folly. But it was beginning to dawn upon him that she was dangerously attractive, and there was that twinge of the heart too. So Charlie Annesley went blindly on to his fate.

Miss Masters was at home, said the maidservant, and in a few moments she swept into the room, a tall, dark girl, with a shapely head well set on her shoulders, and a graceful carriage. She held out her hand unaffectedly to Annesley with a charming smile of welcome.

"Oh, what roses!" she exclaimed, at the sight of those to bring which Charlie had spent the price of a dinner at Frascati's. The very fact of his being tempted to do so ought to have told him of his danger.

"How good of you," she said simply, as she took them from him, with a smile that dazzled him. "I shall wear some of them to-night. We are going to the theatre with Mr. Talbot-Winterson."

Again that twinge of the heart.

"I hope you will enjoy yourself," he said; but he could not help thinking that it was hard lines that the girl he loved should wear his roses to a theatre with his rival beside her. The sting of this thought made him shorten his visit considerably. He felt he wanted to go away alone and think. Was he jealous of John Talbot-Winterson? He began to think he was.

Presently other visitors were announced, and he slipped quietly away with an adieu to Miss Masters. Mabel had fastened one of his roses at her throat, where her rounded chin just touched it, and this gave him a strange thrill of delight, and told him more of his own heart than he had known before.

"A girl to be proud of! Why," as Charlie Annesley said to himself as he walked down the street, "I am proud that she should wear my rose. I am proud of her!"

Then he suddenly stood stock still in the middle of the pavement, much to the astonishment of a passing small boy.

"I believe," he said, "I am falling in love with her!"

The thought troubled him. What chance would he have against his friend Winterson? Not the ghost of one. That lucky possessor of all the talents was rich, and Mabel was a woman who could never marry a poor man. Oh, the thing was an utter impossibility! But the discovery that he loved her troubled him as much as anything in the thirty odd years of his life had ever done, and he could not help thinking every now and again that evening of Mabel and—his roses.

* * * * *

It was just a month later when Talbot-Winterson dashed—so far as such a very refined and well-bred person could be said to dash—into Annesley's studio. There was, for a wonder, animation on his usually stolid face.

"Congratulate me, Charles," he said. It was, perhaps, typical of the speaker that he was the one man in London who ever called him Charles.

"Upon what?"

"My engagement."

"To——"

The name faltered upon Annesley's lips, but the other never noticed the slight hesitation.

"Yes. To Mabel. She is charming, and I really believe she loves me."

This was more than bearable. Annesley turned upon the speaker fiercely.

"You conceited ass!" he exclaimed, with more vehemence than he had ever shown in his life, "That's not the question! Do you love her?"

He almost demanded the reply, in the tone of an old-time highwayman asking for "your money or your life!" Even the usually imperturbable Talbot-Winterson was taken aback.

"My dear Charles——" he began.

"Do you love her?" his friend said once more. "A month ago you avowed her to be uninteresting, you asserted in this very room that she was not a girl you could be proud of."

"A month ago," said Talbot-Winterson, "was—well—was a month ago."

If ever Charlie Annesley came near to kicking, to say nothing of more seriously assaulting a man who professed to be his friend, it was at this identical moment, but he recovered his self-control with a great effort.

"I congratulate you," he said. That there happened to be an accent, almost so slight as to be imperceptible, on the "you," entirely escaped the notice of Mr. Talbot-Winterson. He simply smiled.

"Thanks," he said languidly. "I think we shall be awfully happy. I feel I deserve her after the unbounded attentions I have paid her during the last month or so."

"You conceited ass!" said Charlie. But it did not ruffle Mr. Talbot-Winterson one atom. His skin was too thick to notice the personality. Annesley picked up his brush and went on working with a furious feeling at his heart which only work could appease. His friend came to look over his shoulder, after he had in his affected, dilettante fashion, lit a fresh cigarette.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, as he saw the picture upon the easel, "it is Mabel!"

"Well!" said Charlie, as he turned, brush in hand.

"Have you—ah—her permission?"

"Yes, I have."

"And don't you think that under the—ah—present circumstances, you—ah—require mine?"

Nothing would have given Charlie Annesley greater pleasure than to have knocked the speaker down. He would have been sorry for it a minute after, but it would have done him so much good.

"Why?" was all he said

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"Well, of course you know. But all the same, I shall buy the picture."

"Will you?" said Annesley.

"I must. What do you want for it when finished—to my satisfaction, of course."

"To your satisfaction! Yours! What do you know about painting, you——"

"My dear Charles, don't get angry. I know nothing about painting, but I intend to purchase that picture when finished."

Charlie Annesley tore the canvas from the easel, and picking up a palette knife, slashed it into unrecognisable strips. He flung them in the grate. "There," he ejaculated, "it never will be finished."

For once in his life John Talbot-Winterson betrayed astonishment. Had he been less wrapped up in his self-conceit it might have occurred to him that Annesley, too, might admire—even be in love with the girl to whom he was engaged. But such a thing never came into his head.

"I must say," he began in his most dignified style. Annesley interrupted him.

"That will do!" he said. "If you say more we shall quarrel. There is the way out. You know it. You had better go."

And Mr. John Talbot-Winterson went.

* * * * *

When he had gone, and Annesley heard the front door close behind him, the painter threw down palette and brush, and sank into the nearest chair.

"That!" he murmured, with his head in his hands. "That! To think of—to imagine *that* having the right to kiss her dear hand when I, who worship her, should be afraid to put my lips to the hem of her gown. They are engaged, and he has the right to kiss her hand, perhaps her gracious lips—and I——"

It was probably the most bitter hour that had ever come into Charlie Annesley's life. Draw the veil over it. For even though one may love hopelessly, one never is quite without some faint lingering spark of hope. And poor Annesley was praying that he might never again see the face of the girl he had learnt to love so well.

In less than a week he had packed up, and had left London on a two months' sketching tour which he had had for some time in contemplation. It was the wisest thing to do. Something told him that if he met Mabel again he might say that which he might regret. So he left London and his love.

Wandering about the country he tried to forget the girl he could have been so proud of. Winterson had won her, he said to himself—pray that he, too, would be proud of her in the years to come.

Of set purpose he selected the wildest and most inaccessible regions he could find, places where London dailies less than a fortnight old were a rarity, and post offices unknown. He grew brown and was comparatively happy. But he did not forget. He filled page after page with sketches, tramped mile after mile over moor and wold. But he did not forget.

Happening to bivouac, so to speak, at a somewhat larger village than usual one night, he came across an old copy of a daily paper. Idly glancing through it a paragraph he came upon struck him like a blow.

"The suicide of Mr. John Masters. This particularly distressing event, which took place last week, was, it has transpired, caused by financial embarrassment. It will be remembered that Mr. Masters' dead body, shot through the brain, was found on Hampstead Heath. All rumours of foul play have now been proved erroneous."

Mabel's father! Charlie Annesley looked at the date. It was a fortnight ago. Then he had been dead three weeks. Oh, how his heart ached for the girl he loved. But then he remembered that she had Winterson to comfort her, only somehow he could not quite picture John Talbot-Winterson in the *rôle* of comforter. The part was one for which he would be totally unfitted.

The paragraph had the effect of shortening Annesley's tour considerably. In some vague way he thought that he might be of use to the widow and daughter. Anyhow, it would be a comfort to himself to be in London where they were, and he could learn more particulars of the affair from Winterson. Wherefore he turned his face to civilisation and the Metropolis once more.

Almost the first thing he did on arriving was to go to the Masters' house in Westbourne Square. Here he met with rebuff number one. It was empty, and a board announced its immediate sale by auction. Annesley made a note of the solicitors, and went to see them at once.

Rebuff number two. The solicitors only told him they were acting on behalf of the creditors, to whom Mrs. Masters had made over everything she possessed, except an annuity of fifty pounds a year which had been settled upon herself. Her address? Yes, they knew it, but at Mrs. Masters' express desire, it was not to be given to anyone.

"Not even to a friend?" said Annesley.

"To no one," was the reply.

This was a *cul-de-sac* indeed. There was nothing to be done but turn back. Then he bethought himself of Talbot-Winterson, and hurried off to his chambers. Rebuff number three—Winterson was away for a week. Annesley turned away disheartened. The enforced inaction irritated him. Of course Winterson would know where the Masters' were, thought he.

Fifty pounds a year! From luxury to poverty. And Mabel, with her queenly figure, her grace and beauty—how would she bear it? Bravely, Annesley knew, and with pride; and then he smiled, because he again recollected that she had Winterson.

"She won't want me or my sympathy!" he thought, bitterly. He tried to remember some mutual friends who might know of their whereabouts, but it was early autumn, and everyone was out of town. There was nothing to do but wait.

Slowly though it passed, that week came to an end at length, and Annesley again presented himself at Winterson's chambers. That gentleman, languid and affected as ever, received him with a sort of supercilious cordiality that annoyed Annesley. Something—love of Mabel Masters, perhaps—had opened his easy-going eyes, and he was beginning to see through the veneer that only partially covered his friend's character.

"Thought you were lost!" drawled Winterson.

"No, I'm all right. But what about the Masters'? Where are they? What a dreadful thing to happen!"

"Very! I don't know where they are."

"You don't?"

"Of course not. How should I?"

"But you were engaged to her?"

"I was."

"Are you not now?"

"Hardly. How could you expect a man of my position to marry the penniless daughter of a bankrupt suicide?"

"Then you broke it off?"

"I did," said Winterson. "Most decidedly."

"Then," exclaimed Charlie Annesley, "you are not only a coward but a blackguard! I've done with you. Don't speak to me; you're no longer a friend of mine. You're not even an acquaintance; we are strangers. I don't know why we were ever friends or how I have borne with you so long!"

"Very well," said Winterson coolly.

"I'll find her," cried Annesley, with a look of supreme contempt for the man before him. "I'll find her, and if she'll accept me, I will marry her to-morrow. You—you call yourself a man! You're a *thing!* I never want to see your face again. No, thanks. My hands are fairly clean. Anyway, I have too much respect for them, and too much contempt for you to touch yours!"

And Charlie Annesley flung himself out of the room furiously. When he contrived to cool down sufficiently to reason with himself, he realised that Talbot-Winterson had after all acted only after his lights. Had he—Annesley—only thought, he would have known that what Winterson had done was the very thing he would do. But Charlie Annesley had been too loyal to his friend—now friend no

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longer—to believe or think for a moment that he could behave so despicably.

He dismissed him from his thoughts and set to work to find Mabel Masters. He tried to think what she would be most likely to do. Would she try and earn her own living? But how? Charlie could not picture her as a clerk in the City; a typine. Even the stage, that refuge for so many suddenly plunged into poverty he could not bring himself to think of. He thought of almost everything; and nothing in his most wild flight of imagination came anywhere near the truth!

Before long old friends of the Masters came back to town, but none of them knew anything about them. It seemed to Annesley they had apparently disappeared from off the face of the earth. But, as he reasoned, it was only probable that Mrs. Masters had changed her name, and the chance of his happening to meet them in busy London was a very remote one. Still, he took to wandering about London suburbs in the vague hope that he might be favoured by luck. He was often deceived by a fancied resemblance, but up to one day in Spring, after a lapse of over six months, luck was not on his side.

That day in his life Annesley will never forget. He had wandered rather aimlessly to High Street, Kensington, thinking of Mabel Masters. Suddenly his heart stood still. His dreams had taken to themselves visible shape! There she was, as bright and beautiful as ever. Before he had time to realise that he had found her at last she had disappeared, swallowed up by the doorway of a pretty-looking milliner's shop. Annesley noted the name over the door. It was "Madame Vera." So he waited, with a beating heart. Five minutes, ten minutes, quarter of an hour. Then he summoned up his courage and entered. The shop was empty.

"The lady who entered a quarter of an hour ago?" said the attendant; "but there has been no customer in for longer than that."

Charlie explained.

"The lady was in black? Ah, but, no—that was not a customer. It was only Madame!"

"Madame?" echoed Annesley, not a gleam of the truth dawning on him.

"Surely—Madame Vera."

"Ask her if she will see me!" he exclaimed excitedly. But hearing a voice, Madame Vera had come out of the showroom and came forward to speak to him. It was Mabel Masters.

"So I have found you at last!" he said, in a voice tense with joy.

"I almost wish you had not," she murmured.

"But I have been seeking for you all over London, and I find you here!"

"Yes; this is mine. Let me tell you. When the crash came we—my mother and I—were left with only a little capital settled upon her. I could do nothing, I thought. But I hit upon one thing. I, even when rich, had always been able to make my own hats. It was a hobby, an amusement. Why not, I thought, turn a hobby to profitable account? But it was a struggle at first. Still, I have turned the corner."

"I honour you more than I can say," said Charlie, in a voice full of deep emotion; "and I thank God for letting me find you. May I come and see you?"

"My mother will be pleased, I know."

"And you?"

But Madame Vera disregarded this direct question.

"We have a tiny villa at Chiswick," she said softly. "Does it not surprise you to find me a working woman, after my butterfly life of a year ago! I am very happy, though," with a little catch in her voice, "and I can keep my dear mother in comfort."

"I can only feel two things," said Annesley; "that you are a girl to be proud of, and—that I love you!"

He bent over her outstretched hand, then lifting his eyes and read her reply shining in hers. Then he went out into the crowded High Street with a tumult of hope and joy surging through his heart

Clifton Bingham.

Your Editor Chats.

YOU have in your hands now, my dear readers, the number containing the beginning of our new series, "THE PURSUIT OF SARA." Most probably you will have read every line of the absorbing instalment before you peruse these words, and that being the case, I feel confident that you are eager to ascertain what our heroine does after she leaves the offices of Messrs. Templeton and Co. Of course you cannot expect me to let you into the secret too much, so I will simply say that she makes haste to leave the turmoil of the Metropolis behind her, and, taking with her the precious documents which she is so pluckily guarding, flees to Bedford. Thence her pursuers, furious at being temporarily baffled by a girl, follow her, and——. But I am letting my enthusiasm run away with me, and if I am not careful, shall be telling you the whole of her adventures straight off. Therefore, all I can do is to advise you to possess your souls in patience, and to warn you not to forget to order next week's issue from your newsagent. In it you will find, graphically described, the story of her doings at Bedford.

ERE you have read many instalments of this vivid narrative you are bound to come to the conclusion that Sara is a girl of uncommon pluck, possessing a great quantity of that superb commodity, "British grit." You will, naturally, give me credit for inducing the young lady to publish her revelations, but I must own, that I, in my turn, am indebted to another. In the many years of my editorial career, I do not think that I have "discovered" a heroine in quite so romantic a way as I did Miss Gillespie, as she elects to be called during the progress of her story. Briefly, the facts are these. In the late summer I paid a visit to Bristol, and on my return occupied a carriage alone with a handsome, young gentleman. As a matter of course and sociability, we struck up a conversation, and presently exchanged confidences. I mentioned that I was an editor of a paper devoted to stories of love, and with a knowing smile, he said, "Love? There is nothing like the love of a true woman." I concurred with him, and he went on, "No, and no love romance has yet been written to compare with the one I know!" "What do you mean?" I asked, immediately interested. "I relate to the love romance of the best woman in the world, the woman who is now my wife!" And that's how first I came to learn of Miss Sara Gillespie who was; afterwards I got the gentleman to introduce me, and—the rest is apparent.

"THE SNARE OF GOLD," which has turned out to be one of the most popular serials we have ever had, comes to a dramatic termination next week. The interest in the plot has been sustained from start to finish, and I understand that many of my readers will regret its necessary conclusion. However, it will make way for a successor that will appeal to all of you who have a taste for exciting, as distinct from sensational, literature. The story will be entitled "A Criminal Millionaire," and is sufficient to show you that good things may be confidently expected. Mr. George Griffith, who is the author of this work, is another guarantee that the tale will be a strong one.

Your Editor.

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THE GIRL FROM LEON'S.

How a Pretty Waitress Found a Husband.

FIND me the city clerk, male or female, who does not know Leon's, the great refreshment contractors. Their restaurants abound in almost every part of London, and during the mid-day hours of twelve and two, are generally full to overflowing.

There you will see the young gentleman who that same evening will speak in languid tones of Prince's or Frascati's. There it is that you sit and study the remarkable list of Leon's restaurants, whilst you patiently wait for the Goddess in the Cap to finish her *tête-à-tête* with the young man with freckles and pince-nez. Should you endeavour to hurry her by ringing a bell or tapping on the table, you will doubtless regret it. She will favour you with a sublimely indifferent glance, whilst the young man will stare at you in an injured manner. Then you become conscious that this must be Mr. Leon, and the young lady, perhaps, Miss Leon; and, with a very red face, you ignominiously retire behind a newspaper.

Such is not always the case though, and if it had been, this story might not have been written. Why, I can point out scores of instances where people have been served in les than ten minutes from the time of giving their order.

Stuart Wray was in the habit of visiting the Leon's restaurant in the Strand every day, about two o'clock in the afternoon. After having dined elsewhere he would visit this particular restaurant for a cigarette and a cup of coffee, and to meet various acquaintances.

Naturally he came to know the waitresses, and would occasionally chat with them; for there were not many customers between the hours of 2.15 and four o'clock, when the tea rush starts.

It is the custom of this estimable firm of caterers to change their waitresses periodically; they do not, however, extend this plan to their bill of fare. Thus Stuart found that as soon as a girl got accustomed to bringing his coffee and particular brand of cigarette without being asked for it, she was moved to another branch. But this regrettable state of affairs did not deter him from his visits to the restaurant.

One of the men who accompanied him to Leon's of an afternoon was Guy Harding, his own particular chum.

"By Jingo, Guy!" said Stuart Wray, as they entered the smoking-room one afternoon. "What a fine girl that new waitress is."

He intimated an exceedingly pretty girl, of slender build, who was at that moment carrying a tray of crockery to be consigned to the rear regions.

"Where's our waitress?" he went on, as they sat waiting at a table.

"Shifted, I expect," grumbled Guy Harding. "Just when she knew my cigarette."

They waited for some moments until presently the aforesaid pretty waitress hurried up, her face very red. A more experienced girl had pointed out the two men patiently waiting at one of her tables.

"I am really awfully sorry," she began. "I did not see you waiting. Can I get you anything?"

Stuart glanced up in surprise, for the sweetness of her voice quite matched the beauty of her face. They gave their orders and the girl left them

"I say, Stuart, she's a lady," said Guy Harding.

"So I perceived, but still there is no reason why a waitress should not be a lady, is there?"

"I suppose not."

"Did you see her hands?" went on Stuart. "I should not think they have seen any rough work before. I wonder what made her become a waitress."

Here the object of their conversation brought the coffee and cigarettes. She paused, as though wishful to say something, and then, in a burst of confidence, she turned to Stuart, and said:

"I do not know how to do this; would you tell me if you pay for the cigarettes now, or whether I put them on the bill?"

The question somewhat surprised Stuart, and a momentary smile flitted across his face.

"You need not laugh at me," she pouted.

"Really, I was not laughing at you," Stuart hastened to assure her. "Yes, we pay for the cigarettes now."

"And double if you kiss them," broke in Frank Verden, who had come down since.

The girl flushed to the roots of her hair, and throwing an indignant glance at the speaker, went off without another word.

"Confound it all, Verden, that's a trifle too thick; you ought to apologise."

A roar of laughter greeted Stuart's remark, causing the other customers to glance round. Amongst those who looked at them was their waitress, and she flashed a look of thanks to Stuart, for it was easy for her to divine the cause of his angry expression and the shout of laughter.

He stayed down there a trifle longer than the others, for his office was within a few yards of the restaurant.

Suddenly he was conscious of the waitress clearing away the dirty cups from the table.

"It was awfully good of you," she said, with a smile, "to stick up for me against your friend."

"How did you know?" he replied, almost at a loss what to say.

"It was very easy to see. There are not many men down here who make rude remarks, are there?" she asked naively.

The quaintness of the question once more caused him to try to conceal a smile.

"Why, you are always laughing at me," she said in a disconsolate tone. "Am I so very funny?"

"Please forgive me," he cried. "I expect you *will* find a few of that sort down here."

"I suppose there are black sheep in every flock," she answered with a sigh.

"Oh, come," he said, as he rose to go. "You can hardly call them black sheep."

She ushered him out as though she were a hostess.

His thoughts were full of her for the rest of the day. She was strangely well educated for a waitress, and her manner was that of a well-bred girl. Clearly she had not long been in her present position. But he gave up puzzling over the matter from sheer lack of knowledge wherewith to conjecture.

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Some time went by, but this waitress was not changed as was the usual custom. Gladys, as the other waitresses called her, seemed a fixture, and Stuart Wray had quite come to look forward to the few minutes chat which they generally managed to have after his friends had departed.

* * * * * *

It was an evening in May. The weather had quite belied its ordinary reputation by being particularly fine.

Twilight had set in as Stuart Wray slowly strolled down one of the secluded paths of Hyde Park. He had been working rather late at the office, and a desire for a walk through the Park, before he left town, had seized him.

Presently he sat down, and filled his pipe. There was a strange sense of peace in his surroundings. The dark trees rustling in the cool breeze; the distant hum of the City with its weird glare in the sky; the waters of the Serpentine glistening in the moonlight.

Occasionally lovers passed down that quiet way, and a number of people gazed curiously at that solitary figure keeping a lonely tryst; for there are many who cannot understand the silent communion with Nature which a highly-strung organisation can hold.

Suddenly Stuart Wray sprang to his feet, and gazed after the retreating form of a girl.

"Great Scott!" he muttered. "It's Gladys!"

Then almost before he knew what he was doing, he found himself hurrying after her.

He touched her on the shoulder. Quickly she swung round, and faced him who accosted her.

"Why," she cried, with a glad little smile. "It's you."

They shook hands, and moved slowly along side by side.

"Supposing your friends saw you," she suddenly said.

"Well, supposing?" was his reply.

"Do you not mind being seen with a waitress?"

"Why should I?" he questioned. "If she does not mind."

"But then our positions in life are somewhat different."

"Maybe," he replied. "But Fortune is to blame for that. She is a fickle Goddess, and many that deserve never receive."

"That is a pretty way of paying a compliment."

"I never pay compliments," he said. "I only speak the truth."

There was silence for some time. The matter still seemed to trouble her, and presently she said:

"But what would people say, who knew you, if they saw you with a waitress?"

He gazed down into her face for a moment, and then indicating the masses of cloud that continually obscured the moon, he cried:

"There is your public opinion illustrated; always on the move, always shifty. Bah! I care no more for what people say than——". He paused, unable to find anything sufficiently contemptible to express his opinion.

"I wish I were a man," his companion interposed.

"Why?" he questioned abruptly.

"Because that is how I feel. But I am a woman, and I must bow before the decree of Society."

"Society," he echoed, in a scornful tone.

Together they strolled on, always talking; each finding the other more interesting as the time went on, until suddenly Stuart glanced at his watch.

"Why," he cried. "It's gone eleven."

His companion glanced up in dismay.

"Eleven o'clock! Good gracious! What will they think?"

It was on his tongue to ask who "they" were, but he wisely refrained. They hurried out of the park, and at the corner she insisted on him leaving her. In vain he protested, she was obdurate, and at last he boarded an omnibus for King's Cross.

Her name he had learnt was Gladys Tremlyn. It occurred to him that her education was almost equal to his own. More than ever, then, did he wonder what had brought her to take up the position of a waitress in Leon's.

"Are you not surprised to see me?" she said.

He haunted Hyde Park for some nights after this, but did not see her again. He hardly liked to ask her outright to meet him, until about a week after, when events forced him to.

"I am leaving here to-morrow," she said to him, as they stood chatting in Leon's.

"You are really?" he said.

"Yes, really."

"Going to another branch?"

"No," she answered. "I am leaving Leon's altogether."

There was a queer, tight grip at his heart, and a quick throbbing of his nerves, but he mastered himself in a moment."

"I am sorry to hear that," was his reply, and then suddenly becoming bold, he said: "I may see you in the park occasionally?"

"Well, it is a public place, isn't it?" she answered, but noticing the pained expression on his face she became compassionate, and said: "I shall be in Hyde Park this evening."

"Will you really?" he cried, and his face became bright again.

"Hush! You will have all the people looking at us if you speak so loudly."

"I am so sorry!" he whispered.

"Yes, I will be admiring the statue of Achilles at eight p.m.

"A very laudable occupation," he said gravely. "I, too, will admire Achilles at eight o'clock this evening."

That was the first of several walks they had in the vicinity of Hyde Park at eventime. He remembered how he trembled on one occasion when she caught his arm as a drunken man passed. It would have been a sorry thing for the morality of London had his subsequent wish been granted, for he devoutly hoped that each passer-by would be the worse for liquor.

All this time he had learnt very little of her life. He knew she had gone to live with an aunt at Chiswick, but she would never let him come to see her home. True it was that she had spoken once of having been well off, but he knew very

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little about her otherwise. But, as he told himself, that did not matter. He knew that he loved her, and knew her sufficiently well to be certain that nothing but good could appertain to her.

Then came one Saturday, a red-letter day in every sense of the idiom. He took her to Maidenhead, and they spent the day on the river. Several times the passionate words of love rushed to his lips, but he resisted the impulse to speak.

"She cannot be averse to me," he argued, "or she would not come out with me as she does. But then again, there is a deal of difference between liking a man as a friend and loving him." Then he would contemplate the bowl of his pipe with much gravity, and assure himself that it was a very serious matter.

This sort of thing occurred very often, until Gladys came to notice the effect it had upon him, and to comment on how bad he was looking. Never once, though, did she associate his worried appearance with herself.

Then the climax came, as it will come to all things. And, naturally, it is just on that climax that this story turns.

Mrs. Vane Woodbeigh had a very nice house standing in its own grounds at Hampstead. Mr. Vane Woodbeigh worked very hard to earn money, and Mrs. Vane Woodbeigh worked equally hard to spend it.

It had occurred to her that a "perfectly cha-arming" idea would be to have an open-air evening *fête* and concert in her grounds to which all the nobility and gentry that she was acquainted with were to be asked.

One of the chief guests was the Hon. George Kevill, a member of Parliament for a portion of Hampstead. It will be useless for you to look up a Parliamentary list, for I have carefully disguised his name.

To do Mrs. Vane Woodbeigh credit, or, more probably, the gardener, I must say that the grounds did look "cha-arming." Festoons of fairy lamps and illuminated lanterns hung everywhere, transforming the grounds into a miniature fairyland.

Stuart Wray's father and mother were amongst the guests, and he had accompanied them. To his intense astonishment almost the first person he saw in the grounds was none other than Gladys Tremlyn.

He caught his breath and let it whistle out between his lips in abject amazement. Whatever could she be doing there? She was very tastefully dressed, too. Ah! she had come down to sing. That must be it. She had mentioned to him once that she sang a great deal.

Quitting his parents' side with a hasty excuse he hurried after her. She was walking rather quickly towards a very unfrequented part of the grounds. Presently he caught her up in a sort of grove where none of the other visitors were. Suddenly she turned and faced him.

"I thought you would follow me," she said. "That is why I came here. Are you not surprised to see me?"

"Surprised hardly expresses it," he answered. "I suppose you have come down to sing?"

"Yes, that is it!" she cried eagerly. "Of course they do not know here that I have been a waitress at Leon's, and you——"

"No, I will not mention it," he broke in. "Why should I?"

As a matter of fact she was going to say: "And that was your father and mother that I saw you with, I suppose," but she accepted his interpretation of her remark with a little grimace unseen by him.

"You know I am glad to see you here," he went on. "I was not looking forward to this affair very much."

"Why, there are plenty of nice girls here," she replied, as she gazed up right into his eyes.

That smile maddened him for the moment, and his very soul was fired within him. Then, in the deep shade of the dark elms, and with her sweet face to inspire him, he put his hand on her shoulder and whispered:

"Gladys, I love you, dear!"

That was all he said. There seemed a lot more word somewhere but they would not come. All he could do was to repeat those words, in a passionate tone, again, and again:

"Gladys, I love you, dear."

There was no reply, but she slightly moved so that his arm incircled her neck, and then she shyly reached her hand up and pulled his head towards her. Their lips met, and they forgot all else in the ecstasy of their love.

"Gladys, are you here?" a voice suddenly cried.

Hastily they sprang apart, but the deep gloom of the trees prevented prying eyes from unnecessary observation.

"They want me—I must go!" she whispered hurriedly, and then aloud she cried:

"Yes; I am coming now."

"They are waiting for your song," came the answer.

And she went.

When he had assured himself that he was fully awake and quite sane, Stuart followed. He reached the lawn just as Gladys commenced the first words of "The Garden of Sleep."

He hung on every word of that delicious melody, sympathetically and beautifully rendered by Gladys' exquisite voice, till suddenly his shoulder was touched by someone. Turning, he beheld his father.

"Know who that is, Stuart?"

He gave a guilty start, and did not reply. Taking his silence as a negative answer, his father went on:

"That is Gladys Dewhurst, the great novelist. Is she not young to have achieved so much?"

"What!" Stuart almost screamed the word. Someone said "Hush!" and then Stuart drew his father away from observation.

"That Gladys Dewhurst?" he said. "Gladys Tremlyn is her name. What do you mean?"

"Oh, Tremlyn is her other name, is it? I knew it was Gladys T. Dewhurst."

"Good Heavens!"

Mr. Wray gazed at his son in astonishment. What had he said to produce this effect? Stuart was quite pale, and a strange light burnt in his eyes.

"Are you sure?" he said huskily.

"Yes, quite. She is a niece of the Hon. George Kevill, the M.P."

Muttering some excuse, Stuart hastily left his father, and walked blindly on with his thoughts all in a maze. Presently he found himself in that self-same arbour from which he had so happily emerged but a few minutes before.

"Gladys!" he muttered aloud. "Gladys!"

"Yes, Stuart?" a soft voice replied.

He turned and found her facing him. She started at the strange look on his face.

"Why did you not tell me?" he said.

"Then you know," she replied, her eyes downcast. "I was just going to tell you when they came for me."

"It's all over now!" he groaned.

"Stuart!" she cried, taking his hand as she spoke. "Stuart, why are you so upset? It does not matter at all; I saw you liked me a long time ago, and I—er—I liked you. Then I thought I would prove you by remaining as you had first known me to see if you would keep true. And you came out of the fire scathless."

He was still silent, and a troubled, anxious expression was on his face.

"I was at Leon's to write a series of articles on the life of a waitress, Stuart. Ah, dear, forgive me for my deception."

She placed her arms around his neck, and pulled his face towards her. He kissed her, and then put her gently away from him.

"I cannot marry you now, dear," he said. "You are fitted for a more brilliant life than I can offer you."

"I could have no more brilliant prospect in life," she replied, speaking slowly and tenderly, "than my life as Mrs. Stuart Wray. I love you, Stuart, and will never release you from your promise."

He gazed at her eagerly, the light in her eyes conquered him, and he took her in his arms.

E. Newton Bungey.

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Gerald's Four-leaved Shamrock.

A Pretty Story of Self-Sacrifice.

"A FOUR-LEAVED shamrock! If I could but find one!" said Grace, pausing suddenly in the midst of her song, and letting her hands fall from the keys of the piano into her lap.

"What is the special virtue supposed to reside in the fourth leaflet of a shamrock?"

"Do you not know that a four-leaved shamrock is a fairy talisman, giving its possessor an influence for good over all with whom he comes in contact? He can heal feuds, re-unite parted friends—in fact, be everyone's good genius. I think I shall look for one, Laurence."

"To what use would you apply your magic powers?"

"I would make your uncle relent, of course."

"I am afraid that nothing short of a fairy spell will accomplish that, Grace; reason has no effect whatsoever upon him."

"Have you been administering much of that article lately?"

"I spent more than an hour this morning in trying to make him see that after five years of hard work I have a right to a fixed salary, be it much or little. (We would be content with a little, would we not, Grace?) He will not admit my *right* to anything, but says that if I marry to please him, he will take me into partnership at once. As I do not, however, intend to gratify him in this respect, his liberal offers are not of much use."

"Did he name any particular person whom he wished you to marry?"

"Yes; Miss Blake, of Killora. It seems that he and old Blake have been talking the matter over after the manners of the farmers, and have come to an understanding concerning the number of cows and pigs, or their equivalents, to be contributed on each side."

"Alice Blake is a pretty girl and a nice girl, Laurence."

"She is almost the prettiest girl I know, but for all that I don't mean to marry her. Nor do I think the arrangement would suit her much better than it does me. If I am not much mistaken, she, too, has plans of her own. But while my uncle has the notion in his head, we sha'n't be able to make him look at things from our point of view. Try to find the four-leaved shamrock, Grace, and conjure up a little commonsense for my uncle. A very little would do. I must go now; will you come as far as the gate with me?"

And the two lovers sauntered out into the twilight and reiterated their last words at the garden-gate, leaving the pretty little drawing-room to its sole other occupant, Grace's cousin Gerald, a slender, fair-haired lad of about fourteen, who was lying listlessly on a low couch in the bow window.

Grace and Laurence had been playfellows for so many years that no one but the uncle of the latter felt any surprise when they appeared in the character of lovers.

Mr. Latouche, however, was thunderstruck at the announcement of his nephew's attachment to Grace Neville, and declared, in language of which he afterwards felt somewhat ashamed, that should Laurence persist in his determination to marry the daughter of a beggarly half-pay captain, he might bid farewell to his present home and future prospects at Glenallan Mills.

Laurence was quite dependent on his uncle, with whom he had lived from childhood; he had always been treated as a son of the house, and on his return from school, had begun to assist his uncle in the management of his flax mills.

He was resolved to marry Grace, and he had already begun to make inquiries as to the probability of his being able to utilise the experience gained at Glenallan Mills in obtaining a salaried post in some similar concern.

While Grace and Laurence were loitering in the garden Gerald was pondering over the only portion of the foregoing conversation intelligible to himself—Grace's jesting wish for the four-leaved shamrock.

Poor Gerald was but half-witted; his brain had been injured by a fall in babyhood, and had never properly developed. He was still a child in mind, with all a child's belief in the marvellous—a belief which Grace was chary of discouraging, from an instinctive feeling that his imagination was his highest gift, which, once weakened or destroyed, would never be replaced by reasoning powers.

She was very fond of him, and devoted much time and trouble to the work of training him, and drawing out what little intellect he possessed; while he, on his part, repaid her care with a passionate devotion, obeying her slightest wish, and following her about like a shadow.

He was also fond of Laurence, a ride on whose horse constituted his greatest pleasure; and, though quite unconscious of the reason, he understood, in his own dim way, that Laurence's uncle was angry, and that Grace was grieved.

Anger was a terrible thing to poor Gerald, who dreaded stern looks and harsh words as other lads dread blows.

Why, he wondered, did Grace want the four-leaved shamrock. An unwonted fit of shy reserve prevented his asking for an explanation when Grace returned, but he puzzled over the question at intervals during the night, and the wish for a solution of the difficulty guided his wandering steps the next morning to his old nurse's cabin, which stood on a green hillside, some three miles from his home.

The old woman was sitting on her door-step knitting, and basking in the sunshine. She looked up joyfully as Gerald approached.

"Master Gerald, wherever have you been?"

"I don't know, nurse," answered Gerald. "I must have been busy, I think."

"Busy," said old Joan; "poor lamb, sure it's you that'll never know what being busy means; all the better for you, maybe. Sit down there, an' I'll get you a drink of milk."

Gerald stretched himself at full length upon the grass, and began to drink the milk which Joan brought him in a little china mug sacred to his own use.

"How is Miss Grace?" asked Joan.

"I don't know," answered Gerald; "she is unhappy, I think. Her eyes were full of tears when she came in from the garden last night. She thought I did not see them, but I did. Nurse, what is a four-leaved shamrock?"

"A four-leaved shamrock, alanna? Why, a shamrock that has four little leaves instead of three."

"I know that. I mean, what is the use of it?"

"Well, people say it's a fairy charm that brings luck to the owner. Who was talking to you about it, Master Gerald?"

"Grace was singing about it last night, and she said that she wished she could find one. It had something to do with Laurence's uncle, I think."

"Ah, yes," said Joan. "I suppose Miss Grace thinks that if she had one, she could make things up between Master Laurence an' his uncle."

"And could she?"

"Who knows but she might? By all accounts there is wonderful power in a four-leaved shamrock."

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"I wonder if I could find one," said Gerald.

"Perhaps you might. Sure it's to the likes of you that the good people often send their gifts. Look for it anyway, alanna. 'Tis a pity to have Miss Grace fretting."

Henceforth poor Gerald's one dream was to find the four-leaved shamrock, which was to avert the anger of Laurence's terrible uncle and make Grace happy.

Accordingly he wandered about, day after day, telling no one of his purpose, haunting every meadow and every copse where shamrocks grew, seeking the magic quatrefoil destined to work such spells.

Such freaks of nature, however, though they do occur, are very rare, and Gerald's quest was for long a fruitless one. He had at first avoided the neighbourhood of Glenallan Mills from an unconquerable dread of meeting the terrible Mr. Latouche, whose stern face and iron-grey hair appeared to poor Gerald the embodiment of all that was awful.

At length, after days and weeks of patient search in other places, he so far overcame his repugnance as to go—in the early morning—to a large meadow through which the mill-stream flowed, and where the most luxuriant tufts of shamrock in all the country round were said to grow.

It was too early yet for the mill to be at work. The immense wheel was at rest, and a slender thread of rippling water flowed quietly on, giving no token of the force pent in by the sluices, and only awaiting a liberating hand to come rushing down and give life and motion to the slumbering mill.

As he neared the stream, which had steep, grassy banks, gay with many flowers, the great bell commenced ringing, and the workmen were trooping into the courtyard. He should abandon his search for that morning, since he would not risk a meeting with Mr. Latouche.

He was turning reluctantly away, when he perceived the object of his search—a leaf actually composed of *four* divisions, at the end of a long, trailing stem.

He lay flat down on the grass above, and grasping the herbage firmly with one hand, he stretched the other towards the prize. As he did so, the sudden barking of a dog, accompanied by a loud shout, startled him, and, losing his hold, he slipped down the steep bank into the stream below.

At the same moment the gates of the mill-dam were opened, and the pent-up waters, released from their prison, came seething and foaming down, seizing on poor Gerald's helpless form, and bearing him swiftly towards the certain destruction of the pitiless wheel.

The shout which had scared him was Laurence's, and the bark that of the latter's Newfoundland dog, Carlo. As the boy disappeared from view, Laurence ran forward, urging on his dog with voice and gesture, so that when he reached the bank he found Carlo already struggling with the stream.

To take off his coat and plunge in was the work of a moment. The dog's efforts had somewhat retarded poor Gerald's fate, and Laurence was thus enabled to seize him just as he was being drawn under the wheel.

A few long moments of desperate struggle, and Laurence found himself once more upon the bank, beside the apparently lifeless form of the lad whom he had saved, and whom he now, for the first time, recognised.

A little crowd of men had by this time gathered round him, one of whom, under his directions, carried poor Gerald into the house, and laid him on a sofa in the dining-room.

Mr. Latouche and his sister were summoned, and every effort was made to restore the boy to consciousness. When, after a long time, he opened his eyes, his first word was—"Grace!"

"Do you want her, Gerald?" asked Laurence, bending over him.

'Yes," said Gerald. "I have found it for her at last."

"Found what?"

"The four-leaved shamrock."

And, opening his hand, he showed the little leaf which he had all through managed to keep safely inclosed within his palm.

"The four-leaved shamrock?"

"Don't you remember? Grace wanted it. She said that if she had one she could make your uncle forgive you."

"I remember," said Laurence, with a pang at his heart.

"What does he mean?" asked Mr. Latouche.

"I am afraid he must have overheard some jesting nonsense of ours about a four-leaved shamrock. You know it is said to be a talisman. May I bring Grace here, sir?"

"Certainly, if the poor child wishes for her. Take the pony-carriage."

Laurence hurried away, and in a little time the doctor, who had been sent for, came. He said that Gerald had received some injury, causing internal hemorrhage, and that his life was a question of minutes rather than of hours.

After a little time he opened his eyes and asked again for Grace.

"She will be here very soon now," answered Mr. Latouche.

He was standing a little behind the sofa, and Gerald was quite unconscious that the gentle tones to which he now listened were those of Laurence's terrible uncle.

"I am so afraid of being asleep when she comes," said Gerald. "I want to give her the four-leaved shamrock. She will be so glad to get it; she need not be afraid of Laurence's cross uncle any more."

"Does Laurence say that his uncle is cross?" asked Mr. Latouche, his face changing.

"No," said Gerald; "Laurence is very fond of him, and Grace says that he is good and that it is foolish of me to be so much afraid of him; but I think she is afraid herself, for she never will walk near the mills for fear of meeting him."

The sound of wheels was now heard, and a moment later Grace entered with Laurence.

She went straight over to the sofa and knelt beside it. When Gerald saw her, his whole face lighted up with joy.

"See, Gracie," he whispered, showing his prize, "I have found the four-leaved shamrock!"

"Oh, Gerald!" sobbed Grace, "I shall never forgive myself if my foolish talk has led to this."

"Don't cry about me," said Gerald. "I am not really hurt. Put your arm round me—so. Now I can go to sleep comfortably. You need not be afraid of Laurence's uncle any more."

"I would rather never have seen Laurence again than this should have happened," she cried passionately.

"Right," said Mr. Latouche, in answer to Laurence's look of dismay; "she is all the better worth winning for not being ready to fling old ties to the winds for the sake of her lover. How fond of her that poor boy seems!"

When Gerald next opened his eyes, Mr. Latouche, moved by a sudden impulse, bent over him.

"Gerald," he said, "I can promise you that your cousin need never again be afraid of Laurence's uncle."

"I know," said Gerald dreamily, "she will always be happy now."

"As happy as Laurence and I can make her."

Gerald smiled and closed his eyes.

After a time, Laurence, seeing how it was, took him from Grace's arms, and laid him back upon the sofa.

"It is best as it is, Grace," he whispered; "his life as he grew older could scarcely have been a happy one. Up to this you have made it so."

* * * * *

The four-leaved shamrock, inclosed within a golden circlet of Gerald's hair, hangs in a locket from Grace's watch-chain. Either by means of this, or of some other talisman in her possession, she has cast such a spell over Mr. Latouche, that not even Laurence himself is more devoted to her than is the stern uncle, to propitiate whom poor Gerald lost his life.

Rose Clifford.

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Compulsory.

CLARENCE: "How did Charley come to say he loved you?" Bessie: "Father asked him if he did?"

Brotherly Love.

TOM: "Do you think my cousin Julia would marry me if I asked her?" Jack: "Well, I have always considered her a sensible sort of girl—still, she might."

Thought He Was at Home.

"I TOLD George's uncle to consider himself at home in our house." "Well?" "Well, it wasn't five minutes afterwards that he began to grumble about the cooking."

Another Awful Catch.

"I READ an account of how a girl fell over forty feet without killing herself." "Good gracious! How did she do it?" "Tried to get out of a tramcar with exactly twenty men in it."

Better Left Unsaid.

HE: "What a lovely fan you have, Edith." She: "Yes, my papa gave it me. It came from Paris, and is hand-painted." He: "Indeed? And how nicely it matches your complexion!"

Love Will Find an Excuse.

BERTHA: "I fancy it's going to be a match between Maude and Arthur." Constance: "You don't say so!" Bertha: "Yes, Maude to-day spoke of his stuttering as a slight hesitancy in the enunciation of words."

She Had Her Hopes.

MISS ASCUM: "Wasn't that Mr. Bonds I saw you walking with last evening?" Miss Coy: "Yes." Miss Ascum: "He's a landed freeholder of the county, isn't he?" Miss Coy (blushing): "Well—er—he isn't quite landed yet."

She Saved Him Joyfully.

GLADYS: "That rich young Foodledum said if I didn't marry him he should die." Ethel: "Of course you accepted him?" Gladys: "Of course. I couldn't bear to think of the poor fellow dying like that; it's such a disgrace to die rich nowadays, you know."

A Jealous Maiden.

SHE: "Harry, you said something last evening that made me feel so bad." He: "What was it, dearest?" She: "You said I was one of the sweetest girls in all the world." He: "And aren't you, darling?" She: "You said 'one of the sweetest.' Oh, Harry, to think that I should live to know that I have to share your love with another!"

A Woman's Bargain.

MRS. ENPECK: "I think, Henry, that our daughter has made a very satisfactory marriage, and that she will succeed very well in the management of her husband." Henry Enpeck: "Why do you think so?" Mrs. Enpeck: "I overheard her talking to him this morning, and she got him to agree to a proposition like this: 'If you will do as I want, I promise to do the same.'"

Johnny Was a Flirt.

SCHOOLMISTRESS (in grammar lesson): "'I didn't have no fun at the seaside.' How would you correct this, Johnny?" Johnny: "Get a sweetheart."

Easily Satisfied.

MISS YOUNGUN: "What kind of a man would you like for a husband?" Miss Oldun: "Oh, either a bachelor or a widower. I'm not particular which."

Perhaps He Was Glad.

MOTHER (at a ball); "Are you enjoying yourself, dear?" Daughter: "I'm not." "What is the matter?" "I've refused George six dances running, and he does not seem a bit miserable."

Tit For Tat.

ELDERLY LADY: "All right, sir, I shall sue you for breach of promise." Young Man: "You'd better not attempt it. If you do I'll bring an action for slander against you for saying I proposed to you."

The Pursuit of Knowledge.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: "Have you seen anything of Harry?" Major Golightly: "I heard him say something about going in pursuit of knowledge." Mrs. Golightly: "Ah, that means he is looking for the governess!"

That Terrible Boy Again.

"I DECLARE," said Bella sweetly, "your thoughts run exactly in unison with mine, Augustus. I had those very words in my mouth." "Yes, and I saw him put 'em there, too," said little Tommy, who had seen the kissing going on.

What Could She Expect?

MRS. HIRAM OFFEN: "Here, Bridget, see how dusty it is under the bed." Bridget: "Yes'm." "Haven't I impressed upon you that you must sweep under the beds?" "Av course, ma'am, an' how could the dust get there if I hadn't swept it under?"

Father Was Stern and Mabel Was Wild.

"MABEL," said little Jennie to her big sister at breakfast, "did you tell papa?" "Tell papa what?" asked Jennie. "Why you told Mr. Buster last night if he did it again you'd tell papa—and he did it again. I saw him!" And then papa looked at Mabel over his glasses.

Tricks of the Trade.

EMPLOYER: "You are having a decided flirtation with the girl who has charge of our telephone wire?" Truthful Clerk (with cold chills running up and down his spine, and with visions of instant dismissal): "Y-e-e-s, sir; but please, sir——" Employer: "Well, keep it up. She will give more attention to our calls if you do."

A Change in the Title.

MAUD (smilingly): "So you saw the profound bow I got from handsome Harry Brown? He's just graduated from an agricultural college with high honours as a veterinary surgeon." Ethel: "Yes, so Gladys told me. It's a secret, but she's engaged to be married to him." Maud (with sudden asperity): "Pooh! A cow doctor!"

Bread From a Stone.

"OH, we had the loveliest arrangement at our church bazaar last week! Every woman contributed to the missionary cause five shillings which she earned herself by hard work." "How did you get yours?" "From my husband." "I shouldn't call that earning it yourself by hard work." "You don't know my husband."

He Was Not Poetical.

"ALGERNON is very interesting," said the stockbroker's daughter. "What does he talk about?" inquired her father. "Why, he's ever so well posted in Shakespearian quotations." "Young woman," said the financier sternly, "don't you let him deceive you. Don't you let him make sport of your ignorance. There isn't any such stock on the market. I ought to know, for I've been on the Exchange long enough."

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..THE..

SUCCESS OF FIORNELLA.

A Tale of Magnificent Love.

"Oh, is it you, Arnold? Come in. This is such a happy day for me! Think; the play is finished!"

"But you, Roland, how is it with you? Is it one of your good days? But why do I ask? You are looking as if you had never known what illness was. Your cheek is red, your eyes sparkle. What has wrought this transformation? Finishing this play of yours? Oh, to feel an ecstasy like that!"

It was a small room in a quiet part of the town. There were flower pots in the windows, and the odour of the blossoms mingled faintly with the vague heaviness of a sick-room atmosphere. The furniture was neat; there were adornments of the sort that told of a feminine hand.

The sun sent a straggling ray of light through the white curtains, lighting up the face that looked out from the depths of the pillows. It was a boyish face, with a strangely beautiful mouth and curling lashes, veiling the eyes that were now so lit with ecstasy. Roland Stamford had lain upon that sick-bed for nine months, full of pain and hopelessness, yet now much of that anguish was forgotten, swallowed up in this beautiful joy, this complete, heavenly thrill.

Remember he had just completed his lifework! His play was written.

As for the visitor, whose name was Arnold Dilston, he was as unlike Roland as possible. He was in evident good health; prosperity shone from him everywhere; his good looks were marred by nothing of care or disease. His step was light, his voice cheery. He brought an atmosphere of youth and vigour into the dull atmosphere of this drooping life. When one is twenty-five, has perfect health, and an income that is large enough to allow a life of idleness, with only oneself to care for in the world, happiness is a near companion.

Arnold had taken a chair by the bed. He was watching the queer tricks of the sunlight across the white counterpane. A light breeze was coming in at the window, swaying the curtains gently.

"And now," he said—"and now that your play is finished, you will, will you not, tell us something of it?"

"Oh, yes. I would not speak before, you see, because I might never have completed it, and then what use would the hope have been! But now that it is done!" He said this last as if the words were very sweet to him.

"What is it, then, this play of yours? A comedy, a new *School for Scandal?* A——"

"No, no, Arnold, this is a tragedy. And such a plot! Oh, it is really beautiful. "You cannot fancy; you must read it; surely you will read it?"

"Of course, Roland. But—a tragedy! To-day at the very end, in the twentieth century! It is quite hopeless.

"If it had only been a comedy. They are all gone, you know, the people who look to the theatre for poetry, for inspiring words, and mental profit. We go only to be amused. Why have you forgotten this?"

"I do not seem to have thought of anything like that at all. I knew only one thing; this glorious thing was in me, and I had to deliver it to the world. And now what is the next thing. It must go to a manager and be read, I suppose——"

"Or not read." Arnold only whispered this in his thoughts. His lips said: "Yes, the managerial eye must scan these lines, and then—Well, I hope for the best. What is the best? Why, acceptance, and the announcement of the play's being put in rehearsal for early performance. And then; the test of publicity. Success. Wealth. But—it is a tragedy."

"Why do you say that so sadly? If you knew the stuff this tragedy is made of——! Besides, there is Jermayne."

"Yes, there is Jermayne. Have you written a part for her?"

"Not a part merely; it is the whole play. She is to be the all in all, the predominant character! Oh, my beautiful sister; how gloriously, how sweetly you will play this part. It will bring you fame! Oh, Jermayne has read the play. She loves her part already; she realises it."

"But her present contract? She is so successful at the Trafalgar Theatre."

"Her present contract expires soon; then—ah, yes, then—she shall play Fiornella. It is true that she has a delightful position in Weekman's Company; and yet—there is but little fortune for her. Whereas—as *Fiornella!* Oh, think! There will be nothing sweeter in all the world than Jermayne as Fiornella! If I can only live until that day!"

He closed his eyes in a transport of imagery. Then he went on:

"And you, Arnold, will you take this precious child of mine, this "Fiornella," and take it to the managerial eye? You know some of those people, do you not? You will do this for me? Besides—there is Jermayne."

"Yes," said Arnold, as he took the neatly-wrapped sheets of manuscript, and got up, pushing his chair back gently, "I will do my best, my very best. I hope for the pleasantest things."

"Besides—there is Jermayne——"

Arnold's eyes grew very tender; and he bade good-bye.

* * * * *

"And so they have all refused it?" It was Jermayne speaking; Jermayne, the beloved sister of *Fiornella's* author. She looked at Arnold wistfully, hoping that he might acknowledge that there was someone still untried, some channel open.

Arnold nodded, with pain in his eyes.

"All, all. There is no one else, absolutely no one."

"Oh, it will kill him! It will kill him! My poor brother, poor Roland!"

Her eyes grew dim and she looked into space.

"Is there no way at all, no other way?"

"Yes, there is another way. And Roland shall live, if it depends on *Fiornella.* You see, if the expenses are all guaranteed—almost any manager will take the piece. He risks nothing. The backer risks all that. Well—I will back it. I have a thousand pounds. That will put the piece on the boards. After that—who knows? It may be a great epoch-making triumph. I may," he spoke as if he really believed it, "make a fortune. And you—a splendid fame. And Roland—why, the mere joy of it will be enough for him."

"Oh, but you must not do this. Think, your fortune cast upon one die. If the piece fails——"

"I am a beggar." Arnold smiled as if that prospect were sweetly pleasant. "No, no, it is a very commonplace matter. It is just as if I were buying railway stocks. I may win, or I may not. No one knows. To-morrow I might have speculated it all away on stocks and shares. Instead, I shall stage *Fiornella.*"

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He spoke, this splendid young man, as if he had always had the Stock Exchange fever in his bones. Whereas he had never——But what would a young man not do for a girl like Jermayne?

"Yes," he went on eagerly, "Roland shall get well from very joy. You shall play Fiornella, and *Fiornella* shall succeed! See, I stake my word upon it. Now, go and tell Roland that Weekman has decided to put *Fiorniella* in rehearsal, and that he agrees to the stipulation about you playing the title-rôle. It is a lie that the angels will forgive you. Good-bye, Fiornella."

Jermayne's eyes got very dim.

"Oh," she said chokingly, "how shall we ever——"

But Arnold lightly kissed her fingers and left her.

* * * * *

The curtain went down on the closing scene of *Fiornella*, but the tumult of applause would not down. It never lulled at all, until Jermayne, flushed still from her great *finale*, appeared and bowed, looking like a sweet and gracious queen. And then the storm broke out anew, and there were cries, mingling finally into one compact call, of "Author, author!"

Has there ever been a more touching scene, I wonder, than that of Roland Stamford, lying at full-length in an invalid's chair, being wheeled to the centre of the stage by that beautiful Fiornella? The crimson on his cheeks was very sharply defined against his whiteness, and he looked beautiful—beautiful as Death. He spoke at last, and the silence out in front was almost an agony.

"You are very kind," he said; "I thank you. This—is what I have lived for."

Then his head sank down, and faintness came upon him. *Fiornella* was a success! A magnificent triumph! Who, with that thunderous applause still ringing in his ears, could doubt it. And yet, as each auditor went away, he looked at the other, guiltily, and as if he were ashamed.

As for Roland, when he was safe in his home again, he held quite a reception about his little bed. There were many great men there, men whose names we read of in the personal columns of the papers. And, of course, Weekman was there, and Arnold, and Jermayne. Roland looked, oh, so happy! He talked brightly, brilliantly; the young genius was at his best. The others listened and laughed, and made the boy forget his illness and everything but success. Only, from time to time, they exchanged furtive glances. And when they went away, each, as he shook hands with Roland, and then with Arnold, looked as if he had done something unworthy.

"Oh," said Roland, when he was alone with Jermayne and Arnold, "this is beautiful! Life, how glorious you are. Oh, you doubters! Did I not tell you of this, long ago? And see—it has come to pass!" He turned, smiling, to his pillows, and passed into slumber.

The doubters looked at each other, and the laughter died away from their faces.

* * * * *

It was ten days after the night of *Fiornella's* success. In Roland's little room it was quite still. Outside the sun was going down in salmon-hued splendour. In the outer room were Arnold and Jermayne, and sadness was upon both their faces.

The door of Roland's room opened gently and the doctor issued.

"Well?" said Jermayne.

"Can he live?" asked Arnold.

"He cannot live two hours." The doctor spoke softly, fearing to wound. But there was no hope in his decision. He left nothing, nothing to cling to. "I have done my best," he went on, "but he is ebbing away. There is nothing to be done." He passed out, leaving Jermayne and Arnold to their sadness.

And so it had all availed nothing! Every day the reports from the theatre had been brought to the invalid's couch, the criticisms had been read to him. The doctor had told them that the only hope was in keeping him cheerful and happy. Well, they had done that, at all cost, and now——

Arnold thought a little bitterly of the uselessness of it all. What a magnificent effort it had been! How well the mockery had been kept up! Only to keep Roland in happy content with success, that had been the end of all; that had succeeded, but——

"As literature," Arnold was reflecting, "*Fiornella* was beautiful, majestic. As a drama it was impossible, because of its very beauty and strength. We can't stand genius on the stage; we are grown domestic, even in art, and we worship the commonplace. *Fiornella* was anything but commonplace, and, therefore, predestined to fail. But there are ways and means known to the wily men of the "profession" by which a failure may appear, for a little while, to be a success. The magic wand is composed of bank-notes. Judicious 'paper,' a clever press agent, and a potent wand; these will keep any play afloat for awhile. It is so easy to get a 'house' on a first night! And newspaper columns may be bought at no unattainable figures. Critics are amenable to good wine. But—it certainly takes money. It—has—taken money."

Still musing in bitterness, Arnold went into the next room. Jermayne was there before him, at Roland's side. Roland was already growing unconscious. How beautiful he looked. His eyes rested upon Jermayne and Arnold.

"Ah," he murmured," "you must bid me good-bye, you two, I am going—away. But I am quite happy to go, now that *Fiornella* is making a name for me. Oh, the sweetness of that success. Yes, I think, up above, I shall have a theatre, and they shall always play *Fiornella*. Though, of course, we must wait until you come, Jermayne. And I hope that will be a long way off. I can wait a very long time for you. Well, I must say good-bye. I hear the call-boy.

"It will soon be my—cue, and I will have to—go on—up above. Give me your hands—both of you. So." He laid Jermayne's right within Arnold's right, and smiled up at them both. "It is so, is it not? I have always wanted that, also, and I have got it. How good God is! I have everything—everything to make me the most happy creature. And now—will you—both—kiss me?"

They stooped down and touched their lips lightly to his. Then, in another instant, a slight trembling came over Roland's form, a faint sigh came from between his lips, and—it was the end. But there remained upon his face such a smile, such a look of perfect peace and happiness, as made you feel that death was very gentle with him and loved him, as all had always done.

All the bitterness had gone from Arnold.

"To have seen that perfect happiness," he said, half to himself, half to Jermayne, "was worth twice as much."

Jermayne looked up through her tears.

"Is it all—gone?" she asked, very softly, as if the dead might yet hear.

"Every penny of it."

He spoke cheerfully, as if he were rid of that paltry wealth.

"And you are a beggar?"

"H'm—yes. But——"

"Well?"

"I have you." He drew her to him, and kissed her tear-wet eyes. "Besides," he went on proudly, "we are both young. We have youth and love, and happiness is with us." His eyes rested upon Roland's smile.

Percival Pollard.

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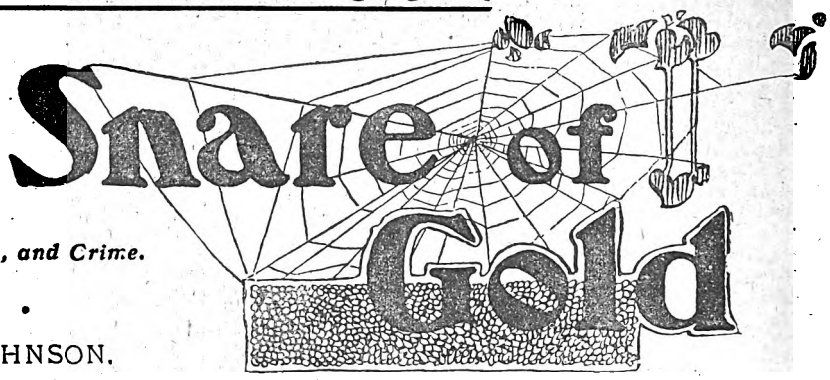
GRAND SERIAL STORY.

The Snare of Gold



A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

• • By • •

HENRY T. JOHNSON.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS SPLENDID STORY ARE:

GEORGE GELDART, a former prosperous City merchant, supposed to be dead, and now known as "Old Mystery."

ERIC GELDART, his elder son, who conspired to kill his father, thereby coming into his property. He then enters Parliament, where he forms a new party.

RONALD GELDART, the younger son, who has been disinherited because he has been falsely accused of robbing his father.

CLARE ARMITAGE, the adopted sister of the two brothers, and who was betrothed to Eric, who now scorns her love.

BOANERGES BLAGDON, the traitorous partner of old Geldart, whom he has cheated in business, and who plots with Eric to murder him.

SAMPSON SCRIMSHAW, company promoter, who befriends "Old Mystery," by whose assistance he is successful in endeavouring to become an M.P.

MR. STANYER, an Australian financier, who gives "Old Mystery" the post of English agent for his business.

MADELEINE LORRAINE, daughter of Lord Lynton, who is beloved by Eric, but who loves "Harvey Bligh," the popular author, really Ronald Geldart.

PHYLLIS DAVENTRY, typewriter to Scrimshaw, who takes a fancy to "Old Mystery." She is rescued from Hooligans by Ronald Geldart.

JACK WIDDICOMBE, cousin to the brothers Geldart, and who occupies a responsible position on the *Meteor*.

TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.
Ronald is Arrested.

"I SEE you've met before," Lady Alastair said in a delighted tone, for she was the essence of amiability. "I am so glad, I'll leave you together," and so saying, she sailed away to bring other interesting young men in touch with other interesting young women.

"You are not vexed with Lady Alastair?" said Ronald, "Because she did not know, and, of course, if you would rather not speak to me I will leave you without another word."

She looked up piteously into his eyes.

"No, no!" she said, "only I should like to speak to you alone," and she looked around as though in despair at the smiling, chattering throng near them.

He led her to the marble staircase and across a domed, mosaic-paved staircase head towards one of the conservatories, where mostly pink and white azaleas bloomed. And she seated herself in a wicker chair in the ambush of branching palms and greenery.

"I want to tell you," she said, as he seated himself beside her, "how sorry I was, how angry with myself for leaving you without a word. It seemed so unjust because, whether your brother was right or wrong in what he said, you had always been so brave and kind to me, and——" she looked down at the jewels on her wrist, "we had always been such friends."

"I am glad you have said what you have said, because it gives me the opportunity and the right to speak," he replied. "The accusation of that man—I never more will call him brother—was a foul, false slander. It is true that prior to my father's death an unjust and cruel suspicion fell upon me. Only yesterday I discovered his machinations.

"Madeleine, my good name and fame are dear to me. I dropped the name that is mine by birth until such time as I could clear it. For a time I had no means to clear it, for I could not believe, still less prove that any man, let alone my own blood brother, could contrive a scheme so diabolical and dastardly as that which Eric Geldart laid against me."

"Brother against brother," murmured Madeleine, horror in her eyes.

"Yes, brother against brother. He plotted my ruin for the one reason that he might shield himself and his own offences behind the rampart of suspicion that he heaped on me. That and one other motive swayed him; the lust for gold, the hunger for my birthright as well as his own, and the mad, hateful design of gaining all my father's fortune, banishing me from that father's confidence, from his heart—ah! at the cost of breaking that heart, or, as it proved, of sacrificing that useful, honourable life."

"Harvey! Harvey!" she cried, calling him by the name she had known and loved him by.

"It is true, true what I have told you. Soon it will be proved. But I have something more to say, Madeleine. Even in my darkest hour, when there seemed no rift in the black cloud of suspicion that loomed over me, one dread was worst of all, one yearning most intense—the dread that you should hear and think me guilty, the hope, the soul-felt hope, that you should know me and declare me to be true."

"Then," she cried, "God grant that you may rend asunder and destroy the mantle of suspicion that has shrouded you, but whether you succeed in that or no, this from my heart I do declare: 'I believe you innocent, and I—I—I love you!'"

He caught her in his arms, rained kisses on her face. Locked in each other's embrace they were oblivious to all the world, oblivious to an approaching form, oblivious to the presence of one who stood regarding them like a Mephistopheles raging at the bliss in which he had no part.

And Eric Geldart, seeing what he saw, hearing what he heard, banished from his black heart all semblance of pity or remorse, all thought of ties of blood or kindred, forgot that once the brother there and he had slept, infants in their cot, folded in each other's arms, the same mother's kiss upon their brow, the same mother's prayer murmured over them, remembered only that the man there stood between him and his heart's desire, and that he might win the love he craved and keep the gold he craved and the fame and reputation which were as the breath of his nostrils. The man there must be crushed and broken, once for all.

Turning from their rapturous embrace, the lovers faced

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him, but this time intensifying not relaxing their clasp of each other's arms, and with scorn and defiance in their eyes.

"I must apologise," Eric sneered. "for interrupting a scene so charming and so interesting; a rehearsal, I presume, for Lady Alastair's forthcoming amateur theatricals—Romeo and Juliet, or Paolo and Francesca?"

"I care no more, sir, for your sneers than for your slanders," said Ronald sternly, "your presence is an intrusion!"

And Madeleine echoed simply: "Yes, an unwelcome intrusion!"

"An intrusion—yes!" he hissed between his set teeth, while his eyes flashed like lightning under the thunder of his brows; "but there may be other intrusions than mine, and they, too, may be unwelcomed. Yes! yes! this way—this way!" and as he turned he called to two stern-looking men who were peering to right and left, followed by the affrighted Lady Alastair and a handful of her guests wide-eyed.

They strode hastily to the conservatory.

"Who is this?" said one close black-bearded man; then indicating Eric, "Is this the man?"

And Lady Alastair said:

"Oh! no! no! no! I am sure it is all a terrible mistake; you have no right to come here, no reason to come here—that is Mr. Eric Geldart—not Mr. Ronald Geldart!"

"But, my lady, the other?"

"Why that," she cried with triumphant indignation—"that is Mr. Harvey Bligh, the novelist; is it not so, Mr. Geldart?"

And Eric answered, hurling an accusing hand towards his brother and speaking to the stern, strong executants of the law:

"That is my brother, Ronald Harvey Geldart, author, poet, whatsoever else he may be, my brother and—a thief!"

A murmur rose from the trembling and now augmented throng, who looked on thrilled and petrified with horror.

"A thief!" whispered one. And another in a whisper answered: "Yes, and something else!"

And he of the black beard, advancing, said:

"Are you Ronald Harvey Geldart?"

"I am," was the unflinching answer.

"And I am Inspector Donnelly of Scotland Yard, and it it my duty, Mr. Ronald Geldart, to arrest you on the charge of the wilful murder of Clare Armitage, and I have to warn you that anything you may say is liable to be used in evidence against you." And in another moment Ronald Geldart stood between the two stern officers of the law, who, each with a hand upon his wrist, led him from out those marble halls, speechless himself with horror and amidst a silent horror of all who saw and heard.

TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.

Jack is Made Happy.

"Good morning, Miss Phyllis!" and Mr. Scrimshaw's Remington promptly ceased its chatter as was its way when Mr. Scrimshaw's typine was about to commence hers.

It was Mr. Widdicombe who interrupted the operations of the young lady operator, in fact these interruptions had of late become frequent owing to various causes.

The *Meteor* was increasing in circulation and importance, and there was more urgent and frequent need for its business manager to confer with its actual, though unsuspected, proprietor.

Again, the attendance of that proprietor in Crosby Square had of late been more urgently and continuously required. Not by the exigencies of the Cosmopolitan Trust and Exchange, the affairs of which indeed Mr. Scrimshaw delegated more and more to his cashiers and managers, devoting a daily, increasing portion of his time and energy to conferences with the strange old man in the dreary office upstairs, and the bustling, hurry-scurry of various dealings, transactions and operations following such conferences.

The staff of the Cosmopolitan were mystified. They knew that business, important and lucrative, appertained to the association of their handsomely-furnished and appointed offices and the somewhat squalid and dreary floor above, knew that it was not for nothing that huge budgets of accounts, almost cabalistic in form and contents, were sent down to them to be copied, and that in other cases balance-sheets relating to the most ordinary operations were directed to be filed upstairs.

Clearly the governor was working a big scheme, and Old Mystery, whom daily the staff of the Cosmopolitan treated with more respect and deference, was in the swim.

Certainly Mr. Widdicombe made these frequent visits to Crosby Square without complaint, and when occasionally Scrimshaw incidentally excused himself, on the ground of pressure of business, from attendance at the *Meteor* offices, the business director of that paper would remark cheerfully:

"Don't mention it, Scrimshaw, we're getting along much better without you—we'd rather not be troubled, I mean to say we'd rather not trouble you, knowing the demands upon your time made by your Parliamentary duties, to say nothing of the necessity of your being here in the City with all this alternate boom and panic in the air."

There was another reason, one that Mr. Widdicombe never mentioned. Fortune had of late smiled on him more consistently than ever he remembered.

His emoluments from the *Meteor* made the hard times of the past seem like a dream. In addition, Scrimshaw, from time to time, had, in his off-handed manner, given Cousin Jack, his old-time befriender, hints and tips of which the latter had availed himself to his substantial benefit.

And yet, strange to say, Jack Widdicombe of late felt lonelier than ever. Indeed, he dated that sense of loneliness back to the moment when he first set eyes on Phyllis Daventry, and strove in a manner, strangely shy and off-handed for a man of the world, to impress the fact upon her.

Did Phyllis catch his meaning? It is difficult to say; certainly she more and more affected not to, which inclines me from observation to believe she did.

Idylls are not all dependent on environment. Of what avail the flowing meads, the rippling streams, the summer zephyrs and the skipping lambs without a Chloe and a Strephon?

But set you down your Strephon and your Chloe in the very vortex of the City's maelstrom, with nothing more pastoral near than the bulls and bears and stags of the Stock Exchange, no verdure closer than in Drapers' Gardens, the Fountain Court of the Bank of England, or the plane tree in Cheapside; rob your Strephon of his crook, replace the silk stockings and the satin-bow-tied breeches he wears in China ornaments by a frock coat and chimney-pot silk hat, give him a silk umbrella for a crook and let your Chloe's curls be crowned, not by a garland of wild flowers, but by a picture hat, and for a smock array her in a blouse and skirt, yet shall Strephon whisper the oldest and the dearest of all stories, and all shall be Arcadian.

"Don't you get tired of type-writing?" asked Jack incidentally.

"Oh, no!" said Phyllis, "it's my work, and it's better than governessing or envelope-addressing or sewing-machining, and I'm not clever, you know, like girls who write or girls who go on the stage."

"Aren't you, by Jove!" said Jack stubbornly, and gazing angrily at a hand mirror which happened to be present, there being a daughter of Eve within the radius of a hundred yards, and which insultingly threw back at him the reflection of streaks, mocking streaks, of white above his temples. "I'd sooner listen to you than I'd read or hear any of them."

"Oh, Mr. Widdicombe, and what message did you say for Mr. Scrimshaw? I'm rather afraid it isn't much use your waiting."

"And why?"

"I doubt if he'll be back this afternoon."

"I don't see that that matters much, if I may only wait."

"If it isn't wasting your valuable time, Mr. Widdicombe," said Phyllis demurely.

"I don't think my time could be better employed; certainly not more enjoyably. Allow me," for a sheet of paper fluttered

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from Misss Daventry's table; and gallant Jack Widdicombe stooped to restore it, then he stared at it, ejaculating, "By Jove! that's strange!"

"What, Mr. Widdicombe?"

"That handwriting. May I look, I don't want to read the contents."

"Oh, certainly, if you like, it doesn't matter; they're Greek and Chinese combined to everybody except Mr. Scrimshaw and the gentleman who wrote them. I can't understand their interesting you."

"They don't, the contents, but the hand, it's as like the writing of a man I once knew as if it were his own—the same quaint tails to the g's and y's and the same twiddley little s's."

"How strange; perhaps it is."

"That can't be; the man I mean is dead."

"Then they are not the same," said Phyllis, "for this one is very much alive."

"What's his name?"

"Strange to say, I don't know, but he's a dear old gentleman and I like him very much. He belongs to the office upstairs with the Taga-Taga Wool Agency on the door. We call him Old—I mean Mr. Mystery, and Mr. Scrimshaw gives him odd jobs to do now and then—little matters that he wishes to keep outside the office, though, as a matter of fact, of late he has kept him quite busy. He seems to have quite taken to him."

"So do you," said Mr. Widdicombe in an injured tone. And Phyllis answered:

"Oh, certainly, he's such a dear old gentleman."

"I'm glad he's old," said Jack, "though, for the matter of that, I'm not getting younger," and he passed his hands ruefully through the iron grey hair thinning so rapidly at the temples.

"Oh, Mr. Widdicome, you're in the prime of life!" and the delighted Jack replied:

"Do you think so? Well, really, when you come to think of it you're not far out." For it is noticeable that men, as a rule, go on considering themselves in the prime of life from thirty-five to sixty. "But, ah!" he sighed, "I'm a great deal older than you."

"Yes," said Phyllis, going on tapping, "but then men are much younger in their ways than women all the way through."

"Do you think so? It has often occurred to me. For instance, for a man of thirty a girl of twenty would be the most natural thing in the world, and lots of men at forty marry girls of twenty."

"Oh, yes!" said Phyllis, typing furiously.

"By-the-bye, if it isn't a rude question, how old are you, Miss Phyllis?"

"I'm twenty-five," said Phyllis, blushing.

"Really, you don't look it," said Cousin Jack, who would have said that whatever she had said. "Well, I say, Miss Phyllis, if a man of thirty is young and a man of forty is not too old for a girl of twenty, why—why——" He paused, the better to elaborate his rule of three sum, "for a young lady of twenty-five a man of forty-five would be just about the age.

"What age?" asked Phyllis, with amazing innocence, and Jack exclaimed:

"The age to ask you, Miss Phyllis, if—if—you'll save a poor fellow from developing into what he's on the verge of—a lonely, dreary, weary, selfish old bachelor. I know I'm not much to look at. I'm neither clever nor rich, also I'm past my prime, and there are dozens of smarter men, younger men, who'd give the world for a smile from such a pretty girl as you, but I love you very, very dearly, and I'll be good and true to you all my days."

He seized her hand—he was seated beside her. Her lips trembled, and her eyes filled with tears.

A hundred thoughts flashed through her mind, she thought of herself as she was, happy in herself, happy in her work, but fatherless, motherless, without brother or sister, and at times feeling very, very lonely, thought of herself as she pictured what she was to be, a prim little old maid going home to a prim little sitting-room of an evening, with the prim tabby cat singing on the prim hearthrug, and the spring-time coming and going and the autumn bringing more dead leaves.

And then—and then—there flitted for a moment in her mental vision a handsome, grave face, a well-set figure, a voice that woke music in her heart, and then—and then, she put that picture by—for ever. And there in the City's heart the little idyll was enacted, and Cousin Jack, somewhat late in life, plucked and laid upon his heart the flower of womanhood that was to make his whole life fragrant.

And through the open window there floated from below a harmony of strings—a harp, a violin, a 'cello. Bustling City men paused just a moment, and a few drones there in the City hive loitered awhile to listen to the wandering minstrels who played on and on, little deeming they were furnishing the incidental music to a real life drama that had reached its happiest situation.

Cousin Jack, with a light heart and the footstep of a schoolboy, all but cannonned with his patron when descending the stairs.

"Do you want to see me?"

"Yes."

"Well, out with it."

"Only just to ask if you can spare your typewriting young lady."

"What for, and for how long?"

"Permanently."

"No, you be hanged! the *Meteor* office is quite distinct from the Cosmopolitan Trust, and mustn't steal its staff."

"But she isn't for the *Meteor*, and I don't want her to typewrite any more; I want her for a semi-detached villa in the neighbourhood of Streatham, and I want her for my wife."

"By Jove!" said Scrimshaw, "who'd have thought it? This sort of thing disorganises business. Tut! Tut! I expect those accounts she's copying will be chock full of errors. Well, never mind, old chap, give us your hand, I couldn't wish her or you a better bit of luck. By-the-bye, Jack, I'll give you a tip that will set you up in housekeeping; put a hundred in Esperanza Reefs."

"What are they?" said Cousin Jack, opening his paper.

"Not quite sure; here, you follow, give me the *Times*."

Mr. Springle obeyed. Cousin Jack opened the paper, took note of the last quotation of the stock in question, was refolding it casually, his eye caught the leaded line, TERRIBLE DISCOVERY IN LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS. A WOMAN MURDERED. And then a name—a familiar name—"Clare Armitage of Belsize Gardens! Good God!" he cried. "Scrimshaw, read!"

"Yes," said the other, "ghastly affair, wasn't it? Did you know her?"

"Yes, yes! Knew her parents too; they died when she was quite a child. My cousin, old George Geldart, who's dead too, now, brought her up in his household. I think she thought young Eric meant to marry her, and I expect he, as was his way with most people, treated her very badly. But, poor soul, who can have done this awful deed?"

TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Phyllis Finds her Father.

On the morning following Frederick Stanyer's return, he and his agent sat in the little room on the second floor in Crosby Square, again conferring.

The conversation mainly turned on market matters, and, not unnaturally, drifted on to liars.

"Talking of liars," said Stanyer, "I met about the biggest specimen just after my arrival out. They were talking about a man of your name, the youngster who made a hit in Parliament, and there was a man in the club just out from home who made himself out to be a sort of walking guide to the Peerage and the County Families, and

(*Continued on page* 509.)

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In connection with the recent statistics published relating to the appalling increase of tuberculosis (lung diseases of all descriptions), consumption, and asthma, Professor Richard Haynel, Director of the Weidhaas Hygienic Institute, Burgess Hill, near Brighton, recently waited upon us and gave us some interesting and wonderful information with regard to his treatment for the above-mentioned diseases. The Professor has asked us to inform our readers that he will forward any sufferer mentioning our paper, full and minute details of how "To Cure Yourself," and a copy of his great work on the subject, which deals exhaustively with the Weidhaas Home Treatment, absolutely free of charge. The book sets forth in a very simple language the easiest, most rational, and really marvellous methods for effecting a cure, no matter how long the dreaded disease may have been running its evil way.

Professor Haynel has devoted over twenty-five years consistent study to the question of securing and restoring health to sufferers from consumption, asthma, chest and stomachic complaints. The treatment he advocates has been thoroughly tested during that period, and the number of cases in which it has proved to be remarkably efficacious runs into many thousands. The Professor gave us several instances of remarkable cures, vouched for by letters received from patients, and the following genuine testimonial shown to us, amongst others, is only one record out of hundreds of similar cases of asthma cured to stay cured.

"To the Director of the Weidhaas Institute.—Dear Sir,—It is with grateful and sincere thanks that I testify to the remarkable success of your treatment. For the last seventeen years I have suffered very severely with my chest, and during the winter of '98 I was so ill and weak that I had no hopes of recovery. My cough and expectoration were incessant, and many a night I could not lie down. I was short of breath. My shoulders were bent, and my voice was almost a whisper, whilst I had a severe pain under the shoulder blades. I tried many remedies, so-called, but none cured until I went in for a course of your treatment. Now the pain is all gone, I can walk without feeling tired, and I am never prostrated. In fact, I am in excellent health. I shall do my best to recommend your treatment.—Yours gratefully, Caroline Sadler, Perth, N.B. (Full address on application.)"

At this season of the year, when Bronchitis finds its way into nearly every family in the land, the experience of Mrs. Smith, of Tewkesbury, will be of great interest to our readers. It proves conclusively the undoubted value of a scientific application of hygienic methods in curing disease. "I suffered from chronic bronchitis, and did nothing but cough day and night, with a good deal of phlegm. My lungs were weak and I gradually got worse in spite of the efforts of a doctor. I often had to be assisted up and down stairs, had to struggle for breath and could eat nothing. Attacks would sometimes come on three times a day, and often lasted three weeks. I could never lie down, and dreaded night to come. I was becoming quite a skeleton, and then I decided to try your treatment. In about eleven months I felt quite a new person. Now my breathing is quite perfect, and I am able to do my ordinary housework, including washing. After three long weary years of such helplessness, I feel more than grateful."

Another wonderful cure effected in a long-standing case of consumption, is a further evidence of the efficacy of the Weidhaas Home Treatment. Mrs. Arnold, of Polegate (whose full name and address can be had on application to the Director of the Weidhaas Institute), writes: "'I have suffered several years from consumption, and the doctors gave me up. I was so ill that I was confined to bed, and I lost a half-pint of blood a day. I also suffered from a dry cough and night sweats, and whenever I attempted to do anything I had a fearful pain in my left side. In September, 1897, I was given up as incurable. I suffered dreadfully from bleeding of the lungs, and I could scarcely eat anything. I heard of your cure and made up my mind to try it just at the time when I was at my worst, for I had given up all hopes of ever being cured. After trying your treatment, in a few weeks I began to improve, my cough ceased and I did not suffer from the night sweats or bleeding of the lungs. I can now walk a considerable distance without feeling the least fatigue. I owe my entire cure to your marvellous treatment."

The Professor is quite prepared to back his own opinions and those of his patients to the extent of £1,000, and will pay this sum to any charitable institution we may name, if one testimonial published by the Weidhaas Hygienic Institute can be proved otherwise than genuine. We cannot impress upon our readers who suffer themselves (or whose friends are in distress through these terrible diseases) too much the importance of immediately putting themselves or their friends into communication with the Director of the Institute. You should at once write in full, giving such particulars as you feel justified in stating as to your symptoms and complaints, and you may rest assured that your case, no matter how complicated or serious, will have the prompt personal and individual attention of Professor Haynel.

Address in full, mentioning that we advised you to write—The Weidhaas Hygienic Institute, 80, Burgess Hill, near Brighton.

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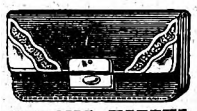

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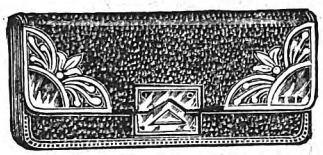

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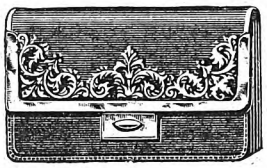

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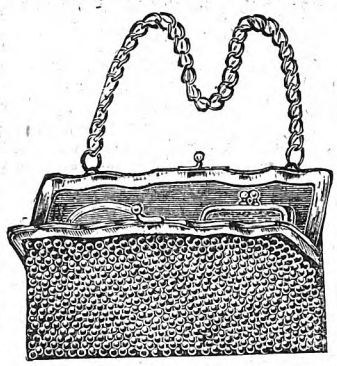

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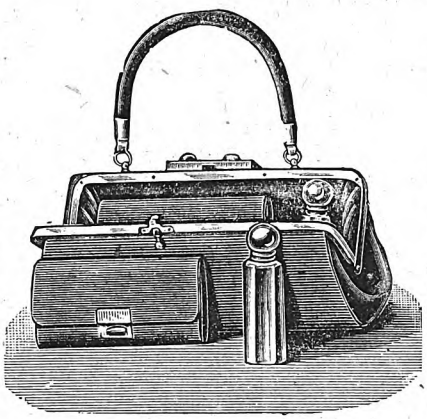

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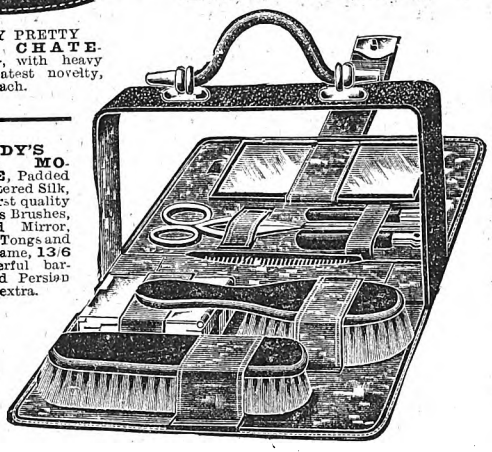

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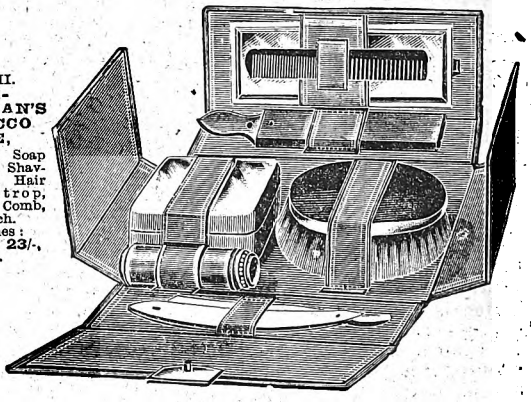

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'Who's Who' rolled into one, and amongst others he professed to know this Eric Geldart, M.P.

"I happened incidentally to mention that I as a lad was in the same office with a man of that name at Berridge and Smilax's in Mincing Lane, and this know-all answered like a shot, 'That's the man; that was Eric Geldart's father.' 'Well,' I said, 'it was very creditable in a young fellow to push his way right through to the front, having regard to his home circumstances,' and, by Jove! the man was down my throat in an instant.

"What was I referring to? Geldart's environment was just about as good a send-off as an ambitious man wanted. Well, I intimated that the man I knew had been rather unfortunate, and when last I met him he was considerably below his bottom dollar. 'Why, man,' says this talking encyclopædia, 'George Geldart was one of the warmest men on the Produce Market!' Said I, 'He may have been, though I should be very surprised to learn it, but when I met him two months ago he was on bed rock, as clean broke as any man could wish to be, and cleaner than most would care to be.'

"This chap curled up his lip and sneered visibly. 'I knew George Geldart very well indeed, dined very many times with him at his house in Bryanston Square, in fact, was there a day or two before he died.' 'Before he what?' said I. 'Died,' says he, and I answered, 'The man I mean is as alive as I am, or anyway he was an hour ago,' for a cablegram from you had been handed me half an hour previously. 'Then,' I added, 'I expect we're talking of different men, the one I mean was the son of Gabriel Geldart, the City alderman, who was in his time Lord Mayor.'

"'Exactly,' my informant replied, 'that was the Geldart I mean; his father articled him with Berridge and Smilax in Mincing Lane before he took him into his own firm. He was at Charterhouse with my own brother. I knew him well; also his two sons, one of whom went to the bad, and was cut adrift, the other is the present M.P. for Little Claverton. Why, I sent flowers to his funeral. My cousin, Dick Farningham, was one of his executors.'

"Well, I held my breath and let him ramble on. Like a good many professional liars, he got hold of one or two facts to weave in the woof of his invention. He described you fairly well, except that he made you out as a kind of type of sleek prosperity, the sort of man you might have been if you'd struck oil before I met you last time I was over here, instead of after.

"Man, he made you out a monument of sleek, snug prosperity and respectability, philanthropist, big donor to all the funds, a governor of this and a director of that, and, observing the direction of my eyes, he suddenly broke off and asked: 'What's the matter with the chandelier?' I said 'Nothing, it was the ceiling I was looking at, expecting it to fall in,' and I waltzed out on the balcony, for that man's lies absorbed all the atmosphere of that room. Hullo! Who's this?" For just then Phyllis Daventry entered the room with a bundle of papers and their typed transcription.

Stanyer followed her with a curious, wistful look in his eyes, then he whispered to Geldart, "Make her talk."

"I think you'll find those all in order," said Phyllis. "Mr. Scrimshaw is late, so I thought I'd bring them straight up to you."

"You're always very good and thoughtful," said Old Mystery. "By-the-bye, Scrimshaw tells me you are going to leave him."

"Yes," said Phyllis, blushing.

"Going to get an easier place?"

"No, Mr. Mystery, that is—well, I hope so, I mean to say," and Phyllis blushed violently. "I'm not going to another post at all, I'm—I'm going to be married and live at Upper Tooting."

"Are you really?" said Old Mystery. "Lucky Upper Tooting, how grey this dreary den will seem without your occasional visits. But who's the happy man?"

"It's Mr. Widdicombe, the *Meteor* manager," said Phyllis, a happier look than ever in her eyes.

Meantime the other man's eyes were fixed with a dilated gaze upon her hand.

"Jack Widdicombe!" exclaimed the old man. "Why my little lassie, he's nearly old enough to be your father. But that's no matter. Love laughs at years as well as locksmiths, and he'll be good and kind."

"Then you know him? I'm so glad! You must come and see us sometimes."

"I don't know, Miss Phyllis."

Stanyer clutched the table.

"But one thing I will do. See here," and he took from his pocket-book a bank-note for £500. "Money may be the root of evil, but sometimes out of evil cometh good. Even gold sometimes brings brightness, and perhaps an old man's gift may make a young woman's home a little happier. I'd like you to buy with this just what you like, and keep it to remember one who always found you gracious, and to whom your gentle words and winning ways brought peace and joy in sad and lonely days."

"Oh, Mr. Mystery!" said Phyllis, "how good you are, but this is quite a fortune, it takes away my breath! I almost wonder if I ought to accept it! It's more money than I ever thought to possess all my whole life; I don't know what to say."

"Tell me, what is your name, little girl, tell me your other name, Phyllis, and say where you got that ring!"

She turned, startled, almost alarmed by the excited tone of the stranger.

"Why, sir," she said, "this ring was my dear dead mother's. Oh! what's the matter?" for the man seemed all of a sudden turned to stone, his eyes dilated, his breath came and went in deep long spasms; he looked upon her like one transfixed.

"Your dear dead mother! Dead—dead!" he faltered; then, strong man as he was he let his head fall on his folded arms and gave way to his grief.

And in answer to the girl's inquiring gaze, Old Mystery said gently:

"This, Phyllis, is my real employer, and my friend, Mr. Frederick Stanyer."

"Stanyer!" exclaimed the girl. "Frederick Stanyer! Why—why that was my father's name!"

"Yes! yes!" said the stricken man, rising to his feet and throwing wide his arms. "Phyllis! Phyllis, at last, my dear, I've found you, come to my heart. I am your father!"

Old Mystery silently stole out of the room, leaving the reunited child and father locked in each other's arms.

He stood a moment irresolute on the staircase. How narrow as well as wide the world was! And then he heard hasty footsteps ascending the stairs and Scrimshaw, with a wild look in his face, bounded up to the landing, a newspaper in his hand.

"Old Mystery!" he cried, "look here, look here!"

And the old man, taking the paper in his trembling hand, read the headline:

THE LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS MURDER!
SENSATIONAL ARREST!

And his eye, roving down the column, caught the name of Clare Armitage.

Clare Armitage, and two other names—those of his own sons.

TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Madeleine Pleads with her Father.

It is doubtful if Eric Geldart, callous and remorseless as we know him to have been, would have been nerved to playing quite the desperate game he pursued but for one consideration, his infatuation for Madeleine Lorraine. And the fever of his passion increased with her coldnesss towards him.

Attractive and delightful as she was, there were plenty in both respects her equal whom the smart, already distinguished young politician might have won for the asking. But for these he had no eyes; it was his way, his heart once set upon an object that was hard to obtain, the more he desired it.

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Had Clare Armitage, whom at one time he thought he loved, been less easy to win he would have prized her more. She, loving him madly and blindly, had thrown herself into his arms, her swift surrender had killed his passion; and, when she stood between the man she loved so dearly and his ends, he took the life that he had blighted without remorse.

But his desire for Madeleine Lorraine had become the ruling passion of his life, therefore a double motive impelled him to his desperate course; the fearful charge against his brother not only tended to his own security, but removed a rival.

Not unnaturally an immense amount of sympathy was accorded him from all sides; even his political opponents deplored the hardships of a young man of such brilliant attainments and promise being subject to a reflected slur.

And when twelve good men and true were summoned by His Majesty's coroner to inquire into the matters touching the death of Clare Armitage, spinster, Eric Geldart, faultless in attire and appearance as his partisans declared him to be in character, faced those twelve good men and true and identified the victim without a trace of emotion.

Not even when he had looked upon that clear, cold, white, set face had he flinched. He looked upon his work, silent and unmoved, touched lightly the ice-cold brow, untroubled.

Yes! even when all of a sudden those around him noted what had not caught their eye before—a stain in the white cerements above the shoulder just where the first cruel blow had fallen. And those who saw marvelled it had not caught their eyes before, while others said the crimson was so vivid it might have been quite new.

The coroner accorded the distinguished witness all the courtesy and respect his position demanded, and the member for Little Claverton gave his evidence, seated beside the representative of the Crown.

Questioned as to whether the deceased to his knowledge had any enemies, he expressed a reluctance to answer that question. But the coroner pressed.

"Mr. Geldart," he said firmly though kindly, "I desire as far as possible in every way to spare your feelings, but in a matter of such serious import as this it is necessary to have, not only the truth and nothing but the truth, but the whole truth."

Then Eric answered that he could only call to mind one person with whom the deceased had been at variance, and when asked who that person was, a thrill of sensation and sympathy followed his reply: "It was my brother, Ronald Geldart."

And he told how when that brother had been charged by their late father with the misappropriation of a large sum of money, the testimony of the deceased had been the most damning against him; told, too, in examination how that brother had disappeared out of his family and social circle, had cut off his environment, and, when next encountered, was bearing an assumed name.

And meantime that brother, a police custodian on either side, watched every movement of Eric's face, listened to his every word. And then the coroner, addressing that selfsame brother, asked:

"Ronald Harvey Geldart, you may, if you choose, give evidence concerning the matters touching this inquiry, only it is my duty to warn you that what you say may be used against you elsewhere."

"I have this to say," Ronald answered. "I met the deceased upon the night in question and I left her alive and well. So far from there being any animus between us she had that night made to me a confession of the share she had taken in as foul a conspiracy against me as ever was laid against a man." Here he faced his brother with a challenge in his eye, but even then there was no flinch in Eric's eyes.

"The story of that conspiracy," said Ronald, "is told in half a dozen words. She, herself under the persuasion, or rather, the coercion of that man—her betrayer—robbed my father, and lied, fixing the crime on me!"

And Eric Geldart, folding his arms, met the accusing gaze with one fully as defiant in its stony impassivity.

As with dogs, it sometimes is with men—give them a bad name you may almost as well hang them. And the jury in this respect did their best by, without leaving the box, returning a verdict of Wilful Murder against Ronald Harvey Geldart.

* * * * *

Lord Lynton lost all patience with his daughter.

"Why, bless my soul, girl!" he rasped out, "you've the chance of a thousand, the man's going up the ladder by leaps and bounds." And then, when the sensational news of the arrest of Harvey Bligh for the Lincoln's Inn Fields murder and the establishment of his identity with Ronald Geldart came out, Viscount Lynton pooh-poohed the idea of the matter affecting Eric.

"The world is too enlightened nowadays," he said, "to let a man suffer for the misdeeds or misfortunes of his kith or kin. Eric Geldart will maintain his position in Society, and his political career will be unchecked, even though his wretched brother goes to the scaffold."

"Oh, no! no! no!" answered Madeleine with a shudder. "They cannot bring this terrible charge home to him."

"That remains to be seen," said her father. "Certainly, as far as circumstantial evidence goes, many a man has been hanged on less."

"But," Madeleine persisted, "Ronald could never strike a woman, still less deal her that dastardly, murderous blow; his nature forbids even such a thought."

The Viscount scanned her curiously, startled at her fervour in the cause of the man accused.

"How do you know?" he asked. "I know that you were present at the arrest, unfortunately, and were, in fact, talking to the wretched fellow when the police arrived; though, happily, so far your name has been kept out of the papers. I was not aware that you were so very intimately acquainted with him, or indeed, that you had ever met him before. Eh?"

Madeleine hung her head.

"Come! Come, tell me, had you ever met him before, and when and where?" He tapped his foot impatiently.

"I have met Ronald Geldart very many times," she answered, now calmly looking him fairly in the face. "Twice he saved my life; once when the horses bolted——"

"What! Was he the fellow who stopped them and was knocked down by them for his pains. I thought that man disappeared without leaving a trace as to his identity."

"So he did; but we met again on the river." And then she told the story of the capsizing of her canoe and her rescue by Ronald.

"But why has all this been kept secret from me?" asked the Viscount, angrily and suspiciously. "Did you ever meet again between that time and the night of the arrest?"

"Yes, very many times."

"Unknown to me?"

"Yes, father. I should have told you, but you and I have lived our lives so very much apart that I hardly thought the matter would interest you."

"Whether it interested me or not, one thing is certain; it would concern me to learn that my daughter was driving and boating with a casual acquaintance of whom she knew little or nothing."

"Oh, but as Harvey Bligh, everybody knew him, answered Madeleine quickly.

"Anyway, I don't consider a scribbling fellow, even though he has acquired a certain kind of mushroom celebrity, a proper acquaintance, certainly not a proper companion for my daughter, and whatever reputation the fellow may have won under an assumed name, he's lost such as he had under the name that was his birthright; his father disinherited him for a thief."

"No! No!" cried Madeleine passionately, "that was a cruel, unjust suspicion, a foul slander it was the work of his life to refute, for he is truth itself."

(To be concluded next week.)

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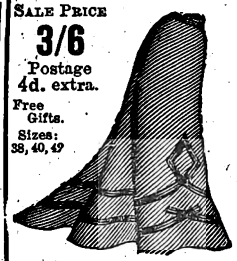

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THE DAILY EXPRESS 1D. ½

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

A One Sided Love Affair.

"H. S." is acquainted with a girl who is very fond of him. He feels that he cannot return her love, as he is not fond enough of her. On several occasions she has been quite indifferent to him. The girl herself made the first advances in the acquaintance. How can "H. S." explain his position without causing trouble?

* * * * *

"H. S." should gradually drop his meetings with the girl, and try to cause her to forget him. As long as he continues seeing her, he will exercise a fascination which is difficult to drive away. Above all, he should avoid giving her the impression that he returns her love, as that way lies a broken heart.

Free Trade in Flirtations.

"Last year," writes "G. S.," "I made the acquaintance of a nice boy, who showed me a good deal of attention. I have been for several walks with him, but am told he keeps up the acquaintance of other girls. Shall I speak to him about it, or let the matter drop?"

* * * * *

You must wait until he makes some kind of declaration of love for you, "G. S." before you can dictate to him as to what other girls he sees. He may be merely cultivating your friendship, and can scarcely be expected to drop his other friends on that account. It is not right for a girl to expect a young man, whom she only knows so slightly, to give himself entirely to her.

A Case of Cooling Off.

"A year ago I made the acquaintance of a young lady," writes "Changeable," "of whom I grew very fond. She returned my affection. About two months after our meeting I grew cool to her, and lost my love. Later on I asked her to break off our friendship, which she agreed to do, without being very sorry. I was told, however, that she seemed very cut up about it. She also said she would be always willing to 'make it up again,' but that she could never love me as before. As I still have a certain liking for her would you advise me to attempt a reconciliation?"

* * * * *

I always advise reconciliations between parted friends, and do so in the case of "Changeable." As to whether or not you resume your intimate relations, must depend on how things turn out after your fresh meetings. If you find that you remain cool to each other, then you should agree that the intimacy had better stop. I suppose a man can be on friendly terms with a girl without committing himself to an engagement.

Is It Trespassing?

"R. A. W." writes: "I am in love with a young girl, but, unfortunately, she is already keeping company with a young fellow. As she does not see much of him, I am very often with her, and believe she would certainly go with me if it were not for him. Is it right for me to meet her in the present circumstances? If not, could you advise me what to do?"

* * * * *

Ask the girl herself whether the course is clear for you to meet her, and tell her you do not wish to do anything to disturb her relations with the other fellow. She should be the judge. If she is not actually engaged to him, she must have the right to say whether or not she prefers your society to his.

A Sweetheart's Family.

"Gussie's" sweetheart belongs to a large family. He finds it very difficult to visit her home and to get a few words in private with her. There is always some younger sister or brother to talk to, and her father persists in boring "Gussie" with politics or stocks. How can he act under such circumstances?

* * * * *

It is pretty clear that "Gussie" is not going the right way to work to make a good impression on his sweetheart's family. It is a great blunder in courtship to make out that the girl alone is the only person in the family worthy of notice. This inclines the other members to put the couple down as tedious young turtle-doves. If "Gussie" wishes to be on good terms with the family he should be as nice as possible to young brothers and sisters. They are very good friends in need, as many a young man has found before now. He might, too, talk politics for awhile with her father without doing himself any harm. Fathers, above all, like to think their daughters are engaged to intelligent young men. Besides, "Gussie" should remember that any neglect or slight offered by him to his sweetheart's people would be very galling to her. When a girl has to choose between her sweetheart and her family, it is not always the former that wins the victory.

A Bloodthirsty Sweetheart.

"F. E. W. S." writes: "I am engaged to a girl, but she knows somebody else. When we have any little squabble, she throws the other fellow's name in my face. The other day I told her I should not pay any more money into her club, and that she must pay for her own dresses. She turned on me, punched me in the mouth and chest, and left scratches and bruises on my arm. Her father seems to have no control over her. I have asked her to return my engagement ring, but she refuses to do so until she has found someone more 'suitable.' Can I claim the ring back and break off the engagement without being sued for breach of promise?"

* * * * *

You seem to have got hold of a woman who could not possibly make a desirable wife. As you are engaged to her I cannot advise you to break off the match without her consent. But you can let the engagement slide, and drop all communications with her. As to her returning your ring, you cannot compel that, but it is to be hoped that, when she sees that you have done with her, she will do so. In the event of breach of promise proceedings, I do not think the girl would have a case, if what you tell me about her conduct is true. I hope she will succeed in finding someone more "suitable" for her gentle affections.

Cynthia

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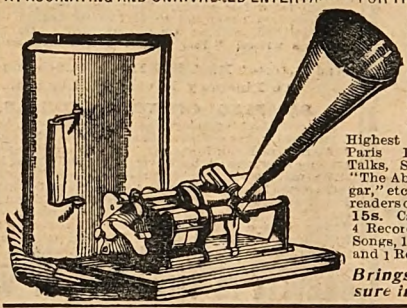

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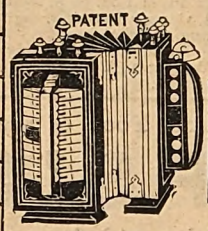

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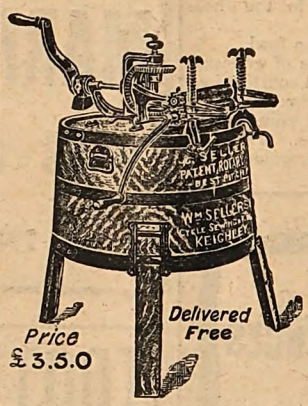

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SHORT STORIES

THE NURSE'S BONNET HAD FALLEN BACK AND REVEALED THE FEATURES OF RIGBY STARR!

No. 775
24/10/03

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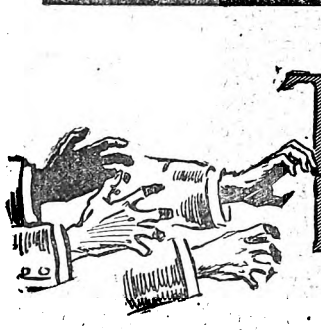

THE PURSUIT OF SARA

For New Readers.

Miss Sara Gillespie, who is the relater of these experiences, found employment as a typine in the firm of Messrs. Templeton and Co., General Agents. The partners in the firm were Mr. Templeton, Mr. Harrington Shackell, and Mr. Rigby Starr. They treated Sara most courteously, especially the senior partner, who, before very long, induced her to tell him all about her absent lover, Noel Masterman. The latter was by profession a doctor, but as he lacked the capital to start a practice in England, he had accepted the post of medical attendant to an old school friend, who was travelling on the Continent for the benefit of his health, and was at present in Nice. Noel had been brought up by his uncle, Sir Francis Masterman, and had excellent prospects, but he incurred the displeasure of the Baronet when he fell in love with Miss Gillespie, and Sir Francis refused to have anything more to do with him. Mr. Templeton assured Sara that he thought Noel had been very hardly treated, and suggested that the best thing for him to do would be to return, and he would see whether he could not obtain a practice for him.

Then one day Noel entered the office unexpectedly, and told his love he had had a wire from his cousin Herbert, saying that Sir Francis was not expected to live long. He had hastened from Nice in order to get his uncle's forgiveness before his death. Sara and he then drove straight to the Baronet's house, only to find that he had already passed away, and that Herbert was now holder of the title. In his will Noel's uncle had bequeathed him a thousand pounds, and with this he intended to buy a practice to which Mr. Templeton had recommended him. One evening Noel and Sara paid a visit to Sir Herbert, and learnt from him that he had insured his life in favour of Templeton and Co. for fifteen thousand pounds. Just as they were leaving Sir Herbert's valet entered, and, with a cry of amazement, Sara asserted that he was Harrington Shackell, one of her employers.

The two men ridiculed the idea, and assured her that the likeness could be but a chance one; they explained that Shackell had a moustache, whereas the valet was clean shaven.

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With this explanation Miss Gillespie had to remain content. The following day Noel received a telegram summoning him back to Nice, and in order that he should be able to buy the practice in question, he gave the thousand pounds to Mr. Templeton, and signed a document authorising the firm to deal for him. By a piece of trickery, the senior partner converted this document into one authorising the firm to deal *with his whole estate.*

In the afternoon Sara overheard Templeton and Rigby Starr talking, and their words aroused her suspicions. She understands that Noel is heir to the Baronetcy, in the event of Sir Herbert having no children, and realises that, should Sir Herbert die, the firm has sole control of her lover's estate.

Just then Harrington Shackell entered, and she was shocked to hear him announce that Sir Herbert Masterman was dead—murdered by him, his valet! So, after all, her suspicion had been only too well grounded! Then, little by little, she heard the diabolical plot against her lover unfolded, and also the hint that she herself was in danger, as she was the only one the murderers had to fear, and they intended that they should run no risks whatever.

Then she resolved on a bold scheme—to get possession of the notes and the document.

She crouched back behind the door.

The three plotters were all too engrossed in their schemes to notice her, so she crept carefully and slowly out of her hiding place, and across the room.

Gradually she came within reach of the precious papers.

She dared not hesitate.

Blindly she snatched the notes, clutched the document.

Then, when too late, the men espied her. With a shriek she rushed across the room, turning over chairs and tables in her flight. One of the villains threw a stick at her, and struck her.

In the nick of time she reaches the door and slams it in the face of her pursuers, locking it on the outside.

Then she fled. Down the long corridor she tore, and into the street.

You will read of what befell her at Bedford in the following pages.

Week by week Miss Gillespie will continue her narrative.

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THIS WEEK'S EPISODE.
in Peril at Bedford.

I HAVE no clear recollection of leaving the building in which the offices of Templeton & Co. were situated. I was so shaken by the suspense, the terror, of the last half hour, that I was able to obey one instinct only—that of flight. A hurried rush down crowded streets, jostled by the throng that filled the pavements pushed now to one side, now to another, I found myself at length at the Bank of England, one of a stream of pedestrians waiting for a 'bus.

As yet I had formed no plans of what to do, where to go, to avoid pursuit. My mind was concentrated on the packet of bank notes clutched firmly in my hand, together with the paper which gave Templeton the power to use my lover's fortune as he pleased. One thing was certain. I dared not return to my lodgings. That would be the first place likely to be searched and the last in which I must be found. I must seek out a spot remote from London, with people of whom I had not spoken at the office.

At this moment an omnibus for The Angel, Islington, drew up. My lodgings were in Brixton, it would, therefore, be quite safe to journey in the opposite direction, to the north of London. I scrambled to the top and secured a seat close to the driver. Then, but not till then, I found some measure of quiet and self-control. Rapidly I ran over a list of acquaintances likely to help me. I must secure a hiding-place where I could remain in safety until Noel should return to England. I racked my brain in vain for some long time until there flashed across my mind the recollection of a girl whom I had known at school. She was my senior by some years, and had secured an appointment as a teacher in the High School at Bedford. Her name was Ellen Hartley. As I remembered her she was a person of decided character and with plenty of commonsense. She would appreciate the difficulties of my position and assist me to remain in hiding till Noel returned.

I decided to start for Bedford that same night. To that end I changed my omnibus at The Angel for one going in the direction of St. Pancras Station. It was just on eight o'clock when I reached the Midland Terminus. The next train to Bedford did not start till 8.40. I had over half an hour to wait. Rapidly glancing round to see if I were followed, I made my way to the station telegraph office, and sent a wire to Noel at his hotel at Nice to this effect: "Imperative you return to England at once—most urgent. Reply to Bedford Post Office.—SARA."

This done I went to the refreshment room and forced myself to eat some excessively dry sandwiches for support upon my journey. I waited there until the last moment, hurrying through the barrier just as the train was going to start. A last look up the platform as we steamed out of the station revealed a tall figure running towards the gate waving a frantic appeal after the retreating train. For an awful moment I thought that it was Shackleton, and fell back into my seat sick with fear. If they should stop the train! I saw myself hauled out of the carriage, conveyed to the nearest police station charged with theft! I clutched the bank notes tightly and crouched back into my corner. Thank Heaven we were off. The platform out of sight, London fast receding, Templeton & Co.—behind.

Bedford Post Office, at which the reply to Sara's telegram was called for by one of her pursuers.

The carriage was empty for nearly the whole way. At Luton, however, an old man and his daughter got in. They addressed some casual would-be friendly remarks to me, but I was too nervous to respond, and murmured some incoherent reply that must have conveyed the impression I was mentally deficient. There were no further stoppages until we arrived at Bedford. The train was late, it was past ten by the time we reached our destination.

I was worn out with stress of emotion, and felt terribly cold and wretched as I stumbled on to the platform. It was too late to attempt to find Ellen Hartley that night; I must defer my search for her until the next morning. Meanwhile I must obtain a lodging for the night. I was afraid to ask the porters if they could tell me of a hotel, for I wished to leave no clue by which I could be traced. I left the station and wandered through the ill-lit streets round about until I found myself in the Midland Road. The County Theatre, brightly illuminated, revealed the burly form of a policeman.

Taking heart of grace, I asked for the principal thoroughfare of the town.

"Keep straight on, and you'll come to the High Street," was the reply, so to the High Street I turned my steps.

It is a picturesque thoroughfare leading to the river at one end and a fine avenue of trees the other, but I had no opportunity of admiring its beauties that night. The shops for the most part were closed, but a confectioner, of the name of Norman, still showed a glimmer of gas in the window. I ventured inside the door.

"Could you recommend me a nice quiet hotel?" I faltered, and seemed to feel the girl's sharp eyes go through me.

"There's The Swan," she began, "but," she paused, her glance took in my pale face and drooping figure, noted my absence of luggage, and grew suspicious.

"Thanks very much," I murmured, and bolted back into the street. I found The Swan without much difficulty. A tall square building fronting the High Street, its side windows looked on the embankment of the river Ouse. The hall looked bright and cheery through the swing doors and spoke of comfort within. It was a large place and I felt doubtful as to the wisdom of staying there. And yet, what else could I do? Past ten o'clock in a strange town, beset by fears, tired in body and in mind, I felt I must at all costs secure a good night's rest.

I made my way down the long hall to the office. A pleasant-looking woman attended to my request for a room, and anticipating her inquiry for my luggage, I boldly stated that my bag had been left behind!

"The porter forgot to put it in the carriage," I said without blushing. "It will be sent after me to-morrow."

No further demur was made, and having registered my name as "Brown," the chambermaid led the way up several flights of stairs and along a corridor to room No. 29. I ordered some supper, and, drawing a comfortable chair before the open window, gazed out into the night.

There was a bright moon, and in the soft light the river, which the room overlooked, shone like silver. The tiny waves lapped the shore with a swish-swish infinitely soothing. The trees rustled gently in the wind; over the water, across the straggling branches was borne the echo of the church clock chiming some sweet, old-fashioned melody to mark the hour. It was "The Blue Bells of Scotland," and the refrain brought an ache to my heart, called up an unutterable longing for my boy. "It was oh in my heart that I wished him safe at home"!

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I ate the cold beef brought for my refreshment, and then having locked the door and bolted the window, took the packet of bank notes from my dress, and sat down to consider what was best to do with them—and the all-important paper Noel had signed.

I had of my own money some five pounds in my purse, ample, as I then thought, to keep me until Noel came back. If I had known all that was to happen—the weary time that I should have to wait, the risk that I should have to run—before he came, I doubt if I should have had the courage to fight on. As it was I comforted myself with the belief that at most I should not have to wait longer than two days—perhaps a week, no more. And then a step down the corridor sent the blood rushing from my heart, and brought me shuddering to the door. Had they found me, was it the police come to arrest me as a thief, a thief who had stolen notes to the value of £1,000 ?

The steps passed on. I drew a sigh of relief, and once more bent my mind to the task in hand. It was folly to carry the notes about with me. If I were captured by one of the firm the prize would be ready to their hand. And yet, where could I deposit such an amount in safety ? I dare not open a banking account, in all probability the numbers of the missing notes would be circulated throughout the country by the next day. I, and I alone could guard them. I decided to cut the notes in halves, keep ten halves myself, and deposit the remaining ten next morning in the cloak-room of the railway station. By this means if the enemy secured me they would still be at a loss for the money. The paper which Noel had signed—the power of attorney as Templeton had called it—was a different matter.

For a moment I considered the advisability of tearing it up. Without the paper the firm would do nothing injurious to Noel, but then I remembered the document was the sole proof of my innocence. Without it I should stand condemned as a thief, who had stolen the notes in a most audacious manner. The possession of the paper justified my action and my flight. At all costs I must keep it. I slept with the previous document under my pillow and next morning stitched it in the bodice of my dress. Come what would it should not be taken from me while I lived.

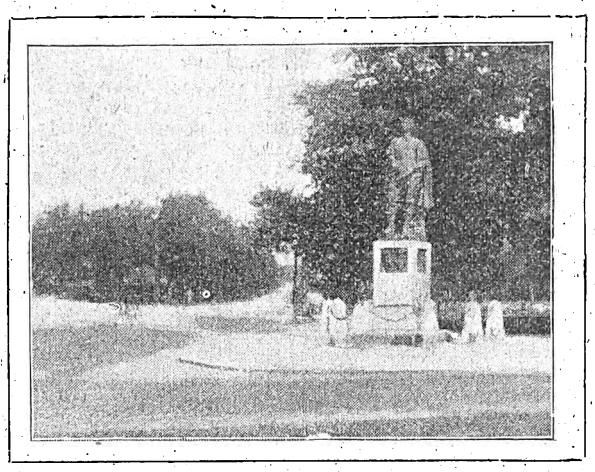
I fell asleep towards the morning, and woke to find the sunshine streaming across my face. It was an exquisite day, and, when after a comfortable breakfast I went out into the town, I felt, despite the forebodings of the previous night, despite the fears that even now assailed me, that in the end all would come right. The High Street looked its best that bright September morning. The shops with their air of quiet prosperity, the old-world atmosphere, that clings like a perfume to the quaint town—which even the electric light cannot bring up to date—combined to raise my spirits.

I found my way to the station and deposited the little packet of notes, or rather half notes, at the cloak-room, and gave the man implicit instructions not to deliver it to anyone but myself even if they produced the necessary ticket. From the station I retraced my steps to a shop in Silver Street that combined a sale of chemicals with that of bags and fancy goods.

I purchased a small portmanteau, and crossing the road, completed my shopping at "Dust's" in High Street, and had the bag and its contents sent to my hotel.

By this time it was close on ten o'clock. It would be too early, I decided, to go to the post-office and inquire for Noel's telegram. It was better not to call there until I felt certain the wire had arrived. If Templeton and Co. had traced me to Bedford, the post-office would be one of the first places at which they would inquire. Unfortunately my red hair would make my identification an easy matter. If I had only known my over-caution was to prove my ruin. With the trick in my hands I gave the game away !

It came upon me as a shock when I arrived at the High School to find it closed. I had forgotten it was the vacation, though unconsciously I had noted the absence of the troops of the bright-faced boys and girls which Ellen had declared were always to be seen about the town. The playground



Bunyan's Statue, Bedford, where Sara first saw the nurse who deceived her.

was deserted, the big iron gates locked; silence reigned supreme.

As I turned to leave, the name and address of the caretaker caught my attention :

GEORGE FRYATT,
Rosslyn,
Hartingdon Street.

As an official of the establishment he would doubtless know the address of the teachers, and he could tell me where Ellen would be found. With some difficulty I found Hartingdon Street, and after a long search among two-storeyed dwellings of small size but pretentious names, unearthed *Rosslyn*. Mr. Fryatt was a broad-shouldered, easy-tempered person, with a heavy moustache, not nearly so high and mighty as the name of his habitation. He could give me no information, moreover, as to Ellen's whereabouts. Miss Hartley was no longer at the High School, and so far as he knew, not in Bedford, The news came upon me as a thunderclap; dazed and despairing, I turned towards the High Street once again. I glanced at the shops, butcher, baker, grocer—surely some of them must know the name of Hartley. Ellen had lived some time in Bedford, with her mother, the widow of an officer. It was impossible all trace of her could be lost. Nevertheless, I pursued my questions in vain, and cross-examined stationers, boot-makers, and milliners, to no purpose. until with a flash of inspiration I entered the stores at the corner of Dame Alice Street, rejoicing in the name of Dudeney and Johnston.

"They had served Miss Hartley and her mother for some time, in fact up to the end of June. Their house was at the top of De Pary's Avenue, on the left-hand side going to the park. One of the prettiest houses in the row, with carefully kept flower-garden, impossible to mistake it."

Thanking the assistant for his information I hastened to follow his direction. As I came out of the stores, the sun, shining on the Avenue, lit up the statue of John Bunyan with a sudden radiance. Preoccupied as I was, the beauty of the figure against its background of leafy trees came home to me. With face upturned to the sky the great Pilgrim stood, "pleading with men," urging with eyes and hand.

I wondered as I gazed if Bunyan had ever felt so much afraid and perplexed as I. The powers and principalities of Darkness arrayed against me could never have seemed so terrible to him. And yet he had been to gaol, here in this town. And at the thought and all that it suggested, I shivered, despite the sunshine.

Others beside me seemed attracted by the statue that morning. A young fair-haired woman, dressed as a hospital nurse, was reading the inscription on the pedestal. At her side stood a slim, dark fellow with a good-looking, eager face.

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I fancied they were lovers, and remembered Noel, with a thrill of envy. The next minute the pretty smiling face had darkened, something her companion said seemed to distress her, she flushed, then put her handkerchief to her eyes, and moved into the shadow.

Poor girl! I thought, and took an instinctive dislike to the young man for vexing her. Later I changed my opinion.

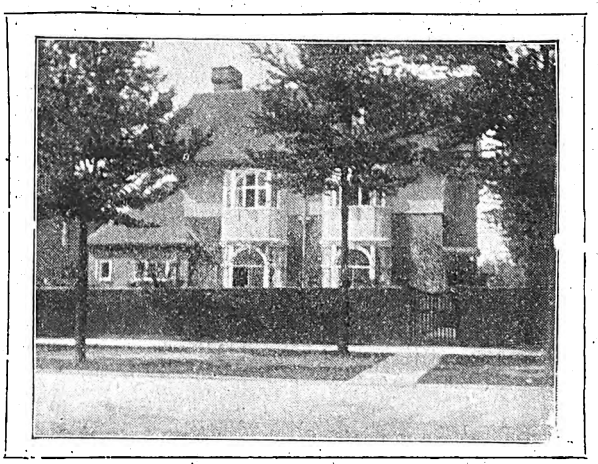
My mind was full of Noel as I walked up the Avenue, and I seemed to reach the house, described to me as Ellen's, very quickly. The garden was bright with flowers, the windows daintily curtained. It was a pleasant place, and my pulse quickened at the thought that I might find in it a haven.

Up the broad, gravelled path to a prettily-porched door where a maid-servant answered my summons.

"Miss Hartley? She left here some months ago. I couldn't tell you her address at all. I did hear she'd gone abroad."

That and that alone was all the information she could give me! The friend on whom I had relied for help was gone. The refuge I had hoped to gain was lost. I loathed the sunshine; as I walked down the garden path the roses were hateful to me, the brightness of the morning hurt me.

For the first time I realised how hopeless was the struggle on which I had embarked. How could I, a young, inexperienced girl, hope to defeat three of the boldest and most unscrupulous criminals of the day? If only Noel would wire to me—I glanced wistfully down the Avenue towards the post-office. No, it was still too early to inquire for the telegram. It was not yet half-past ten, he would only just have arrived in Nice. I must wait a little longer.



De Pary's Avenue, Bedford, where Sara meets with a bitter disappointment.

From the Avenue I found my way into the Park. The gates stood invitingly open, I caught a glimpse of cool, green trees, and longing for a place in which to sit and rest I crossed the Park and walked over the grass, to where, against a leafy clump of crab-apple a seat was placed invitingly. The shouts of the boys and girls sounded in the distance, the cries of the children at play faded to a pleasant hum. I leant back and closed my eyes, and for a little while I must have slept.

When I awoke, someone was sitting beside me. It was the nurse whom I had seen by Bunyan's statue. She was even prettier than I had thought, with dainty pink and white complexion, and soft, fair hair, parted on a low broad brow. She was no longer crying, but there was a wistful look on her face, and the sensitive lips quivered.

"Is anything the matter?" I asked impulsively. "I mean, can I do anything to help you? You must forgive my asking, but——"

"It's very good of you to care," she answered in a husky sort of voice, "and I'm grateful to you for speaking. You see"—she turned towards me with a sudden appeal—"it's dreadful to be all alone when one's in trouble. I don't know a soul in this place. There's not a person here to care whether I live or die. I'm nursing a cross-grained old woman, who grudges me a moment away from her bedside. And, and"—here the handkerchief came into requisition and the pretty face was distorted with sobs. "I've had dreadful news," she gasped, "my sweetheart's ill, and I can't go to him. My brother told me this morning. He came over from Elstow to let me know."

"Where is your sweetheart?" I asked, full of sympathy.

"In London, he's down with diphtheria. The people he's living with wired to my brother who came to tell me. You see, I'm so poor I daren't throw up my nursing engagement, and Dick is as badly off as I am."

It seemed a sorry story, and such comfort as I could give unavailing. However, I recounted all the instances I could recall of people who had recovered from the complaint, and my stories seemed to have a reviving effect. She talked more brightly, her cheeks grew pink, her eyes sparkled, and once or twice she laughed in a quick, excited sort of fashion, that struck me as peculiar.

"It's done me good to see you," she said at last, "I feel ever so much more hopeful about Dick. You don't look very well yourself, dear, are you in pain? I notice you keep pressing your hand to your heart."

I flushed crimson and wished my new-found friend had not been so observant. The notes were concealed in my bodice and in nervous apprehension at their loss my hand stole now and again to my side to reassure myself of their safety.

"It's nothing much, thank you," I answered, and rose to take my departure.

"Sha'n't I see you again, dear?" she asked. "I'm off duty this evening; I wish you'd meet me and go for a walk. It's beautiful by the river. I'll be at the Suspension Bridge some time between eight and nine. I shall hope to see you. Anyway," she pressed my hand warmly, "I sha'n't forget your kindness. Good-bye."

I left her on the seat, her slim figure outlined against the green of the crab-apple trees behind. The echo of her laugh came after me; mocking, scornful, it reminded me of somebody, though whom I could not think. It gave me a creepy sensation to hear her. There was something unpleasant, almost evil in the sound. And yet who could associate evil with so pretty a creature? She was so simple, so innocent. She had not asked my name nor displayed any curiosity concerning me; only that one question, why did I press my hand to my heart? And that was surely explained by the fact of her profession.

From the park I went to the post-office.

I arrived in Dame Alice Street flushed and out of breath. Trembling with agitation I could hardly control my voice as I put the all important question:

"Is there a telegram addressed to 'Gillespie'?"

The clerk, a short, clean-shaven man with a sharp face and peering eyes glanced at me suspiciously.

"Who are you?" he asked abruptly.

"My name is Gillespie—Sara Gillespie," I answered.

"Have you any proof of that?"

"Proof?" I gazed at him, it was so foolish, so ridiculous a thing to be asked for a proof that I was—myself.

"Come," he said brusquely, "I've no time to waste. Have you any letters or documents to show you are the person you state yourself to be?"

The blood rushed to my cheeks.

"I only came here last night," I stammered, "but—but—I can tell you from whom the telegram is coming. It is from Nice, from a gentleman named Noel Masterman. It is of the utmost importance. It is life and death. I swear that I am Sara Gillespie. For Heaven's sake give me the telegram." And I stretched out my hand imploringly.

At the very moment when I had uttered my name, a woman

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standing at my side uttered an exclamation. I turned and recognised her as the manageress of The Swan.

"I thought you said your name was Brown," she said coldly. "You registered it as Brown, at all events."

"I thought as much," said the clerk. "Look here," he leant across the counter, bringing his face level with my own, "I don't want to get you into trouble, but unless you are careful, I sha'n't be able to avoid it. The telegram you speak of was given to a young lady some half hour ago. She told me that another person was likely to call and claim it, and that I was to be careful not to give that person any information. To be plain, she said you were an impostor, and——" He glanced at the woman next to me, "it's pretty clear you are. The lady gave proof she was the rightful owner of the telegram, that she was the Gillespie referred to in the address. Now," he motioned towards the door, "you'd better go before you make matters any worse. Make haste, Miss—Brown," and he laughed derisively.

For a moment the full significance of what he said did not come home to me. I stared at him stupidly, blankly. Then, as the hideousness of what had happened became clear, I broke into pleading, protestations, threats. I clambered wildly for my rights, sobbed out Heaven knows what prayers, what revilings, until, worn out with emotion and realising at last the futility of all requests, I left the office and wandered weeping and half distraught about the town.

How they stared at me, the people in the High Street! Elderly gentlemen with the unmistakable air of Army officers surveyed me sternly, pretty young girls, gazing in the fascinating hat and bonnet shops, regarded me askance. I did not heed them, I paid no regard to looks and comments, but hurried on, my brain surging with hate, my blood on fire for revenge.

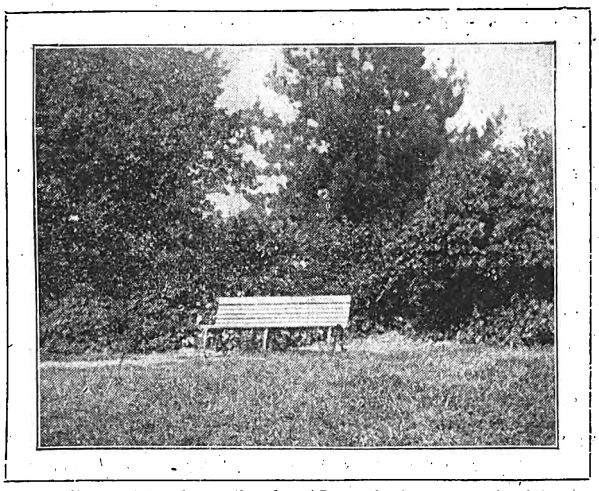
What could I do, what was there left for me to do? Templeton & Co. had outwitted me.

I lost a precious hour before reason suggested the only possible method of repairing a mistake. The firm had obtained possession of Noel's wire and had doubtless replied to it. There was a bare chance that by sending another telegram I might counteract the effect of the bogus one already dispatched. Buoyed up with fresh hope, I hastened to the Midland Station, and dispatched a message to my lover from the railway office. I urged him to take no notice of any other wires he might receive, but to come back at once. The address I furnished this time was that of a stationer in the Midland Road, named Sawyer. I had already interviewed him and obtained his promise to receive all communications addressed to "Sara" at the cost of a penny each.

This done I felt a little calmer, and by the time I had been for a long tramp, my nerves were once more under control. I felt weak and hungry, and remembering a certain Oriental café I had noticed by the post office, I made for Dame Alice Street, and passed through its hospitable portals.

A large pleasant room with Japanese screens and curtains which formed convenient alcoves for small tea parties of three and four, the place was crammed with people. The food was dainty, and the waitress, a pretty, dark-haired damsel with bright eyes and shining teeth, soft footed, and tactful. She moved my table into a quiet corner, and asked me nicely if I were tired. Just a few words, but in my soreness of heart and bitterness of spirit, they comforted me. I shall always think of the dark-haired waitress at the Oriental café with kindness.

High Street, Bedford. The Swan Hotel, where Sara stayed, is on the right.



The seat in the park where Sara slept, worn out with fatigue and worry.

Tea over, I hastened back to Sawyers, and inquired if my anxiously expected wire had come.

"Not yet," was the answer, and the same reply greeted my further application an hour later.

Tired to death I felt unable longer to keep up. My limbs would not support me, I felt that if I did not rest I should utterly collapse. With the courage of despair I went back to The Swan, though after the scene at the post office, I half-feared they would demur. Nothing was said, however, and I went up to my room and flung myself on the bed, craving for rest.

Here at least I was safe, the door was locked, the key in my hand. Templeton and Co. could not break in upon me. The next time I went down the street, one of the firm might capture me, but for the present I was secure. And yet the apprehension that even now one of them might be watching The Swan on my account prevented me from rest. The feeling was so strong upon me that I started to my feet, and, opening the window, looked down on the embankment.

The river lay cool and pleasant in the fading light of the afternoon. There were a few loiterers upon the landing-stage watching the boats come in, and a trap drawn by a powerful-looking grey was drawn up just opposite my window. The driver bending down was speaking to someone in the street. Then a stout man in a black suit clambered into the vehicle. There was something familiar about the cut of his frock coat, and I caught a gleam of shirt front that sent my heart into my throat.

The next moment fear became certainty. The man turned in his seat and glanced towards the window—glanced at me! And in that glance I recognised the senior partner, Richard Templeton. I drew back from the window and half fainting fell on my knees upon the floor.

He had seen me, I felt sure of that. Was he going to take me now, send for the police at once to arrest me? Or would he wait awhile? Sooner or later he would put out his smooth, white hand and clutch me in its cruel grasp. When? That was the question. How long before—before? My lips moved convulsively.

"He shall not take me!" I murmured, "he shall not take me."

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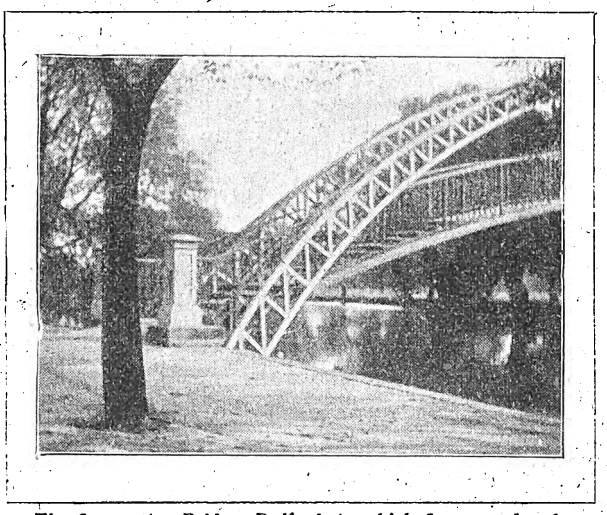
I rose to my feet and gazed from the window. Had Templeton been there, God knows what rash and awful thing I might have done. I was mad at the moment, and with terror and suspense. But I searched the river front in vain for his portly figure. He had gone—for the moment I was saved.

But only for the moment. He might return at any instant and find me in The Swan. The instinct of flight was strong upon me. I would leave Bedford, and take refuge in one of the big Midland cities. I would go now, at once. Even as I reached the door I remembered that I dare not go until I had an answer to my telegram. I must know where Noel was, what he meant to do. It was time now to call again at the shop in the Midland Road and ask for the wire. I glanced up and down the corridor, craned my head over the broad staircase. The sound of voices, the jingle of plates and glasses, rose from the hall. It was the dinner hour. At that moment perhaps my enemies were in the dining-room waiting for me.

I cautiously descended the stairs, pausing in the middle of the flight. A tall, broad-shouldered figure standing with his back towards me at the bar, filled me with fresh fear. It was Templeton himself!

For a moment I stood irresolute. If he turned and saw me—the game was up. If I retraced my steps and sought again the refuge of my room, it did but delay the evil hour. Some time or other I must leave my shelter, and fall into his hands. My brain worked quickly. I saw and seized the one chance of escape.

With a quick drawn breath, I sped lightly down the few remaining stairs, and slowly, cautiously walked down the long hall to the swing doors which led to liberty. I did not hurry, the least sign of haste I felt would betray me. The lights of the town twinkled in the distance. It seemed as though I never should reach those two glass doors. The last few steps my courage failed. I ran the short distance yet remaining, ran from the place, and never stopped until I reached the Midland Road.



The Suspension Bridge, Bedford, to which Sara was lured.

"No wire?" I asked, my voice trembling with agitation. "Are you sure, please look again, you may have made a mistake? It is so—so terribly important."

"There's no telegram or letter either," said the man, "perhaps it will come later."

Perhaps! If not, what was there left for me to do? I had escaped Templeton once, but I might never have such luck again. My only hope of avoiding capture at his hands was to leave Bedford then and there, and yet by doing this, I cut off all communication with Noel. I could not leave until I had heard from him. If I could find a safe place in which to hide, I would run the risk of remaining for a little while at least. Yet where could I find a refuge? In this strange town I was helpless, not a creature would stretch out a hand to my assistance.

Unless it was the nurse I'd met that morning. I recalled her pretty face and gentle manner. She had thanked me for my sympathy, perhaps if I told her something of my troubles she would try to help me, give me a hiding-place for to-night at least. It was a slender chance, but I was desperate and ready to pluck at straws.

It wanted but a few minutes to eight when I reached the Suspension Bridge. The embankment was deserted, the river lay cold and grey under a sullen sky, across the water came the rushing of the weir. It was a lonely spot, at that hour, on a dull night like this not a soul was to be seen. The promenade, with its leafy trees, thronged with pleasure-seekers on a summer evening, was desolate and still. The lights from the houses standing back from the road were the only sign of human presence. And the houses seemed very far away. I crossed the bridge, and, standing in the middle, on the apex of the arch, searched either shore for a sign of the fair-haired nurse.

The water rushed over the weir, the wind sighed among the branches. I shivered, and as St. Paul's chimed the half-hour, and still she had not come, the greyness of the river crept into my soul.

Fearful of turning back, afraid to go on, I leant against the column at the foot of the bridge and waited in the silence of the night.

It might have been half an hour later when I heard a soft footfall across the path. A low, curious laugh sounded close beside me, a hand was laid on my arm.

"You dear thing," said a voice—the nurse's voice, "have you waited for me all this time, how good of you!"

She looked very fresh, altogether charming in her neat costume of brown, and the slight feeling of uneasiness that had inspired me that morning vanished as her big blue eyes met mine.

"You are tired and cold," she said caressingly, "and I believe you are in trouble. You comforted me this morning, it's my turn to play consoler now. You must tell me what's worrying you. Let's find a quiet spot where we can talk undisturbed."

It struck me that the place where we were standing was as quiet, not to say remote, as could be desired. But I yielded to the suggestion, and linking her arm in mine, the nurse and I turned in the direction of Newnham Bridge.

The silence grew denser, the darkness more profound. The rushing of the weir, which alone broke the stillness of the night, sounded ominous.

"Let us stay here," I said, pointing to a seat, "I don't care to go any farther. If I'm to tell you my troubles I'd better begin at once. Otherwise you may not have time to hear my tale."

"I haven't to go back for another hour," she answered, "let us go a little farther, dear, and we shall be quite undisturbed. Oh, I know it looks quiet enough here, but there are always a lot of loiterers on the embankment. I prefer to talk where I'm sure of not being overheard."

She laughed as she spoke, and the sound sent a shudder through me. I felt a sudden fear of this fair-haired, sweet-faced woman, and was half-inclined to return and run the risk of meeting Templeton. Even as the thought crossed my mind, she tightened her hold upon my arm and hurried me along the narrow path. The water here seemed very deep; the river, cold and clear beneath the sullen sky, must hold many a strange, dark secret in its keeping. Overhead the trees bent their boughs shivering in the night wind.

The nurse and I were quite alone!

By this time we had reached the end of the embankment and arrived at Newnham Bridge. Lonely and most romantic of spots, the scene of lovers' meetings, vows, farewells! Here,

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at this tree that overhangs the water, if legend is to be believed, long, long ago, a sister from a neighbouring convent kept a fatal tryst with a cavalier, who stole her heart away. There, so the story goes, the mother abbess traced them and, rather than brave the church's ban, the unhappy sister jumped into the river and found quiet in its cold depths.

Lonely it was, aye, very lonely. Strange whispers came from the trees, faint murmurs rose from the water.

"One moment, dear," said the nurse. "I've dropped my handkerchief. I must run back and find it."

I watched her down the path until she disappeared among the trees. Then, fascinated with the quiet of the place, the strangeness of the scene, I dropped upon the grass that grows right to the river's brink, and, leaning my head upon my hand, rested against the trunk of the wide-spreading tree that stands within a few yards of the bridge.

The rushing of the weir made music in the distance. Strange how the sound fascinated me. The water was deep, deep at my feet—how terrible a death to drown in that limpid stream.

I recalled with a shudder the tale that I had heard, how only a few days back, playing with his little girl in the recreation ground across the bridge, a man had tripped and fallen into the river. And so deep the water was, so treacherous its current, that he was borne away out of sight, out of the ken of those he loved. The band had been playing, the people had been laughing as he fell—and no one knew.

It was a terrible death to die. I shivered nervously, and watched anxiously for the figure of my new found friend.

The mist rising from the water enveloped me, I could not distinguish a yard before my hand. I scrambled to my feet and called.

"Where are you, nurse? Nurse, where are you?"

No answer, only a faint rustle in the bushes, no answer. Dear Heaven, what is it?

A hand at my throat, a grip of iron round my waist.

"Help! Help!" I shriek. But the shriek dies into a moan as the relentless fingers tighten. A rift in the clouds above casts a gleam of light upon the path.

"The nurse!" I gasp. "The nurse!" And then the truth breaks in upon me. With cloak streaming in the wind, bonnet thrown aside, I see the face, the figure of my assailant. Not the nurse, not the sweet-voiced, fair-faced woman, but Rigby Starr. Starr, the most cunning, the most unscrupulous of the partners.

I cannot call, my voice is strangled in my throat. Closer he grips and closer, urging me nearer to the water's edge.

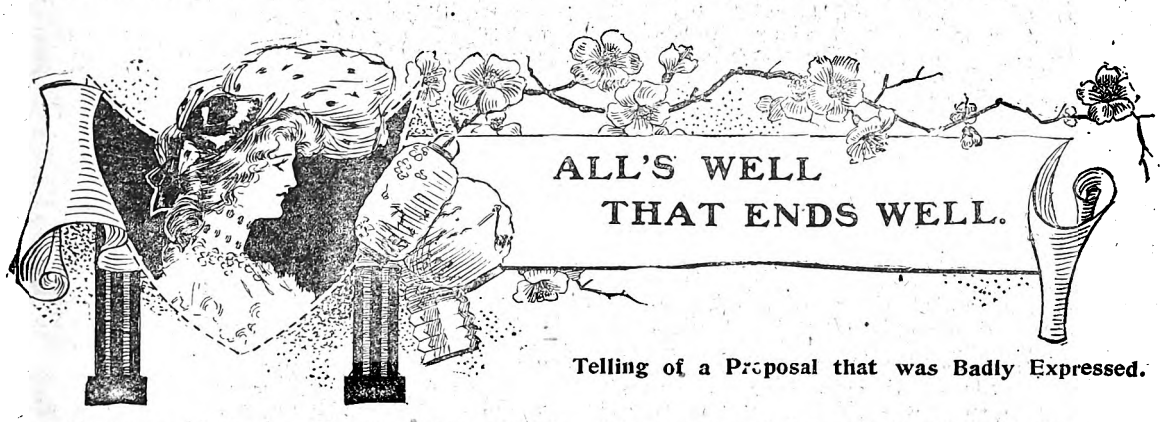
The river and the sky meet in a grey infinity; the swaying branches stretch into mocking fingers, pointing to my doom. I feel his hand upon my heart.

"The papers," he hisses, tearing at my bodice, "the papers—or——"

The ground slips from beneath my feet, the cruel waters hunger to lap my face. I strive with all the strength, the desperation of despair to keep him off, but I am helpless in his hands. Slowly but surely he forces me back. A wild desire for life, for love battles within me. I fight desperately, vainly against death.

The river closes over me, I am falling—drowning—lost!

(Another Episode next week.)



ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

Telling of a Proposal that was Badly Expressed.

Roy Manville and Daphne Ellesmere sat together in Lady Cazenove's conservatory. The murmur of fountains was in the air, and each little spray rose from its white marble basin like a quivering column of mother-of-pearl, rose-tinted by the soft-shaded, ruby lamps that hung above. Tall, broad palms spread their cool, green leaves, gracefully drooping at the tips, from sap-scented stems that rose up out of the moist mould in which they were bedded. The scent of orchids was wafted between the leaves of fern and palm, and the singing of birds in an invisible aviary made music more harmonious than even the brilliant orchestra in the distant ball-room.

Beauty such as this—soft, subdued, harmonious—is perhaps the most subtle and ravishing of all. Giving wing to one's imagination, it might have been just such a spot as this where, in the first beginning of all things, Romance had been cradled and nurtured, and Love had breathed the first breath of her undying life. And Roy Manville sat side by side with Daphne Ellesmere and looked, not at the blended beauties with which he was environed, but covertly and disturbedly at the girl beside him. Thus is the witching loveliness of nature dominated by a woman's smile!

"Miss Ellesmere," he said, after a pause, "I have asked you to accompany me here in order to prefer a request that has long occupied my thoughts."

A soft, pink blush tinted the whiteness of Daphne Ellesmere's cheeks, and a light, veiled in an instant, shone in her blue eyes. But of these things, too, Roy Manville was unconscious.

"The truth is," he went on hurriedly, "I love you very dearly, and have been bold enough to hope that you will consent to become my wife. I am not a poor man." He remembered, with some misgivings, that young Lord Seagrave had paid her marked attention of late, and though but a courtesy title, the holder of it was well known to be immensely rich. This had been the rift in Roy's lute for a long while, and he hastened to expatiate on his own fortunes. Love is not always clear-sighted.

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"I am not a poor man," he went on. "My income amounts to as much as two thousand a year, and I have other prospects upon which I may count with a tolerably good show of certainty. It is true, I have no title to bestow on you, but the lineage of my family is as unimpeachable as any that is represented to-night under Lady Cazenove's roof. Sir Cedric Manville fought side by side with William the Conqueror, and my ancestors have many times been chosen by their sovereigns for the bestowal of royal favours for services rendered both at court and in the field."

For an instant the light flashed again in Daphne's eyes. But it was not so soft and dreamy on this occasion. The flush, too, was this time more like the faintest indication of anger than of pleasure. But she made no reply, and Roy, regarding this as an unfavourable sign, went on as before.

"I know," he said, with slight embarrassment, "that there have been and still are many suitors for your hand, whose worldly position and prospects compare in many respects to mine with undeniable advantage. But if I admit this, I am at least conscious that, though in these respects you would be the loser, there are yet others where the advantages are upon my side."

Still Daphne Ellesmere maintained an uncompromising silence. There was now the very faintest indication of a curl at the corner of her ripe red lips. Was this Roy Manville, the very whisper of whose name had for more than a year sent a flush to her cheek and a sweet, shy longing into her young heart? Was this the love she had dreamt of as once to be hers—hoped for, in the secrecy of her own heart, as the glorious fulfilment of her life? Her spirit rose in revolt at this mercenary proposal, in which love but played the part of an auctioneer's hand-bell, calling the attention to bargains within. Even with herself, Daphne Ellesmere was honest, and she knew she had loved this man as she would love none other. But she had always believed he loved her. Even now a feeling that it was so lingered in her heart and would not be gainsaid. But if this were indeed true, why did he not say so honestly? Position, prospects, lineage, unimpeachable honour, comparison with other suitors—anything, everything but love! She was growing angry. But Roy suspected it not. Her silence seemed to indicate an under-current of hesitancy due to her doubts as to the indisputability of his qualifications, and he grew resentful at the thought.

Poor Roy! He loved this Daphne Ellesmere with all his honest young heart. She was his morning and evening star, the lodestone of his life, and the love he gave her was little short of absolute worship—the worship of a true man to a good, pure woman, whom he almost believes to partake of some higher gifts of spirituality not vouchsafed to other women. But he had long been troubled in mind. Life is full of strange and inexplicable contradictions. And here was one. His very humility made him boastful. He knew his own position was inferior to that of Lord Seagrave, whose admiration of Daphne Ellesmere could have but one termination. Comparatively speaking, he, Roy Manville, was a poor man beside this wealthy magnate. And the consciousness of this, accentuated by his innate humility, troubled him and made him doubtful of his own chances. And so he had crossed Lord Seagrave's Martini-Henri with his own little toy-pistol and tried to carry off the situation with advantage to himself. How much better would it have been had he gone unharmed!

"Miss Ellesmere," he said, his hands nervously pressed together on his knee, "this is a very serious matter with me. Will you honour me with your answer?"

This was a little better. But Daphne's spirit had been roused.

"I think," she said calmly, "that, under the circumstances, the proposal is one which, however it honours me, admits of but one answer. The position you have defined so accurately is one that holds no attraction for me. I am heartily glad to hear that your prospects are so promising. The other circumstances I knew before, and they are therefore no news to me. I think we had better drop the subject. Will you be so good as to escort me back to the ball-room?"

She rose as she spoke, and Roy, grinding his teeth in impotent anger and wretchedness, offered her his arm.

* * * * *

It was a week later. Roy Manville sat moodily in the easiest of easy-chairs in his well-lighted sitting-room, and thought long and bitterly of his defeat. The real cause of that defeat, and the way in which he had himself hastened it, never for one moment occurred to him. Yet he was not a fool, but a thorough-going, good-principled, and, in all other respects, clear-sighted, young man. He was handsome, too, with short, crisp, curly-brown hair, and earnest hazel eyes, that looked fearlessly out upon all mankind.

Why had he been so blind? In his ignorant conceit, he had imagined that Daphne Ellesmere loved him, and now—well, it was all over now, and the fool's paradise in which he lived had vanished like any other figment of the imagination. He was very miserable about it all. Life would have been so bright with Daphne as his wife. And now—well, she would marry Lord Seagrave, and he—he would look on and hide his sorrow from the eyes of the curious.

A footman entered, bearing a card. Roy knitted his brows as he read the name inscribed thereon.

"All right," he said. "Show Mr. Ellesmere in."

The man retreated, and, a moment later, the visitor entered the room. He was a fair, boyish-looking young man of some two-and-twenty summers. Normally the face was frank and open, but to-day an expression of nervousness and embarrassment made this less noticeable. Roy looked up as he came in.

"Well, Bert," he said, "what on earth brings you here? I thought you were still cramming at Oxford."

Bertie Ellesmere shook his head.

"I'm supposed to be," he said dolefully. "But the truth is, I'm in a dickens of a mess."

"Ah!" said Roy understandingly. "Same old game, I suppose, Bert?"

Bertie nodded.

"How much is it this time?" inquired Roy, after a short pause.

"Two thousand," was the astounding reply.

Roy started, and he looked gravely over at his visitor.

"You're surely joking!" he said.

"Wish I was," responded Bertie, with a sigh. "I thought the thing was a dead cert. this time."

"You generally do," Roy observed quietly.

"Yes, I know," replied Bertie shamefacedly. "But I got regular inside information this time. Even the jockey had his money on her."

"Merely a blind, my boy," interrupted Roy.

The "boy" ignored the remark.

"I put every fraction I could rake together on the brute," he went on hopelessly. "Borrowed a bit more to make it a bigger thing still, and the bounder came in a bad fifth."

Again there was a long pause. Presently Roy asked:

"What are you going to do about it, Bert?"

Bertie shifted uneasily in his chair.

"God knows!" he said irreverently. "The governor would kick me out of the house if I told him. He said he would last time. That way is quite impossible. The mater hasn't got a hundred pounds in cash all told just now, so she can't help me. There's only one way out of it that I can see."

"What's that?" Roy asked quietly.

"Slope," was the brief reply.

Roy shook his head.

"Not a man's trick," he said decisively. "Surely an Ellesmere is not afraid to face the music, particularly when it is he himself who is responsible for it?"

Bertie coloured.

"Don't be hard on a chap," he said humbly. "I know I've been a fool, and if only I get can clear of this mess, the remembrance of it will be a lasting lesson to me."

Roy was silent. His thoughts flew back to Daphne. How

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her heart would ache if she knew of her brother's disgrace. He knew how dearly she loved this brother of hers, how she had screened and excused him on former occasions, how rejoiced she had been of late at his apparent studiousness and freedom from debt. And now he was in a worse plight than ever. The ruin he had up to this time averted was now inevitable. Then another thought occurred to him and his heart hardened.

"From one or two things that have come under my notice during the past week," he said, a little nervously, "I am inclined to think your sister Daphne has come to some understanding with Lord Seagrave. If this be so, it is more than probable that gentleman would not hesitate to help you out of the present difficulty. Particularly," he added, "if the matter was laid before him by the person most likely to influence his decision."

Even as he uttered the words, Roy hated himself for the thought which had inspired them. Bertie looked at him in wonderment.

"I think you're making a mistake, old fellow," he said. "But as it seems to me I have over-estimated your fund of sympathy for one so badly placed as myself, I will not intrude further."

He rose as he spoke, but Roy motioned him to the chair he had left.

"I beg your pardon, Bert," he said. "It was beastly of me. But you don't know all. I don't know what I'm talking about sometimes."

Bertie looked quickly into Roy's face, and a gleam of understanding came into his eyes.

"Ah!" he murmured inwardly. "So it's as bad as all that! Well, I should never have thought Daphne would have refused him."

"Bertie," said Roy, looking earnestly into his face, "does your sister know of this?"

"Yes," replied Bertie.

Roy sighed. Poor girl! He wished he could have spared her that.

"Well," he said, "will you give me your word of honour as a gentleman that you will never repeat this performance? You are a man now, Bert, old fellow, and you must recognise that the many and bitter humiliations which you are compelled to endure as a result of this reckless spirit of gambling are draining your moral character of all its manhood and sense of honour. The sum is a large one, even for me, but if you will give me your sacred promise to avoid such pitfalls in the future, I will make you out a cheque for the amount."

A flush—half of gladness, half of bewilderment—came into Bertie Ellesmere's face. For a moment he was almost dumfounded.

"Roy," he said, "do you really mean it? Why, the most I hoped of you was that you might be able in some way to show me how I could raise the money." His face shadowed a little. "I say, Roy," he added doubtfully, "I don't know how long it may be before I can hope to cancel the debt."

He tenderly folded her in his arms, and she laid her head on his breast.

Roy smiled.

"That will not be necessary," he said. "If you are not too proud to accept it, you shall have it freely. Only, I must have your promise."

Bertie's lip quivered.

"Oh, Roy," he said, "you are too good! Of course I promise. On my word of honour, this shall be the last time I give way to the temptation to gamble. I shall always remember how near ruin and disgrace I have been, and the memory shall make me strong."

Roy grasped him by the hand and shook it.

"One thing more," he said, and looked straight into the other's eyes.

"What is it?" asked Bertie.

"Don't—tell—Daphne!"

For a moment there was silence in the room. Then Bertie nodded his head.

"She's a good girl," he said warmly. "I once thought—but that was a mistake, I suppose."

Roy Manville felt the warm blood mantling his cheeks, but he paid no heed to the other's words. Drawing out his cheque-book he filled in and signed a cheque for £2,000, and handed it across to Bertie Ellesmere.

"God keep you straight from now on!" he said earnestly. And, half an hour later, the two men separated.

* * * *

Another week had slipped—or rather dragged—by, a week of alternate depression and short-lived resolve for Roy Manville. There seemed no help for it all. Daphne's cold refusal of his love was as bitter to the taste as upon the night when it was uttered. What to do next had been his chief thought since, and at last he had made up his mind. He would go abroad.

The sunlight streamed in through the open windows of his room, and trunks, portmanteaux, valises, gun-cases, and other indispensable accessories to travel were strewn about the floor. He made it a rule to superintend his own packing, and to-day the occupation afforded him partial forgetfulness. He was trying to forget. But the attempt was a failure, and he admitted it to himself, though he still went on trying.

There was a tap at the door, and Bertie Ellesmere burst in upon him.

"Hullo, Roy," he exclaimed in surprise. "What the—where the—— I say, old chap, what's the meaning of all this? Not going away, are you?"

Roy nodded.

"Yes," he said, a trifle embarrassed by the interruption. "London's too beastly cold and wet for my liking. I'm going abroad."

"Where to?" asked Bertie.

"Oh, I don't know," was the somewhat vague reply. "I sha'n't touch the overdone continental resorts. Think I'll do a bit of big game hunting in Africa and South America. Anything for a change, you know."

Bertie Ellesmere regarded him quizzically. He thought

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he comprehended the meaning of this unexpected, and, to his mind, rather irrational exodus.

"Rather sudden, isn't it?" he asked, as he took a seat and watched the proceedings.

"Well, yes—that is, no. I've had it in mind for some time. I say, Bert, how did you get on about the other affair?"

Bertie Ellesmere's face flushed.

"Ah!" he said earnestly. "You were just in time to save me, Roy. I can't tell you how grateful I am to you."

Roy stopped him.

"Oh, that's all right," he said. "Glad to hear it's all square. Now I am going to forget all about it. It must always remain a secret between us, Bert."

"I sha'n't tell many people about it, as you can well believe," responded Bertie grimly. "It's scarcely the sort of thing one would care to advertise."

Roy nodded.

"Just so," he said—"all the better for me."

For fully five minutes there was silence. Then Bertie said:

"I say, Roy, don't think me impertinent, but have you and my sister quarrelled of late?"

Roy bent his head over a portmanteau.

"Oh, no," he said thickly. "We are the best of friends. What made you think of such a thing?"

"Don't know," said Bertie laconically. "I wondered, that's all."

He sat still for a while, and then got up to go. There was a twinkle in his eye as he held out his hand to bid Roy good-bye.

"Well," he said, "I must be going. Good luck, old fellow. I hope your big game will be bigger than you anticipate."

Roy grasped his hand warmly.

"Thanks," he said cordially. "Good-bye, Bert. Oh, I say. Er—you needn't allude at home to the fact that I'm—er—going away. Not that it matters much, but I'd rather you didn't."

Bertie Ellesmere maintained a stolid composure and lack of comprehension that did him credit.

"All right," he said. And with a farewell nod, he took his departure.

"What the dickens made him turn up?" grumbled Roy to himself as he tugged viciously at the straps of a too-distended trunk. "I was forgetting all about them. Just my luck. Well, I shall be out of the way by midnight, and then——" He broke off abruptly and applied himself energetically to the task before him. For nearly two hours he packed and ordered and grumbled and praised, and then, the work ended, he dismissed his assistants and sat down on a chair to consider what was to be done next. He looked very handsome as he sat there, with the glow of healthy exertion on his expressive face. And yet there was an indescribable air of melancholy about him that, in the eyes of some, might have added to rather than have detracted from his unquestionable attractiveness.

A slight noise roused him from his reflections. Turning, he saw the figure of Bertie Ellesmere, with the handle of the door in his hand, holding it open for someone to enter. The lad's face was expressionless, and he paid little or no heed to the astonished man within. A lady stepped into the room, and Bertie prepared to retire.

"Beg pardon, old chap," he said shamelessly. "But really, you know, the thing was impossible. Ta-ta! See you later." And he closed the door behind him.

With an effort Roy recovered his self-possession and offered his visitor a chair. She accepted it, and, seating herself, looked round on the evidences of coming departure.

"You are going away," she said reproachfully. "You might have told us of your intention, Mr. Manville."

Roy was nonplussed.

"I did not think you would care," he said simply.

Daphne looked up at him in protest.

"Well," she said, "we will let that pass. You were going away, however, without giving us the opportunity to thank you for a deed of generosity which we can never repay."

Roy coloured. He inwardly anathematised Bertie for his garrulity.

"That is of small consequence," he said shamefacedly. "And I fancy Bert has a curious notion of gratitude, since he has already violated one of the conditions imposed upon him."

Daphne smiled. It was a very sweet smile, and Roy trembled to the finger-tips as he met it.

"It is a violation of which I approve," she said. "He told me the very day you gave him your help so unreservedly. Every day since then I have been expecting you to call. You used to visit us at one time, Mr. Manville."

Roy was growing desperate. It seemed the best thing to face the matter boldly.

"How could I?" he said warmly. "How could I lightly forget the way in which you met my addresses a fortnight ago? I knew then, and know now even more thoroughly, that I am unworthy of you. You showed me that truth all too plainly. How could our relations remain unaltered after an experience so humiliating?"

Daphne Ellesmere studied the pattern on the carpet.

"Are you quite sure you were not somewhat to blame?" she asked.

Roy looked down at her in puzzled surprise.

"I—to blame?" he repeated in bewilderment. "Miss Ellesmere—Daphne—was I to blame because, loving you with my whole heart, I dared to hope that the wish of my life might be realised?"

"Pardon me," replied Daphne, still with her eyes on the carpet, "but, if my memory serves me right, you scarcely mentioned such a thing as love in your catalogue of matrimonial inducements. I have a dim idea that your rather highly-varnished account of your present position, future prospects, and past lineage precluded any such sentimental admission on your part."

Roy stood quite still as he listened to the words. And then he saw it all—the mistake he had made—the too-important place he had given to worldly considerations, the too-trivial one to love. She wanted bread, and he had offered her a stone. And his jealousy of Lord Seagrave had done it all. Love was uppermost now, and he gave it the secondary place no longer.

"Daphne," he said tenderly, "is there any hope for me yet? I was a fool to speak thus to you. But I knew Lord Seagrave meant to ask you to be his wife, and I could think of nothing but the advantages he possessed over me. I was terribly afraid you would influence your choice by those advantages, and that made me expatiate on my own poor position. I forgot that, to a woman such as you, there is an inducement higher than all such as these—love. So I made my love subservient to my position. It was hard even to do this, for even as I enlarged on my prospects, my heart cried out for utterance. But I was afraid. Oh, Daphne, tell me, dear, is there one small chance for me even yet? I do love you, darling—love you with an intensity of devotion that swallows up every other thought. Say there is yet hope."

She held out both her hands to him, and he tenderly lifted her from the chair upon which she sat. Then he folded her in his arms and she laid her head upon his shoulder.

"Oh, why didn't you come?" she pouted. "I waited for you so impatiently."

"I was a fool," he said in self-condemnation. "But why did you come?" he asked her in return.

Daphne laughed.

"It was a case of Mahomet and the Mountain," she said archly.

At that instant Bertie Ellesmere put his head in at the door. He gave utterance to a prolonged whistle, and, in deference to what he beheld, closed the door once more.

Roy laughed, and said:

"That was the cheapest two thousand pounds' worth I ever had in my life. But the boy is a rascal nevertheless."

Walter J. Mowbray.

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JUDGED IN HASTE.

Showing how Easily Troubles Pass Away.

"It is a shame, a burning shame," cried Kittie Wayne, as she looked up from the letter in her hand, and dashed away the indignant tears which had gathered thickly on her long, dark lashes.

"What is a shame?" asked a soft, languid voice, and a tall, handsome young man, with dark blue eyes and a fair moustache, came out from under the shade of the elm trees which bordered the road, and leant carelessly over the garden-gate near which Kittie stood.

"Oh, Leslie!" exclaimed Kittie, with a quick blush, and smiling through her tears. "I didn't know you were there! When did you come?"

"Just a moment ago," answered Leslie Earl, "and when I saw you coming down the walk, reading that letter, I concluded to wait here for you. I prefer to interview you here," with a wave of his hand that took in rose-bushes, elms, and circular beds of heliotrope and verbenas, "to stifling in that abominable, stuffy little parlour."

Kittie laughed, then grew sober instantly.

"Tell me what troubles you, Kittie?" said Leslie. "I have a right to know your every thought now."

"I am not so sure about that," said Kittie; "but of course I will tell you this, for it may affect our future very materially. I may not be able to marry you, after all, Leslie, for mother may need me to work for her."

"I will work for your mother if anything of the sort is necessary," said Leslie. "I certainly sha'n't give you up, no matter what happens. But I understood from you that your mother was comfortably situated on a farm somewhere."

"But she is to lose the farm," said Kittie. "I was wondering why I did not hear from her, for she usually writes me a letter twice a week, but I never imagined anything was wrong. And now, after waiting ten days, I get the worst kind of answer. My cousin Asa, with whom my mother and two sisters have had a home for twelve years, died a week ago, after an illness of only a few hours, and he has left the farm, live-stock, and all his money, to Ebenezer Cranch, the son of his only sister. Mother is to have only the furniture of the house. Isn't it a shame? How *could* he be so cruel! And what *is* mother to do?"

"One question at a time, please," said Leslie, "and give me some explanation. I don't exactly understand. Why should this Ebenezer Cranch—beautiful name, I must say—have the property? What was the nature of his claim on your cousin?"

"He had none at all save his relationship," said Kittie emphatically. "More than twenty years ago—before I was born—he lived with my cousin Asa at the farm for a time. But his father was a worthless, wretched creature, who would never stay long in one place, and he soon took his wife and boy away, and Asa never saw them afterwards. When father died, my cousin sent for mother, and gave us all a home. He was very old, and she gave him the most devoted care, and now he has left everything to that Ebenezer Cranch. Why, he didn't even know where he lived! He left directions with a lawyer to find him!"

"It *is* a shame," said Leslie slowly. "I don't blame you for feeling badly, Kittie. But perhaps it will all come out right in the end. Don't worry."

"How *can* it come right?" cried Kittie. "Oh, that hateful Ebenezer Cranch!"

"Now, that isn't just," said Leslie. "He isn't to blame for his uncle's whim, you know, and he may be a very good sort of fellow."

"I doubt it," said Kittie. "Probably a gawky, ugly, disagreeable fellow, who will make himself hated at Merrifield. And of course he won't have ambition or brains enough to manage the farm. It will all run to decay."

Leslie laughed

"Come, now, Kittie," he said; "let me make a prophecy. You'll throw me over and save the farm for your mother yet by marrying that very Ebenezer Cranch."

"I wouldn't have him if he was covered with diamonds," said Kittie. "And you know, Leslie, that I wouldn't give you up for any other man living."

"Dear love," said Leslie, kissing her, "I know how true you are. But still," with a teasing laugh, "I do feel a little shaky when I think of the fascinating Ebenezer."

"You may be sure I sha'n't sleep a wink to-night for thinking of him," said Kittie. "Of course he will turn mother out, and where is she to go?"

"Come in and sing to me," said Leslie, "and forget all about Ebenezer."

So arm-in-arm they walked up the tree-bordered path, and entered the house, where Kittie tried to coax some melody from the wheezy little piano which Mrs. Smith had bought in her girlhood.

Kittie was the teacher of the district school, of which the Rev. Mr. Smith was a trustee, and Leslie was a lawyer in the large town of Castlebury, two miles distant. He had an excellent practice, and was well able to support a wife; so when he fell in love with pretty Kittie Wayne, there were no difficulties in the way of an early marriage. The wedding had been fixed for the last week in June, for Kittie's school closed on the 15th, and she had intended to be married from her cousin's home in Merrifield. But now death had changed her plans very materially; and after Leslie had listened to all the ballads with which Kittie was familiar, he easily persuaded her to promise to be married quietly from the good clergyman's at the time appointed.

"It is unlucky to postpone a wedding," said he, as he argued the question, "and, of course, you can do a great deal more for your mother when you are my wife. Who knows we may outwit that Ebenezer Cranch yet."

"No such good luck," said Kittie. "There's no chance for a law case, is there?"

Of course Kittie waited very anxiously for her next letter from Merrifield, and when it came she read it with tears of thanksgiving, for Ebenezer Cranch's lawyers had written to say

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that Mrs. Wayne and her daughters need not move immediately from the farm, as possession would not be taken for several weeks.

"So, you see, the ugly Ebenezer is not as hateful as you imagined," said Leslie, when Kittie read him her mother's letter.

"He's only making a convenience of mother," said Kittie, who was too prejudiced to be just. "Of course, if he couldn't take the farm at once he didn't want it deserted."

"He's a bold, bad man," said Leslie. "There's no doubt of it. I suppose you wouldn't let even Hannah look on him favourably."

"Never!" said Kittie, tossing her curls. "Hannah is far too good for such a wretch."

"But she might keep the farm if——"

"Not at such a sacrifice," interrupted Kittie. "Please don't talk about the man, Leslie; you know how I hate him."

The day before her wedding Kittie received another letter from Merrifield. Mrs. Wayne sorrowed over her inability to be present on the great occasion, and wished her daughter every happiness. She concluded by saying that Ebenezer Cranch's lawyer had written to say that his client and wife would be at Merrifield a week or two later, but requesting that Mrs. Wayne would remain in the house until their arrival.

"Poor Hannah's last chance is gone," said Leslie, when Kittie told him what her mother had written. "She can't save the farm by marrying her foe, it seems, as he has a wife already."

"To think that *any* girl should have been willing to marry *him!*" said Kittie.

The wedding came off with due pomp and ceremony; for Mrs. Smith had insisted on giving a substantial breakfast to the guests, and the vicar had taken pains to invite every one for miles around. There was much feasting and merry-making, and Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Earl left Castlebury 'mid a shower of rice and old slippers. They were to take a honeymoon tour for a fortnight, and then return home by way of Merrifield, for Kittie was very anxious to see her mother and sisters.

"And if you desire it, Kittie," said Leslie, indulgently, "we will carry mother, Hannah and little Margie back with us to our own home."

"I don't see anything else to be done just at present," said Kittie; "but I don't like to burden you with the support of so many, Leslie. Oh, that hateful Ebenezer Cranch! If he had never existed, mother would have had the farm for her own."

* * * * *

It was a warm day in the middle of July when the newly-married couple reached Merrifield. Kittie had written to Hannah to meet them at the railway station and that worthy spinster, who was a dozen years older than the bride, was duly there with a horse and trap.

"Oh, Hannah, I am so glad to see you!" cried Kittie, as she rushed to embrace her sister.

"But didn't the Cranches come?" asked Hannah.

"The Cranches?" repeated Kittie wonderingly.

"Yes, they were to come to-day," said Hannah. "I received a letter from the lawyer last night."

"How unfortunate," said poor Kittie. "I hoped to escape them. I know I sha'n't be able to treat them with common civility."

"But they haven't come," said Hannah, as the train steamed away, leaving only an old man and a dog on the platform. "I suppose they changed their minds."

"I am glad they did," said Kittie, as she climbed into the trap. "I hope it may never be my lot to look upon the face of that hateful Ebenezer Cranch."

The farmhouse was soon reached, and the tears sprang to Kittie's eyes as she noted the beauty of the fertile field stretching away on either side of it, and the luxuriance of the shrubbery in the garden. For she thought how soon the place was to pass into the hands of strangers

A well-spread table, loaded with everything in the way of eating that the farm could afford, awaited the hungry travellers in the great cool kitchen, where the large windows were shaded by fragrant honeysuckle vines and the door screened from the sun by stately elms nearly a century old.

But Kittie's brow contracted as she saw that there were plates laid for seven.

"You see, we fully expected Ebenezer Cranch and his wife," said Mrs. Wayne.

"I am not anxious to see the woman who could marry Ebenezer Cranch," said Kittie. "The man and the name combined would be the death of any ordinary mortal."

When supper was over, Leslie went out into the garden to smoke a cigar, leaving his wife to talk to her mother and sister. And Kittie had plenty to talk about, for it had been almost a year since she had left home to take charge of the district school near Castlebury. She was in the midst of an account of her wedding when Leslie came suddenly in at the kitchen-door.

"The Cranches have come," he said abruptly.

"The Cranches!" repeated four feminine voices in different tones of surprise.

"Yes; come into the parlour and see them," said he.

"Are they in the parlour? Did you let them in?" asked Hannah. "I wonder how they happened to come at this time. I know there is no train after five o'clock, and it is nearly seven now."

"Oh, Leslie, what are they like?" asked Kittie.

"The wife is a very pretty little woman," answered Leslie. "But Ebenezer is a great, ugly, awkward, fellow," laughing.

"I knew it," cried Kittie. "I had an intuition that he would be like that. You know I always said so, Leslie."

"You'd better come into the parlour," said Leslie. "It isn't polite to leave them alone so long," and he led the way through the hall, followed by the four women.

"Where are they?" asked Kittie, as they entered the parlour; for the room was empty. "Oh, Leslie, how could you hoax us so!"

He slipped his arm round his wife's waist, and drew her before a large mirror which hung between the two front windows.

"That is Ebenezer Cranch's wife," he said, nodding toward Kittie's reflection. "Don't you think her a pretty little woman? Bow to her and tell her you're ashamed of having abused her so."

"Leslie, what on earth do you mean?" cried Kittie. "Have you gone crazy?"

"Not in the least," said Leslie. "Sit down and I will explain matters to your entire satisfaction, I trust."

When they were all seated about him, he said:

"My father's name was Stephen Earl, and I was named Ebenezer Leslie, after some revered ancestor, I suppose. When I was only a year old my mother married Samuel Cranch, and very naturally I was called by the name of my stepfather as I grew up. We lived for several years on this farm with my uncle, and then my step-father moved to Sussex. There he deserted my mother, who died a year later. I was old enough then to appreciate the wrongs she had suffered, and I promptly dropped the name of the man I had learnt to despise and hate, and took my own. I never had liked the name of Ebenezer, so I thought I might as well drop that too. So I began again as Leslie Earl, and have been called so ever since. It was a great surprise to me to hear that my uncle had left me his property, and a still greater surprise to learn that the young lady to whom I was engaged to be married was my uncle's second cousin. And when I heard her abuse poor Ebenezer Cranch so fiercely I determined to play a practical joke on her. Tell me, Kittie, do you think I succeeded? And how do you like the appearance of 'the hateful Ebenezer'?"

In spite of her chagrin at having been so completely hoaxed, Kittie felt that she could afford to be teased, for the termination of her troubles was as happy as thee lose of a fairy tale.

Florence Hallowell.

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LOVED and ACQUITTED.

Telling How a Girl Saved Her Sweetheart.

"Oh, dry up, Oswald, for everybody's sake. You are for ever on that old subject of yours."

"Well, Frank, the danger was never greater that it is at the present day. Everywhere women are taking positions at small salaries to the detriment of men who have families to keep."

"Can't you find some fresh arguments, Oswald. Yours are getting a bit stale now."

Then Frank Becher made a frantic rush to escape the heavy, chastening hand of Oswald Gray, his future brother-in-law.

Oswald enjoyed the reputation of being a first-rate fellow, but a bit of a crank on the subject of women working in positions that men had once occupied. He was engaged to be married to Lilian Becher, to whom he was passionately attached.

The Becher family only consisted of three—Mrs. Becher, her daughter Lilian, aged twenty-one years, and her son Frank, aged nineteen. Mr. Becher had died many years before, and Mrs. Becher lived on the dividends which his invested wealth yielded.

When Frank Becher left school Oswald Gray had obtained for him a position in Messrs. Pole, Mannering & Co., where he himself was accountant.

Oswald and Lilian had been engaged nearly two years but they did not contemplate marriage until Frank was in a fair position so that Lilian would have no qualms in leaving her mother.

As Frank left the room somewhat hastily to avoid being assisted by Oswald, he almost ran into his sister who was entering the room. Oswald came forward to greet her.

"Why, Lilian," he said, "how pale you look, whatever is the matter?"

"I am afraid I shall upset you if I tell you, Oswald."

"But I would rather hear it, dear. Tell me."

Lilian's face became even more pale, but a determined look shone in her eyes as she said:

"I have accepted a berth as typine with Messrs. T. Austin & Co., the india-rubber merchants." She glanced up almost defiantly as she spoke. He saw the look, but did not put it down to nervousness, which would have been correct, but interpreted it as a defiance of his opinions.

"Why have you done this? You know how much I dislike it," he asked in an angry tone. It was the wrong attitude to adopt, and immediately she was on her mettle.

"My dear Oswald, I am surely at liberty to do as I please to some extent."

"Particularly if it is against my wishes, I suppose?" was his bitter retort.

"Oh, Oswald, how ridiculous you are!" she cried, stamping her foot in vexation.

"Very likely," he responded, now quite angry. "But you will either choose to do as I wish or our ways must part."

She started to her feet and confronted him with flashing eyes.

"Then I will choose," she cried, her anger at his unreasonableness quite carrying her away. She snatched off his ring, he took it, bowed slightly, and then the door slammed and he was gone.

The noise of the door seemed to wake up her senses. "Oswald, Oswald," she cried, and then covered her face in an agony of grief. Whilst he, in a blind rage, stalked on and on, regardless of direction.

So Oswald Gray and Lilian Becher parted, and pride kept them apart, whilst their hearts ached and they craved for one another.

At Pole, Mannering & Co's., Frank Becher treated his senior with silent contempt, for he felt that the quarrel was a family one. A sensible youth would have been the means of patching it up, but Frank apparently was not sensible.

As accountant to his firm, who were furniture manufacturers in a large way, Oswald had a great deal of money constantly passing through his hands, and his work was of a most responsible nature.

He dragged through the days after his quarrel with Lilian, wishing that each of them might be the last.

It was on the fourth day after the parting that Oswald received a message to go to the principal's room. He found that the manager of the bank was with Mr. Mannering when he arrived. The head of the firm was a tall, slightly built man, with very dark hair and eyes, always giving one the impression that he was in need of shaving.

"Can you explain that, Mr. Gray?" he said, placing a drawn cheque in front of him.

Oswald glanced at it and saw that the cheque was drawn to "bearer," and that the amount was £200.

"No," he said as he handed it back, "I have no recollection of drawing it."

"Neither have I any recollection of signing it."

Oswald glanced in surprise at Mr. Mannering and then examined the cheque again. It was signed "Harry Mannering" and apparently was in the handwriting of Mr. Mannering.

"What do you take it to be, Mr. Gray?"

"It looks like a private cheque of your own, sir."

"Examine it more carefully."

"Why," exclaimed Gray after a minute or two, "this does not appear to be your own writing, but it is a remarkably fine imitation!"

"Exactly what we think," drily assented Mr. Mannering. "But then I did not sign the cheque, neither was I here on

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Monday when the cheque was apparently drawn and cashed, and you and I are the only persons who could get at the cheque book. If you will look, you will see that the counter-foil has been taken completely out."

"You surely do not mean to insinuate ——" cried Oswald, and then he stopped, glancing from one to the other.

"I do not see any other course," said Mr. Mannering. The matter has been in the hands of a private detective since yesterday morning and he has stated that everything points to——" Mr. Mannering paused and shrugged his shoulders.

"But it's absurd," cried Oswald, trying to laugh but making a ghastly failure. "You surely do not believe it?"

"But, Mr. Gray, the case is a very simple one. Two persons have access to a cheque book, a private one only occasionally used. A cheque is drawn and cashed. You and I are the two persons, and it is out of the question that I should forge my own name, isn't it?"

"Now, Gray," he went on, "own up to it. It will be better in the long run."

"But I haven't anything to own up to," protested Gray. "Won't you believe me—I did not take the money."

"Well," said Mr. Mannering, "I was prepared to help you out—if you still persist, I have only one course open. I cannot afford to throw £200 away."

As he spoke, the door opened, and the plain-clothes officer from Scotland Yard entered.

"I arrest you, Oswald Gray," he said, "on a charge of forging the name of your employer."

"Great Heaven! But I am quite innocent. Mr. Mannering, you do not think me guilty?" cried Gray.

"I do not know what to think, but the evidence is very strong."

So they led Oswald Gray away.

As a matter of fact the bank manager who had discovered the forgery had practically been the means of Oswald's arrest. There had existed a bitter animosity between the two men for many years, and the manager was not slow to take advantage of this opportunity. He knew he could easily persuade Mr. Mannering, and so the most decisive steps were taken.

Lilian was prostrate at the news, and refused to believe that Oswald was guilty; whilst her brother openly jeered at him, and complimented Lilian on being well rid of a scoundrel.

But now she yearned for Oswald more than ever. Now that he had met adversity she longed to be by his side to comfort him, but still that pride prevented her. And Oswald, well, Oswald began to despair of everything. First Lilian and then this cruel blow—both seeming so unjust to him. He would have given much to have had Lilian beside him in this time of trouble; but as with her, his pride would not submit.

Once the law had got Oswald Gray in its grip, Mr. Mannering began to regret his hastiness. Gray had been in his employ for fourteen years with never a suspicion against his fair name. But it was too late to retract, the law must take its course.

At last the day of the trial came round. The court was fairly full of people, for the continuation of a much-tried case was to follow the trial of Oswald Gray.

Frederick Furrian had been engaged on behalf of the prisoner, whilst Lionel Lincoln was the prosecuting counsel.

From the first everything seemed to go against Oswald Gray. From the fact that he alone besides Mr. Mannering had access to the safe, down to the fact that the particular character in the signature which had caused the forgery to be discovered very much resembled the identical character in the prisoner's handwriting. In the correct signature the two letters "N" occurring together in "Mannering" were exactly similar, whereas in the counterfeit the second "N" differed somewhat.

Lincoln made out a very strong case against Oswald Gray, whilst Furrian's defence, although it was clever and well delivered, lacked material. Consequently in the judge's summing up it was clear that his opinion had gone right against Oswald.

Presently the jury retired but were only absent for about five minutes.

"We find the prisoner guil——"

"Stop!"

It was the defending counsel's voice; he was waving a paper in his hand.

"My lord," he cried, "I regret this irregularity, but the most important evidence has just been handed to me."

There was some commotion in the court, but presently everyone had settled down, and then Furrian commenced:

"My Lord and Gentlemen of the Jury. On the purely circumstantial evidence put forward by the most learned counsel for the prosecution, we were within an ace of committing a great error of justice.

"My lord, I hold in my hand the written confession of the real culprit, but, as it is the desire of all parties concerned that his name should be suppressed, I will pass it to your lordship to read."

The judge read the confession as did the jury. It was a perfectly legal document, sworn before witnesses, and setting forth the details of how the robbery and subsequently the forgery was committed.

Thus Oswald Gray was discharged without a stain on his character, although he was bound over to appear if called upon at some future date.

Oswald could hardly believe the truth until he read the signature of the man who had committed the forgery. But he did not seem particularly astonished, his solicitor thought, only sad. But as soon as he was free from the necessary legalities, he hurried home to think.

At home that evening he found a letter from Mr. Mannering, who had been in the court. In it he suggested that Oswald took a month's leave of absence, whilst he trusted that the inclosed would help him further to enjoy it—"the inclosed" consisted of a cheque for £50. Mr. Mannering further went on to say how bitterly he regretted the step he had taken, and apparently his sorrow was quite sincere.

On the following day there came over Oswald an intense longing to see Lilian again. To gaze into her blue eyes and read the love message there. To feel her heart beating against his. Pride was conquered now, and he hurried with all speed to the Becher's home. The door was opened by Mrs. Becher.

"Oswald!" she cried. "You?"

"Yes, Mrs. Becher, I've come to beg pardon from Lilian."

"She is not home yet from business."

The words caused Oswald a momentary pang, but he took the thrust smilingly.

"You'll come in, won't you, Oswald?"

"Do you think she will see me?"

"Oh, yes, she will only be too glad of some comfort."

"Ah, I was forgetting your trouble in my own cares. How is Frank, where is he, do you know?"

"The last we heard of him was that he was on his way to Buenos Ayres. My poor misguided boy, and to think that you nearly paid the penalty of his crime."

"But how was he found out?"

"Lilian discovered it. He came home with the story of your arrest, and his effusive liking for you immediately turned the other way, just like his father used to be. Two or three days afterwards Lilian entered his room rather suddenly and surprised him locking up a desk, and she was sure she caught the glint of gold; he flushed very much, and went on at her for going about so silently.

"Next day Lilian lifted the desk and found it much heavier than usual, she shook it, but he had foreseen such a contin-

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gency, though he anticipated an accidental one only, and had put in paper to prevent the rattle.

"He bought some new clothes and a diamond pin for his tie, besides various other things, until Lilian could restrain herself no longer, and next day she forced open his desk and found almost one hundred and eighty pounds in gold and notes. When he came home she accused him, he blustered and protested, but eventually confessed.

"The following morning she made him sign his confession, but immediately afterwards fainted away. While she was unconscious Frank slipped away with the money, and this morning we got a letter from him to say that he was on board a tramp steamer bound for Buenos Ayres.

"Directly Lilian recovered, she hurried to the court with the confession and the rest you know. What with your quarrel and Frank's behaviour, the girl is quite wearing herself out."

Oswald's expression grew more doleful with each sentence of this explanation, and at the finish he was calling himself every name he could think of.

Mrs. Becher had gone upstairs to lie down, and Oswald paced up and down the dining-room like a caged panther.

"Will she never come?" he cried. He consulted his watch on an average every minute and a half. She was not due in till six o'clock, and it still wanted a quarter of an hour till then.

At last he heard the latchkey in the front door, and heard Lilian coming down the passage to the dining-room.

She opened the door, and started at seeing a man's form before her. She stared for a moment as though she could not believe her eyes, but only for a moment. Then with a glad little cry she was in his strong embrace.

"Oh, Oswald," she cried, "my Oswald; I've wanted you so much." But the reaction had been too much, and her tears began to flow. Tenderly he soothed her, and kissed her tear-bedewed eyes.

"Oswald," she said presently, "I have something to tell you. It is why I went against your wishes and accepted Mr. Austin's offer of employment.

"You know mother's money was invested in the Lode Star Diamond Mines, well, the company were in low water at the last meeting, and were unable to declare a dividend. Consequently, the regular income which mother received stopped, and it was thought that the company would have to go into liquidation, then I thought it time to put my hand to the mill."

"My poor dear Lil, how I misjudged you," he cried remorsefully. "But our marriage must take place at once, my income is quite large enough for all three of us."

"Impetuous boy," she laughingly said. "You haven't heard all yet. Last week a very rich find was made, and mother's solicitor sold all the shares at an immense profit, and reinvested them in Government stock. He sent a cheque, too, for £200 to Mr. Mannering yesterday, and I leave business next Saturday week, dear."

"Anyhow," he cried, "I cannot wait about any longer for you, love. More things will be happening if I do. How will next month do?"

"Of all the ridiculous old things, next year, you mean," she retorted.

But eventually they brought it down to September which was four months ahead. Thus once again that truest of all sayings proved itself—"The course of true love never runs smooth."

But a very pretty wedding took place early in September, and a radiantly happy pair left London *en route* for Jersey.

One thing more and my story is finished. From the first Oswald Gray suspected Frank Becher. He had lent him his keys, including the key of the safe, to open a drawer with. He had noticed that Frank was some time gone, but excused himself by saying that the key would not work properly at first. Oswald thought nothing more of it until his interview with Mr. Mannering, and then he remembered it, but for Lilian's sake he kept silent, and would have suffered for another in order to spare her ignominy and shame. But she never knew of it, and I only relate it now with the idea of dispelling the rather adverse opinion which I am afraid my lady readers may have formed of Oswald Gray. **E. Newton Bungey.**

Your Editor Chats.

I am very glad to find that my new features, and especially the development in the pictorial covers, are so popular among my readers, and very many have written me congratulatory messages concerning them.

One of my numerous correspondents is "J. G. R.," Streatham, who in the course of a long epistle, says, "I have been greatly interested in 'The Bridge of Ruin,' and am sorry that it is now completed. It is a story which should warn all inclined to gamble. I was much amused, however, at one part of the story, *i.e.*, the taking of the snapshots. I presume the games were played in a room, *and in the evening*." He then goes on to say that this is impossible from a photographic point of view. His assumption that the snapshots were taken in the evening is wrong, for in the number in which the episode is related, that of August 22nd, it distinctly states that they were playing *in the afternoon*. However, I thank "J. G. R." for his well-meaning criticism, and I feel sure that if he turns up that issue he will agree with me that he is under a misapprehension.

You will all, no doubt, appreciate this week's instalment of "The Pursuit of Sara." A great feature is the reproduction of photographs showing the actual places where the principal incidents occurred, and these, although, of course, of special interest to readers in and around Bedford, will be interesting to all readers. I am pursuing the same course in respect to Northampton, the next town in which Sara undergoes many exciting experiences, which she relates in next week's number. On the cover of this issue is depicted the scene at Newnham Bridge, where Rigby Starr makes so cowardly an assault upon Sara. There will be an equally striking picture on the cover next week. I anticipate that there will be a big demand for "Short Stories" in Northampton and environs next week, so regular readers there had better ask their newsagents to reserve them a copy, so as to prevent the disappointment of hearing them say "Sold out."

Besides the thrilling relations of "The Pursuit of Sara," a splendid new attraction starts in our next. This is Mr. George Griffith's serial "A Criminal Millionaire," which is bound to create much interest. Very little need be said in recommending this to readers, because the author is so well known as a writer of stirring stories. "Good wine needs no bush," is an apt quotation, and hence I need not dissertate on the merits of our coming serial. You might, however, do your friends a good turn by mentioning what I have in hand for them, and thereby oblige me too.

A good many correspondents have written me inquiring whether any more "Love Problems" will appear. They intimate that they would be sorry to see this feature dropped, but I can calm their fears by announcing that shortly some more of these interesting problems will be published. In reply to "Perplexed," the number containing "Should a Husband Discuss His Business Affairs With His Wife?" was the one dated September 12th of this year.

Owing to a printer's error one of the admitted solutions to No. 141 in the Juggled Letters Competition was given as Gilgach; this should have been Gilfach. I hope to be able to announce the names of the prizewinners shortly.

Your Editor.

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The Story of an Attempt at Matchmaking and its Result.

"Yes, I like the look of the young fellow very much," said Mr. James Reece frankly. "Then we may take it as a compact, Will, that the young people marry. You've seen my daughter, and you think that she would make a suitable wife for Charlie?"

"I think that the marriage should prove an ideal one!" cried Mr. William Crewe in a tone of conviction. "It would be very pleasant to both of us if the young people were to make a match of it. There are the two estates side by side; they would make a capital whole, if under one master. I cannot claim that my family has lived on my estate for ever so many generations, because I haven't had it two years, but that doesn't make any difference. Well, we will each do his best to bring it about, but it must be quite a question of free will. No coercion!"

"I wouldn't coerce Lucy for anything!" declared Mr. Reece emphatically. "Still, we can do a great deal to bring about the desired end. We can throw them together; we can make judicious remarks, and so on. Oh, I think it will come about, Will. You know, it is association that has a great deal to do with falling in love! If a man never sees a certain woman, he doesn't fall in love with her—how on earth can he? And, on the other hand, if he constantly sees a certain woman, it's about three dozen to one that he will fall in love with her. That sort of thing happens every day, under conditions that seem to preclude the possibility of marriage. Therefore, the chances are greater when the two parties are—well, attractive."

"Precisely!" agreed the other parent.

The matter dropped at that point, so far as actual discussion went, but both fathers set to work to accomplish the object in view. Reece and Crewe were friends. They had been to school together and had kept more or less in touch with one another during the succeeding years, although they had been separated for the greater portion of them.

Reece had spent a considerable time in various Colonies, in the Government service, while Crewe had devoted himself to business in the mother country. The Reece estate had been kept in hand by his sister during his sojourn abroad, but her death had had something to do with his return and his decision to settle down and take matters easily.

Reece was delighted when he discovered that the adjoining property had been acquired by his friend, and it was not long before the two men began to think of matrimonial plans for their offspring.

However, the respective son and daughter did not view the matter in the same light, for it was not long before the young people saw the drift of certain broad hints, and perceived the object of sundry excursions and invitations. If the hints had not been so broad, Charles Crewe and Lucy Reece might have fallen in love as a matter of course, but when they discovered that they were being thrust on one another, as Lucy mentally termed it, their independent spirits rebelled against the plan and they deliberately made up their minds that they were not going to be disposed of like so much furniture. The natural result was that there was no progress in the direction of matrimony and the fathers looked at each other in dismay.

"They don't seem to take to one another, do they?" observed Mr. Crewe dolefully. "It's rather disquieting, isn't it?"

"It's *very* disappointing," emphasised Mr. Reece. "Yet," he added, brightening a little, "it's not altogether a bad sign, you know! They have guessed our plans and it has ruffled them a bit, probably! That will wear off, and they will fall in love as deeply as—as——"

Mr. Reece could not find a simile, so he lamely desisted.

Then they hit on a plan for throwing the young people more together for a time. Crewe intended to have various extensive alterations carried out in his house; this work necessitated that father and son should go away from the house for a time, and take up their abode at a hotel. Reece invited the Crewes to stay with him and his daughter during the progress of the work. Charlie Crewe, who had taken over the active management of his father's office in Manchester, an hour's ride from home, would find himself just as conveniently situated as in his father's house.

Thus it came about that Charlie and Lucy, already somewhat antagonistic, found themselves in closer proximity, which tended to increase their antagonism. To make matters worse, although he thought that it was doing quite the opposite, Mr. Crewe said that Charlie needn't go up more than three days a week as business was always flat at that time of the year, and they could all have a good time.

It was the third day after the Crewes had installed themselves in the home of the Reeces. Lucy entered the library to get a book on geology and she found Charlie lazily reclining in an armchair, reading the latest novel and smoking a cigar. He was the picture of indolence.

"Can I get it for you, Miss Reece?" he inquired, rising slowly and speaking in the tone of a man who hoped that a negative reply would be given. He received the negative answer but with an addition which he did not expect.

"No, thank you, Mr. Crewe! I should not like to cause you any undue exertion! Pray remain seated!"

"You are so dreadfully energetic, Miss Reece!" he drawled, sinking back into the comfortable chair. "I suppose *that*, and the fondness for fossils, come from living in the Colonies! I admire your energy and your studious disposition, but I cannot imitate them, I regret to say!" Then, lowering his eyes so that the malicious twinkle in them should not be seen, he added: "Are you going to keep me company by sitting here to study?"

"I should not like to disturb the profundity of your reading, Mr. Crewe!" she retorted, flushing. She bowed and passed out of the room.

"By Jove!" muttered Charlie. "I am afraid I was a bit rude, but she was not behindhand! Well, I think I am making myself appear something of a dolt to her, and she won't be in a hurry to say 'yes!' when I pop the question, as I must do just to please dad. He'll be cut up about it, but I can't help it!"

Charlie Crewe presented himself to Lucy as an indolent fellow, rather shallow in mind, and bordering on the fop; not at all the kind of man to maintain and increase a large business. She preferred a man of the masterly type; strong of body and brain, morally and physically brave, capable of facing and overcoming all difficulties. To her, therefore, this Charles Crewe was the opposite of her choice of a husband.

Lucy did not perceive that he was exaggerating, that he was not really what he showed himself to her, yet she ought to have guessed it, considering that she herself was playing a similar game of exaggeration. Lucy was not the blue-stocking which she made Charlie think she was; she had a liking for study and she enjoyed athletic exercises, but at heart she was essentially homely and womanly. Her disposition was gentle, tender, and she preferred the work of a home to the study of

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fossils, and the work of a geologist with hammer and other appliances. Instead of being really the rather masculine, independent, "stand-offish" girl, she was yearning for a strong arm to protect her.

They kept up the play whenever they met and they believed in the truth of one another's acting. When alone, each smiled at his, or her, success and experienced increased dislike for the other party. It was a game of cross purposes with a vengeance, and the cherished desires of the fathers were suffering in consequence.

Mr. Crewe and Mr. Reece both felt constrained to say something, when, after more than a week had passed, there was no result. Crewe had an interview with his son, in which he delicately made the young fellow aware of the fact that his own desire was no nearer realisation, and Charlie evasively stated that it was his intention to ask Lucy to be his wife if—the elder man did not notice the significance of the remark—if she would have him! In his mind he was sure that he was making acceptance impossible. Reece, on the other hand, told his daughter that he feared she had not been so attentive as a hostess should be to a guest; this made Lucy flush as she felt that there was some truth in the reproof. She promised to mend her ways.

"That's right," said Reece, adding lamely: "You see, when we stroll out and Charlie's father and I somehow leave you behind, as we have done several times, and then we come back—h'm, some time afterwards—to find you, why, you two are apart as if you were strangers! He is smoking on the grass and you are botanising!"

It was a muddled kind of speech but Lucy understood the drift of it. She did not, however, respond to the obvious suggestion.

Lucy Reece began to mend her ways that afternoon; she decided to make an advance, a step which cost her some rebellious feelings.

"Mr. Crewe," she said to Charlie, whom she found in the library, smoking the inevitable cigar, "I am going to town, and it looks uncharitable to leave you alone, as our worthy parents are out. Will you walk with me? It is only three miles there and three miles back?"

She was just slightly confused; his clear eyes had lifted for a second, flashing a keen glance at her, only to close lazily.

"Is it the same distance each way?" he asked quizzically, seizing upon the awkward turn she had given to her speech. "I really do not think that I am equal to so much exertion, Miss Reece! Why not ride? It's perfectly useless to walk when you can ride, you know!"

"Then you will excuse me for leaving you?" she inquired in a tone that meant that he would be obliged to do so. "I am sorry to have disturbed you." Then, her temper getting the better of her at this rebuff, she burst forth before she was aware of it: "I don't believe you would walk or bestir yourself if you knew that someone was being killed outside on the lawn!"

She was gone. He laughed softly.

"That settles the marriage question! I must take an early opportunity of popping the question and get the thing finished. It *was* rather rude of me though! Yet, by Jove, she gave me a Roland for my Oliver!"

Lucy hurriedly dressed and went on her errand; she was furiously angry now, partly because of Charlie's refusal and partly on account of her own stinging retort. Oh, why do parents act so foolishly as to try to make matches between ill-assorted couples! Lucy could not understand why; she felt angry with her father, with old Mr. Crewe, with everybody, that she should have been placed in so awkward a position!

"It will not be for long now," she comforted herself by saying; "he will give up the idea and will find some excuse for going away!"

So she treated him with proper courtesy for the next two days, although he was almost exasperatingly cool and dense on occasions. She was congratulating herself that there would be no proposal, and therefore she would not have to bear the blame of having refused him, when the thunderbolt came.

They were alone in the small drawing-room used on ordinary occasions. Charlie Crewe laid down his book and went to her side. His face betrayed some set purpose, and, in her surprise and agitation—annoyance, she would have called it!—she rose from the couch at his approach.

"Miss Reece," he began hesitatingly. He did not call her by her Christian name. "I must apologise for bothering you, because I can pretty well guess beforehand what you will say. I won't waste any words or sentiment over it! Do you think you could marry me? Would you be my wife?"

Everyone will agree that no girl in her senses could have accepted such an offer. Small wonder, therefore, that Lucy drew herself up stiffly and gave him a frigid answer.

"I suppose it is very kind of you, Mr. Crewe, to make the proposal, but I wish you had not."

"Just as I expected," he said, with unconcealed relief. "It was a sort of duty, you see. I was bound to do it, although I knew that the proposal would be unacceptable. I don't think we are suited, do you?"

"I do not think that there is any need to discuss the question of compatibility, Mr. Crewe," she returned icily, and she left him.

Charlie went back to his seat. He tried to smile, but that expression quickly gave place to a frown, and he began to gnaw savagely at his fair moustache. Somehow, he was not satisfied, although he had achieved his object.

"It was beastly hard on her," he muttered, jumping up and pacing the room with quick strides. "I don't want to be forced into marriage with any girl, but I ought to have adopted the more manly course of declining to carry out dad's wish. It wasn't manly to throw the responsibility on her, and to make the proposal in that way. Suitable? Well, perhaps not, but I needn't have insinuated that I didn't think she was good enough for me. Of course, that's how she will take it."

If Lucy had seen him as he strode townwards ten minutes later, she would have marvelled at the energy of this indolent man; and if she could have gauged the depths of his eyes at that moment, she would have entertained some doubts concerning the correctness of her idea respecting the extent

The rope swayed with the strain and stretched ominously.

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of his intelligence. But Lucy had her face buried in the clothes of the bed on which she had thrown herself. Her well-moulded figure was shaking convulsively and a smothered sob betokened a condition of mind and heart that would have startled Charlie Crewe.

That evening Lucy did not appear at dinner, and Mr. Reece, with some anxiety, informed his two friends that she was suffering from a severe headache and appeared to be quite prostrate. Mr. Crewe expressed his great regret with evident sincerity; Charlie mumbled some words of sympathy, which were not quite intelligible. The meal was not a success, and the three retired earlier than usual.

Charlie Crewe could not understand what ailed him; he admitted that he ought to have been pleased, but he was not. Of course he did not wish to marry Lucy, and he was not going to marry her, so—— That was how he reasoned on the following morning, but he could not get any farther than the "so——" Lucy was at the breakfast-table, trying hard to appear cheerful, but it was not a successful attempt at all; the elder men were not happy, either, for they had learnt of the failure of the matrimonial negotiations. There was no ill-feeling between the two parents because Lucy had declined the proposal; they accepted the situation in all friendliness.

Charlie saw Lucy go out for a walk, perhaps on some fossilising expedition, as he would have said previously, and he wondered that he should feel rather cross that she had not asked him to accompany her; she must have known that he was fooling when he declined her invitation on the last occasion, he told himself, and now that there was no further chance of an unwelcome proposal, what reason had she for not asking him to go with her?

He watched her out of sight, gnawing at his moustache. It was vexing that she had not asked him; it was a fine morning, and he didn't want to sit in a stuffy library and smoke. A fellow cannot always be reading novels and smoking!

He decided to go out alone and to take a different direction. "I suppose I might have offered to go with her," he mused, as the thought occurred to him, "but I don't care to thrust myself upon anyone." He went off at a swinging pace, trying to wear away his ill-humour by hard walking or to get it blown away by the refreshing breeze.

About a mile from the house the land was hilly, and at one spot was a chine or ravine known as The Grindle. On one side the descent was comparatively easy, but on the other it was exceedingly dangerous to attempt a descent. It was almost perpendicular, with jutting pieces of rock here and there to afford a precarious hold. The Grindle was a lovely spot and formed the destination of many a walk.

Charlie Crewe unconsciously found himself near the Grindle after nearly an hour's tramp; he was on the steep side, and he decided to approach the edge in order to obtain a view of the sloping side and rest for a while.

"I wonder which way she took?" he asked himself incontinently. He gazed at the beauties of the Grindle for a minute or so, after which he threw himself on the grass and lay at full length.

"Charlie, my boy," he said, apostrophising himself "you've been an idiot! If you didn't want the girl"—there was a meaning pause at this point—"*if* you didn't want her," he went on, unconsciously emphasising the little *if*, "you needn't have gone on like that. I should think——"

He stopped and sat bolt upright as a sound struck his ear. He listened. There! It sounded like a cry for help!

He sprang to his feet and hurried along the summit of the Grindle, calling out, in stentorian tones: "Who's there?" And presently he caught the reply: "Here, down the Grindle!"

The voice came from one of the most dangerous portions of the chine, and he recognised it. Good Heavens! How had she got there?

He soon located the exact spot. Lying flat on his face, he looked over; he saw Lucy on a narrow ledge, several feet down. She was compelled to hold a small projection by one hand in order to keep on the ledge, which was almost too narrow to afford a foothold, and, moreover, sloped slightly downwards. It was evident that she had slipped from a higher projection, and had just managed to save herself. Even now, if her feet should slide along the sloping ledge, she would certainly be precipitated to the bottom, a distance of at least one hundred feet!

"Hold on, for Heaven's sake!" cried Charlie. "I'll get you out of that!"

His blood ran cold for a second as he thought of what might happen, but in a moment he was cool and collected. All the latent strength of his character came to the front.

There was no help near, and if he spent time in running in search of a rope, Lucy's strength might give way and—— He shuddered.

He was wearing a light overcoat. He slipped it off and cut and tore the material into stout strips, which he quickly tied together. The nearest projection to which he could attach one end was two or three feet below the edge. He cautiously clambered down and secured the improvised rope. The free end dangled a foot above Lucy's disengaged hand.

"It isn't long enough," groaned Charlie. "Can you hold on while I tear my jacket and make it longer?"

"I can't. My feet are slipping. I'll give a spring and grasp it."

He had great difficulty in suppressing a cry of fear as he saw her spring lightly upwards. Her hands grasped the line. It swayed with the strain and stretched ominously.

"For Heaven's sake," cried Charlie again, "be careful. Wait till I get down a little further to help you. Oh, what should I do if you fell? I cannot bear to think of it!"

She was climbing up, steadily, hand over hand, as she had been taught to do in the gymnasium; but at that involuntary remark she stopped and looked at him with a gaze that penetrated the inmost recesses of his heart and caused a peculiar feeling of exaltation to spring up within it.

"Would you care so very much?" The words came from her lips before she could realise their meaning; she flushed fiery red immediately she had uttered them, and, turning her eyes from him, she continued the ascent.

"I should have nothing else to live for, Lucy!" he declared, not impulsively, but with the cool deliberation that proceeds from full recognition of the truth.

She reached the projection to which the line was secured; while she held to that projection, he drew the free end of the line towards him and scrambled to the summit, where he held it taut as he lay on the ground. This gave her the means of getting to the summit.

Scarcely had she placed herself beyond danger when he had her in his arms; and she, nestling closely to him, gave vent to her over-strained feelings in a flood of tears.

She had been trying to get a specimen of the bee orchis when she had slipped, narrowly escaping a dreadful death.

"I am so sorry that I made that cruel remark about your not being energetic enough or brave enough to——" She began, but he stopped her with a kiss.

"I think we have both been making a big blunder, haven't we, now? And I propose that we go straight back to our worthy parents and tell them that we have decided, all of our own free will, to bring about the realisation of their hopes. Do you agree, Lucy?"

Charlie always averred that Lucy said "Yes!" but Lucy declared that she made no reply, for the simple reason that Charlie did not give her time. A man in love is so impulsive!

Geo. Day.

HE: "But you promised me this waltz?" She: "Yes, but that was before I had seen you dance!"

"HE offered her his hand and fortune." "Did she accept it?" "No; the first was too large and the second too small!"

"SHE is a Russian Countess." "Indeed! Has she much in her own name?" "Has she? She's got nearly the entire alphabet!"

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Making the Best of It.

MABEL: "I'm sorry you asked me to marry you; it pains me to refuse." George (cheerfully): "Oh, don't worry; perhaps you know best what I am escaping."

Brave Girl!

ADA: "I saved a man's life at Blackpool last summer." Clara: "How? I didn't see anything about it in the papers." Ada: "Well, I should hope not. He said he'd die if I didn't let him kiss me."

He Had His Doubts.

JUDY: "Will ye give me yer promise, Dennis, that y'll love me foriver?" Dennis: "Sure, an' Oi'd loike to do that same, Judy, but Oi'm hardly of the opinion that Oi'll lasht as long as that."

Then They Recommenced.

JACK: "The photograph you sent me is just like you, dear. I kissed it ever so many times." Nina: "Did it return your kisses?" Jack: "No, of course not." Nina: "Then how can you say it is like me?"

Two Different Things.

DAISY: "I have an engagement with Cholly, and I don't know how to get out of it." Helen: "Haven't you any reason for breaking it?" Daisy: "Yes, I have a reason—Cholly is the reason—but I want an excuse."

Forewarned is Forearmed.

ETHEL (engaged a week): "George and I have never had a quarrel!" Maud: "Oh, I think you ought to have one before you are married; otherwise you can't be quite sure whether you are going to have your own way or not!"

Then There Were Screams of Silence.

"AH!" sighed Miss Antique, with a languishing glance in the direction of Mr. Oldboy, "if I had been born in the days of chivalry!" "Well," he said, as he scratched the bald spot on the top of his head: "You came pretty near it."

He Would Have Cause to Remember.

SYMPATHETIC SISTER: "Cheer up, Arthur, Mabel has treated you badly in jilting you, but you will soon forget her." Arthur (moodily): "Not for a long time, sis, I fear. The lovely jewellery I gave her was purchased on the easy payment system."

Hubby Had Got Tired of Cold Meat.

MASTER (to cook): "You needn't say anything to your mistress, Jane, but have you a policeman for a sweetheart?" Cook (indignantly): "Certainly not, sir!" Master: "Then you'll have to get one, or else leave. I want someone to eat up the cold mutton."

A Little Going a Long Way.

MR. HENPECK: "I shall have to go to town to-day, Maria, and I shall want some money, for there's train fare, lunch, 'bus fares, and I've got to——" Mrs. Henpeck: "Well, John, take this shilling, and, mind, if you come home the worse for drink I'll not let you in."

An Unkind Suggestion.

SHE: "So you are writing me a poem?" The Poet: "Yes, but I can't find anything to rhyme with 'Cupid' that will adequately express my state of mind." She: "Why not 'stupid'?"

A Cool Proposition.

"MY daughter is absolutely too young to marry," snorted old Goldrick. "Well," replied the dejected suitor, "what would you say to my taking her marriage dowry now and waiting a few years for the girl?"

Cruel Girl!

"I MET a pretty girl this morning, and she looked at me in a way which led me to believe she was trying to make an impression." "Shouldn't wonder. People generally select something soft for that purpose."

He'd Had Them Before.

MRS. YOUNGWIFE (welcoming husband home): "Now, ducky, I've been cooking all day. I've made pie and cake and biscuits." Ducky (cheerfully): "Then let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die."

Less Sudden Than She Thought.

HE: "Oh, pray, Miss Dalrymple, don't call me Mr. Brookes." She: "Oh, but our acquaintance has been so brief. (Sweetly) Why shouldn't I call you Mr. Brookes?" He: "Oh, only because my name's John Somerset!"

Poor Old Hubby!

"WHAT time is it?" asked his wife suspiciously, as he came in. "About one." Just then the clock struck three. "Gracious! When did the clock commence to stutter?" he said, with a feeble attempt at justification and a joke.

Would His Love Melt or Dissolve?

SHE: "If it were necessary, and I were your wife, would you go through fire and water for me?" He: "Do you think it would be necessary?" She: "It might be." He: "Then I think you had better marry a fireman. Good evening!"

Sufficient Credentials.

CAREFUL PARENT: "Before I give consent to your proposed marriage to my daughter I must know something about your character." Suitor: "Certainly. Here is my bank-book." Careful Parent (after a glance): "Take her, my son, and be happy."

The Joys of Matrimony.

HUSBAND: "Don't you think that you are rather unreasonable to expect me to take you to a ball, and stay awake until four o'clock, and then get up at eight and go to my work?" Wife: "I may be a little unreasonable, but it's perfectly brutal of you to mention it."

His Debts Had Grown.

RICH AMERICAN FATHER-IN-LAW: "My daughter and I are much disappointed in your estate. It seems to be a barren tract of land, and I don't believe anything has been grown on it for fifty years." The Penniless Count (cheerfully): "Monsieur forgets ze magnificent mortgages."

The Sarcasm Was Intense.

"MY hands are awfully cold," said the pretty girl suggestively, as they drove home from the dance. "Why didn't you bring your muff with you?" asked the practical young man. "I did!" she snapped. But she wouldn't explain where the muff had gone to, and he has been wondering ever since just what she meant.

But Ethel Said Nothing.

"ETHEL," said a fond mother, "did George leave any package for me last evening?" Ethel (falteringly): "Why, no, mamma! What made you ask?" "Oh, nothing; only I heard him say, as he said good-bye, 'Now, here is one more for your mother,' and I thought that it might be that pattern for lace-edging that his mother promised to send me."

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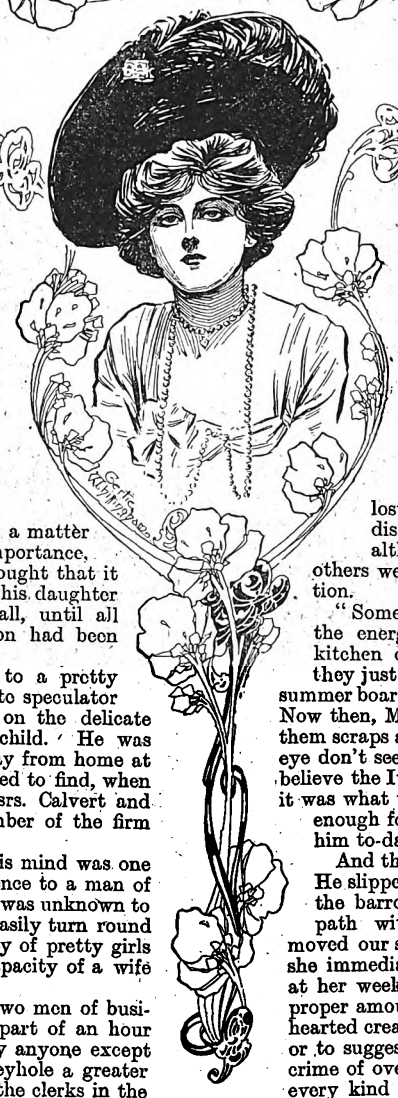
ONLY AN AMATEUR.



The Romance of a Gentleman Organ-Grinder.

THERE were three alternatives offered to Mr. Nicholas Frost. The first was suicide, and he put that on one side immediately as being too painful to contemplate; the second was borrowing from his friends to enable him to pay the debt which he owed of £10,000, which looked so much like the broad and easy way leading to the workhouse that he fought shy of venturing along it, and the third was marrying his daughter to the firm of Calvert and Son, his creditors.

Whether the father or son had her was a matter which after all was of very secondary importance, and this was especially so because he thought that it would perhaps be wisest neither to take his daughter into his confidence nor to consult her at all, until all the preliminary details of the transaction had been successfully negotiated.

"There is some advantage attaching to a pretty daughter after all," mused this unfortunate speculator one morning, as he set out to the City on the delicate mission of endeavouring to sell his only child. He was glad that the young lady was staying away from home at the time, and on the whole he was relieved to find, when he reached the magnificent offices of Messrs. Calvert and Son, Stock Brokers, that the junior member of the firm was also away on his holidays.

After all, the subject which occupied his mind was one which he could broach with more confidence to a man of a certain age, than to a young fellow who was unknown to him even by sight, and who might very easily turn round and say that there were in the world plenty of pretty girls who would suit him admirably in the capacity of a wife without a forfeit of £10,000.

Exactly what transpired between these two men of business, closeted as they were for the best part of an hour together, will probably never be known by anyone except the office boy, who had his ear to the keyhole a greater part of the time. But it was noticed by the clerks in the counting-house that when Mr. Nicholas Frost came downstairs he looked very hot and uncomfortable.

The subject which he had in hand was one of such extreme delicacy, that he spent half an hour in beating round the bush in the most elaborate manner, before he dared come to the point; and it was only when he at last blurted out that in the place of the £10,000, which was due, his daughter would be at the disposal of Mr. Calvert, senior, that he discovered the very unpleasant fact that Mrs. Calvert was still alive.

Thereupon he beat a very sudden and shame-faced retreat, and as he wended his way home he confessed that the choice now practically lay between suicide and the workhouse. After the most unfortunate mistake which had occurred, he could not very well mention the subject which he had in mind to the junior partner.

His prospects were anything but cheerful, and it was even a question whether it was practicable to borrow £10,000 from his friends. If not—then he must go to bed and think it over.

The organ grinder at the gate had been grinding away for fully twenty minutes at the popular tunes which filled his barrel. The nurses and the children under their charge had gaped over the fence to their hearts' content, and the pitiful old ladies confined to their rooms on the upper floors of that fashionable country boarding house had rained down sundry pennies upon him, a good many of which were lost in the long grass, to judge from the disappointed look on the man's face, although he found them quickly when the others were showered down by way of compensation.

"Some won't encourage them," said Mrs. Grit, the energetic proprietress, as she stood at the kitchen door, duster in hand; "but I say that they just help boarders to keep lively; and if your summer boarder gets low spirited you're apt to lose her. Now then, Maria, don't stand gaping there, but take them scraps and warm them in the oven. What the eye don't see the heart don't grieve for, and I don't believe the Italian foreigner would care if he did know it was what the folks left on their plates. If it's good enough for mince to-morrow it's good enough for him to-day, ain't it?"

And then Maria called the foreigner to come in. He slipped the monkey's chain from the handle of the barrow, and shuffled up the well-kept gravel path with a look of eager expectation which moved our susceptible old lady upstairs to tears, and she immediately made up her mind not to complain at her weekly bill, although it was about double the proper amount, as Mrs. Grit was such a good, kind-hearted creature it would be cruel to hurt her feelings or to suggest that she had been guilty of the heinous crime of overcharging one of her boarders. And so every kind action has its reward, although we may not know it.

While the organ grinder was feeding in the kitchen with a relish which did great credit to the scraps, although it made them look rather small, a young man came down the road with a fishing-rod in one hand and an empty basket in the other. He was very good-looking, and his peculiar oval face with its bright Southern complexion and jet black hair was shown off to the very best advantage by the exceedingly Bohemian dress which he wore, probably for the very reason that he knew how becoming it was.

Your City man when he goes for a holiday as a rule prefers to be a little eccentric in his attire, and certainly the combination of coloured shirts, knickerbockers, and a huge fisherman's hat gave the young man the appearance of a theatrical bandit rather than anything else. He put down the empty fish basket inside the boarding-house gate, and then went back and examined the barrel organ.

"It looks easy," he thought to himself. "I never could see why girls should waste the best years of their lives learning

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the piano, which probably they will never play without giving offence to anybody with an ear for music, when the whole thing can be done so much better by just turning a handle. If I had to earn my own living I think that this sort of thing would suit me."

Then he took hold of the handle and began turning it. The result was very bad.

"Not so easy as it looks," he thought to himself, as he pounded the handle round with a series of disconnected jerks and began to get hot.

"Wonder what tune I'm supposed to be playing now. Never heard one quite like it before. Doesn't seem to attract any very great crowd either."

It was disappointing that there was nobody, not even a baby, to appreciate his efforts. The nursemaids, on whose support he counted, had all gone into the house to look after the children, and the older people, imagining that the legitimate grinder had recommenced operations in a very unfavourable mood, thought that the sooner he went away the better; and in the hopes of discouraging him to discontinue, they carefully abstained from looking out.

"Wonder where the owner of this muscle-developing machine has taken himself to?" mused the young man as he mopped his forehead with a handkerchief. Then an inspiration came to him.

"By Jove!" he said, laughing softly to himself at the brilliancy of his own thoughts, "I'll trundle the thing down to the village and see how much I can make. It's down the hill all the way there, and the old man can fetch it back himself if he wants it. Good idea."

He found the barrel organ a considerable weight at first, but after a time it seemed to run easier, and finally the only question was whether he would ever be able to stop the thing at the other end. However, half way down the hill, when the speed was estimated at fifteen miles an hour, he brought up against the wheel of a small dog cart which was coming slowly in the opposite direction.

Thereupon the barrel organ went over, playing the last chords of "After the Ball" as it did so, and finally settled down on the top of the young man who had got entangled in the handles.

When he got up again he found that the horse was rearing and doing its best to run backwards down the hill on its hind legs, while the young lady, who was driving alone, was screaming at the top of her voice.

Whether the horse had a natural antipathy to popular tunes, or hated Italians, or thought that the barrel organ was going to attack it again, did not appear, but it was some time before the young man who sprang at the frightened creature's head was able to persuade it to assume its natural position on four legs.

In the meantime the young lady, whose nerves had naturally been very much shaken, had not failed to notice the good looks of the man whom she was kind enough to consider her saviour, although, as a matter of fact, he had done more towards bringing her to a sudden end than anything else.

"Saved," she muttered to herself, as the horse at last resumed its horizontal position, "and by an organ grinder as handsome as he is graceful."

Miss Frost, for she was the daughter of the man who at that moment was trying to sell her hand to his creditors, had been to a modern school and she knew Italian, and as soon as she had caught her breath she aired it for the organ grinder's benefit.

In Gay Paris

"Signor," she said, bending forward and showing her pretty white teeth, "how can I thank you for saving my life? It was very brave of you."

"An Italian lady, by Jove," thought the young man—an Italian would never have supposed it for a minute—and he instantly replied in the same language and an accent peculiar to street arabs.

"Signorina, that I have done something to spare you alarm has made me happy. If by chance I saved your life I am too much honoured and favoured." He thought, on the whole, it was better to put it this way to apologise for having done his best to kill her.

"Never was there such an organ-grinder," thought pretty Miss Frost. Then her blue eyes lighted on the barrel-organ, where it lay apparently none the worse for the collision.

"Is it hurt—your organ?" she asked anxiously in the Italian language as spoken in the class-rooms at Girton. And the young man interrupted her in the same language as taught by Professor Sprachemalli."

"That is my affair, signorina."

"How proud he is—perhaps he is a prince who has been obliged to fly the country," thought Miss Frost, and thereupon she bestowed another gracious smile upon him, and, thanking him with all the most eloquent phrases she could remember, she drove away, turning once to wave a dainty lace handkerchief to her preserver.

And so they parted—Miss Frost to tell her adventure to her aunt, and the young man to find the missing owner of the organ, and to pay him the price of the damage which he had brought about.

At tea-time he had made many inquiries concerning the Italian lady, and to his surprise he found that nobody, not even Mrs. Grit herself, knew anything of her.

This was most disappointing, for he had already been looking forward to their next meeting with pleasurable anticipation, and framing a few words which would express his anxiety after her welfare in the most eloquent words of her poetic language.

Do what he would he could not forget that pretty face and gentle voice, and he found himself singing "Some Day" as he wandered about the garden on a moonlight night in a voice, so plaintive that one old lady sent down her maid to inquire if he was feeling unwell, and if there was anything which she could do for him.

He procured an Italian dictionary and phrase book, and sat late into the night, brushing up his knowledge of the language, which had never been a very extensive one, and every day he wandered up and down between the boarding-houses and the village, looking out for that little red-wheeled cart with the spirited bay horse and the charming young lady inside.

However, it never came his way, and for the very good reason that Miss Frost's aunt had forbidden her ever to drive out alone again, and condemned her to the family carriage and the driving of old Carter Pattenden, the family coachman, who always avoided that hill into the village whenever he could.

So for many days the young man never saw the beautiful foreigner who had broken his romantic heart, while pretty Mildred Frost hardly knew whether she was wretched or happy, when she thought of the wonderful romance that had come into her life, for she owned to herself that she adored the organ-grinder, who was certainly a prince in reduced circumstances.

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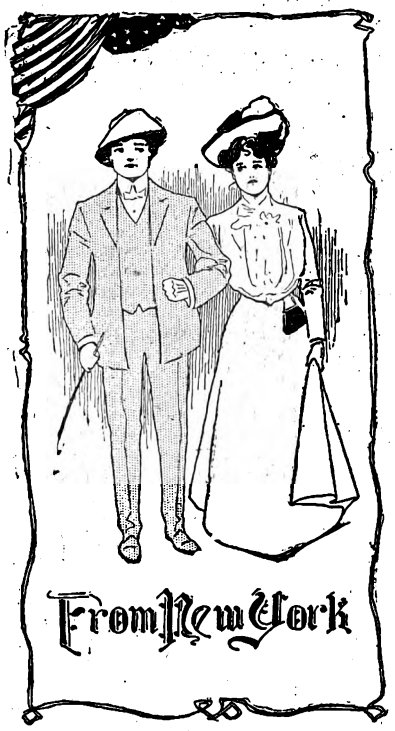

At last they met. It was in this way. The young man was consoling himself by fishing on the banks of a little stream which ran through a wood, and Miss Frost was out for a solitary walk, lost in contemplation of the happiness which was in store for her some day, when the second volume of her novel in real life would be good enough to begin.

"My gallant preserver," she cried, as she caught sight of his picturesque broad-brimmed hat. "Oh, signor, is it possible?"

And he answered in Italian also.

"Signorina, this is the happiest hour of my life. Ah, how I have dreamt of this meeting, how I longed with all the passion of my heart to speak to you once more, to stand face to face, and to gaze into those dazzling eyes," he had learnt this by heart out of an Italian novel, and he was rather proud of it.

And so these two began to make love to one another in a foreign language, and never for a moment did either of them suspect the nationality of the other. Miss Frost felt sure that her aunt would not welcome an organ-grinder as a guest, and so she had to make excuses for not asking him to call.

The young man, on his part, fished for an invitation as he had never fished for trout. He was a gentleman, and he thought that after the open way in which they had expressed their admiration for one another the least the young lady could do was to ask him to five o'clock tea.

He was desperately in earnest over this adventure, and he was burning to know her parents and to pay his addresses properly. However, Miss Frost did not feel equal to introducing a wandering musician into her aunt's drawing-room, and although she was in her heart secretly hoping that he would suggest an elopement, she did not dare even to think of her father's passion when he heard of her attachment for this handsome organ-grinder.

"I wish to goodness that she knew a little English," thought the young man as his adored sat on one side of the stream with a phrase book hidden under her muff, and he sat on the other with a dictionary concealed in his fish basket. "I don't understand half she says, except when she condescends to talk in the language of the eye. I expect something unpleasant will come of this."

Something did.

One evening about twilight the young man and Miss Frost sat in the little cove, which they had chosen on account of the utter seclusion, upon some damp but very mossy rocks.

His arm was about her waist, her head on his shoulder, and he had called her "Carissima" and "Bella Carissima" several times when an avalanche rolled down the steep bank upon them. That was the effect. It was, however, only the portly form of Mr. Nicholas Frost who had come down from town for the day and hearing that his daughter had gone out for a solitary walk, had set out in search for her. and attracted by the sound of voices, he had pitched upon the lovers, and, slipping in the excitement of the moment, he had come down the slope with a rush.

They broke his fall, but when he picked himself up he began to use language which was more forcible and penetrating than polite or coherent. And in the pauses he wanted to know "what the dickens his daughter was doing, and who on earth the confounded rascal was who sat with her."

The young man, quite conscious that he deserved the reproof, only it was the girl's fault for not having asked him to call, was just feeling in his pockets for a card, and wondering somewhat at the fluency with which the old gentleman, who was evidently her guardian or her father, spoke English, when, to his utter amazement, the girl flung herself on her knees.

"Father, please don't be angry," she pleaded in perfect English. "This is the noble organ-grinder who saved my life. He cannot speak one word of English, and in saving me broke his organ, and has to support himself by fishing. Remember, father, that but for him I should now be in my grave. Oh, father, I love him, and so, as you love me, be merciful."

"Mildred Frost," said the old man, "you're an idiot. Here, you organ-grinder, can you speaky Englesy at all, you know?"

"Perfectly," said the young man, with a gesture of despair. "In fact, I'm an Englishman. I thought your daughter was an Italian lady until this moment, and she apparently paid the same compliment to my knowledge of the language Allow me to explain the somewhat embarrassing position into which you have put us by your unexpected arrival. I have, I need hardly to say, the most respectful admiration for Miss Frost, and wish to——"

"I can't listen to any explanations," interrupted the old man, stamping his foot on the ground in ungovernable fury. "What business have you to make love to my daughter, you disreputable, dirty, lazy, good-for-nothing vagabond? If you broke your confounded organ in saving her life, although I would like to know how the dickens you did that, I will pay for a new one. I am deeply grateful for what you have done," he added, growing more conciliatory at the look of pain and supplication in his daughter's eyes, "but you see organ-grinding or fishing is not—that is—I——"

"Quite so," said the young man, with slightly heightened colour. "Only there seems to be some mistake. As to organ-grinding, I'm only an amateur. I thought your daughter knew that. I'm no more a professional than I'm an Italian. And perhaps you know James Calvert by name. He has rather an extensive business in the City. I'm his only son. It was a mutual mistake."

The old man sat down on the rock as if he had been stunned. "Done it again," he muttered to himself. "Lost my second chance. There's nothing for it but suicide now. What a fool I am to be sure. I might have seen the fellow was a gentleman."

However, when he had made it clear that he quite understood and appreciated what a good match the young man would be for his daughter, and how proud he would be to call Mr. Calvert, junior, his son-in-law, he found that things were going all right after all. The young man had no idea until he was married to Mildred, daughter of Nicholas Frost, that his father-in-law was no other than the ruined speculator who had lost all his money through his careless dealings with the firm of Calvert and Son, Throgmorton Street.

Stanley Hammond.

To Story Writers.

We shall be pleased to consider complete novelettes of about 20,000 words in length, and to pay cash down for those accepted. Manuscripts must be type-written (or very legibly hand-written), and should be sent to The Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Postage for return of MSS., if unsuitable, should be inclosed.

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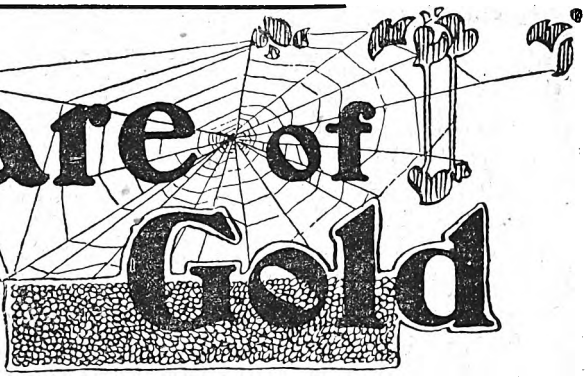
The Snare of Gold



A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

· · By · ·

HENRY T. JOHNSON.

TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Madeleine Pleads with her Father.

"RONALD GELDART was an outcast from his father's house. Now he is charged with the cruel murder of a poor lady whose only offence was clearly that she knew this Harvey Bligh for what he was; held in her possession the secret of his past, and, no doubt, to that knowledge owed her cruel death," continued Lord Lynton.

"Father! Father!" cried Madeleine, in anguished accents. "You must not speak of him so cruelly and so unjustly!"

"Why not?" exclaimed her father fiercely, fixing a thunderous look upon her.

And she, drawing herself erect, said very quietly and slowly: "Because I love him."

For some moments her father was silent, rage and amazement choking his utterance, then he demanded in a strained and husky voice: "How far has this folly gone? Has anything been said between you?"

"Yes," she answered, "he has asked me to be his wife, and I have promised."

"What! What! I could find it in my heart to say bitter things to you, but, of course, what has transpired has put an end to your folly; you will never see him again."

"On the contrary, I am going to see him now."

"To see him? A man in prison on a charge of murder—one who before long will doubtless be a felon. I forbid you, I dare you—dare you to sully the name you bear by such a course."

"I am sorry," she said, "because till now, strangers in all save ties of blood as we have been, I have always striven to obey you—but now——"

"Now? Well, now this fellow lies in a police-cell, the evidence against him, even without going into it is so overwhelming, that they will not grant him bail. And you——"

"I am his affianced wife. I believe in him and love him. It is in the hour of his direst gloom and peril that my place is most clearly at his side. In my hour of danger he rushed to my aid at peril of his life, in his time of peril I go to him whatever may befall."

"Go then," said the Viscount, pointing to the door, "but—you will not return, my house no longer is your home, you cease to be my child."

For a moment she swayed, convulsed by the conflict within her, not alone of love and duty, but of love and love, of duty and duty. Then she went forth out of the stately mansion, that palace in a colony of palaces, hastening in the direction of the cell wherein her lover lay!

Ronald sprang up with a glad cry. The station gaoler was a stern man, but with a strong heart within his coat of official mail, and he affected an absorbing interest in the perusal of a card of rules throughout their *tête-à-tête*, and there in the grim surroundings of the cell, in Ronald Geldart's darkest hour, the girl he loved repeated once again all that she had confessed of love for him, and trust and faith, in happier scenes, in brighter hours, all that and more.

So that when, a little later, he faced his accusers in the dock, he did so with head erect and a gaze so unflinching, that while some could not find it in their hearts to believe that the hand of Cain could rest upon a brow so frank and open, others, readier to believe evil, added to the list of his alleged offences the crime of callousness, averring that just the man who could bear himself so nonchalantly would do the evil deed.

Eric Geldart, called, repeated the evidence he had given at the inquest as to identification; also he identified the letter, making the appointment with the deceased on the night in question as being in his brother's handwriting.

This, however, Ronald admitted, reiterating also his admission at the inquest that he had kept the appointment on the night in question. And once again he was remanded.

TWENTY-NINTH CHAPTER.

Geldart Determines to Act.

GEORGE GELDART had attained his heart's desire, the end and aim he had aspired to had been reached.

What the big picture to be some day painted, the big book to be some day written, the big battle to be some day fought and won—what these things are to other men, his System was to him, it was his great work, at length he had achieved it, and, like countless men and women before him, he found the yearned-for fruit when gathered turn, like Dead Sea apples, to ashes on his lips.

His pet idea had realised his most sanguine expectations. Hundreds of thousands of pounds in various banks stood to the credit of the quaint, mysterious old man in the names of the various trusts and syndicates under whose denomination he, in conjunction with Sampson Scrimshaw, worked his elaborate scheme, and his one alloy of bitterness had been the reflection that, had his wilder son and partner had faith in him, and had his younger son availed himself of his birth-right partnership instead of flinging it aside, even the gigantic fortune he had piled up with Scrimshaw might have been multiplied, in fact, that with extended operations, their hoard might have surpassed those imaginations and calculations.

And there had been the consoling reflection that even yet it was not too late; he could go back to them now with his system proved, his new Golconda not only prospected but worked, and its output assayed, his Eldorado not only explored but exploited.

Wealth—wealth beyond the dreams of avarice, beyond the realms almost of human imagination could be his and theirs, and he could furnish proof, could give them earnest of the untold-wealth in store.

And then this had happened. Just when he had added the topmost pinnacle to his house of cards—of winning cards—at a breath the whole structure had collapsed in ruin, the son he had wronged and whom he meant to compensate so

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wholly, so munificently, and whose name he meant to clear from that unjust stain, now lay beneath a yet more heinous ban, charged with that supreme offence for which the law prescribes its extremest penalty.

That Ronald had done this thing he could not believe, and, reading the accounts of the tragedy, putting the evidence piece by piece together, he remembered on the night in question meeting, just by chance, Eric and Blagdon near that spot, coming from the direction where the ill-fated girl was found, within a few minutes, perhaps seconds, of the crime, and reflected that had he not turned aside to avoid encountering but pursued his path, he must have happened on the murdered girl.

What was Eric doing there on the very scene of the murder of the misguided girl who held the secret of his fraud?

And then, reading the account of Eric's evidence at the inquest, and listening to the stray comments that reached his ears regarding the affair (for the matter was the chief topic of public discussion), comments directly, desperately condemnatory of Ronald and sympathetic with his brother, the old man knew that Ronald had spoken only the truth and that it was his Judas brother who had lied.

What should he do? What could he do?

Suppose he stood forth before the world and proclaimed aloud his strange, weird story, who would believe him? Ronald perhaps, whose accusers would declare that belief, even if expressed, to be a lie. Eric? Eric might believe, but he would lie his hardest in denial, steep his soul in blacker perjury than ever to hide the lies and fraud of earlier days. And Blagdon? the arch hypocrite and humbug, would indorse his perjury.

True, George Geldart was conscious of the wealth at his command, but how was that to aid him?

Stanyer could tell his version of the story, but then to Stanyer he had represented himself as a very different individual in most ways from the well-known and highly-respected George Geldart believed to have died in Bryanston Square, and to be now resting beneath the marble sarcophagus of the family vault inscribed with his many alleged virtues.

Besides, even if he proved his story, which in the end he possibly might do, how was that to aid him? How was that to hinder Eric from his sinful hounding of his innocent brother to the scaffold?

What should he do? What could he do?

Whatever there was to be done, however many steps he had were to be taken, this was the first: to seek out Eric, to face him, and by all or any means prevail upon, force him if need be, to lift the load of calumny and perjury that he had heaped upon his brother's head.

THIRTIETH CHAPTER.

Blagdon Gets a Shock.

Three men were seated in the smoking-room of Sampson Scrimshaw's luxuriously appointed flat. One talking, the others listening with indrawn breath.

And when George Geldart finished his story Scrimshaw wiped beads of perspiration from his brow, and Stanyer, clutching the arm of his chair, instinctively moved that chair a little farther from the speaker.

A shudder and a silence fell upon the two men, to whom it seemed that they were in the presence of one back from the grave, listening to the voice of one risen from the dead. And at last Stanyer, in a strained, husky voice, said slowly:

"Then, that man at Sydney was telling the truth?"

"Absolutely," said Geldart. "I knew Dick Farningham's cousin who went out to Australia very well."

His elbow resting on the table, he leant his head upon his hand with an absent, saddened air. His scheme had turned out so wrong, and ended so badly; the System had been proved; he had in what seemed to him the short sequel to his life's story amassed a fortune, yet what did it avail him?

He had also proved his younger son innocent of the theft of which he had suspected him, but then, at what a cost!

He had proved his elder son a very villain, how deeply dyed a villain he dared not even think; and Clare—whom he had regarded almost as a daughter—Clare was dead—murdered, and his younger son stood charged with the awful crime.

He was sure that younger son was innocent, also, of this charge, but who was guilty? That was the question he scarcely dared to frame.

"Well," said Scrimshaw, after a pause, "this accounts for a lot that puzzled me. I knew that only a man of long experience and colossal ability could be so perfect a master of financial craft as you. I knew you had a story of some kind, that you had been a man of mark.

"What I imagined was that in some way yours was a second life, though not in the way it has turned out to be; that in your earlier phase you had made some big mistake, something had happened that you could not face, and when I noted your aversion to meeting many people, and particularly people moving in certain swims and circles, and, again, when once or twice very early or very late callers at the office passing you casually upon the stair asked who was that strange old man, and tried to cudgel their brains to locate the face, I was all the more convinced.

"I remember watching from my window between the lights one night I saw a man in passing turn and look at you, then grow white and stagger, one hand on his brow, and the other on his heart; and when Jack Widdicombe came to the City to consult me about the *Meteor*, as he entered my room with a face white as death, he gasped out that he had seen a ghost."

"It seems to me," said Stanyer, "you'll very likely find some difficulty in establishing the fact that you are yourself, especially if you have two such men as Blagdon and that bright elder son of yours to deal with. Why didn't you make a clean breast of it all when you met me?"

"We hadn't met for so long, we'd become little more than strangers, and, to tell the truth, I was a little bit amused by the way you patronised me; it was a novel sensation. And then, again, I saw my way to fulfilling the dream of so many years and testing my System. But now I'm more bewildered than I was in those weird hours when the terror of the fate I had only just escaped was still upon me. What can I do—what can I do?"

"Clearly the first thing to be done," said Scrimshaw, self-possessed and matter-of-fact as ever, "is to extract the truth out of your son Eric and his precious partner. It won't be the easiest task. Getting butter out of a dog's mouth will be child's play to it. Eric will battle like a tiger; he's a villain, but he's a villain of grit—the easier man to tackle will be Blagdon; he's not such a villain as the other, but he's flabbier. Now it seems to me our best course is to get him here."

"Would he come?" asked Stanyer.

"He'll have to," said Scrimshaw. "I'll make him!"

"How?"

"I've got him in the toils; when you've got a man set fast in the toils of debts that he can't meet you can make him dance to a good many tunes, according as you pull the string. One moment!"

He walked across to the telphone and asked for Blagdon's number; then they heard him in conversation with the man they wanted.

"I want you to come over here to my rooms in Walsingham House. You can't? I'm afraid you must. Can't; you distribute prizes to—what? Oh, well, the Young People's Self Help and Mutual Improvement Society must get somebody else. You don't understand my tone? Come over here and then you will. Look here, if you're not at my rooms by nine o'clock to-night I close your account and tell my lawyers to put on all pressure. Don't do that? Well, you come here. What's it all about? Tell you when you come. Is it to your benefit? It's necessary to your safety. You'll come? Of course you will!"

He rang off, and turned to his visitors.

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"That cur will come to heel." Then he rang up Eric.

"Want to see you here at half-past nine. At the House? No, here—I'm not coming down. You must? I tell you you mustn't. What do I mean? Come here and I'll tell you. You mean to vote against the Amendment? You must pair. What the dickens am I driving at? Come here, and you'll see. You'll demand an explanation? You'll get it. Yes, I've been dining, quite wisely. Be here at ten to-night or to-morrow's papers will publish something more than interesting and less than pleasant, so far as you are concerned. You will? Oh, yes, I'll explain my words, and more. Good-bye!" Then to his guests:

"He's coming too."

* * * * *

The hour brought the man. Precisely as the subdued chime of the bronze pedestal clock in Scrimshaw's smoke-room sounded nine the soft-footed, subdued-mannered man-servant announced "Mr. Blagdon," and Boanerges, very flustered and perspiring, and breathing deeply and rapidly, hurried in. Having glanced round the room to see they were alone, he exclaimed:

"Bless my soul, Scrimshaw, what's the meaning of this? I was perfectly astounded by your peremptory tone and words; perhaps, however, it sounded differently through the telephone."

"Yes, the tone does lose in transmission. Sit down."

"But surely, Scrimshaw, you're not going to be unpleasant with regard to my account? You've always been so agreeable, when the balance has been heavier against me than now, and at the present moment it would be most inconvenient; in fact, impossible for me to—arrange a settlement."

"It depends on you whether I am going to be pleasant or otherwise."

"Bless me! what do you mean? What have I done?"

"It doesn't matter what you have done, it's what you're going to do that matters."

He touched a bell. Frederick Stanyer entered, and Scrimshaw, motioning him to a seat, went on: "This gentleman is Mr. Stanyer, back from Australia; you don't know him, but that's of no importance."

Blagdon puffed out his cheeks.

"I want him to listen to what I am going to read, and you are going to sign, and he and I are going to witness."

"But you've got it all in the accounts. I've never disputed your figures."

"It has no more to do with our account than with the man in the moon. Listen!"

And Blagdon, with his eyes almost starting from his puffy cheeks, listened while Scrimshaw read. And this is what he heard:

"I, Boanerges Blagdon, of The Laurestinas, Brixwell, in the County of Surrey, and of Billiter Square, in the City of London, merchant and broker, being of perfectly sound mind, conscious of and responsible for my actions, hereby make this solemn declaration.

"In the month of January of the present year I did in conjunction with Eric Geldart——"

Boanerges clutched the arms of his chair.

"Conspire unlawfully to commit the following offences."

"Why, what does this mean?" said Blagdon, starting up, with a catch of the breath and even paler yet.

"Sit down, and I'll tell you." And Scrimshaw went on reading:

"Firstly, having embezzled from the partnership assets of the then firm of Geldart, Blagdon and Geldart, of Billiter Square aforesaid, merchants and brokers, the sum of £10,000 in notes!"

Blagdon gasped.

"Is that man a detective? I won't sit here!"

"You'd better." And Scrimshaw repeated: "The sum of £10,000—to procure and incite one Clare Armitage, spinster, now deceased——"

The man's face turned from white to grey.

"To abstract the keys of a certain desk on the premises of George Geldart in Bryanston Square. Secondly, in conjunction with the said Eric Geldart, to change the said notes and with the proceeds thereof to replace the amount of the said embezzled assets. Thirdly, to steal and destroy a certain promissory note for £1,500 given by me to the said George Geldart, Esq., of Bryanston Square aforesaid, to secure the sum of £1,500 advanced by him to me. Fourthly, with the said Eric Geldart and one Hamish Macquoich, L.R.C.P., to manufacture false and fraudulent evidence respecting the mental condition of the said George Geldart with the object of and for the purpose of placing the said George Geldart under detention in an asylum for the insane."

Scrimshaw paused. Blagdon, with a dogged, hunted look in his eyes, cried:

"Is that all?"

"Not quite all, there's something I am going to mention later. But so far you'll sign."

"I won't," said Blagdon hoarsely. "I deny it all—all!"

"Just as you denied giving the promissory note!"

He passed his hand across his brow. What did it all mean? Had Eric split? But, no! even if he would have done so it would be as fatal to himself as to Boanerges. And if Eric had not split what other evidence could there be? Geldart was dead. Clare? With a shudder he reflected that Clare was dead. What then was all this indictment? What was their attempt to wring this confession from him based upon? Theory, imagination, bluff; then he would meet it with bluff.

"It's all a lie, an infamous lie!" he exclaimed, "and I will nail it to the counter and I will assert myself and vindicate my character, my unblemished character, against those who dare to assail a man in my postition. Yes, by George, sir, I'll do so to their cost!" Then, after a moment's pause, convinced that he was on the right track, he turned on Stanyer.

"Are you a police officer? If so, where are your credentials? I demand to see them. If you are not, how dare you intrude your presence on me. And you, Scrimshaw, how dare you bring me here to listen to a charge so false, so infamous!"

"I'll explain that later," said Scrimshaw, striking a vesta and applying it to his cigar. Then, his foot upon the arm of his chair, after a few thoughtful puffs, he said:

"There's one other clause I'm going to add, but I'm going to get you to draft it."

"Some other preposterous lie. And what may that relate to?"

"The murder of Clare Armitage, and your presence on the scene at the time!"

All the bluff, all the bravado of Blagdon was instantly crushed and pulverised; his knees fell over with a sudden jerk; his manner, his bearing, the whole man, suddenly collapsed as he listened to the thundered words—met the thunderous

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gaze of his accuser, a gaze he had never seen in that man's eyes before.

"Now," said Scrimshaw, "there is pen and ink, add the other clause and—sign!"

"I won't—I won't!" he said in a hoarse, choking voice. For a moment he seemed unable to breathe. "I'll leave this place; let me out—let me out!"

"When you have signed!"

"But I won't; I'll leave this place!" He made for the door, Scrimshaw put his back to it, and the key clicked in the lock. He gazed at the windows.

"I'll shout for police!" Then his eye caught another door. Panting and breathless he made a dash towards it, turned the handle, flung it open wide. "You'll pay for this!" he said, facing the two, for they were standing calm and immovable, making no sign to stay him. "As for your other clause," he went on, "it's only another lie, we—weren't—I mean I wasn't there!"

"You were! You were!"

"Who saw me there? Bah!" for his question unanswered by them, he turned, dashed into the adjoining room, a dimly-lit chamber round which he searched, casting a hasty glance for yet another door.

And his eyes fell upon a mirror, a mirror reflecting the tiny gleam of one solitary gas jet. And his own white face.

And another face. Oh, God!—the face of George Geldart! whom he had seen in his grave clothes lying in his coffin! There—there it was beside him! With a shriek he turned from the reflected image, and lo! there face to face, close to him, almost touching him stood the image that had been reflected.

A moment, with hair rising erect, with a great spasm at his heart, he looked upon the face and form of the George Geldart whom he had betrayed, whose son he was content to let unjustly hang—then down in a heap he crashed and tumbled at his feet.

THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Father and Son.

So complete was his collapse that for a while they thought the shock had caused heart failure. But by-and-bye he recovered consciousness and came round. Only they dared not let George Geldart again approach him.

Piteously, frantically he clung to them as a child might to its parents, beseeching them to keep what he could not conceive to be other than the apparition, the accusing spirit of the man he had wronged, away.

And when they bade him, as the condition of their so doing, sign that confession, he, whimpering abjectly, assented to sign it as it stood. But Scrimshaw was firm.

"Bring Geldart in," he said, "let him tell what he knows!" And then the broken wretch bade them give him the pen and he would sign it, clause and all, only in mercy let them keep the awful Thing away.

Then Scrimshaw put it to him that he was there, and with the certainty of one thing for the basis of a guess at another, that he was standing by when it was done.

"No, no, not close by! Not far off, but I could not see what was going on for the mist and the darkness.

"Put that down, Stanyer! But you knew!"

"Not all, not all. I couldn't tell why she was screaming."

"Write that down too."

"You didn't think that he was killing her?"

"No, no; not till he came back and I saw his hands."

"Write fast, Frederick Stanyer:"

"Her blood upon his hands, on Eric Geldart's hands, and then you knew what he had done!"

"Not quite, not for certain; for when I challenged him he wouldn't answer, he only washed his hands at the fountain, then caught me by the arm and hurried me away."

"My God!" ejaculated Scrimshaw, "this is the worst thing I ever heard. Poor, poor Old Mystery! Have you got it all, Stanyer?"

"And hurried me away," Stanyer repeated. "Yes, there it is."

"Now sign," said Scrimshaw, handing the beaten, pulseless, backboneless wretch the pen.

A moment he strove to make one final stand.

"It'll mean my ruin!" But they, knowing that, whatever the penalty, he had merited it, knowing with what unhesitating callousness he had been content if not to wreck, to suffer another's ruin, to hold his tongue when even a word might save an innocent life, were quite relentless.

"Sign!" said Scrimshaw. "Bring Geldart in; let him tell him all he knows!"

"No, no!" he quavered hastily, and, knowing that they knew much, but not how much they knew, and dreading the approach of the man he had seen nearly a year ago in cerements, the man he for long had thought his treachery had killed, he took the pen and signed.

And no sooner had he done so than the consciousness of what he had done flashed upon him, possessed him even more strongly than his terror.

"Give it me back!" he clamoured. "I deny all—deny you to prove anything!"

But he appealed in vain. Scrimshaw, snatching the paper with one hand, with the other thrust him back into his chair.

"My friend, it is so seldom you perform a really honest action that, having brought you to one, I can't stand by and see you spoil it. And now you'd better have another nip of brandy to bring you quite round. Hullo!" for a bell rung, just as the chime hummed out the half hour and the smooth-faced, smooth-tongued, smooth-mannered servant announced:

"Mr. Eric Geldart."

"Don't let him in; don't let him see me, he'll—he'll murder me!" And Scrimshaw, opening a third door, he bundled swiftly through it, and made his way down a side stair out into the street, out into the world that he scarcely dared to face and that ere long might be ringing with the news of his disgrace.

The member for Little Claverton entered with a stern, inquiring look on his face.

"I don't understand your message, Mr. Scrimshaw, and am here to demand an explanation." Then his eye fell upon Stanyer.

"What does this mean?" he asked. "I was not aware that I was going to meet a gentleman with whom I am unacquainted."

"I think we shall be able to explain everything, Geldart," said Scrimshaw, lazily; "won't you sit down, and, if you'd like a drink, there's the tantalus."

"I will not sit down, and be hanged to your tantalus! I came here to learn your meaning in presuming to address me as you did just now over the telephone."

"And you shall. I sent for you here to save a life."

"What do you mean?"

"Your brother's life."

"My brother's life is nothing to me. He and I have long ceased to be brothers, and he must take the consequences of his crime."

"Precisely, but not of yours."

"What!" for a moment his eyes wavered and his face paled. "What new insolence, I may say madness, is this?"

"Neither madness nor insolence; plain, straightforward fact. I sent for you to clear your brother from the charge of murder now made against him, and from the earlier slander fixed on him of having robbed his father."

"And you and my brother can be hanged if you think that, because I have done business with you, and perhaps you have a few thousands against me on your books, that entitles you to be insolent; let me tell you, you have mistaken your man! After this interview never presume to communicate with me in any way again."

"So be it," said the other, "but before this interview closes let me read something that may interest you."

And he read aloud—"I, Boanerges Blagdon," and Eric started as at an electric shock, and as Scrimshaw read on and on his visitor's face became more set and rigid, his breath came and went slowly, his cheeks, even his lips, paled and his eyes

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quivered with a dangerous light, his hands were clenched till the nails cut into the flesh

Stanyer, watching him narrowly, marked how when Scrimshaw reached the fifth clause Eric's nostrils dilated, his breath came deeper and faster; watched him, too, just as Scrimshaw had reached the last line of that confession, spring like a panther at the man who held it, and seeing this flung himself upon him, took him by the throat, and in another instant Scrimshaw had his wrist in a vice-like grip, for he was strong of hand as well as head.

"None of this, or else—a whistle, and the police are here, and you will leave with handcuffs on your wrists!"

"Scrimshaw, you shall pay for this!" cried Eric.

"I pay what I owe. Now listen to me. There is time for you and Blagdon to clear out to some country where extradition treaties cease from troubling, leaving a confession which clears your brother."

But the expression of impatient scorn on Geldart's face as well as on his lips, interrupted him.

"Very well then," he said, "alternatively, your brother steps out of the dock a cleared and vindicated man, and you take his place, charged with the crime of which he will have been acquitted."

"Scrimshaw," said Eric, "you talk like a fool. Do you think I am a child to be frightened by such a bogey as that. Blagdon never signed that paper; it's a forgery, or, if he did sign, then he was out of his senses or under duress, and beyond that where are your witnesses?"

Scrimshaw touched a bell. Stanyer threw the door open and in a moment father and son stood face to face.

Yes. Eric beheld the father he deemed he had followed to the grave nearly a year ago, beheld him with eyes dilated and glistening with horror, consternation, dread; iron as he was for a moment his fibre gave way.

"What—what is this?" he gasped, then he, too, trembled unnerved. "Who is it?" he cried again. "It can't be a ghost, there aren't such things! It's a living man—but no, no, no! it can't be!"

"It is—it is," the old man cried in an agitated voice, broken by a choking sob. "Eric, my misguided, poor, sinful son, it is your father!"

Eric Geldart with slow steps retreated, maybe some four yards, with terror-dilated eyes fixed upon the grief-stricken man who faced him, the others looking on as though spell-bound. For a while he could not find his voice, until at last with an effort, he whispered hoarsely and slowly:

"No—no, it couldn't be! I don't know what your plot is, but you are not my father, though for a moment I almost dreamt you were his ghost."

Then in as few words as might be, George Geldart told the weird and eerie story of his awaking from the trance which had held him so long only just in time.

As he listened, Eric Geldart's face underwent many and strange evidences of the mingled emotions working within him; dread, horror, fear, doubt, incredulity, and as he listened he reasoned, thinking as always, what was best for his own safety, his own advantage.

And gradually, clearly, the conviction forced itself upon him that his safest course, the only course it seemed that would save him from ruin, perhaps from the gallows, lay in absolute and strenuous denial of that story.

Brushing aside all considerations as to its possibility, plausibility, probability, its truth or falsehood, when his father, ceasing to speak, bowed his face into his hands, Eric Geldart, by an effort of will recovering to some extent his normal composure, sneered:

"Upon my word, a likely story for a twentieth century generation. Whom do you expect to believe it?"

"I believe it," said Scrimshaw and Stanyer together.

"It is true," said George Geldart.

"And nothing is of less importance to me than your belief," said Eric, with a venomous sneer at the listeners to the story. Then to its teller, "You'll find it somewhat difficult to prove."

"Not so difficult perhaps as you imagine, Eric. If it were

(*Continued overleaf.*)

Wanted: More Babies.

In recent years so many gloomy predictions have been made concerning the decline in the birth rate in Great Britain, that it is quite refreshing to find that John Bull has still left a remnant of sturdy sons and daughters possessing the faculty of perpetuating their species in a degree not one whit less than the most prolific of their ancestors.

To the Lincolnshire Agricultural Society we are indebted for this inspiriting discovery. At their Annual Exhibition held recently in Lincoln, prizes were offered to the labourers who had brought up and placed out the greatest number of children. The first prize was awarded to Thomas Hought, of Tealby, Market Rasen, with a record of 19 children born, 17 brought up, and 12 placed out. Other competitors had families of 16, 15, 14, 13, and 12, there being altogether ten entries for the prizes offered.

That large families, such as these, should still be common in rural districts, at a time when the birth rate is steadily declining in the great centres of industry and commerce, is but another proof of the damaging effect of city life and air upon the national health and vitality. One eminent authority declares that of persons city born and bred, who have attained the age of thirty years, not more than one in every ten is free from indigestion in one or other of its varied forms. When we consider how the body is starved and poisoned and the vital functions impaired by this scourge of modern life, we cannot be surprised at any shrinkage in the birth rate or deterioration in the national physique. To stop this ruinous loss of vitality and restore the national stomach to its former efficiency is an object worthy the support of every true patriot. Fortunately no time need be lost in experiments. In Mother Seigel's Syrup we have at hand a digestive tonic that exerts a curative and stimulating influence upon the debilitated organs of digestion, which fully justifies the position it has held for thirty-five years as the national remedy for indigestion.

To tens of thousands of tortured dyspeptics it has brought comfort, health, and renewed vitality. One of them—Mr. W. Nicholls, of Whitehall Mansions, Archway Road, Holloway, N., says: "At one time everything I ate, and especially the things that I most relished, seemed specially designed for my torture. After every meal the pain and discomfort in my body and sense of fulness and oppression at the chest were most distressing and wearisome. Coupled with this were constant retching, and the frequent vomiting of an acid fluid. It didn't much matter what or how little I ate, my stomach seemed utterly unequal to its task and I suffered in consequence. Though I regulated my diet and tried all manner of medicines, I gained no permanent relief until I had recourse to Mother Seigel's Syrup, and that went right to the root of the malady. In a very short time, under its influence, I could eat whatever was set before me without fear of pain or distress, and felt brighter and more buoyant than I had done for months. If, by any chance, anything that I eat disagrees with me a few doses of Seigel's Syrup invariably put me right again. As a digestive tonic I consider it has no equal, and my own experience and observation justify me in strongly recommending it to all who are cursed with indigestion or a weak stomach."

Abounding vitality and buoyant healthfulness such as follow the use of this tonic of fruits, roots, and herbs, are the surest antidotes to dwindling birth rates and national decay.

Pity the Lazy Man.

Don't be too hasty in censuring the lazy. Disinclination for work is often an indication of ill-health, and the idler in such cases is deserving rather of pity than blame. Indigestion and torpid liver cause languor, depression, and physical and mental degeneracy as surely as Mother Seigel's Syrup, the tonic of fruits, roots and herbs, dispels indigestion, tones the liver, and gives energy, vitality, health, and that is a fact proved beyond doubt by the experience of thousands who have tried it.

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not true how could I have told you the conversation that transpired between you and Clare in what you deemed a death-chamber?"

"She might have blabbed—I mean I deny absolutely that such a conversation happened—it's a lie—a lie—a lie! Your object may be fraud or blackmail, but I'll defy you, and I'll fight you to the end."

"Eric!"

"My name is Mr. Geldart, sir, to you. My father, George Geldart, is dead and buried, and I shall know how to protect my own interests and my own good name. As for you, Scrimshaw, I shall have a searching inquiry into your share in this transaction. I'll have it all dragged out where you found this man, how the impudent, impossible story was hatched, what you paid or promised him."

Scrimshaw made a step forward, then paused, controlling himself, and said with a scornful laugh:

"What I paid him—ha! ha! ha! Your father, Eric Geldart, can buy you ten times over."

Eric, surveying the not too smart figure, with a sneer said: "Another strain on credulity! I never gave you credit, Mr. Scrimshaw, for so bold an imagination."

"It's true, it's true, Eric," said George Geldart, a note of triumph breaking into his tone. "I've worked the System, I've proved it, I've proved and it's rung true from beginning to end in every detail. I worked it with Scrimshaw: we started it with tens and made hundreds, with hundreds and made thousands, went on with thousands, made tens of thousands, with tens of thousands we made hundreds of thousands—and I've proved that if you'd only believed in me and been true to me, you, Blagdon, Ronald, aye, all of us, might have made our millions!"

Once again Eric blenched. The System, the System, that he had heard the father he deemed dead dilate upon, as he considered, rave about, the wonderful manipulation of figures and of financial mechanism.

And it had triumphed. Now he understood much at which he had marvelled.

The remarkable, unaccountable fluctuations in the Share Market of late, the frequent absences of Scrimshaw when Eric had called, his frequent and sudden visits to the Continent, the relegation of matters in connection with his ordinary business to his clerks, his recent developments in style of living, environment, and so on, his stupendous purchases at big prices of art treasures, horses, yachts, and so forth, and his munificent gifts.

Eric had always guessed that some abnormal influence was at work to account for these things, and had characteristically ascribed them to some colossal and triumphant stroke of fraud.

And then Blagdon's confession! Yes, yes, with growing horror he felt that the story he had just heard was true, felt that his own doom was sealed, but he would not own it, even to himself.

Facing them defiantly he exclaimed:

"It is all a pack of lies, part and parcel of some scheme of fraud, a scheme that I, aided by the law, will frustrate and expose, an impudent imposture that you shall rue and suffer for, each and all of you."

"Go then," said Scrimshaw, "judgment will follow you, will some day overtake you."

He little knew how near that some day was.

Eric flung wide the door, turned upon them one look of concentrated malignity and defiance, then dashed out of the room, strode swiftly to the outer door, wrenched the handle from the servant's hand, shouldering the astonished man aside, and hastened down the corridor.

Ting, went the bell. He rushed forward.

"Stay there with the lift," he shouted, 'one moment."

"Too late, sir; stand back!"

But Eric, blind and deaf to all, except the passions that possessed him, rushed madly forward, clutching and forcing back the gate of the descending cage the man was closing. He forced it open; thrust himself forward, though the man cried, "For God's sake, back!"

There was a sound of a crashing, sickening blow, Eric Geldart, with a groan, sank in a huddled mass half-within, half-without the cage that fell—and then stopped fearfully.

A few minutes later a horrified group stood round his prostrate form, a doctor kneeling beside him in Scrimshaw's rooms, where, at his request, they had taken him.

Opening his glazing eyes he whispered: "How—long—have I—to live?"

"Not very long," said the doctor.

"Send for——"

"A clergyman?" asked the doctor, filling up the pause.

"No—a magistrate."

"My boy, my boy," said old Geldart, kneeling beside him—"my poor lad, what do you want to do?"

"To—put—things—right, to—undo—some—of—the—wrong, the—hand of judgment—has fallen—on me."

Then for a while only his heavy breathing and his father's sobs broke the silence.

"Do—you—forgive—father?" he whispered.

"Yes, yes, my boy, the blame was not all yours, it was mine—mine, I made a god of gold and taught my sons to worship it. Then he turned to Scrimshaw, who had just re-entered, accompanied by another man, demanding almost fiercely, "Who is this?"

"My neighbour, Jefferson, who is a magistrate."

"Take him away," said the old man—"let the lad die in peace."

"I cannot—go—in peace—unless—I speak."

"But oh, my son—my son!"

"He is right," said Scrimshaw, "you must remember that you have another son. Justice must be done before it is too late."

Then in the silence of what was to be his death-chamber, Eric Geldart spoke, slowly, painfully, but distinctly.

"I have—read—that paper—Blagdon's—con—fession, it is—true—I—not—my—brother—robbed—my—father, I, and—Clare—planted—the notes—to—throw—suspicion on my brother. I—killed—Clare Armitage—to silence—her. God—have—mercy—on my—guilty—soul—for—Christ's—sake!"

His head fell back, the whispering accents ceased, and the soul went forth unto the Seat of Judgment and, thank God, of mercy.

THIRTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

Wedding Bells and Reconciliations.

The *Meteor*, in its next issue, which appeared upon the following day, excelled itself, broke even its own record in the way of sensations. It had done many things, had exposed gigantic frauds, brought home unpleasant truths to exalted people, originated and fermented during its short career many agitations which had resulted in drastic alterations in the law.

But on the day following the sudden and tragic death of Eric Geldart, the *Meteor* provided its readers with a sensation that was the subject of general topic that night in every club, dinner-table, or place of assembly in London.

The morning papers had furnished one sensation in the death of Eric Geldart, the Member for Little Claverton, but the *Meteor* surpassed them. For just when the editor of the paper had passed the complete number, Scrimshaw burst into the office with orders to stop the machine, and was closeted for a while with Mr. John Widdicombe, the general manager, and the editor, with the result that two formes were unlocked and reset up, and the paper on the following day appeared with an article which set the town by the ears.

For it dealt with the whole story of George Geldart's narrow escape from premature burial, his second secret life, and it wound up with the declaration that Ronald Geldart, charged with the murder of Clare Armitage and against whom a coroner's jury had returned a verdict of Wilful Murder, was

(*Concluded on page* 542.)

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The "Borderland of Deafness."

It seems remarkable that many people who have defective hearing refuse to believe that they are deaf. Although such a defect may be slight or only noticeable when the afflicted person has a cold in the head, and may not seem worthy of attention, yet such a condition will, of a certainty, become actual deafness if neglected. In fact the Aurist finds it most difficult in many instances to determine when the ear ailment began and consequently looks with great suspicion upon the slightest degree of defective hearing as placing the afflicted person within the "Borderland of Deafness." The Editor of *The Review of Ear, Nose and Throat Diseases*, in the last issue of this medical journal, goes into this subject thoroughly, and for the sake of those who may be interested will send, post free, on application, a specially written paper on Tests of Hearing and the Prevention and Cure of Deafness. All applications should be addressed to The Editor, Drouet Institute, 10 Marble Arch, London, W. The Editor advises patients, however, when possible, to visit the Drouet Institute for a personal consultation with the medical staff. Consulting hours are—in the morning, 10 to 12, and in the afternoon, 2 to 4, week days only. A fee of five shillings is charged for personal consultations.

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IMPROVES ALL STARCH

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of successful ironing lies in the use of Borax Starch Glaze. There is no middle course. It is either Borax Starch Glaze in the starch—or flabby, dull, and dispiriting results. With it the finish of the best laundries can be obtained at home easily and every time. Borax Starch Glaze compels good results even with inferior starch, but when best starch is used the finish will be immeasurably superior to any before obtained.

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FREE SAMPLE AND SOME NOVELTIES if you name this Paper and your Grocer.

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FOR WASHING EVERYTHING.

To CURE Drunkards

MRS. GEO. FULLER, *who saved her husband.*

There is a cure for Drunkenness which has shed its radiance into thousands of hitherto desolate homes. It does its work so silently and surely that while the devoted wife, sister, or brother looks on, the drunkard is reclaimed, even against his will or without his knowledge or co-operation.

This famous remedy has guided many a young man to sobriety and into the high road of fortune, and has saved the father, the brother, and the son.

If you send name and address to the Ward Chemical Company, 51 Century House, Regent St., London, W., they will post enough of the remedy free to show how it is used in tea, coffee, or food.

Mrs. George Fuller says:—"*I am only too thankful my husband never now wishes for intoxicating liquor. I gave him Antidipso in his tea and coffee, and it has quite cured him.*" With the

FREE TRIAL

Packet will be sent Books and testimonials from hundreds who have been cured, and everything needed to save those near and dear to you. Don't neglect to write to-day.

ALL FAT PEOPLE

can safely **Reduce Weight and cure Corpulency permanently** by taking **TRILENE TABLETS** (Regd.) for a few weeks. They are small, agreeable, harmless, and never fail to IMPROVE both HEALTH and FIGURE without Change of Diet. An English Countess writes: "*Your Trilene Tablets act admirably.*"

Send 2s. 6d. to **THE TRILENE CO.**, Sole Proprietor **66 Finsbury Pavement, London.**

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

Princess Liechtenstein writes from Landsberg, Austria: "I pray send your excellent tablets directly." Mr. Canham, 67 Alexandra Road, Norwich: "Tablets cured my wife of extreme stoutness; it has never returned." Mrs. H. Cox, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The Tablets reduced me 1½ stone." Mrs. S. Alexander, 102 Dixon Street New Swindon, says: "They reduced me 23lb., and I am cured." Countess Furstenberg, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well." Mrs. Crossley, of Moss Hill, Torver, Comston, says: "I weigh much less and can breathe so much easier; I am delighted."

DON'T COUGH *for* KEATING'S LOZENGES EASILY CURE THE WORST COUGH.

One gives relief. An increasing sale of over 80 years is a certain test of their value. Sold in 13½d. tins everywhere.

Ask your grocer for

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(The most nutritious)

COCOA

And take no other.

SULPHOLINE LOTION

For clearing the skin from Spots, Blemishes, Redness, Roughness, giving a Beautiful Complexion and pleasing appearance.

SHILLING BOTTLES.

REAL HEALTH.

It's always a pleasure to meet a woman with a lovely complexion and bright spirits. But you cannot enjoy the best of health unless your system is in faultless order—every organ doing its appointed work and doing it regularly and well.

TOWLE'S PILLS

have brought health to thousands of ailing women the wide world over, by relieving distressing complaints, and giving tone to the system generally. Avoid injurious imitations.

In Boxes, 1/1½, 2/9 and 4/6.

The 2/9 boxes contain three times the quantity of the 1/1½ size.)

of all Chemists, or Post Free on receipt of 15, 34, or 56 penny stamps or P.O.O. from the Sole Proprietors,

E. T. TOWLE & Co., Nottingham, Eng.

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absolutely innocent of the crime, and that his innocence would be established by the evidence of his dead brother, and by a written confession made by Boanerges Blagdon, the one time candidate for Brixwell.

And when on the afternoon of that day Ronald Geldart appeared on the remanded charge against him, the court was crowded to suffocation. It was Cousin Jack who conveyed the startling news to Ronald Geldart.

Cousin Jack, accompanied by Madeleine Lorraine and Ronald's solicitor, entered his cell. First they told him that they had good news for him, then that the good news meant that evidence was to hand clearing him of the crime, that that evidence was the confession, the dying confession of the actual murderer.

That that murderer was his brother!

And here the strain told on Ronald, and he broke down and sobbed upon the bosom of Madeleine.

But they soothed him, told him to nerve himself, to prepare to hear yet more startling news, and they paved the way to breaking that news by telling him that it cleared him from all suspicion of having robbed his father. This gave him comfort, a comfort tempered, however, by his own exclamation: "If only my father could have known!"

Then they told him that his father had known, they could satisfy him on that point, strangely, marvellously. Then, bit by bit, they broke to him the startling story of his father's narrow escape from premature burial by waking from the trance that was so like the death.

And later they brought his father to him, leaving the pair alone in that strange interview that wrung both their hearts, that stirred innumerable emotions.

And later on Ronald Geldart left that crowded court discharged, proved innocent without a stain, after one of the strangest hearings of a charge that had ever taken place within its walls.

Blagdon had been called, had been sent for, and, not in the slightest degree to the surprise of those who knew, could not be found. He never has been found, though rumours have arrived by travellers returning from Colorado, Denver, U.S.A., that a man answering his description, but a silent, saddened, broken-down old man, is living there in retirement, his only companion a devoted wife.

* * * * *

George Geldart, though he reassumed his name and identity, led thenceforth a quiet, subdued, secluded life, devoting the means he had amassed to the alleviation of want and suffering and amelioration of the lot of those around him.

The truth of his story was finally established by the Home Office granting exhumation of the casket that had been supposed to contain his lawful remains, but which was found to inclose instead only the contents he had enumerated. Hence the tablet to his memory was removed from the cenotaph, to be replaced, when the time shall come, by tributes rendered by sincerer hearts.

His few intimates are Cousin Jack, whose bright home he sometimes visits, and whose buxom, cheery little wife always affectionately esteems him as "Old Mystery." Stanyer, restored to the daughter he loved, is as happy a returned cornstalk as thrives on English soil. Also Scrimshaw, who having at last got tired of piling up fortune upon fortune, has taken to winning Derbys, growing orchids at a thousand pounds a bloom, and dreams of some day sending out a challenger to lift that cup that Britain covets but America has nailed down.

So now this tale is almost ended—a tale of wrong wrought, injustice endured; of suffering and of sin, but at last of innocence vindicated, of injustice in some degree atoned for, of wickedness brought home and terribly requited.

It ends, as all stories dealing with a lover and his lass should end—with wedding bells. Wedding bells for Ronald Geldart and for Madeleine Lorraine, despite her father's anger, his declaration that if she bore that name he would see her face no more.

They were married, as became the circumstances, very quietly, and after their wedding they went away together for a while to try to forget in new lands and new surroundings the sorrows they had known.

The wedding bells of Cousin Jack and Phyllis, who are none the less happy because once, a while ago, Phyllis closed and buried in her heart of hearts a little love story that only she herself knew of, and that never worked out to an ending.

And someone else still cherishes a story that she and she alone has ever known of. A little servant-girl in a Bloomsbury boarding-house, who, while polishing boots, fireplaces, or knives and forks, dreams again and again of that bright Apollo whom it was enough for her to behold and worship from afar. Her love story never will have an ending because it will endure as long as she lives, for her alone to know, for her alone to muse on, until her dreams are broken by the rocking of the bells and shrill or strident calls for Arethusa.

Viscount Lynton, deceived in Eric Geldart, broken in spirit and in fortune, had declared that he would never again look upon the daughter who had disobeyed him and who for the sake of the man who though proved innocent, bore the name of one who had led him to his ruin.

For years he kept his word, nor indeed was he approached with any overtures to reconsider it.

And then, at times looking back, he saw where he had erred, saw that the estrangement between them had been of his own causing; and, broken in health and fortune, he began to yearn for the daughter's love that he had thrown away.

And one day, to distract his mind from these thoughts with the Spring sunshine, the Spring air, and the Spring flowers, he strolled into the Park.

And, by-and-bye, he happened on a fair-haired little fellow scarce some five years old, in great distress, and inquiring the cause the Viscount ascertained the little boy had lost his nurse. Patting the little golden head, Lord Lynton asked where his home was, and being told the number of the house in Holland Park next asked the little belated wanderer's name.

A pair of blue eyes, still tearful but sunny, looked up frankly in his face, and the little fellow lisped:

"My name, dear kind gentleman, is Lupus Ronald Geldart."

Geldart! The old man started at that name. And Lupus! Then she had given his name to this, her first-born, her dearest loved with the sunny hair and eyes. Yes! yes! he could see something of Madeleine in those eyes.

Then she had not quite forgotten him, had preserved some love and tenderness for him, they were not quite so far estranged as he had thought!; had they known it, perhaps had never been really so very far estranged at all, only too silent, too reserved, too occupied each with his and her own ways; he too absorbed in his dreams of politics and wealth, enmeshed too tightly in the Snare of Gold to take even her, his only child, close to his heart.

And while these and a thousand other thoughts flashed through his mind, he was walking on holding the little fellow by the hand.

And the younger Lupus, confident, trustful, and now quite composed, began to chatter of the things that occupied his dreams by night and day—his boats, his pony, his toys, and—best boon of all—his dear mamma.

And by-and-bye they came to the threshold of the little fellow's home. It was swiftly opened—not by the pale-faced servants in the hall there, but by the distracted mother, who swiftly stooping swooped up her treasure to her arms. Then she looked at his friend and guide.

"Father! father!" she cried. "You—you brought him back to me!"

"No, no, Madeleine! He brought me back to you!"

The End.

Next week starts "A Criminal Millionaire," by George Griffith.

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GIGANTIC BALE
49/6
BEDDING & DRAPERY
6/- DEPOSIT 1/6 WEEKLY

This Bale contains Pair Full-sized heavy Whitney Blankets, 1 quilt, red and white, blue and white; White Honeycomb Marcella or Red Twill your choice; Pair Full-size White Twill Sheets, 3 Pillow Cases, 1 Bolster Case, 5 Toilet Mats, 1 Toilet Cover, 2 Turkish Towels, Pair Fine Lace Curtains, 1 White Table Cloth, 1 Fringed Damask Table Cover, 6 Dusters, 2 Tea Cloths—28 Articles 49/6. How to pay. Send 6/- only, we send Bale, carriage paid for approval; balance can be paid in six monthly payments of 6/-, and one of 7/6. If you pay balance on receipt, send only 38/6, saving 5/-. Address below.

55 ARTICLES FOR 25/-
ON CREDIT.
Our Gigantic Parcel contains 6 Table Knives and Forks, 6 Dessert Knives and Forks, 12 Tea Spoons, 6 Dessert Spoons, 6 Egg Spoons, 1 pair Sugar Tongs, 2 Table Spoons, 2 Mustard Spoons, and 2 Salt Spoons. We send, carriage paid, on receipt of 3s.; balance 1s. weekly.
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with this week's
HOME NOTES
(No. 510).
A PAPER PATTERN OF THIS BLOUSE.
Of all Bookstalls & Newsagents.
PRICE 1d.

SONGS COPIED.
Legibl as print, 5d. page; transposed correctly 6d. page. MRS. CONYERS, Morchard Bishop, Devon. Recommended by the Marchioness of Waterford, Lady Arthur Hill, Miss Ellen Terry, etc.

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For 1s. Mr. WILLIE will send a Reading of the Stars W. T. STEAD, Esq., and many other prominent gentlemen have testified to the accuracy of their forecasts. Send the exact or approximate hour of your birth, if possible, date, year, &c., together with P.O. 1s. and stamp. Satisfaction will be guaranteed.
THE RESULT WILL ASTONISH YOU.
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SPECIAL BARGAINS UNREDEEMED.
A full list sent post free on application.
SAVE £ d $
13/6 Gent's magnificent 18-ct. Gold-cased Chronograph Stop Watch, jewelled movement, perfect timekeeper, 10 years' written warranty; also fashionable curb (pocket to pocket) double Albert same quality (stamped and guaranteed), with handsome seal attached; three together.
12/6 Lady's handsome 18-carat gold-cased Keyless Watch, jewelled movement; exact timekeeper, 10 years' warranty; also fashionable long watch-guard, same quality (stamped and guaranteed) elegant West-End pattern the two together.
14/9 Furs.—Magnificent Alexandra Dagmar necklet and muff: beautiful real Russian sable hair, worth 4 guineas, not been worn; sacrifice for 14.9; approval willingly.
19/6 Genuine Italian Mandoline, by Stridente, Naples; fine tone; 21 ribbed, real rosewood, pearl and tortoiseshell inlaid, in saddler-made case; approval.
8/9 Feather Boas; bankrupt stock; spec'al bargains: real Ostrich Feather Boas, beautifully curly; perfectly new, in box; colours: grey and white, black and white, and natural.
10/6 Lustrous diamond and ruby Half-hoop Ring, set with 5 matchless doublet rubies and 8 real diamonds; solid gold, hall-marked.
7/6 Curb Chain Bracelet, with paddock and safety chain; 18-carat, rolled gold (stamped and guaranteed), in velvet case.
6/9 Broooh; very handsome 18-carat rolled gold, 3 swallows in flight; set lovely turquoise and pearls in case.
21/- Lady's solid gold Keyless Watch, jewelled in 10 rubies, beautifully engraved case, splendid time-keeper; 10 years' written warranty; week's free trial.
8/6 Fashionable Long Neck-chain; genuine 18-carat rolled gold (stamped), beautifully finished; very choice design.
9/6 Organ Toned Melodeon; magnificent 26/- instrument. 12-fold bellows (metal bound), 3 sets steel bronze reeds, and 4 acting stops, including Tremolo and Diapason action; rich powerful tone, perfect order.
9/6 Necklet with Heart Pendant, very pretty Princess of Wales rope pattern; heart set with pearls and turquoise.
12/6 Magnificent 5-row Pearl Collarette; finest quality, mounted with four bars of lustrous Orient diamonds, in velvet-lined case.
Any of the above articles sent on approval willingly.
R. H. DAVIS, Pawnbroker and Jeweller,
284 Brixton Road, London, S.W.

Our Readers will Please Remember that

TUESDAY, 3rd NOVEMBER,

IS

KING EDWARD'S HOSPITAL FUND

SHOPPING DAY,

and that a large number of shops in London will be displaying a notice in their windows that they are giving a percentage of their takings on that day to the London hospitals.

We hope, therefore, they will make a point of making some purchase, anticipating some requirements on this particular day, *viz.*, TUESDAY, 3RD NOVEMBER. Most shops joining the scheme will be offering some special cheap lines, and reducing their prices to make a good day for the Hospitals. Boots and bonnets, furniture and eatables, all and everything, little and great, help the scheme.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

A Lax Lover.

"I HAVE been going out with a young man for four years," writes "SISSY," "but he has as yet said nothing of marriage, though he has told me he cares for me very much. I am not in a hurry to marry, but my friends keep on questioning me about the date of the ceremony and what sort of ring I am going to have. Don't you think it is time he made some proposal? I feel rather hurt at his want of confidence in me."

* * * * *

Yes, four years is a very long time for a courtship which has not blossomed into an engagement. I should quietly tell the young man the questions that are being put to you by your friends, and leave it to him to act in a straightforward way. Perhaps, as you say, he is putting by money for a home. In any case, he should have confided that much in you.

❦❦❦

Calf Love Again.

"MATER" has a son of eighteen, living some distance from his home. When he writes, he generally refers at length to his "love" affairs. Lately he has been talking about becoming engaged, though he is only earning a very small salary. How should "MATER" act?

* * * * *

As a general rule, "MATER," youths of eighteen do talk rather freely about engagements, and such things, and are generally fairly flush in the matter of love affairs. These things are not to be taken as seriously as if the youth were four or five years older. I presume the young lady to whom he refers has parents, who are not likely to allow your son to pay too close attention to her. A little visit to him would enable you to judge matters for yourself, and if things look serious, you had better take steps to stop it. A word to the girl's parents would, perhaps, have the desired effect.

❦❦❦

A Prejudiced Sweetheart.

"SOME months ago," writes "J. M. A.," "I fell madly in love with a girl of twenty-two. I am sure she returned my affections. Since that I have heard she is not fit to be loved by anyone. Much as I dislike to believe this, I have infallible proofs of its truth. I still love her, but feel I could not see her without being prejudiced. What is the right course to pursue?"

* * * * *

If "J. M. A." loves the girl, as he says, that is rather an argument against his contention that she is not fit to be loved. She must have some redeeming qualities to have attracted him as she has. Let him ignore the "infallible proofs," and find out for himself whether or not she is a fit object of his affections. Nobody is blameless in this world, and a lover should be the last one to cast stones at the object of his love. Be charitable, "J. M. A.," and only be influenced by your own personal feelings towards her.

How to Start an Affair.

"I MET a young man the other day to whom I took a great fancy," writes "H. T. Y." "He has not seen me since, nor has he written or sent any message, so I do not know whether he wishes to resume the acquaintance. However, I myself am very anxious to do so. Will you please advise me how I can give him the opportunity?"

* * * * *

If "H. T. Y." has a friend who knows the young man, she might ask her (or him) to convey the hint that she is anxious to open up correspondence. Should the young man be also inclined to do so, probably he will write to "H.T.Y." on some matter or other, giving her an opportunity of replying. If "H. T. Y." has not a mutual friend able to do this service, why not drop him a line herself? She might easily find some excuse for writing; asking him for an address, or something of the kind, and she could then judge from the tone of his reply if he is inclined to correspond more fully. If not, then "H. T. Y." had better let the matter drop, as the young man may have other attachments.

❦❦❦

Etiquette of Presents.

"WHEN a man admires a girl, but has not yet proposed, or even expressed his feelings, would it be bad form to send her a present? If not, what kind of present could be sent?" "E. W." asks me this question, he himself being in such a position.

* * * * *

It is not correct to send a girl with whom you are slightly acquainted jewellery, or any item of toilet. Those are reserved for the later stage of the affair. At the first stage, the present should take the form of flowers, or pretty trifles, Books, music, too, are presents which can be given under such circumstances; or if "E. W." possesses a dog or a kitten, and knows the girl to be fond of domestic animals, he could make her a present of that sort. The present, by-the-bye, had better be made in response to some wish expressed by the young lady, or "E. W." may find himself in the absurd position of making an unwelcome gift. I have known stern parents to themselves return such presents to the sender, with curt notes, particularly in the case of jewellery. Certain gifts are looked upon as suggesting familiarity, and that is an unpardonable offence in a comparative stranger.

❦❦❦

A Mature Flirt.

"MONA" is in doubt as to the genuineness of a sweetheart of hers. He is a gentleman sixteen years older than herself, who has no particular occupation, but lives with his mother. Though he kisses and squeezes "MONA," and professes undying love, he has told her that he cannot yet consent to a public engagement. I am asked to say whether I think the gentleman has no further intentions towards "MONA" than to flirt with her.

* * * * *

From your description, "MONA," the man does not altogether seem of the marrying sort. As he has no occupation, and has reached a mature age, and also, as you say, has had a good many love affairs, and been rather "fast," he seems the kind of man that would trifle with a young girl's affections, but avoid the responsibilities of marriage with her. I certainly should ask him definitely what are his intentions, and decline to permit his attentions unless he makes a definite proposal. And why *not* tell your mother? Surely her advice in the matter is the very thing you want? Without knowing the gentleman, it is very difficult for me to say whether or not he is sincere in his admiration.

Cynthia

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A SITUATION WORTH £100 A YEAR

For a BOY. (Parents may help their Son to win.)

A SITUATION WORTH £100 A YEAR

For a GIRL. (Parents may help their Daughter to win.)

Offered by THE BOYS' LEADER, "The Paper a Boy can take Home." Published by the Proprietors of "Pearson's Weekly," &c.

The Editor of THE BOYS' LEADER offers a Situation in the Offices of PEARSON'S WEEKLY, THE BOYS' LEADER, &c., and a salary of £100 a year to commence with, to a boy; and a like Situation and Salary of £100 a year to a girl.

100 CONSOLATION GIFTS WILL ALSO BE AWARDED.

These will be offered by competition, and the competition is this:—

SIX QUESTIONS WILL APPEAR EVERY WEEK IN "THE BOYS' LEADER."

THIS IS THE FIRST SET.

1. *Who wrote Robinson Crusoe?*
2. *What famous British soldier is known as "Bobs"?*
3. *Who is your favourite hero (not fiction), and why?*
4. *Who made most runs in first-class cricket this summer?*
5. *Which is your favourite book, and why?*
6. *When was King Edward VII. born. Give year and day?*

The Second Set of Questions will appear in THE BOYS' LEADER (1d. every Tuesday), on Tuesday, November 14.

It will be noticed that some of the questions call for an expression of opinion only, and others you will have to search for in books.

Cut out and paste these questions on a sheet of foolscap paper numbering it No. 1. Write your reply to No. 1. immediately below, and then follow with No. 2, and so on, saying in what book you found the information and who helped you to find it.

Anybody may help you provided you say who. No competitor must be over 21 years of age. No reply must exceed fifty words. Keep all replies until the last set appears and until we tell you to send them in. Write plainly in ink on one side of the paper.

HINTS

Most towns and even villages have now a Reference Library, so it will be easy to get access to books.

Parents and friends may be able to tell you many of the replies, and you can use this information provided you tell us how you obtained it.

This competition will be a valuable education for a boy or girl, even if they do not wish to enter for the prizes.

The two successful competitors will be given the choice, after we have arranged with their parents, of entering one of the following departments of our offices:—The Editorial Department, the Art Department, the Counting House.

Should the winners live outside London, we have no doubt we shall be able to arrange with their parents as to their residence.

At all events, here is an opportunity for some boy and some girl to put their feet on the first rung of Fortune's Ladder, and we hope every parent who has his child's interest at heart will make an effort on their behalf.

THE BOYS' LEADER is the best paper a boy and girl can read. It is only a few weeks' old, but has already, by reason of its healthy tone, taken the first place in this class of literature; and articles and stories are contributed by Jules Verne, George Manville Fenn, Theodore Roosevelt (President of the United States), Sir Henry Seton-Karr, M.P., Major Baden-Powell, T. P. O'Connor, M.P., Lord Ernest Hamilton, the late Max O'Rell, the Duke of Argyle, General Sir Evelyn Wood, G.C.B., &c., &c.

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BEECHAM'S PILLS

are composed of vegetable drugs of great purity and medicinal value; have been in almost universal use for over half-a-century, and are without doubt an **Effective Corrective** in all cases where a corrective is needed, as they act directly upon both the digestive and Nervous Systems

BEECHAM'S PILLS Assist Assimilation, Banish Biliousness, Cure Constipation, Develop Digestion, Liven the Liver, Strengthen the Stomach, Correct Unhealthy Conditions.

A box of BEECHAM'S PILLS should always be kept in the house, as like a "stitch in time," they may save much future worry, and on the first sign of any derangement of the system a dose should be taken, and they will invariably have the most beneficial effect.

They Cure Disease by Removing the Cause of It.

REMEMBER *that if you require a reliable remedy to remove the complications caused by Biliousness, Imperfect Digestion, Torpid Liver and Impure Blood, you can always depend upon* **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**

Sold Everywhere in Boxes, price 1/1½ (56 pills), 2/9 (168 pills).

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SHORT STORIES

No. 774.] Week ending October 31st. 1903. [Price One Penny.

"Give me those papers, before I count ten, or—*your lover dies!*"

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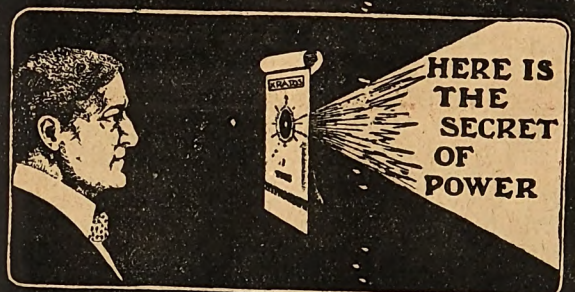
(*A Thrilling Incident from this week's "THE PURSUIT OF SARA." See inside.*)

SELF-HYPNOTISM



MAKE YOURSELF OVER.

A new and unique device called **The Hypnograph** has been invented for Self-Hypnotism.

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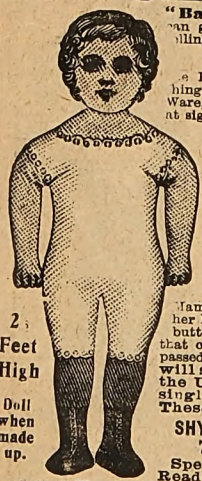

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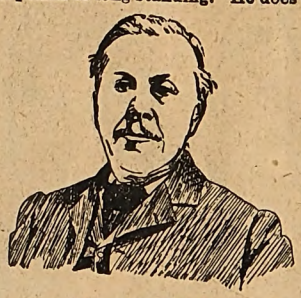

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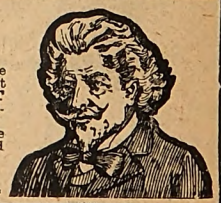

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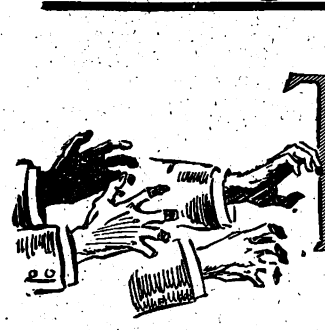

The Pursuit of Sara

For New Readers.

Miss Sara Gillespie, who is the relater of these experiences, found employment as a typine in the firm of Messrs. Templeton and Co., General Agents.

The partners in the firm, Mr. Templeton, Mr. Harrington Shackell, and Mr. Rigby Starr, treated Sara most courteously, especially the senior partner, who, before very long, induced her to tell him all about her absent lover, Noel Masterman.

The latter was by profession a doctor, but as he lacked the capital to start a practice in England, he had accepted the post of medical attendant to a friend, who was travelling on the Continent for the benefit of his health, and was at present in Nice.

Noel had been brought up by his uncle, Sir Francis Masterman, and had excellent prospects, but when he fell in love with Miss Gillespie, Sir Francis refused to have anything more to do with him.

Mr. Templeton assured Sara that he thought Noel had been very hardly treated, and suggested that the best thing for him to do would be to return, and he would see whether he could not obtain a practice for him.

Then one day Noel entered the office unexpectedly, and told his love he had had a wire from his cousin Herbert, saying that Sir Francis was not expected to live long. He had hastened from Nice in order to get his uncle's forgiveness before his death, only to find the Baronet already dead.

In his will, Noel's uncle had bequeathed him a thousand pounds, and with this he intended to buy a practice to which Mr. Templeton had recommended him.

One evening Noel and Sara paid a visit to Sir Herbert, and learnt from him that he had insured his life in favour of Templeton and Co. for fifteen thousand pounds. Just as they were leaving Sir Herbert's valet entered, and, with a cry of amazement, Sara asserted that he was Harrington Shackell, one of her employers. It was, however, explained that Shackell had a moustache, whereas the valet was clean shaven. With this explanation Miss Gillespie had to remain content.

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The following day Noel received a telegram summoning him back to Nice, and in order that he should be able to buy the practice in question, he gave the thousand pounds to Mr. Templeton, and signed a document authorising the firm to deal for him. By a piece of trickery, the senior partner converted this document into one authorising the firm to deal *with his whole estate.*

In the afternoon Sara overheard Templeton and Rigby Starr talking, and their words aroused her suspicions. She understands that Noel is heir to the Baronetcy, in the event of Sir Herbert having no children, and realises that, should Sir Herbert die, the firm has sole control of her lover's estate.

Just then Harrington Shackell entered, and she was shocked to hear him announce that Sir Herbert Masterman was dead—murdered by him, his valet! So, after all, her suspicions had been only too well grounded! Then, little by little, she heard the diabolical plot against her lover unfolded, and also the hint that she herself was in danger, as she was the only one the murderers had to fear, and they intended to run no risks.

Then she resolved on a bold scheme—to get possession of the notes and the document. Bursting into the room, she seized the precious papers and managed to elude her astounded employers. Then she fled.

Besides the £1,000 in notes, Sara had about five pounds of her own money with her.

She wired to Noel, bidding him return to England at once. Then Miss Gillespie took train to Bedford, where she expected to find an old school-friend, who, however, had gone.

Calling at the Post Office to see if there was a reply to her telegram from Noel, she was thunderstruck to hear someone else had called for the telegram.

Who *could* it be but Templeton and Co.?

Faint at heart, she made her way to the Park, where she met a prepossessing-looking nurse, who seemed in great trouble.

They arranged to meet in the evening, and did so. Strolling along, they came to Newnham Bridge. Suddenly the nurse made a cowardly attack on Sara, forcing her back into the waters. The river closed over—she was drowning!

The nurse's bonnet was thrown aside, and revealed the features of Rigby Starr!

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The Pursuit of Sara

AT NORTHAMPTON.

The Horror on the Racecourse.

The water filled my mouth, the pressure of Rigby's hand upon my throat thrust me down deeper and deeper. Then, as the world turned dark with the foretaste of death, the grip of his fingers suddenly relaxed; in his eagerness to destroy me, he had lost sight of his own safety. The ground on which he knelt, sodden with water, collapsed beneath his weight. He was pitched head foremost into the river and carried by the current some short distance down the stream. Released from the fearful pressure, I rose to the surface of the water. My fingers, almost within reach of the bank, clutched eagerly at the grass, the fallen leaves, the very stones; slight as was their support, it served to bring me closer into the shore. With a desperate effort, I grasped at the overhanging branches of the tree. The bough I caught was slender, it bent beneath my weight. Slowly and painfully I dragged myself towards the shore. Once it had almost snapped with the strain, and, poised over the black depths for a shuddering moment, I had thought to slip back. With a convulsive movement I raised myself and fell, gasping but saved, upon the shore.

By this time Rigby's shouts for help were ringing through the night. I could distinguish a dark object floating on the water, nearing by slow degrees the fatal weir.

His life against my safety and my lover's. For a moment I had wished him dead. The next, with a strange relief, I heard an answering shout, and caught sight of figures running down the bank, distinguished the splash of oars from a rescuing boat.

I did not wait for more, but staggered, borne down by my garments, heavy with water, to the other side of the road. There behind a friendly hedge, I took off my coat, shook the wet from my hat and hair, and tried to think out my next move.

The precious document and the packet of notes were safe. My ordeal had not been in vain; but with my teeth chattering and my limbs numb, even this consolation failed. I was ready to lie down and die by the roadside!

A forlorn and miserable object, I dragged myself to the middle of the road, and stood with uplifted hand to attract the attention of a passing cart. The driver stopped short when he saw me, and commented freely on my bedraggled condition.

"Been in the water, eh? So I *should* think. Whatever were you up to?"

Falteringly I explained that I had stumbled in the darkness, and narrowly escaped from death.

"I came down to spend the day with some friends," I continued mendaciously, "and when I got here I found they had left Bedford. I must go back to London to-night or I shall lose my situation. Could you help me?" I looked up at him appealingly. "Perhaps you live near; your wife might let me dry my clothes. I can't go to a hotel, I haven't enough money."

He considered for a moment and looked at his nice clean cart—it bore, I believe, the familiar name of Dudeney & Johnstone—and from his cart to where I stood, dripping and depressed.

"You're in a terrible state, missie," he said at last. "Still, I suppose I must help you. Come along up." And, leaning towards the ground, he gave me a friendly hoist to the seat beside him.

It seemed a long time before the cart drew up at a small house in Garfield Street; a very eternity before, a wordy argument with his good lady over, my friend conducted me to a neat, bright-looking kitchen. A comfortable meal was spread upon the table, the kettle was singing on the hob, and a cheery fire blazed in the grate. The housewife, a comely matron of about forty, relented when she saw me, assisted me to divest myself of my clothes, and, wrapping me in a huge garment of her own, sat me in an armchair by the fire until such time as they were dry.

St. Paul's was chiming half-past eleven when I left the house—the kind-hearted folk would not take a penny for their trouble—and walked up the High Street once again; my limbs were stiff and my head ached badly, but my courage had returned and I was ready to fight to the last gasp. I realised that it was imperative I should leave Bedford before the morning. I must abandon the chance of hearing from Noel. To run the risk of capture again and renew the experience of the evening would be madness. The next day would find the firm eager and alert. I could not hope to escape their clutches if I were still in the town.

I found the station deserted, the booking office closed, and the porters in a state of somnolence from which it was difficult to rouse them. I feared that the last train for—anywhere—had already left, but a severe cross-examination elicited the fact that a train from London for the North was due at—1.33 a.m. I had as yet formed no decision as to my next stopping-place. I did not wish to go too far afield from Bedford. The hope of claiming Noel's telegram, which I fondly pictured lying at the little stationer's, dissuaded me. I must select a town large enough to hide successfully from my persecutors, near enough to permit me to communicate with Sawyer's—the shop in the Midland Road.

I decided on Northampton, and learnt that if I took the 1.33 to Wellingborough I might catch an early morning train from there to my destination. The next two hours dragged very slowly. Alternately I paced the platform and the waiting-room, starting at every shadow, shuddering at every footfall.

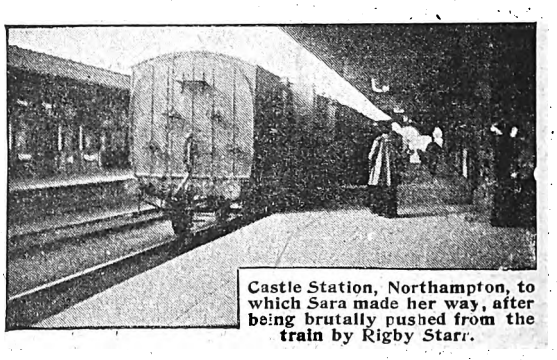
At length the station roused from silence, woke up to activity. The down train from London was due. I watched the few belated passengers alight, and envied them the comfortable homes, the warm and loving greetings which awaited them.

I hastily took my ticket, and, having claimed my packet of notes from the cloak-room, chose a carriage at the end of the train, and settled myself in the corner. The whistle sounded, the train began to move. I breathed a sigh of relief. I had defeated Templeton & Co.! I was leaving Bedford free, and with the papers still in my possession.

Another moment and we should have steamed out of the station. And then a figure darted across the platform, and, regardless of protesting porters and irate officials, swung into the nearest carriage. I had caught but a glimpse of the late passenger, but that glimpse had sent me sick with fear.

The man who jumped on to the train was Rigby Starr.

The train rushed through the night, a metallic roar rose from the glistening lines that marked its path. The throbbing of the engine, pulsating with energy, seemed to keep time to



Castle Station, Northampton, to which Sara made her way, after being brutally pushed from the train by Rigby Starr.

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The Drapery, Northampton, to which Sara wandered before she had recovered from the effects of her rough handling.

the beating of my heart. The carriage swayed from side to side; the dim lamp swung from the top, its faint beams falling on the huddled figure of a girl whose eyes, big with terror, looked from a small white face, whose hands wet with fear were convulsively enclasped.

What was that sound that rose above the rattle of the engine? A door banged farther down the train. I felt, rather than heard, soft, cautious steps upon the footboard, covering by painful, slow degrees the distance between my carriage and that other.

It was I, Sara, that those steps were approaching. It was I, that stealthy figure sought. I—weak, defenceless—that the bloodhound hunted. I heard, in fancy, those evil feet stop at my door; I saw, in fancy, a white face glare at me through the glass. A hand shot through the door, a hand that closed upon my throat with a relentless, murderous grip.

I started to my feet. Where could I hide, how could I escape? Under the seat—impossible, it would make the task easier for my assailant. Should I pull the danger cord to stop the train? I could not; if I summoned assistance I must offer explanation, and that would result in my incrimination.

Half mad with panic, I opened the door upon the other side, stepped through, and with the daring of desperation, turned my fingers round the handle, and crouched, half kneeling, on the footboard.

The whirr of the wheels deafen me, the jolting strains my muscles almost to tearing point. My eyes are dazed; the throbbing of the engine beats upon my brain.

And then the door upon the farther side is opened. The sound thrills me like the edge of a keen knife. The footfalls sound close. I sicken with a deadly nausea.

Will he never end his search? Each cushion has been overturned, the space under the seats examined.

Dear Heaven, surely he is going now?

He will not look through the window, nor open the door? He cannot dream I have escaped that way.

And then the window is darkened, his head cranes out, his face, his evil, mocking face, looks down on mine.

With a laugh he stoops and grasps my arm.

"I've got you now," he shouts, "you sha'n't escape this time!" and strikes at my wrists with all his force. "Let go, let go, you little fiend. You sha'n't escape this time, I say. Another minute and you'll be beneath the train, and the papers will be in my pocket. Let go."

The blows fall on my head, my arms, my hands. He twists my wrists, tearing by main force my fingers from the handle. In the struggle the door flies open. I am swung off the footboard, swung over the earth that rushes past with such velocity.

A moment and then—the door, the train, Rigby's white, wicked face are whirling in the distance, and I am left a quivering heap upon the ground!

At first I thought that I was going to die. Weak as a child, I had not the ability to move. I lay as I had fallen on a heap of gravel. My face was cut, my hands bleeding, but as yet I felt no pain; my heart seemed to have stopped beating. I was benumbed from head to foot.

The recollection of Rigby's threat stirred a desire for life within me. He had declared he would kill me, that dashed to pieces by the train the papers I had striven to guard would fall into his hands. Those papers, thank Heaven, were still safe, the touch of them seemed to help me. I wondered if he would stop the train and institute a search for me. It would be easy for him to trump up a tale of suicide.

Reflection convinced me he would adopt more cunning methods. There was some hours' interval between the 1.33 and the next train. There would be plenty of time for Rigby to get out at Wellingborough, the first stopping place, and walk back along the line until he found me—or as he hoped, my dead body. The train reached Wellingborough at 1.54. I judged it wanted ten minutes to that time. I might, therefore, expect the junior partner to return in something over half an hour. I could rest for a little while before I moved to safer quarters. Unless I had been injured in the fall, in which case I should still lie at his mercy.

Slowly I staggered to my feet. I could stand, my legs were not broken nor my arms, though my wrist was badly sprained. The movement stirred my blood, my body seemed to wake suddenly to a sense of pain. I ached and smarted all over, my nerves were jarred at every step. Ill as I felt, I did not realise at the time how close to death I'd been. Had I fallen on the bare ground I must have been killed. I should inevitably have broken my neck.

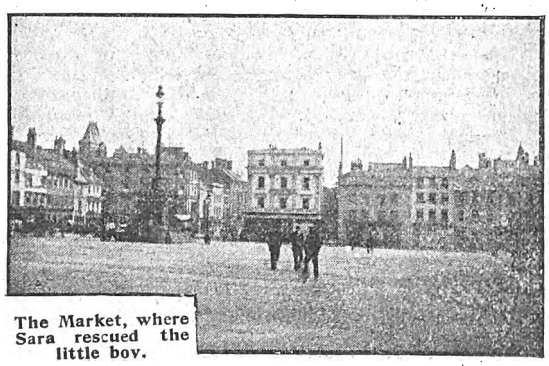
Gradually and with great pain, I stumbled along the line until I reached a gate opening into a field. It was padlocked, and at first seemed an insuperable obstacle. Somehow or other I clambered over, and walked, swaying to and fro, across the meadow, down a lane, and then into another field.

By this time I must have been light-headed. I remember fancying I was in the Strand with Noel at my side. The stars gave place to the electric lights, the spectral trees became shop fronts, the hedges the portals of a theatre.

Instinct must have led me to where, sheltered from the wind, there rose a hayrick. It had already been partially demolished and a lot of loose hay was scattered at the foot. Instinct again led me to gather up the soft, sweet-smelling stuff by armfuls, until I'd formed a fragrant heap. There, close to the rick, warmed by its scented heat, I rested, and thinking I was back once more in my Brixton lodgings, I fell asleep.

The sun was high in the heavens when I woke; the birds, lured into the belief that it was summer, sang their sweet songs until the neighbouring thicket thrilled with melody. The pain had left my limbs, my head was clear. I realised that, thanks to my youth and strength, I had passed safely through a dangerous crisis.

I found my way to a neighbouring farmhouse—removing first the straws hanging, Ophelia-like, about me—and purchased a slice of home-made bread and a long draught of



The Market, where Sara rescued the little boy.

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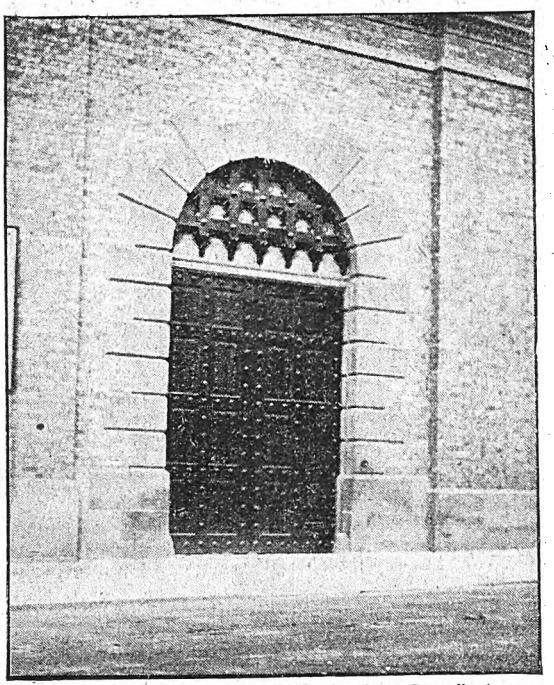

The Prison Gate, Northampton Gaol, where Sara first saw the red-haired man.

milk. The nearest station I was told was Elsham, a village a few miles from Kettering. By slow degrees I reached my goal, and after many changes and some long, dreary waits, found myself, at length, at the Castle Station, Northampton.

The platform was crowded, the bridge, which one had to cross to leave the station, thronged with passengers. I was jostled and pushed hither and thither, too weak and dazed to stem the current. I gave up my ticket, clasped mechanically in my hand, and then instinctively clutched at the pocket of my dress to reach my purse. It was not there!

The sickening feeling that came over me, the shiver of fear that seemed to run along my blood into my very fingertips, the sudden faintness that caught my heart! Penniless—it would be suicidal to try to cash one of Noel's notes—alone, in a strange place, barely recovered from one ordeal, how could I hope to face another?

The shock paralysed my faculties, I walked dazed and benumbed up Gold Street, not knowing nor caring where I went. The shock had been too great, I felt like a derelict tossed on a sea of circumstances.

I must have wandered about for hours before I found myself in a wide thoroughfare, lined with bright shops, busy with gazers into the well-stocked windows. The Drapery, as the townsfolk have christened this particular locality, is built on a gradual ascent. From Adnitt's, the Peter Robinson's of Northampton, I looked down on the square-towered church of All Saints, lit up by the noonday sun. The cool green trees that flank the building were restful to the eye, standing like sentinels, untroubled and serene, amidst the roar of traffic, the clatter of trams that circle round the church.

A town of sharp and vivid contrasts; a jumble of fine buildings, mean dwellings, splendid thoroughfares, squalid streets. Its people marked by fierce individuality, vigour of life, a scorn of bearing, an immense impatience of control.

Something of this I realised as I walked down the hill towards the church, leaving the fashions of the Drapery and Adnitt's tall electric lamps behind.

From the Drapery I made my way into the market, a huge square, shut in by large and for the most part unprepossessing buildings. A fine site, and on market day cheerful with the hum of buyers and sellers, busy with rows and rows of stalls. But on that morning it wore an empty, almost forlorn appearance. The shops seemed void of custom, the pavement of life. It was an oasis of silence in a desert of sound. A few stragglers loitered in the roadway, towards Sheep Street, a knot of factory girls, neat in white aprons and sailor hats, were gossiping.

Suddenly the silence was broken in strange, dramatic fashion. The wild inspiriting clatter of horses' hoofs upon the cobble stones, the jingle of harness, the shouts of the crowds, gathered as if by magic, proclaimed the coming of a fire-engine. In an instant the upper end of the market square was thronged. Shopmen left their customers, operatives curtailed their dinner hour, street boys appeared as from the ground beneath their feet.

Nearer and nearer came the inspiring jangle; swept by the crowd I stood eager as any, on the kerb-stones.

As the engine turned the corner, from the group of factory girls, there broke a curly-headed mite of five or six. Wild with delight he shouted, waving his cap, dancing with joy within the path of the galloping horses.

I stood the nearest to the child, and automatically responded to the exigencies of the situation. Like a flash I darted from the kerbstone, and plucked the child from under the horses' hoofs. For a second I stood dazed, and then, even as the horses and the men, aye, and the very engine seemed falling on me, I was pulled back, an arm was thrown about my neck, and I stood the centre of a crowd of cheering men and tearful women.

"He's my brother," said a dark-haired girl, her face ashen, her voice trembling. "I couldn't ha' lived if he'd been killed." She didn't thank me—in words—but gazed, a world of gratitude in her brown eyes.

"It's nothing," I said feebly, "nothing," and then the market seemed to rise, the statue in the middle to topple, the houses to shake, and I remembered nothing more.

Propped up against the knees of a fat and friendly market woman, I opened my eyes, a strong taste of brandy in my mouth—to find myself the centre of a friendly crowd. The dark-haired operative stooping over me, lifted me gently to my feet.

"You're a stranger, my dear?" said the market woman.

I nodded and clung to the slim figure that supported me.

"You'd best come home with me and rest a bit," she said; and spoke in such a kindly voice, and with such evident desire for my consent, that I could not demur. I felt as some poor traveller in a desert to whom a helping hand is suddenly extended from a bush of thorns.

Home—the word brought tears to my eyes. Home—I gratefully linked my arm in hers, and buoyed up with a sense of security, managed to walk to the corner of Abingdon Street, where we took a tram.

Some short distance up the road, my friend signalled for the tram to stop. We alighted at Wood Street, a wider and more picturesque turning than the majority of streets, where the workers of the Midlands have their homes. Profoundly depressing are those rows and rows of two-storeyed red-brick dwellings, which, without a pretence of forecourt, open right to the street.

Bald, and staring, without distinction, and lacking all possibility of privacy, the monotonous, barefaced structures—alike in every town throughout the Midlands—lack all that should be present in the dwellings of the people. The giant factories that consume the workers' health and strength, have left a mark upon their very souls, slowly but surely grinding out all longing, all desire for lovely things.

Maggie Dunkley lived at the top of Wood Street, on the right-hand side, going to Campbell Square. The house was overgrown with creeper, the windows, draped with clean white curtains, were bright with flowers. Her mother, an apple-cheeked woman, with brown hair touched with silver, accorded me a cordial welcome. The news of her boy's rescue had already reached her, and she was overflowing

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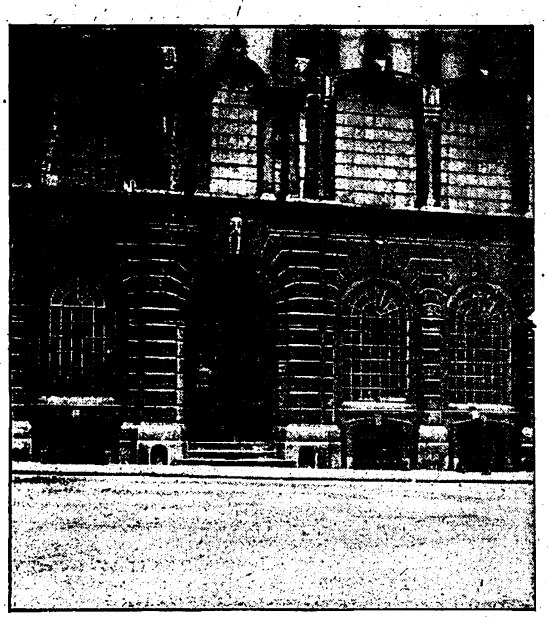

Cooper's Factory, where Sara applied for a situation.

with hospitable intent. She was somewhat anxious, however, as to who and what I was; and but for her daughter would have embarked on a kindly but thorough cross-examination. Maggie, however, nipped her intention short, and taking me up to her room, helped me into bed.

"You shall tell us to-morrow," she said, when I tried to explain my forlorn condition. "No money?" her kindly face flushed with sympathy. "Never mind, you're with friends." And, with a soft kiss on my cheek, she left me to a long, deep sleep—the first since my escape from Templeton and Co.'s London offices.

It was to Maggie's kindly ears I told my history, as much, that is to say, as I thought wise. The notes I did not mention. I had grown chary of trusting strangers. She was sufficiently quick-brained to understand the salient points of my narrative, and enthusiastic in her admiration for my pluck in fighting Noel's enemies. I explained that I had no money, and no means of getting any until I had a letter from my sweetheart, but she overruled all objections to my staying, and promised to do her best to find me employment if I did not hear from Noel within a week or two.

I wrote two letters that afternoon, one to Noel, telling him all that had occurred since we had parted, and another to Mr. Tenant, his patient. I addressed both to Nice, hoping that if Noel's failed to find him, the other would reach its destination.

Maggie at my intreaty took a journey to Bedford to inquire for letters or wires at Sawyer's, but the errand was fruitless. Noel had sent no word. It remained for me, then, to wait for my lover and to guard against Templeton and his two partners.

The time passed quickly and not unpleasantly in the house of the virginia creeper. Mrs. Dunkley was glad of my assistance in the house, and did not seem to grudge me a home. Her husband, at work at a shoe factory, was a quiet but not unkindly person. The other members of the family were Maggie, a "fitter" in the same factory as her father, and Dick, the curly-headed urchin whose life had been so nearly ended in the market place.

As day followed day and none of the firm made their appearance, I was lulled into a sense of security; but for my fear for Noel, the gnawing anxiety I felt for news from him, I had been almost content. When, however, at the end of the week no news had come, I felt it was time to bestir myself. I could no longer intrench on the Dunkley's hospitality. I must get work. Maggie's endeavours on my behalf not being successful, I determined to apply myself.

To this end one sunny morning I set out for Cooper's factory. At the top of Wood Street on the way to Campbell Square, there stands Northampton Gaol. The walls, tall and grim, tower above one's head, so high they stand that the mind cannot scale the barrier set between the world of silence and the world of life. The prison gate, Fate's doorway, through which, how many children of despair have passed, lay dark and stern, a blot upon the sunshine of the day. It had a fascination for me this same door; often I stood, my ears filled with the sound of laughter as the hurrying factory hands swept past, my eyes dazzled with the brightness of the clear, cold sky, till gazing at the portals I had shuddered.

If it should be my fate to cross that threshold; if my enemies, relentless in their pursuit, should trace me, capture and cast me into that place of death!

As I gazed the little wicket on the right hand of the prison door was opened. A man looked out upon the world; not a warder nor yet a prisoner, though I doubt if there were in the prison one whose face bespoke such guilt. I did not know the man, I had not seen his face before. Lean and cadaverous, his long, thin face was pointed, his eyes—small, crafty eyes—set close together in his head. His hair of a red, so vivid as to touch scarlet, lay in a peak upon his forehead, like—like, yes—like a stain of blood.

My fixed regard attracted him; as his gaze met mine, I felt as if some evil thing had looked at me, a moment his eyes remained on mine, the next his face had disappeared, the wicket closed..

With a sigh of relief I turned away. Alas! that face was doomed to play a large part in my destiny.

After that afternoon my feeling of security came quickly to an end.

Arrived at Cooper's factory, I interviewed the manager and pleaded hard for work.

He shook his head, regarding me, I thought, contemptuously.

"You are too old for an apprentice," he said, "and too untrained for a worker. I don't suppose you can work a machine?"

"I could learn," I faltered. "I'm not stupid."

"I'm afraid I can't hold out any hopes," he replied. "All our workers are apprenticed quite young—just after they leave school."

Dispirited by my lack of success, I asked if I might go into the workroom and see Maggie. It was close on five o'clock, near the hour of dismissal. I felt that a walk with my friend and kind companion might cheer me up.

Having gained permission, I sped up the winding staircase, past rooms heavy with the scent of leather—brown, black, and faint coloured fawns. Huge piles representing thousands of pounds were waiting to be converted into shooting, walking, golfing—every kind of boot; past the cutters' room, where Maggie's father worked, packed full of men, young, old, and middle-aged, their eyes glued to their work, their shoulders bowed with stooping. Into the machinists' room, where the whirr of revolving wheels made the brain giddy. Young girls of seventeen and under, guiding with incredible dexterity the heavy leather that the needle pierced so easily; matrons, mothers of families, working machines even more complicated, and here and there a faded little woman shrivelled and wizened to the colour of the leather that she held. In the "fitters'" room I discovered Maggie; above the clang of the hammer her laughter rang out. Her face fresh as a flower, with damask cheeks and clear brown eyes, glanced up at me.

In a few words I explained my errand. She smilingly agreed to my request that she should leave, and a few minutes later, after a hasty cup of tea, we were hurrying down Abingdon Street, to look at the shops.

We studied the windows intently, admiring the hats in Adnitt's, the dress materials in Cole and Hughes. Maggie was a managing soul; her earnings, some sixteen shillings weekly, she husbanded carefully, the greater part being deposited each week in a savings' bank.

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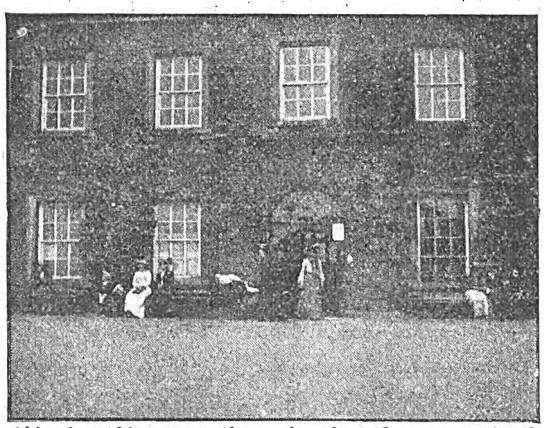
She decided that afternoon, however, to purchase a new gown, and to that end collected a large number of patterns. By the time we had selected the ones we preferred, the evening had set in. The streets immediately about the market were thronged with work girls, shouting, laughing in high spirits. At the corner of Guild Hall Street we encountered a neatly-dressed, horsey-looking man.

Maggie turned crimson when she met his eyes.

"It's my young man," she whispered, and the next minute was clinging closely to his arm. It seemed to me a time when my absence would be more appreciated than myself. I shook hands with the horsey gentleman, and murmuring something about "shopping," moved off in a contrary direction; up the street, towards Abingdon Square, past troops of operatives, with here and there a young man in their midst, clean-shaven, gaitered, horsey from head to foot. Through the square itself, with its desolate looking People's Café that flanks the statue of Charles Bradlaugh, dauntless and unafraid, the genius of the Northampton people. Whether the statue be a fine one or not it is impossible for me to say. During my stay in the town it was invariably surrounded by barrows bearing advertisement placards setting forth the attractions of the Music Hall. It was strange to catch a glimpse of that earnest, powerful face rising above letters a foot high proclaiming that "Joe Elvin's" performance was unrivalled!

I was too tired to walk further that afternoon, and the trams, crowded with folks, did not appeal to me. I retraced my steps, taking a short cut through the Guild Hall from Abingdon Street. Half way down the corridor I ran against an individual coming in the opposite direction. Glancing up, I recognised the man I had seen that afternoon at the prison gate. Murmuring an apology, I hastened on; to my discomfort, he turned round and followed me. In a sudden panic I rushed on at full speed, flying down the steps of the Hall, and falling almost into Maggie's arms.

"Help me," I said wildly. "I'm—I'm frightened. Look," and I pointed to the man with the scarlet hair regarding us from the top of the steps.



Abingdon Abbey, near the park, where Sara encountered Shackleton cunningly disguised.

"He's not pretty to look at, certainly," said Jim Goodman, Maggie's sweetheart. "Would you like me to go for him, missie?"

"Oh, no," I urged. "Let us get home. I can't bear to be near him," and much to Mr. Goodman's disappointment we set off for Wood Street, the groom, for that I discovered was Jim's calling, enlivening our way with descriptions of certain fights in which, by all accounts, he had not played the part of a spectator.

He left us at the door with many expressions of good-will towards me, and offers "to go for" any man I liked to name.

That night I could not rest. Every sound resolved itself into footsteps, each gust of wind seemed to me like a voice—my enemy's voice crying for my destruction.

Next morning I confided to Maggie that I carried with me bank notes for a thousand pounds. I felt I could no longer bear the weight of the secret all alone.

"If you really think the red-haired chap means trouble, you ought not to walk about with the notes upon you," she said thoughtfully. "You say you've cut 'em in halves? Well, you keep one packet, I'll hide the other here under this board in the floor."

It struck me as a primitive hiding place, but, failing a better, I took advantage of it, and deposited the packet under the loose plank by my bed.

I was up early that morning, straining my eyes down the street to catch a glimpse of the postman.

"No letters?" I asked, my heart torn with fear and hope.

"Not this time," was the answer, and the man, unconscious arbiter of life and death, passed on.

In the afternoon of the same day, I took Dick up to Abingdon Park, where it was arranged that Maggie and her lover should meet us later on. It was a lovely afternoon, the old Abbey girdled with trees, cloaked with ivy, towered up straight and tall against the clear blue sky. I sat down on one of the seats provided by a thoughtful corporation, and, keeping Dick well in sight, waited for my friends.

Maggie and Jim arrived a full hour before I had expected. I gave Dick into their charge, and declining an invitation to accompany them, gave myself up to reverie. If only I could see Noel but for a moment! I hungered for him, my soul cried out for a touch of his dear hand. The tears forced their way to my eyes and a lump rose in my throat.

"Noel," I whispered, "Noel."

As if in answer to my call a step sounded on the gravel path. Hoping I do not know what wild feverish thing, I turned, and met the gaze of the man I had seen at the prison door!

He was taller than I had thought at first, and his shoulders were broad, his build powerful. I rose from my seat and hastened from the Park, not pausing until the echo of his steps, pursuing me, had died away.

I left the Park by the nearest gate. It led into a fine wide thoroughfare, lined with well-built houses standing in ample gardens, it is a pleasant suburb and a growing one.

Some distance down the road I passed a pair of large iron gates through which I caught a glimpse of trees and flowers and a broad carriage drive. The lodge, overgrown with green, was picturesque enough to make me pause.

Looking up I scanned the windows, neatly draped with spotless muslin. One I noticed particularly, was framed with creeper, kissed by the autumn into blushing red, looking exquisitely pretty.

"What is this place?" I asked a passer-by.

"It's an asylum," was the answer, "*a lunatic asylum?*"

I gave a start—flowers, open windows, fresh green trees—the place did not present the appearance one associates with a madhouse. I wondered if the inmates were all mad; it might be some were the victims of a conspiracy as cruel as that which parted me from Noel. I glanced again towards the window of the lodge and watched until, as if in response to my scrutiny, someone approached. A hand lifted the window higher, a black-coated arm appeared upon the sill, and then a head and shoulders filled the aperture. For a second I gazed, breathless with fear and hope. Then, with a scream that brought the people to their doors, I flung myself upon the iron gates.

It was Noel who looked at me from the window. His dear face that gazed at me. Noel, *Noel!*—a prisoner in a madhouse!

"Come out!" I shrieked, and then gripping the iron bars, clanged the bell, appealing with wild cries for help!

The window was shut down, Noel taken away, perhaps—the thought was madness—to a padded room, where bound and gagged he would endure the horrors of torture both physical and mental!

Again and yet again I shook the gates, until the sound of approaching wheels aroused me from my passion. A brougham drew up outside the house. A tall, professional-looking man whose air and manner proclaimed him to be a

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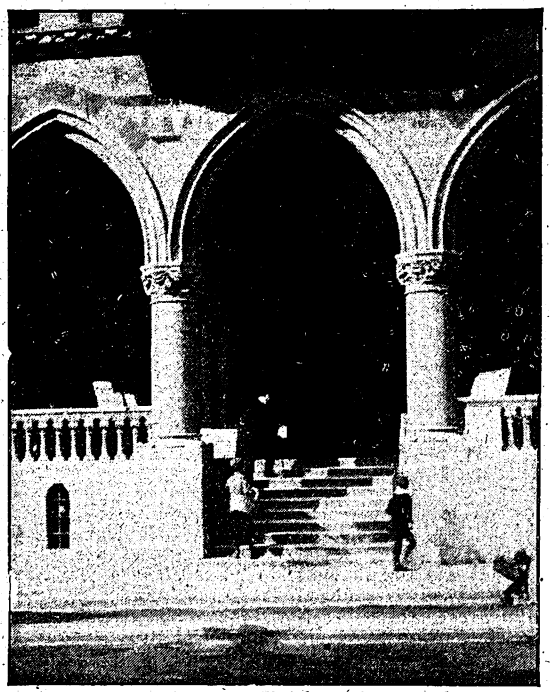
doctor alighted on the path, close to his heels a second man stepped out; the red-headed individual who had caused me such alarm.

"We're in good time after all, Dr. Anesley," he said.

Anesley! The name awoke a thousand recollections. The doctor whose practice Noel had wished to buy was called Anesley. Doubtless he, like Noel, had been duped by the firm of Templeton & Co. He would help me, help my lover. It was a veritable stroke of fortune that had sent him to me at this crisis.

"Doctor, I want your help. My sweetheart, Noel Masteman, the man who was in treaty for your practice through the agencyof Templeton & Co. is in that place"—and I shook my fist towards the lodge. "You don't know me; I'm Sara Gillespie, the girl to whom he is engaged. I was employed as typine in their office at St. Helens. I discovered they were plotting against Noel; I discovered they had murdered, *murdered* his cousin, and that—"

With a gesture the doctor stopped my flow of eloquence.



The Guild Hall, where Sara fled from the man she saw at the prison gate.

"What proof have you that Mr. Masterman is here?" he asked.

"I have seen him in that room"—and I pointed to the window framed in rich red leaves.

"Doctor," I clasped my hands about his arms. "Let him come to me; he is not mad; dear Heaven, you know he is not mad!"

He gazed at me with kind, compassionate eyes, then, signing to his companion to withdraw, led me aside.

"Now," he said quickly; "if I'm to be of help you must control yourself. You tell me Mr. Masterman is at the lodge. If that is the case, I, as one of the physicians of the establishment, will inquire the reason of his detention there. It is, however, possible," his voice sank almost to a whisper, "that he's there for purposes of investigation. Others beside yourself my dear young lady, have reason to suspect Messrs. Templeton & Co. You must understand their influence is far-reaching. Mr. Templeton, in fact, is one of the trustees of the asylum. I cannot openly question his doings; it is a matter for diplomacy."

"Meantime——" I interrupted.

"Have no fear, Miss Gillespie; I will help you to the best of my ability. I will call at the lodge, see Mr. Masterman, and ascertain the reason for his detention. If he is kept there by the agency of Mr. Templeton I will on my own responsibility release him. If, as I suspect, he is there to keep an eye on the head of the firm, I will ask him to send you a message to that effect."

His words were plausible, his manner kind. I yielded to his persuasions and consented to remain *outside* the lodge gates until I heard from him or Noel.

"That man," I said, pointing to the red-headed person, "I mistrust him; who is he?"

"A keeper in the asylum," the doctor replied. "He is devoted to me, and takes special interest in my own particular cases."

"I saw him at the gate of the prison the other day."

"Quite possible; his brother is a warder in the gaol."

He smiled the gentle, persuasive smile of the medical man. I yielded to his influence, and watched him and his familiar through the iron gates, waiting, hungry of heart outside.

Within five minutes the scarlet-headed man appeared. My own locks being more of red than auburn, it may seem peculiar that his hair should have inspired me with such a feeling of revulsion. The explanation lies, I think, in the fact that his head was sleek and smooth (my hair is very curly), his skin of leaden hue, his face, his figure, redolent of craft and cunning—a very Judas.

"I am to tell you," he commenced in a gruff voice, which to my fancy sounded like the grating of a prison door, "I am to tell you that Mr. Masterman is watching over your interests and his own. He dare not see you now. Were he to try and leave the place it would excite Templeton's suspicions."

"Where's Templeton?" I gasped, "not here?"

"He is at present seated with the Board in company with Dr. Anesley."

"But is Noel a—a—— Is he thought to be *mad?*" I asked.

"He was received here on Templeton's recommendations and by the certificate of two doctors as a patient. His cleverness helped him to escape and remain concealed in the lodge. That same ability will enable him with my help to leave the place to-morrow morning, when he will join you."

"Where?" I asked, my heart beating wildly, "where?" In my enthusiasm I was ready to smile upon the man of the prison gate.

"You are to meet him on the racecourse by the grand stand at five o'clock in the morning. That, and no other is the hour when he can in safety see you. Will you be there?"

He looked at me nonchalantly, not by so much as the flicker of an eyelid did he reveal the anxiety which he must have felt.

"I will come," I answered. Then: "Can you take a note from me to—to—Mr. Masterman?"

"Better not," he answered, shaking his head. "It will excite suspicion."

Somehow the answer reassured me. I felt reproached at the disgust the man's personality had inspired in me, and at the conclusion of the interview felt constrained to thank him for his kindness!

Maggie was not enthusiastic when on my return to the house in Wood Street, I told her what had happened.

"You should have hammered and hammered at the gate until he came to you," she said, "I could not have left Jim in a madhouse were it ever so."

"But Noel sent a message to me," I remonstrated, "saying I must wait. Don't you see, Maggie, there's so much at stake. We have to bring these people to justice, to——"

"I reckon you want *him* most of all," she interrupted, "so long as I had my lad I'd let the others—rip."

With which illogical conclusion she ended the discussion.

Next morning before the dawn lightened the darkness of the sky I was astir. Something, I know not what, a premonition of menace, a foretaste of danger, made me rouse my sleeping bedfellow.

"I'm afraid to take these with me, Maggie," I said softly, thrusting my packet of banknotes and the paper that Noel had signed into her hands; "keep them for me. If all is well, Noel and I will come together and reclaim them, if not——"

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"If you're not here by seven o'clock I shall know there's mischief," she interrupted. "Even now, I'm loth to let you go alone. I wish I had told father," she paused; "anyway, Jim knows." She smiled at the mention of her sweetheart's name, and, linking her arms about my neck, wished me "good luck" with all her heart.

The streets, dim and ghost-like in the grey morning, struck a chill to my heart. Abingdon Street, void of trams and traffic, empty of pedestrians, seemed like a churchyard. Wellingborough Road, shrouded in mist, was to my excited fancy peopled with ghosts. The trees made shuddering noises; through the white vapours the funnel-shaped steeple of the church built by a healthy brewer—dubbed by the irreverent Spillsby's "Fire-escape," formed a landmark. I groped my way until the racecourse, ghostly and deserted, loomed before me. I leant against the palings that fence the grand stand and waited, heart and brain on the alert to catch the sound of anyone approaching. Gradually the mists dispersed, the course lay clear before me. In fancy I conjured up phantoms of the steeds, the jockeys who had ridden to the winning post. Scarlet and green and blue, the jackets passed before me mounted on satin-skinned thoroughbreds, darting like arrows from a bow.

What fortunes had been made and lost on this same course! How many eyes had craned to follow the horse which bore the last hopes of a spendthrift; how many voices had been raised to greet the victor as he swept by!

The place, no longer desolate and lonely, was to me thronged with the tragedies, the comedies that are enacted on a race-course.

Far, far as the eye could reach the white posts reared themselves upon the soft green sward; in the background a line of hills, mystic, wonderful, made the sky line. In the near distance a row of houses, spectral in the dawning, turned blind eyes towards me.

Of a sudden a shaft of light crept rapidly across the horizon. In its beams I distinguished a group of men approaching me. Filled with apprehension I hastened towards them. I had taken but ten paces in their direction, when from the grey mist that enveloped me, I felt a hand upon my shoulder, another on my wrist.

I was held fast—immovable.

Struggling, I turned my head. The men who held my arms were strange to me.

"Keep quiet," said a low voice, "and we won't harm you. It's no use to struggle, you'll only hurt yourself."

The figures I had first observed were rapidly approaching. A tall man, gagged and bound, led by two others; a third walked at their side; a fourth in advance.

The latter came quickly to where I stood. I seemed to recognise in him the man of the prison door.

"Where is Noel Masterman?" I called, struggling with frantic efforts to release myself.

"Here!" And he pointed to the figure bound and gagged behind him.

"You," I commenced. With a gesture he cut me short.

"Look," he said, and, raising his hat, he made a mocking bow. "Look at me, Miss Gillespie. Do you not know me—now?"

He thrust his face—his hateful mocking face—into mine. The red hair, that like a stain of blood had marked his forehead, the leaden-coloured skin, the narrow brow, were gone—gone—and in their place there looked at me the murderous face of Shackleton!

"You're very clever, Miss Gillespie," he said derisively. "But this time we have you *tight*. There is your lover," he pointed with a gesture of contempt to Noel. "And now"—his thin lips twitched with eagerness—"you must make your choice. Tell me where I shall find the paper and the notes or——" he paused, throwing up his hands. At the signal the man who walked near to my lover drew out a pistol, and held it to Noel's head.

"Speak," cried Shackleton, "or——" and his gesture said the rest.

"I give you ten seconds to make up your mind. The papers are not on you; that I know. Say where they are, and your lover's life is spared. Refuse, and, by Heaven, he shall die!"

My throat grew parched, my tongue clung to my palate. I tried to think, tried to evolve a plausible tale that would deceive him, so that I need not confess that the papers were in Maggie Dunkley's hands. He simply dared not murder Noel before my eyes. He——

"One!" counted Shackleton, and the earth went round me at the sound.

"Two!" Gasping, I babbled out a tale of having buried notes and papers up in Abingdon Park. It sounded wild, improbable, to my own ears, to his it was mere balderdash.

Fear, as the torturers of long ago well knew, deprives the imagination of all power to invent, the mind to all strength to conceive. The victim under the strain of torture is driven back upon the naked truth. He cannot lie.

"Three!" Must I tell him? I might surely trust Maggie to keep faith, and yet on my silence hung my future and my lover's. They dare not kill him?

"Herbert Masterman died," said Shackleton, reading my thoughts, "why not Noel?"

"You will not have him killed," I gasped, "if—if——"

"I will spare his life," he answered, "if you confess. Then, marking the irresolution still upon my face, snapping his fingers. "Four, five, six!" he cried.

My eyes searching the plain espied a horseman galloping towards me. Close on his heels ran a figure, strong, alert. Were they coming to help me and Noel? Had Maggie, fearing foul play, flown to my aid?

Why could I not invent a colourable lie to gain time, until they arrived? If I could hold his attention, if I could keep back the seconds that he counted with such fiendish joy!

"Help," I screamed, throwing my voice towards the horseman.

"Eight," said Shackleton, and the trigger of the pistol held to Noel's head was raised.

The horseman spurring his steed drew nearer.

"Nine! Is he to die?" cried Shackleton.

I tried to answer, but my voice was strangled in my throat. Only a hoarse murmur came from my lips. I could not speak, I could not even make a sign.

A second, but a second, and my love must die!

Ten—and the fatal shot was to be fired!

(Sara Relates her Adventure at Leicester Next Week.)

Arthur Applin's New Story,

"THE GAMBLE OF LIFE,"

Has Just Started in

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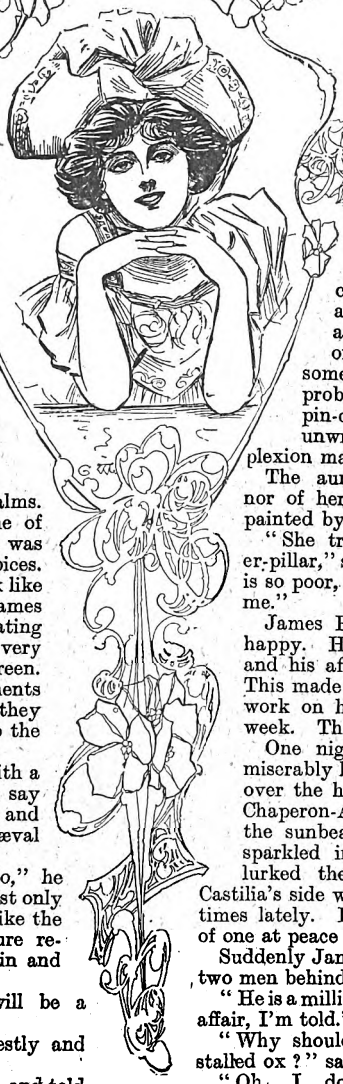

Relating the Mistake She Made.

HER name was Susan Anna, but her lover re-christened her Castilia. If he had been a plumber or a paper-hanger he would probably have called her his "black-eyed Susan"; but he was a poet and an artist, even if his name was James Henry Perkins, so he named her Castilia, and told himself that her eyes were the colour of a mountain lake when the storm hangs over it, and her hair was as densely black as a moonless midnight.

They met at an afternoon tea, and sat talking in a little shaded alcove behind some tall palms. The atmosphere was heavy with the perfume of roses, and the tremulous music of the violins was broken by the thin, airy treble of women's voices.

A red-shaded lamp made Castilia's cheek look like a peach on the south side of a sunny wall. James Henry told her so with a delightful, hesitating boldness, and she blushed divinely and was very glad that the lamp-shade was not blue or green. They discovered in those ten undisturbed moments that they were absolutely sympathetic; they worshipped the same authors, were devoted to the same actors, and adored the same things to eat.

"Fancy you being an artist," said Castilia, with a fascinating note of awe in her voice. "I dare say you have a lovely studio, with painted windows and rusty armour, and old tapestry and mediæval chairs."

Perkins smiled cynically. "I have a studio," he answered, "but the properties you speak of exist only in the imagination. The light in my studio is like the strict truth, crude and hard, and my furniture resembles the tale of Mark Antony in being plain and unvarnished."

"Ah, yes," sympathetically. "But you will be a great artist some day."

"I hope so. I mean to be," he said, modestly and firmly.

At this moment the Paternal Friend appeared, and told Castilia that her Chaperon-Aunt desired her presence immediately. The Paternal Friend was a very charming man, by the way, but James Henry hated him on the spot.

For several days after this James Henry saw nothing of Castilia; but it happened that Castilia could not easily forget the man who had so plainly given her to understand that he thought her lovely. She reflected that for a long time she really had been intending to have her portrait painted, and she was quite sure that Mr. Perkins had a great deal of talent, not that she had any especial interest in him, but she was so weary of frivolous and empty-headed Society people, that it was very pleasant to meet an interesting and companionable man.

When James Henry was made aware of this decision of Castilia, he promptly turned his great historic picture to the wall. He would, for a season, cease chasing the will-o'-the-wisp—Fame—and paint the droop of Castilia's eye-lids and the curves of her lovely mouth.

Castilia did not find him so companionable as she had hoped during the sittings. For one thing, he looked at her with a certain critical, professional gleam in his eyes, and for another, he scarcely talked to her at all, and it was very tiresome sitting in one position so long, but she obtained some consolation from the reflection that he probably stood in awe of her aunt, a vast, pin-cushiony woman, with a skin so white and unwrinkled that it instantly suggested complexion masks and an unfeeling heart.

The aunt did not approve of James Henry nor of her niece's wild idea of having her portrait painted by an obscure young artist.

"She treats him as though he were a c-c-caterpillar," sobbed Castilia upon her pillow, "and he is so poor, so deserving, so m-m-much in love with me."

James Henry, in the meantime, was miserably happy. He was desperately in love with Castilia, and his affection he knew was absolutely hopeless. This made him miserable. He was doing excellent work on her portrait, and he saw her twice a week. These facts made him happy.

One night when he was feeling particularly miserably happy, he went to the opera. Glancing over the house, he saw Castilia in a box with the Chaperon-Aunt. She wore a gown that was like the sunbeams veiled in mist, and shining stones sparkled in her dark hair. In the background lurked the detested Paternal Friend, and by Castilia's side was a man James Henry had seen many times lately. He was florid and stout, and had the air of one at peace with the world and himself.

Suddenly James Henry's quick ear caught her name; two men behind him were speaking of her.

"He is a millionaire—made money by mining—definite affair, I'm told."

"Why should she yoke herself unequally with that stalled ox?" said the other man.

"Oh, I don't know. Money always marries money."

James Henry levelled his glass at the chorus, but it was a confused blur; he paid no heed to the *prima donna*, although she was singing divinely. After the curtain fell he rose and left the house.

He was now obliged to confess to himself that unless Castilia returned his love, life would not be worth living; but he had no reason to suppose that she did; and what had he, who was just beginning to make his name known, to offer her? It was by reason of these inward cogitations that James Henry became acquainted with the chill, grey dawn which crept through the windows each morning and greeted his sleepless eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Perkins, are you ill, or have you had bad news?" faltered Castilia, at her next sitting.

"I am not ill," said James Henry coldly. He looked towards the Chaperon-Aunt, who had fallen into a gentle doze; then he blundered desperately. "but—but—I am going far away."

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"Going away! Why are you going far away?" cried Castilia, with a sob in her voice.

"Because I love you, Castilia, with all my soul; because I will not be so selfish and cowardly as to ask you to marry me, when I have nothing to offer you, so I am leaving you forever."

"Nothing to offer! Leaving me forever!" exclaimed Castilia, with honest scorn and amazement. "You don't regard my feelings in the matter," she said inarticulately, "and—and"—impulsively—"I love you, James Henry, just as much as you love me."

The pincushiony Chaperon-Aunt opened her eyes on a prettier tableau than she had ever seen on the stage, but she was a very unromantic person, and she expressed her opinion in very strong terms. She was only one, however, and her opposition did not count for much.

So Castilia and James Henry were married, and fancied that they were destined to live in a state of ideal bliss ever after—only they did not.

In the first place, James Henry was a very ambitious man and absorbed in his work, and Castilia, instead of being properly delighted at his industry, was offended, for she was young and foolish and exacting.

The artist sat many hours in his studio, and when the light faded, and he could no longer paint, he thought much of his work, and was often pre-occupied and absent-minded; and Castilia was firmly convinced that he had ceased to love her, and sought once more the society she had characterised as frivolous and empty-headed.

Her portrait was finished in time for the Academy, and all London rushed to see it, and went into raptures over it.

And Castilia was very, very proud of him, but she would not tell him so. "He would think it's only because he's become famous."

"She might have said one little word of appreciation, and not have been so utterly, heartlessly indifferent," thought James Henry bitterly.

When Castilia's portrait was brought home the best light was found in her sitting-room, so there it was hung, where she could sit and watch it by the hour. And how she grew to hate it!

Really, it was Castilia at her best, her beautiful, Spanish, haughty best. Some one had called it the portrait of a rose-leaf princess; and, indeed, her lovely face stood out, flowerlike, from the warm shadow of velvets and furs.

She often apostrophised her portrait ungratefully. "You hateful thing," she would cry, "I don't want to be 'a rose-leaf princess,' I—I'm a woman, and I want to be loved."

Just about this time, Perkins began to paint the portrait of a very charming woman, older than Castilia by some years. She had a mobile face, wonderful light eyes, changeful as the sea, and masses of light hair; and she was very witty and fascinating. Castilia hated her, especially when James Henry expressed his opinion that to paint her portrait so as to do her justice was the work of a lifetime; for she was variable as the winds, and her wonderful play of expression mirrored every mood.

His artist's soul was pained because Castilia would not see her beauty.

"Beauty!" she scornfully exclaimed, "I should think her bones would make holes in her dresses, poor creature! and she looks as old as the hills with that sallow, faded complexion."

She became more and more dissatisfied with her own portrait. Sometimes she felt that she would like to burn it. Why had James Henry given her that arrogant expression, which seemed to say, "Behold me! I am an heiress!" She wished she hadn't a penny.

One evening she strolled into the dimly-lit room, where her husband sat dreaming before the fire. Resting one arm on the mantelshelf, she looked curiously down upon him. "He's thinking of that horrid creature," was her jealous fancy.

"Tell me, James, dear," she said, "what is the best thing in the world?"

"The best thing in the world?" he said dreamily. "Why, freedom, I suppose."

That was enough. She turned and left him. "You poor thing!" she said to her portrait as she passed it. "You poor thing," she repeated, meaning herself.

"Why, Susie," said the Paternal Friend, who had just been admitted, "in the dark, and in tears? Is the world hollow, and your doll stuffed with sawdust?"

"I'm crying," she said meekly; "I—I—was just crying."

"I see. Shedding a few tears for want of something better to do," jestingly.

"I'll tell you why," she said desperately: "I hate that portrait of myself—I loathe it. I can't stay in the same room with it!"

"Send it to me then, Susie," he said soothingly. "I'll give it house room until you want it again."

"Oh! for goodness sake, take it, will you, really? It's so cold, and haughty, and scornful."

The Paternal Friend thought he understood. "I will send for it to-morrow," he said. "And, remember, when you wish for it, it is yours."

"Where is your portrait, Castilia?" said James Henry the next day.

"I didn't like it here," replied Castilia, "I took it down."

The artist grew a little pale and said nothing.

Now, since his marriage with Castilia, he had become very chummy with the Paternal Friend, so a day or two after this conversation he called at the house where the Paternal Friend lived in solitary state. He was admitted on the supposition that the master of the house was at home, which turned out to be a mistake.

While waiting, James Henry looked idly about him. Suddenly he staggered back against the wall, for there, hanging in the broad light, was his portrait of his lovely, haughty Castilia. Hastily leaving the house, he turned mechanically homeward. As he neared his own dwelling he lifted his moody eyes to see the Paternal Friend walking blithely away from the door. James Henry strode gloomily into the house; in the hallway stood Castilia—a radiant, different Castilia.

"Oh, James!" she cried joyously, "what do you think has happened?"

"Susan Anna," he said, sternly and gravely, "I know what you have done with your portrait."

"Susan Anna!" The end of the world had come. In the days of his greatest indifference he had never called her Susan Anna.

And because she was a woman, and very much in love, she—slightly prevaricated.

"Yes," she said sweetly, "he has just been here to tell me that he is going to be married to that horrid woman with the green eyes; and"—triumphantly—"I sent the picture to him as a wedding present."

James Henry's face cleared, and then clouded anew. He looked bewildered.

"But—but," he stammered, "he came to-day to tell you of his engagement, and you sent the picture to him three days ago."

"I know I did"—despairingly—"I hated it so, and I cried and said that I couldn't stay in the same house with it, and he offered to keep it until I wanted it again."

"You hated your beautiful portrait, the best thing I ever did," said James Henry in astonishment. "Ah, I see! It was because I painted it, and you had ceased to love me or to take any interest in my work."

"No," she cried, "not that; I never ceased—to take an interest in your work. I—I—James Henry, it was you who ceased to love me."

"Castilia!" he exclaimed in amazement, "I never loved anybody in this wide world but you."

"Not even the Paternal Friend's *fiancée?*"

"What nonsense! My lovely, darling Castilia, she is excellent for purposes of study; her grace and odd colouring are so marked; but you are you—and all is said."

Nancy Blake.

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A Matter of Business.

Which Tells of a Policy that Cut Both Ways.

"YES, Jack, I do love you."

"You — do — really, Doris?"

"Why, of course I do, you silly boy."

The above conversation took place in the wood which stretches from the outskirts of the village of Amfield away down to Mouswater.

It was the old, sweet, inexhaustible story over again; man's love told in halting, passionate utterances; woman's reply, shy and trembling.

In this case Jack Guthrie could hardly believe the evidence of his ears. Not that he doubted Doris Thornton, but he did not seem to be able to bring himself to understand that this beautiful girl could actually yield herself into his keeping for ever.

Doris Thornton was the only daughter of James Thornton, Esq., a wealthy brewer, who was also the proprietor and editor of the *Domsey Times*.

Jack Guthrie was the owner of Horseley House, a fine old English mansion standing in its own park. It had a home farm, good and plenteous shooting, wild deer, and, in fact, all the attributes which go to make up an English country gentleman's home.

Jack's father, the late William Guthrie, J.P., M.F.H., had died some years before. Mrs. Guthrie and Jack had lived on at Horseley House although they often spoke of buying a smaller place. At least Mrs. Guthrie did, and Jack would doubtless have agreed if Doris Thornton had not come home from the Continent.

She had gone away an angular, bony, plain, awkward girl, and had returned to England at the age of twenty, a most graceful and beauteous maiden.

Why, it was the custom in Amfield and Horseley to say, in praise of anything beautiful, that it was "as pretty as Miss Doris."

Now she had hardly been back four months, and she was already engaged to be married.

It may sound rather calculating to say it, but Doris could hardly have done better. Jack Guthrie was a good-looking, well-educated man of about twenty-six years of age. He was exceedingly well off in regard to monetary matters, and a better fellow or finer athlete was not to be found if you searched the countryside for miles around.

Was it not on record how he had caught hold of Bill Boffin, who was more drunk than usual in the King's Head at Horseley, and carried him struggling for almost half a mile into the park; there he dipped him in Catbasket Pond, which effectually sobered him, and took him home to Mrs. Boffin, into whose hand he put a sovereign.

And there were many similar tales to be heard, for the young master was a great favourite in Horseley.

So now he stood with the trembling form of Doris Thornton clinging to him; his face bent down and pressed against hers; his arms holding her to him as though he would never release her.

She loved him; he could hardly credit it. But it was true—true as God's air and sunshine that he breathed and stood in.

They had met near the Keeper's Cottage at half-past two, and now it was just on six o'clock. Guthrie glanced at his watch, and uttered a sharp exclamation of surprise.

"I must hurry back home, Jack. Father will wonder wherever I have disappeared to," said Doris, when he acquainted her of the hour.

"H'm!" he replied. "That opens up some fresh possibilities. Do you think Mr. Thornton will be pleased when he hears of our engagement?"

"Whyever not, Jack?" Doris cried, in tones of astonishment.

"Well, you remember, he and the guv'nor never used to hit it off very well, did they?"

"Oh, no," cried Doris in anxious tones. "But surely he would not let that interfere between us."

"I hope not, Doris, with all my heart. I suppose I must come over and see him soon. When shall I come?"

"He is going to London on Wednesday, Jack. You had better come to-morrow."

"To-morrow then it is," he replied with an anxious and enormous sigh, which provoked a rippling laugh from Doris.

In half-an-hour's time Jack was striding swiftly along the woodland path which comes out just above Mouswater.

Doris was his, he kept repeating to himself. The very birds sang her name, and he caught himself repeating:

"There's a thought of Thee in the soft sweet breeze,
That sighs o'er the golden moor.
There's a song of thee in the green-leafed trees,
And will be for evermore."

He hardly slept that night through excitement, but a swim in Catbasket Pond refreshed him wonderfully, and he whistled merrily as he passed through the Amfield Woods to beard Mr. Thornton.

"Mr. Thornton will be down in a moment, sir," announced the footman who showed Jack Guthrie into a large morning-room, that opened out into the grounds of Amfield House.

Jack seated himself, and proceeded to survey his surroundings and the position. His reverie was broken by the sudden entrance of Doris. She stood for a moment in the flood of sunlight at the door, and then, with a cry of pleasure, she darted forward and in a moment was in her lover's arms.

It was exceedingly unfortunate that Mr. Thornton happened to choose that exact moment to enter the room. And it was still more to be deplored that his game-keepers had reported that morning that there had been a big raid by some poachers during the night.

"Wh—wh—what the d—d—dickens does this mean?" he spluttered.

"Er——" remarked Jack.

"Oh!" cried Doris, and then she retreated hurriedly, basely deserting her lover.

"Good-morning, Mr. Thornton," began Jack. "I am pleased to see you."

"That's not the truth, sir. You were not pleased to see me," was the ungracious rejoinder.

"No," replied Jack meditatively. "I suppose I was not."

"Well," grunted Mr. Thornton, "now you are certainly candid.

"First of all, though," he went on, "I should be glad to

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know what the pretty scene that I was unfortunate enough to interrupt meant. Confound it, sir!" he was getting angry now. "What do you mean by kissing my daughter?"

"That's what I came to see you about, Mr. Thornton."

"Oh, you did, did you—came to see me about kissing my daughter, eh? A peculiar mission indeed."

"Well, not exactly that, but——"

"Do you know what you do want?" peevishly broke in the old gentleman. "At least I can tell you one thing you do want and that is a business education. You come here to see me about something, and you hum, and haw, and what not, instead of coming to the point."

"I love Doris," burst out Jack, goaded to desperation by Mr. Thornton's haggling.

"Oh; now we have something to work on. Is she equally silly?"

"I don't understand you, Mr. Thornton."

"No, I suppose not. You are one of those young men who have been brought up in the lap of luxury and have never known what it is to want. You have never had to depend on your business ability or your own cleverness, have you now?"

"No," replied Jack glumly.

"I suppose you want to marry Doris?"

"Yes," replied Jack blithely.

"Well, the question I put to you just now was, does she want to marry you?"

"Why, you do not suppose——"

"I do not want any suppositions," broke in Mr. Thornton, "but a plain answer. Yes or no."

"Yes," snapped out Jack.

"Well, that's decided, at any rate. Now then, what qualifications have you as a suitor for my daughter's hand?"

"Eh?" responded Jack blankly.

"Goodness, gracious! You are as dull as the Opposition. Why should I agree to your marriage with Doris?"

"We love each other," replied Jack shortly, for he was beginning to lose his temper. "I shall make her mistress of Horseley."

"Very nice, very nice. But I do not wish my daughter to marry a man for whom I have no respect."

"What in the world do you mean, sir?" roared out Jack, as he towered over Mr. Thornton.

"Now, please don't get excited, a good business man always keeps his head."

"Good business man be hanged," retorted Jack. "I want to know what you meant by saying you did not respect me?"

"Well, what have you done that I should? You are not responsible for your position and wealth. You have done nothing but shoot, ride, drive, and all the rest of it. Why should I respect you?"

There was no reply. It was a knotty point and required consideration.

"Now, look here, my boy," said Mr. Thornton, in a kindlier tone than he had yet adopted. "When you can come to me and show me that you have got a good business head on your shoulders you shall have Doris. Do something clever in the business world, something to show that you have brains, but until you have succeeded I refuse to agree to your marriage with Doris."

It was a knockdown blow for Jack, but the fighting blood of his race surged through his veins; he set his jaw, and momentarily clenched his fists. Mr. Thornton noted these unconscious actions, and inwardly approved them.

"That is your ultimatum, sir?" said Jack at length.

"It is, my boy."

"Well, then, I'll agree. But you'll let me see Doris once more?"

"You shall have her to yourself for half-an-hour," replied Mr. Thornton. "And then you must endeavour not to see her until you have fulfilled the conditions of our compact.

"It will be better in another way, too," he added. "For it will test whether your love for each other is strong enough to endure separation. Now I'll send Doris in to you."

Jack impatiently paced up and down the room after Mr. Thornton's departure. His brow was knit, and his lips tightly compressed. Hearing the door open, he swung round. Doris came towards him with a troubled, apprehensive look on her face.

"Well, Jack?" she said, as she crept into the shelter of his arms.

"Well, little woman. We must make the most of this half hour for it is the last we shall have together for some considerable time."

"Jack!" she cried. "The last! What do you mean?"

Then he told her of her father's decree, and that he had had to agree to it.

"But I will not keep you long, dear," he added. "I'll do something to make him come round very quickly."

The remainder of the interview need not be chronicled, but after Jack had gone Doris was some considerable time putting her hair straight. Having done that, she sat down and sobbed, and made her hair all untidy again.

As for Jack, he strode on down the main road, looking neither to the right nor the left. Through Amfield he tramped, down the road past Mouswater and on to Horseley, but he did not come back to ordinary everyday thoughts until he found himself past the village of Abis, and only a little way from Dunchester.

Two days passed by, and many plans had evolved in his brain, but they were all dismissed for some reason or other.

Suddenly his eyes gleamed, and he jumped to his feet excitedly.

"Got it!" he screamed. "By the Lord Harry, I've got it."

And the next day he departed to London.

* * * * *

Domsey (pronounced Dumsey) is a quaint old town built round a very ancient monastery. It is tenderly referred to by its inhabitants as "Domsey in the Mud."

Sleepy is the most characteristic adjective to apply to Domsey, except on every other Thursday when a market is held. There is one every Thursday, but the fortnightly market is much the larger of the two.

Like the town, Mr. Thornton's journal, the *Domsey Times*, was a peaceful, ambling sort of newspaper. They used to say that subscribers who were accustomed to an afternoon nap, very often failed to sleep if they had not got a copy of the *Domsey Times* in their hands.

It had a delightful little way of its own of appearing on different days of the week, according to how much time the Editor could spare to it.

However, Domsey woke up one morning to find all its walls placarded with staring posters. They were printed with a green ground and white letters with a scarlet edging. Altogether they produced a most startling effect. The text of the contents was as follows:

TO THE INHABITANTS OF DOMSEY!
You will shortly be the proud possessors of a first-class
NEWSPAPER
which will not send you to sleep.
READ THE *DOMSEY TELEGRAPH.*
Price 1d. Published every Thursday.
A LONDON NEWSPAPER IN DOMSEY!!!

It is really only in a country town or village that people talk to each other about everything, and that the popular opinion is generally quickly known.

Domsey viewed this innovation with marked interest. It was a splendid idea of the promoters to publish the paper on market days.

The *Domsey Times* had always been on sale at the various stationers, and there the subscribers had to go to obtain a copy. But on the Thursday when the first edition of the *Domsey Telegraph* came out, a number of boys paraded the town with copies of that paper for sale.

Most people bought both of the papers, and made nasty comparisons to the detriment of the *Times*.

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"Well, Oi be danged!" remarked a burly, red-faced countryman. "This be a foine paper, I'll taak it hoam to the missus."

This expressed the general opinion of the Domseyites, more particularly when they read that copies would be delivered free of charge to all subscribers within a three mile radius of Domsey.

A large office and printing works had been taken over by the promoters in Church Street, which was surveyed with wondering admiration by all the townsfolk.

At Amfield House, Mr. Thornton read the *Domsey Telegraph* with vague, angry feelings of uneasiness.

"Won't last, my dear," he assured Doris. "You will see that my words will come true. The *Times* has been established too long, and has too firm a foothold to be thrust out by a flashy paper like this. I tell you, my dear, the *Telegraph* will expire in a fortnight."

Doris did not care much about the rivalry between the papers, all she wanted was Jack. She had not heard a word about him since he went to London, and she yearned to see him again.

However, a month went by, and the two vivid red motor-cars still made their rounds to the subscribers to the *Telegraph*. The new paper appeared with marked regularity, and was always far better informed than the *Domsey Times*.

The latter paper never made the slightest mention of its rival, but where you saw one copy of the *Domsey Times* you would see four copies of the *Domsey Telegraph*.

The climax came when the *Telegraph* commenced a series of prize competitions which highly took the fancy of Domseyites.

The circulation increased by leaps and bounds, and people living in Dunchester and Sarbury, both large country towns about eleven miles distant from Domsey, began to take in the *Telegraph*.

Mr. Thornton commenced to look worried. The *Domsey Times* had always been a lucrative investment but now he was beginning to lose money over it.

True it was that he could well afford it, but the idea went against the grain, and at last he came to the conclusion that he must adopt some means of altering the state of affairs.

It was a sore blow to his pride after having held the field for twelve years to have to give in to a newcomer after two months.

Sadly, therefore, he sat down and indited the following letter:

Amfield House, near Domsey.

To the Proprietor of the Domsey Telegraph, *Domsey.*

SIR—*It must be apparent to you that there is no opening for two local papers in Domsey, and in consideration of that fact I beg to make the following proposal:*

That the Domsey Telegraph *and the* Domsey Times *be amalgamated and incorporated under one Proprietor and Editor, but that the original proprietors of the two papers receive a division of profits, such division to be arrived at by placing the accounts of the two journals in the hands of a trustworthy valuer, etc., etc., etc.*

In two or three days' time a reply came back from a London firm of solicitors who were empowered to act for the proprietor of the *Domsey Telegraph*. The letter was to the effect that their client would not consider for one moment the question of amalgamation, but he would be willing to be bought out.

Mr. Thornton was now at a critical piont. Either he must give in, and cease to issue the *Domsey Times*, or else he must agree to the said proposal.

Already people were quietly laughing at him, and he knew that the death of the *Domsey Times* would mean a great loss of prestige. So he took the bull by the horns and commenced negotiations for the purchase of the *Domsey Telegraph*.

The price asked was a high one—£500 more than he had anticipated paying. After some haggling he managed to reduce it by £150, but had to close at that figure.

So the *Domsey Times*, now somewhat glorified, remained the only local newspaper in that remarkable and somnambulistic town.

All this time Doris was worrying the roses from her cheeks through the absence of Jack. Never a word or a message had come from him, all she knew was that he had gone to London.

Mr. Thornton had been too much occupied by reason of his newspaper controversy to pay much attention to his daughter's looks, but now he had time to himself he was astonished to find how ill she was looking.

"Here," he said, when he had elicited the cause of her pale looks from her. "We'll have that young man back at once. I'll write him to-day."

But at that very moment a footman brought in the visiting-card of Mr. John Guthrie.

Doris hastily slipped upstairs.

"Well, sir," said Mr. Thornton, "what can I do for you?"

"Fulfil your part of our contract," was Jack's reply. "I have done my part."

"Indeed, and what have you done?"

"That!" cried Jack, as he handed Mr. Thornton the cheque with which he had paid for the *Telegraph*.

Mr. Thornton looked at it, and then his face went scarlet with suppressed rage.

"What!" he shrieked. "You did that?"

"Yes, sir. Good business, was it not?"

"Good business!" Mr. Thornton almost screamed. "You young——" He paused and considered for a moment. Then the angry look died away, and an amused twinkle appeared in his eyes.

"Well, after all," he said. "You've only done what I told you to do. Here, take this back."

He held out the cheque.

Jack took it, and deliberately tore it into several pieces.

"Now, sir, we're quits. I've had my turn and paid for it."

"No," cried Mr. Thornton. "You must not do that."

In vain he protested, Jack was obdurate.

"Well, my boy. You've been a bit smarter than your future father-in-law. Here's my hand on it. Now I will send Doris in to you."

Presently she came in, and Jack has said that the bliss of that reunion was worth the pain of the parting and absence.

With the aid of some of his journalistic friends and the outlay of some capital, Jack had found it very easy to produce the *Domsey Telegraph* and to make it a far better paper than the *Domsey Times*.

"Where there's a will there's a way"—even in Domsey—and generally everywhere when there's money to back the will.

E. Newton Bungey.

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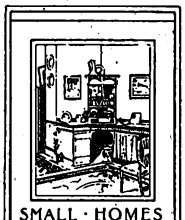

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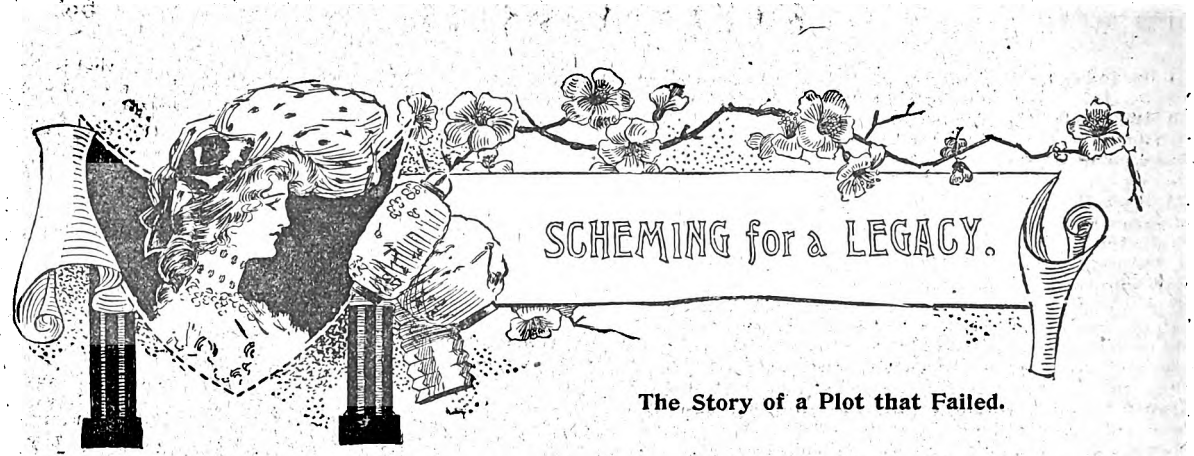

The Story of a Plot that Failed.

THE first time I met Mrs. Penthony she was—very naturally and properly, as it was only two months after Terry's death—clad in deepest widow's weeds. "My poor, dear husband," was written large all over her, from the orthodox crape bonnet on her head, to the dainty black-stockinged ankles revealed as she stepped out of the carriage.

We had not been aware of the existence of Terry's wife until she announced herself in a heart-broken letter to my father as Terry's widow, and then my mother insisted on inviting her at once to Penthony Court.

We had all adored Terry—my father, mother, and myself. In earliest years I had trotted after him, his devoted little slave, and, when asked my name, had always responded, "Terry's sister," instead of the proper reply, "Diana Penthony."

Terry, however, had not turned out quite as he ought to have done, and after a somewhat lurid career, he was sent abroad with a tutor, to rusticate in a quiet German village, from which he sent my mother repentant and affectionate letters. It was a terrible shock to us all when we had a wire from Mr. Green, the tutor, announcing our poor, dear boy's sudden death, followed by a letter telling us that the authorities had insisted on the interment taking place within the next two days.

My father was prostrate with grief, and his next heir and nearest male relative, my cousin, Dare Penthony, was in India, so poor Terence was buried far away from us all without one of his kith and kin to follow him to the grave.

Six weeks later, Mrs. Terence Penthony's letter amazed us all. Of course Terry, being twenty-four, might quite easily have got married without seeking his parent's consent, but there seemed no motive for secrecy.

Katherine Penthony was, she told us, the daughter of an independent gentlemen, who had settled in the remote German village for his health's sake, and she certainly wrote us in the style and handwriting of a gentlewoman.

"Poor, dear boy," sighed my mother, "it seems strange he did not tell us of it."

"It seems her father died very suddenly," said my father, glancing over the letter again, "and Terry asked her to marry him at once because she was alone, and then the poor boy's death followed before he could announce the marriage to us."

"Poor child, it is very sad for her," murmured my mother.

"She doesn't seem to know that Terry came into ten thousand pounds on his marriage," my father went on.

"Did he really?" asked Dare, who had come back from India, on receiving my father's summons.

"His godfather left him ten thousand pounds, to be paid over to him on his marriage day, not before, and to pass to his widow, if she survived him. It was rather a queer idea, wasn't it?"

"Rather," said Dare. "But you are not going to accept this woman's unsupported statement that she is Terry's widow, are you?"

My mother fired up at the idea of doubting the poor girl's word, and my father picked up another letter with the same post-mark, and opened it.

"As it happens, my dear Dare," he said quietly, "we are not required to accept Katherine's unsupported testimony. This letter is from Green—Terry's tutor, you know, giving a fuller and more detailed account of the marriage than the poor, broken-hearted child has been able to do. It seems that they fell in love with each other at first sight, but that the father's sudden death precipitated matters. Terry's own death occurred but two days after his marriage, before he had time to write to us. Read for yourself." He handed the letter to Dare, who glanced over it, and then passed it on to my mother.

An invitation was sent to my sister-in-law by return of post, with the result that, within three weeks, she arrived in the deepest possible mourning, and with a face expressive of the acutest grief.

But she was very beautiful. I had been in the habit of considering myself rather a pretty little person, but I faded into insignificance beside Katherine. What was my round, rosy face compared with that faultless oval of hers? How commonplace were my grey eyes beside her large, velvety black orbs. My nut-brown curls seemed unworthy of admiration, seen near the heavy, rich black locks that crowned her small, graceful head. And how short and stumpy I looked beside her tall, slim, exquisitely graceful figure.

She took us all by storm. Her manner was perfect, sweet, gentle, mournful, pathetic. My father and mother adored her, and wished her to make her home entirely with us, but, to my secret joy, she refused. She would spend every summer with us, she promised, but there was an old uncle in Krahwinkel—the German town where she had met Terry—with whom she wished to make her home while he lived. It might not be long, for he was over eighty, but, while he lived, her duty, she thought, was to him.

So it was agreed that she should remain with us until arrangements could be made for paying over to her the ten thousand pounds, due to her as Terry's widow, and then she should be free to return to Krahwinkel until next summer, when she would come again to Penthony Court.

I secretly hoped affairs would be arranged very soon, so that she might go, for, however much I might have liked her had she not been such a general favourite, it was really more than an ordinary, flesh-and-blood girl could stand to see her winning the affections of both father and mother, and, far worse, of the young man on whom I had set my own heart, and whom I had fondly imagined to be my own lover.

He had certainly been very tender to me in my first grief at my brother's death, and we had got upon very affectionate terms before the arrival of the disconsolate widow. Was she so very disconsolate though? Were my jealous eyes mistaken when I saw glances cast at Dare—glances which no disconsolate widow ought to throw to another man, much less a man who was rightfully another woman's property,

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Quite three months had passed before the lawyers had everything in order, and were ready to hand over the ten thousand pounds to Terry's widow. The money was, by her request, to be paid into the hands of a banker in London, there to await a suitable investment.

It was a lovely evening in mid-September, a glorious harvest moon shone down on the flower-beds on the lawn at Penthony Court, lighting them up with its pale but distant beams, and leaving the terrace and house in the shadow.

I had been at the piano ever since dinner, playing favourite bits of music to my parents, but my attention was chiefly occupied in wondering with all my jealous, wounded heart, what had become of Dare and Katherine. An hour ago, they had gone out of the low French window on to the terrace to look at the moon, and apparently they were still looking at it.

I stole a glance at the other occupants of the room. My father had dropped asleep over his newspaper, my mother was absorbed in a difficulty she had encountered in her lace-work. They would not notice, if I slipped out after the missing couple. Go I must; my heart was on fire with jealousy, anger, and pain.

Two figures, both dark, were at the end of the terrace, where the steps led down to the lawn, and the moon was shining full on them. They were leaning against the balustrade, so absorbed in each other's society that they did not notice my approach. I did not mean to become an eavesdropper, but there was a big lump in my throat as I saw their loving attitude, which quite prevented speech, and before I could swallow it down and call attention to my presence, Dare had bent forward and kissed the glowing cheek so near his own, and I stood frozen to the spot. My worst fears were realised; the man I loved was the lover of my brother's widow.

"Kate, darling," he was saying, when, to a certain degree, I came to myself, "you do love me, don't you? It's too early to talk of a second marriage as yet, I know, but give me a word of hope."

"Don't be ridiculous," Kate's sweet voice replied. "You know you love Diana."

"I thought I did," Dare answered slowly. "Yes, Kate, you are right; I thought I loved little Di; she is a sweet, dear little girl, but you—Kate, you are a goddess. My beautiful, my glorious love, kiss me."

With a faint cry I drew back, and fled in the other direction, down into the park. How could I bear it? My grief for my brother's death had been hard to bear, but what had that been compared with the pain that his widow had brought upon me? As I ran sobbing through the park I suddenly heard a man's step approaching me, and before I could stop myself I ran headlong into the arms of someone coming from the West Lodge.

"Di, my little Di," said a familiar voice in my ears, and dear, well-known lips pressed mine. "Well, little sister, is it you?"

"Terry, Terry, *Terry*," I cried. "Oh, how can it be you? You are dead."

"Dead!"

He released me in his surprise, and faced me in amazed silence. The moon showered its beams full on his astonished face, and showed it to me as clearly as if it had been daylight. It certainly was my brother Terence; my brother whom we all believed to be buried in a little German village, and whose widow was now on the terrace with the man I loved.

"Dead!" he repeated, almost in a whisper. "Diana, what do you mean?"

"Well, anyhow, your widow is here," I said confusedly.

"My widow!" he echoed. "Dear little Diana, what is the matter with you? My widow? How *can* I have a widow? I never was married—nor am I dead, as you can see."

"Well, she *says* she's your widow," I said, doubtfully, "and she *says* you're dead. And Mr. Green says you're dead."

"Ah, that I understand," replied Terry, with a peculiar look. "Does mother think I'm dead?"

"Why, of course, Terry," I cried; "you mustn't go to her now—the shock might kill her. I'll prepare her. But—who's Kate?"

"Kate? A great, strapping creature, is she? With black hair and eyes? Handsome, but coarse?"

"Yes, that's Kate," I replied, greatly consoled by this description of her triumphant charms. How I wished that Dare could have heard it."

"That's Green's sister. I'll tell you all about it, Di, and then you must break the news of my return to my father and mother, and I'll make a clean breast of it to them. Come and sit down here. I know very well why she's posing as my widow here. We weren't long in Krahwinkel—why did my father send me to such a dull hole?—before I found out that Green wasn't a bit what he pretended to be, and he found the place as unendurable as I did, so we soon set off together for Monte Carlo, where I lost heavily. Kate, Green's sister, was at the tables, too, and Green, who knew that by my godfather's will I came in for that money on my marriage, tried his best to bring about a match between us. But I was not having any. She's just the kind of girl I can't stand at any price. Well, I had lost so much money that I had got into a regular fix, and I worried myself into a brain fever over it. When I came to myself, I was in a miserable little hut, where I had no idea, with a dirty old woman gabbling Italian to me. After a bit, Green turned up, and told me that he was going to keep me prisoner there until I promised to marry his sister. One way or another he did manage to keep me there—I was very weak with the fever, remember—until three days ago, when he also took ill with some kind of fever, and I managed to escape, while the old woman was attending to him. Now, dear, run off to the house, I can't wait any longer. Break the news to my father and mother, but don't give Kate Green any warning, if you can avoid it."

How I managed to tell them the glad news, I don't know, but I did somehow, and in a very short time Terry was in his mother's arms, back from the dead!

The routing of Terry's widow followed shortly afterwards, and was undertaken by Terry himself.

I was not present at the scene, and only know that she was permitted to remain at Penthony Court that night, and that no proceedings were to be taken against either her or her brother. She went off by an early train next morning, and we never heard any more of either brother or sister.

As for Dare, he was first stunned and then remorseful for his treatment of me, but I am of a very forgiving disposition, and I soon pardoned his brief infatuation.

In fact, I may as well confess that when he asked me to prove my forgiveness by becoming his wife, I only required a judicious amount of pressing before I faltered out a shy but very willing "Yes."

It was very lucky that Terry returned at the moment he did, lucky for himself, myself, and—Dare!

Vera Serkoff.

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POWERFUL NEW ROMANCE. **STARTS TO-DAY.**

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

FIRST CHAPTER.

Lady Medcalf-Mears' "At Home."

"I say, Maud, you know everybody in town. Tell me who that chap is?"

"Which 'chap,' my dear Captain Iddison?" replied Lady Maud.

"Oh, look here, Maud, you needn't be so awfully formal with a fellow, you know. Hang it all, we're——"

"Yes, of course, my dear Percy," interrupted Lady Maud Hyam, the latest, and, as some said, the most beautiful of the season's *fiancées*, "but I was only following your own example, and, after all, formality has its uses even between engaged people."

"All right," replied Captain Iddison. "You know I don't pretend to be much good at formality."

"No, my dear boy, I know you aren't, and I am very glad of it," replied Lady Maud, dropping her fan lightly on the broad shoulder of the young Hercules who was sitting by her side in Lady Medcalf-Mears' big drawing-room in Lowndes Square. "You are a good deal better at fighting, and that's why—well, I suppose that's why I like you. At any rate, it's one of the reasons. And now which fellow is it that you mean?"

"Why, that one, of course," he replied, so far forgetting his good manners as to half point with his finger at what was certainly the most distinguished male figure in the big, crowded drawing-room.

"Oh, yes!" she said, with a little note of awe in her voice. "That? Why, Percy, do you mean to say that although you returned only a fortnight ago from the ends of the earth, you haven't yet made the acquaintance of the lion of the season? Don't you know that Lady Medcalf-Mears always has the newest and biggest lion in the whole social menagerie at her 'At homes,' especially just when the season's beginning? That is Mr. Isolo Staunton, the modern Monte Christo, as they call him.

"He is one of the biggest scores that even our experienced hostess has ever made. He is a man—you have only got to look at him to see that—six feet one in his boots if he's an inch, and built to scale; a millionaire no one knows how many times over—and something else which raises him far above the ordinary rut of men and millionaires—a mystery."

"What's that?" murmured the Honourable Percy, leaning if possible a little closer to her and looking into the beautiful face which was so temptingly near his own. "A mystery—what do you mean by that? I should hardly have thought that a man with a past that no one knows anything at all about, if that's what you mean, would have been taken up by Lady Mary, however big a pot he might be in other ways."

"My dear boy," she laughed, "you ought to know that a man with an unknown past, if he has done something, or made himself something, is one of the most successful social exhibits that the modern hostess can put on show!"

"Is that all you have to tell me about the new lion? You see I have only been back a fortnight, and I have spent about eight days of it up at Harrowby, which is nearly a day's journey each way. Can't you tell me anything more about him? I don't know why I should take such an interest in the subject, but somehow I do."

"Yes," said Lady Maud with a little toss of her golden-crowned head, "if he were a woman and as good-looking as he is as a man, I should almost be inclined to be jealous, but really I can't tell you anything more than I have done, except what everybody can tell you at the clubs.

"He is, as I have told you, a multi-millionaire. No one knows who he is, what he is, or where he came from. Of course, without his millions, I suppose no one would ever have heard of him, but with the millions to gild what everyone admits to be a very interesting personality—well, here he is, Isolo Staunton.

"But stop, here comes Mr. Ellerton. You know him, of course—the only son of Sir Wilfrid Ellerton. I think Sir Wilfrid is one of the men we really ought to be proud of. He began life, they say, as a fitter, or whatever they call it, in a machine shop at Ellerton, in Yorkshire. You know such a lot of people in the North are named after the places they live in, or else the places are named after some far-away ancestor who made the place, and so they must be a sort of aristocracy of their own kind with scores of generations behind them. But you can see for yourself," she continued in a lower tone as she rose and held out her hand.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Ellerton, I hope you haven't been here very long, or I should feel inclined to be offended with you for not having come to speak to me before. You don't know Mr. Iddison—I beg his pardon, *Captain* Iddison? He is only just back from Somaliland, so you may as well be introduced now."

The Honourable Percy Iddison, captain of His Majesty's Engineers, V.C., D.S.O., and special service officer in South Africa, shook hands warmly with Ellerton.

The handshake didn't mean much, but the look that was in their eyes convinced both of them in the same moment that each had met a man, and each instinctively liked the other.

What Percy Iddison saw, when he shook hands with the son of the man who had taken the world by the throat for the sake of his son, was just this:

A straight, upstanding, square-jawed, broad-browed, curly, chestnut-haired young fellow of about twenty-four, a year less than his own age, with dark eyebrows over-arching grey-blue Celtic eyes. A sort of man that he would like to have

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with him in a tight corner, or meet face to face in what he would have called a really good scrap.

"I see that you know each other already," said Lady Maud, with a little laugh rippling through her words. "I suppose it is a case of when man meets man—now, isn't that quite the prettiest compliment that woman could have paid both of you?"

"Really, Lady Maud, I am afraid you are quite too flattering, at least to one of us," said Ellerton, with a glance which the other man would have resented if he hadn't felt that he was quite safe, "still——"

"Thanks, but don't say any more just now, because—well, I think other things are going to happen. Now, Percy, you are going to have a new sensation. Excuse me, just one moment, Mr. Ellerton, here is Lady Mary bringing the lion of the evening to be introduced."

As she said this Wilfrid Ellerton turned his head towards Lady Mary Medcalf-Mears and the Lion. As he did so, Iddison noticed that there was a streak of almost white hair running from the front of the left ear down almost to the base of the skull, which showed up like a streak of white mist against a bank of blue-grey thundercloud. His hair was dark chesnut, almost black in certain lights, and almost golden in others.

"Rather curious, that. Still, I've seen that sort of thing happen in a month or so in the field, but not go in a streak like that. Wonder what's been the matter with him. Not an Army man, so he can't have got it in that way!"

These were the thoughts which ran through Percy Iddison's brain as he shook hands with Wilfrid Ellerton and then turned to greet his hostess, Lady Mary Medcalf-Mears, who had brought her latest lion to be introduced to her most interesting, although, perhaps, not her most distinguished guests.

"I don't think you all know each other yet," said Lady Mary. "Mr. Isolo Staunton, Lady Maud Hyam, Captain Percy Iddison, Mr. Wilfrid Ellerton, and *vice versâ*. Well, now, you know yourselves as far as the conventionalities go, and the rest, I think, I can safely leave in your own hands. You see, I am rather busy this afternoon, and so I know that you will excuse me."

With that she vanished into the throng of the other guests with grace that no other woman in London had been able to copy.

The preliminaries of polite conversation-making were hardly over when a famous Hungarian violinist, accompanied by an almost equally famous German pianist, began to play. This, of course, put an end to all talk save among those who, in spite of their breeding, were yet sufficiently ill-mannered to think that the music—which was costing their hostess something like five guineas a minute—was only intended to mask the muttered commonplaces with which they were wasting time until it was possible to make a decent leave-taking.

"Shall we go and listen?" said Lady Maud, rising with a look, that was practically a command, at Iddison. "I love the violin."

The others who were seated rose also, and they drifted along with the tide, which was flowing with a gentle frou-frou of silken underskirts, into the music-room overlooking the pretty, old-fashioned garden.

SECOND CHAPTER.

A Spectre from the Past.

But there was one man in that company for whom just now the sweetest strains that genius could win from the most perfect instruments were only utter discords, tormenting almost to madness.

Percy Iddison was not the only man who had noticed that curious white streak among Wilfrid Ellerton's chestnut curls. Isolo Staunton had seen it to, and he had all too little reason to wonder how it came there. As soon as the music was over he made his adieux and went out into the street, staring about him with wavering eyes like a man newly awakened in a strange world. When his brougham came up to the door he dismissed his man, saying that he preferred to walk home, and telling him he was not required.

Isolo Staunton was a man of action, as well as of thought, and when he was thinking really

"Good afternoon, Mr. Ellerton," said Lady Maud, "let me introduce you to Captain Iddison."

hard it was also absolutely necessary for him to have his muscles as well as his nerves at work, and so he walked.

His brain had never been working with such fierce intensity as it was working now as he made his way along the crowded pavements of Sloane Street and Knightsbridge. Much of his life had been passed in the wilderness, and now he felt a desperate longing for the solitude of the wilderness again, and the solace which that solitude brings.

He turned up into the Park past Apsley House, and walked across to the Marble Arch. So far there was only one thought in his brain, only one thing that his eyes really saw—that thin streak of white hair running through the closely-cropped chestnut curls of Wilfrid Ellerton. It was something like a brief but ever-recurring nightmare to him.

At the corner of Edgware Road he took an omnibus to Cricklewood.

He got out into the open country as soon as he could. He knew it had to come, and with that primeval instinct which possesses every human being, he wanted to get away from his fellow men and fight his trouble out in solitude.

For an hour he walked on, a strange figure, clad, as he was in his light grey frock suit and a glossy hat, which was now tilted back at an angle which would have made men in Pall Mall look round at him, his hands behind his back, his head bent forward, seeing nothing but the road over which he was walking.

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Then out of the dust which rose on the wind blowing behind him, certain shapes began to form themselves. The fields and the hedges vanished. In their place came a wide, blue-grey expanse of water.

The sky-dome above was blue-grey also. Its colour had been burnt out of it by the fierce rays of the sun that was blazing overhead. What was left of paint on the whale boat was crinkling up into blisters. There was a man lying forward, just as he had dropped off the seat. He was the second who had died that day. The other had seen visions of islands, green with verdure, fed by clear springs, and he had drunk the seawater and had presently dropped himself overboard, raving mad, to drink more of it, and so find the common death of the castaway.

He was steering, and beside him was an axe, the symbol of the power which he had taken into his own hands when the boat was cast adrift from the sinking ship which had been hurled hundreds of miles before one of those gales which come up from the Antarctic.

On the mid-thwart there was a man sitting. His arms were on the gunwale and his head lay loosely between them, moving with every motion of the boat. He was half dead already and it would not take very much to finish the business with him. Forward on the next thwart there was a boy of about fourteen, dying, but still strong with the miraculous vitality of youth. There was enough of biscuits and tinned meat and water to last one man for another fortnight or so, but not enough for three. He was half mad with the insanity of thirst aggravated by the horrible temptation to drink by the pint the precious water which his discipline had so far limited to a few spoonfuls. He saw himself let go of the tiller and rise wearily from his seat. He heard himself say:

"It's no good, Willy. Jack's gone and old Tom is about finished. You and I had better make an end of him and finish the cruise somehow between us. We have not stuff enough for three. There might be for two."

Then the boy jumped up and came at him with a sudden flush in his white cheeks, and a sudden energy in his whole body.

"No," he muttered hoarsely, the words coming thickly and slowly from between his parched lips. "No, I see what you mean, but you sha'n't. It is murder. It doesn't matter whether he is half dead or not. It is murder all the same. You —You shan't do it. It's murder, I tell you!"

He picked up the axe as the boy jumped at him. He tripped over the half dead body of the man on the middle thwart, and as he went down the axe fell. He saw a streak of red among the chestnut curls and then the sky and ocean seemed to come together.

He stumbled forward, lifted the axe again and struck the prostrate man. As he lifted it once more his own brain seemed to snap with a bang—and there the scene ended.

The curtain of forgetfulness dropped swiftly upon the stage of memory. The scene vanished—and here he was again walking between the green English hedges with the broad fields on either side of him sloping upwards to the softly rounded tree-growing hills.

Isolo Zuarez, castaway and convict, was dead, once more. Isolo Staunton took off his hat, wiped his forehead, put his hat on again, thrust his hands into his pockets, and walked back to the Cricklewood Arms, saying to himself between his tightly clenched teeth:

"If he remembers well, I suppose it will mean I return to the Chinchas, again a convict. If he doesn't, so much the better. If I'd finished the job before I fainted no one could have traced me. Tom was dead and Willy was insensible, and I was mad when they picked us up. The axe had dropped overboard, and when the young beggar came to he remembered nothing.

"If he only has forgotten, then in just a few years more the world shall see another Napoleon—the uniter of a thousand warring interests, the director into a single channel of the energy which is now spent in conflicts which are as trifling as the quarrels of children in the gutter, the Creator of a new Power in the world, a Power which, directed as I will direct it, shall break the yoke which these Anglo-Saxons have put upon the necks of the nations, and make Spain once more what she was in the days of Cortez and Pizarro, Queen of the Seas and Mistress of East and West!"

THIRD CHAPTER.

Looking Backwards.

The key-note of Isolo Staunton's later existence had been independence. It did not matter to him whether the person with whom he had to deal for the moment was a man or a woman. He was wont to pride himself on the consciousness that in matters of business—he recognised no distinction of sex, and this, as many of his unsuccessful rivals were forced to admit, was a very great advantage to him. He could swindle a pretty duchess or get a Cabinet Minister into financial troubles which would be profitable to himself with just as light a heart as he would get the better of a German Jew financier.

He cared for nothing but money, and for what money could buy for him.

Although he possessed the genius of making money he also had the cleverness to see that it is not exactly money which makes one a power in the world, but rather the use that money is put to, and so he used the superfluity of his wealth wisely.

One of his carefully calculated extravagances was his turbine yacht *Isola*. She was a thousand-ton vessel and her engines were the latest development of the turbine principle of propulsion. Her lines were exquisite, she was a veritable aristocrat of the ocean and, although no one outside her officers and crew knew it, she was also the fastest craft in the world.

His little expedition to Cricklewood had really been one of the most strenuous experiences even in a life as full of living as his had been. He was just thirty-eight and he had begun to live at ten. His father had been a Scottish adventurer, called sometimes Staunton and sometimes Saunders, and Zuarez had been the Spanish disguise or semi-translation of the latter which he had adopted when he took the plunge into South American politics which, after a couple of bitterly fought revolutions, had resulted in his becoming first Vice-President and then President of Peru. He had married a very beautiful Spanish girl and Isolo, their only child, was both physically and mentally as good and as bad a compound of Scottish and Spanish American as could well have been produced from such a union. He had his father's inches, a good six feet of bone and muscle, his mother's features, but the shape of his head was Scottish in its squareness, and his hair was a crisp, curly, reddish-brown. The fire of the Spanish American was tempered by the cold, calculating genius of the Scotsman, strangely combined with the dreaminess of the Celt.

The second revolution had ended in utter ruin. His father had refused to believe in the failure of his cause, and so had delayed beyond reasonable limits his preparations for escaping with the Presidential plunder. The result was that he was caught and shot by the victorious revolutionists, and his plunder duly transferred to the pockets of his successor, and those who had helped him to overthrow the tyrant, and in the natural course of events some other tyrant was put in his place.

This had happened when the boy was ten years old, and after it had come five or six years of poverty and exile with his mother in Chili. Then his mother, the only human being he

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had ever loved, died, leaving him her own ideals and the lessons she had taught him as her only legacy, and after this had begun the wild life on the coast, now ashore and now afloat, a desperate gamble of liberty, and perhaps life, for sudden wealth, the living death of the Chincha Islands, the almost miraculous escape, a few years at sea, then the tragedy of the whale boat, and then the marvel which had laid the foundation of his present fortune, the extent of which no one but himself could measure, and of which no one save those in his inmost confidence knew the real sources.

So far for nearly fifteen years these fortunes had grown steadily and swiftly, and as the millions had piled themselves on each other the great ideal which he had inherited from his Spanish mother had come nearer and nearer to its longed-for fulfilment. Political and military agents all over the world had been working for years towards the same end under the orders of an unknown and invisible master. Diplomatists had found their negotiations shaped almost unconsciously by the same mysterious power and, in short, all the vast machinery that he had set in motion was working smoothly and well, when this spectre from the past had suddenly risen above the unclouded horizon and he saw not only the fabric of his life work but even his own liberty, nay, his very life itself, at the mercy of a lad of twenty-three.

The *Isola* was lying alongside Ocean Quay, Southampton, about a week after the reception, with steam up ready for one of those mysterious trips which periodically took her owner far away beyond the ken of the fashionable world of Europe.

Isolo Staunton was lying on a lounge in his exquisitely, though somewhat plainly appointed, private room at the after-end of the long, spacious promenade deck. It was entirely isolated from all the other saloons and state-rooms on the ship. It had double walls of steel and oak and double windows of thick plate glass through which no sound could penetrate, and it was generally understood on board the great yacht that when the Señor was in his sanctum no one was to approach him, or have any communication with him except by telephone from the captain's room under the navigating bridge. It was in fact the most perfect council chamber that any ruler of men crowned or uncrowned could have possessed, an inviolable sanctuary of secrets which the most ingenious curiosity must fail to penetrate.

The Señor was just now in earnest consultation with his principal counseller and only real confidant, a tall, sparely-built man of about fifty-five, whose delicately-cut, aquiline features, dark, piercing, though somewhat closely-set eyes, high, narrow forehead, and still dark, glossy hair only slightly frosted with grey at the temples proclaimed him a Castilian of the purest blood. This was Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia. He was the last remaining scion of one of those ancient Castilian families which had settled in Peru soon after the conquest, and had kept its proud blood pure by avoiding all inter-marriage. Like many other such families in South America, wars, revolutions and confiscations had reduced them to almost absolute poverty, but President Zuarez and Don Ramiero's father had been comrades in the revolution which placed him in power, and he had done much to restore the fortunes of the Valdez family. Comradeship in arms had led to complete personal devotion, and Valdez had become the President's one trusted counsellor as Ramiero was now the one confidant of Isolo Staunton.

He knew of the irregularities which had consigned the man whom Society called the modern Monte Christo to the sea-girt prison of the Chincha Islands, but in his eyes they were political offences against a usurping government, and therefore rather in the nature of virtues than of crimes. He knew also of the tragedy of the whaleboat—for Staunton never gave half confidences, knowing well how treacherous they are—and *that* he excused on the double ground of delirium and self-preservation. Under any circumstances the son of his father's friend and the benefactor of his house had a better right to live and do his great work in the world than a couple of common seamen and an insignificant ship's boy.

"Of course the great point is," said Staunton, after they had put in a few moments of hard thinking, "whether young Ellerton remembers me and the painful circumstances of our last meeting or not. If he doesn't, which is the same thing as saying that if that crack which I thought necessary to give him across the head has, as such a crack will do sometimes, cut that little piece out of his memory, I don't see that we need disquiet ourselves in vain about him."

"Pardon, Señor," interrupted Valdez, with grave deference, "but there I would say that you are going wrong at the very beginning. It is exactly in that case that I would counsel you to take the most prompt measures for his very necessary suppression."

"I am afraid I hardly follow you, my dear Ramiero," said Staunton, looking up quickly. "If the fellow remembers nothing, and he certainly didn't seem to have the ghost of a recollection of me the other day at Lady Mary's, what harm can he do? As far as that little incident is concerned it is as good as dead."

"For the present—yes," replied Valdez softly, as he rolled a little brown Peruvian cigarette between his tapering, long-nailed fingers, "but for all that his existence, or if you have scruples about proceeding to extremities, his continued existence in freedom, can nevertheless be nothing but a perpetual menace, not only to that great and glorious work to which you have devoted your life, but even to your life itself. Is he not the one living link which connects the present with the past? He knew, as you have told me, of your escape with Martinez from the islands, for Martinez had told the whole story in his delirium in the boat. He was on the ship which picked you up, and therefore he must have known that your story about the shipwreck was false—that you were not cast-away sailors but escaped convicts, wherefore his story of the real shipwreck and your rescue would be quite sufficient to connect you with the man who was sent for life to the Chinchas, to say nothing of the necessary abolition of your sometime accomplice, Martinez. No, no, Señor, memory or no memory, he is a living menace to you."

"And, therefore," said Staunton, after a long meditative pull at his cigar as he watched the blue rings curling up towards the maple panelled ceiling, "therefore, with your usual thoroughness of policy, I suppose you are going to counsel the completion of the work which the hatchet would have finished there and then, if I hadn't been faint with hunger and thirst, and dizzy with delirium. Frankly, I don't like the idea. I suppose I have become, if not more moral, at least more fastidious since those wild old days came to an end. I fight with money, with my own and other men's brains, not with hatchets. They are too much like the savage's tomahawk. In other words, I suppose I have become civilised. No, no, we must not talk about abolition. I will have no bloodshed until it becomes absolutely necessary. Ah! wait a moment, we ought to have some of the reports by this time. This may be something."

The telephone bell rang softly as he spoke. He got up and took the transmitter from the hook.

"Very well," he said, after listening for a few moments; "kindly ask Mr. Morton to come here."

He put the transmitter back and said, as he sat down:

"I had an idea it was Morton. As I told you, as soon as I made that unfortunate discovery, I put him on to look up the Ellerton family history with a special reference to Master Wilfrid's doings since he came back from sea. There he is! Would you mind opening the door, Ramiero?"

Valdez rose and noiselessly opened the double doors.

"Come in, Mr. Morton," said Staunton, leaning back on his sofa and lighting a fresh cigar.

The Honourable Reginald Morton, close-clipped, clean-shaven, well-set-up, and perfectly dressed walked in, with glossy hat in hand, as Valdez closed the doors behind him.

As he will play no insignificant part in the present narrative the reader may as well make his acquaintance here as elsewhere.

He was one of those social products which have come into being since the aristocrats opened their arms and their houses to the plutocrats. He was the younger son of Sir Reginald Wriothesley Morton, a baronet of long descent and ancient

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creation whose position in Society was rather too big for his means, and who was further burdened by the possession of three marriageable daughters who cost a great deal to keep in the social swim, and whose matrimonial prospects had remained at the vaguest for some four seasons. The elder son Wriothesley had inherited a nice little fortune from his grandmother and also occupied a very snug permanent secretaryship, and the two combined to raise him above the reach of financial temptation.

Reginald had begun the world with a good education, a very fair Oxford degree, perfect manners, a limitable assurance, and a very easy conscience. His leanings were towards finance, and his father's influence had got him a very decent berth in a big stockbroker's firm, and through this channel he had drifted into connection with Isolo Staunton, and so far now, as the world knew, he was one of the millionaire's confidential secretaries. As a matter of fact he was his social spy. His birth and breeding gave him the *entrée* to the most exclusive circles. He knew how to keep his eyes and his ears open and his mouth shut, and however unscrupulous he was in getting information it was part of his social creed to be absolutely true to his salt. At present the said salt was worth about two thousand a year to him, to say nothing of the good things he was always getting on to, the plums and currants, as it were, that were left behind when his employer had taken his own slice out of the financial cake.

"Good afternoon, Morton," said Staunton genially; "there's whisky and soda, help yourself and take a cigar. You've got some news, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Morton, putting down his hat and taking a cigar, "about the Ellertons, of course. Not very much that isn't generally known, I am afraid. They are not a family with secrets, you know. They are not old enough to have cupboards with skeletons in them. Sir Wilfrid makes no secret of his humble origin—rather glories in it, in fact, after the manner of self-made men who have had the good sense not to turn out misfits. I've traced the family tree back for three generations, and there the roots lose themselves in quite hopeless obscurity. Authentic history seems to begin with Sir Wilfrid and his son, and of course everyone knows who and what Sir Wilfrid is and was."

"Anything about the son?" asked Staunton carelessly. "I suppose he has not done anything to particularly distinguish himself yet, has he?"

"No," replied the spy, looking at the ash on his cigar; "his general reputation is almost monotonously excellent. His manners and breeding seem to point to some remote ancestry to which he has harked back. He's a sportsman, though, and does everything that a gentleman ought to know and do, a great favourite with women, whom he rather tolerates than worships, which is perhaps the only peculiar thing about him except the past."

"His past!" echoed Staunton, with a slight lift of his eyebrows. "Surely he is rather young to have a past, isn't he?"

"You've noticed that curious streak of white hair that he has over his left ear?"

"Yes," said Staunton, with a half-stifled yawn. "Has that anything to do with his past? I did notice it the other day, now I come to think of it."

"No, it isn't that, but it is connected with the only curious fact in the whole of my investigations."

"And that?"

"Well it seems that when he was quite a lad Master Wilfrid showed his independence in character by running away to sea. He got round the Horn and up to Valparaiso, and thence up to Callao and Peru, and then somewhere off the coast he got wrecked. He was saved with two or three sailors in a boat, went pretty nearly mad with hunger and thirst, and that's all he remembers, and he came to himself weeks afterwards in New York. He can't remember the name of the ship he was wrecked in or who got away with him in the boat. All he does know was what they told him on the ship that picked him up, that there was one man lying dead in the boat and another dying, and that he had a cut in his skull that would have let the life out of anything but a boy. When the cut healed, curiously enough the hair grew over it again quite white. The other fellow who lived was quite a harmless lunatic and remembered nothing. They lost him in New York. That was Master Wilfrid's little mystery of the sea. But anyhow, it is true because he told me himself."

"Thank you, Morton," said Staunton, with an air of boredom which was so admirably simulated that it looked as though he were trying to disguise it. "I'm afraid your investigations have not been very fertile, though, of course, you have found out everything that there was to find. Your last item is of course romantic, if unimportant, still it is interesting as a curious little bit of psychology. Did he tell you, by the way, whether anything had been tried to get his lost memory back."

"Well," replied the spy, "of course his father wanted all sorts of things done, but Wilfrid absolutely refused to have his skull fooled about with. He argued that, after all, it didn't matter having those few weeks cut out of his life. The episode was over, and everybody connected with it was dead, except himself. His brain wasn't injured—as it certainly was not seeing what he has done with it since—and the result has been that he has had his own way, and that is about the end of it."

"A wise decision," said Staunton carelessly. "I'm going for a couple of months' cruise, and if you care to take a holiday for that time in your usual social happy hunting ground I hope you will do so. And now, if you really won't have a whisky and soda I needn't detain you any longer."

FOURTH CHAPTER.

Sentence of Living Death.

"Well, friend Ramiero, what do you think of that?" said Staunton as Morton disappeared, and Valdez closed the double doors behind him, "there doesn't seem to be very much danger as long as my late shipmate adheres to that very convenient resolution of his, not to let the doctors make experiments with his skull. That I think relieves me from the disagreeable necessity of adopting your unpleasantly drastic proposal as to speedy and permanent abolition."

"I am afraid I cannot see eye to eye with you there, señor," said Valdez, meditatively rolling another of his everlasting little brown cigarettes. "My own opinion is the same as it was before, and if anything stronger."

"But how can that possibly be when the fellow has absolutely forgotten about everything that happened then?" exclaimed Staunton, a trifle impatiently.

"A danger that is only latent, señor," replied Valdez slowly, "is not a danger which has been abolished. What I mean is that this young man's memory of those few weeks, which means as he thinks so little to him, and which, as you know, means so much to you, may have been totally destroyed. On the other hand it may only be in abeyance."

"You mean, of course," said Staunton, with a faint echo of anxiety in his voice, "that if Master Wilfrid were to meet with another accident to his head, say a fall in the hunting field, rendering an operation necessary, the doctors might insist on operating upon that part now injured? Well, granted such a remote contingency might possibly come to pass, I don't see how we are going to prevent it, unless by means which I will really not consent to."

"There are others not quite so drastic," murmured the Spaniard in a gently suggestive tone. He paused for a few moments, but Staunton made no sign, and he went on speak-

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ing, now quickly and earnestly. "You must forgive my insistence, señor, but this, as you must see, is not a matter to be played with. Who is this young man, or what is his family to you or to us? His family are nothing. He is a constant source of danger. Think of it, I pray you. All the splendid promise of your life work, your liberty, perhaps your very life, depends perhaps upon the continued pressure of a little splinter of bone on that boy's brain. Even if he had a serious illness, say a fever of some sort, the injury would at once be aggravated. The doctors would at once inquire into the cause. For my part I am perfectly certain as to what they would find, and, therefore, as to what they would do, and Wilfrid Ellerton would rise from his bed with those few weeks put back into his life. What, I ask you, señor, in all earnestness, might be the possible results of such a recovery to you and to us? And then," he went on with a sudden softening and lowering of his tone, "there is the Señorita Mercedes. What would become of all the brilliant prospects that lie before her if Wilfrid Ellerton became able to tell the story of those two or three weeks, and if the Peruvian Minister in London demanded an inquiry? I need not remind you that once suspected, not even your millions would buy indemnity for the son of the man they still call the tyrant Zuarez."

"Heavens, no!" exclaimed Staunton, getting on to his feet and thrusting his hands into his trousers' pockets. "No, you are right. Whatever happens there must be no danger to Mercedes' future."

He began to walk up and down the room, his hands still deep in his pockets, and his eyes fixed on the dull red Turkey carpet. Valdez rolled and lit another cigarette, and smoked in silence. He knew his chief's mind too well to interrupt the train of thought which he had set in action, and he was right, for Isolo Staunton was thinking quite as hard just now as he had done that day in the lanes and fields of Cricklewood. For him the whole world only held one human being whom he loved with the passion of absolutely disinterested devotion, and that was his beautiful nineteen-year-old daughter Mercedes, a child of a boy and girl marriage, born only a year before the heavy hand of the law had fallen upon him and thrust him into the living grave of the Chinchas. Her mother had died of grief and shame, and some had whispered of starvation, too, during his captivity, and it was not until ten years later, when the foundations of his mysteriously sudden fortune had been laid, that his agents had been able to trace her to the convent school of La Merced in Lima for orphan girls, and been allowed to take her away to the care of a father who was obliged to remain nameless, leaving a splendid contribution to the school endowment in exchange for her.

Every advantage that love could suggest or money could buy had been lavished on her since then. This season she had made an informal, but brilliant, entry upon the social stage. Next year she was to be presented by a Duchess and an aunt of a Cabinet Minister, and already her extreme beauty, enhanced if possible by the golden halo of her father's uncounted millions, had set busy tongues wagging as to the magnificence of the social future which might be hers if she chose. Certainly this exquisite girl, with her delicate and yet radiant Andalusian beauty, made more bewitching yet by the dash of Celtic fire, this daughter of the great financier who was also the friend and confidant of rulers and statesmen, might surely look high.

And for her, his beautiful, idolised Mercedes, to find herself banished from that brilliant-seeming world, whose confines she was only just crossing, as the daughter of an escaped convict and the murderer of his companions. For her to endure the agony of seeing him, the father whom she adored, and the father whom she honoured above all other men, as it were, stripped naked in the world's market-place amidst the jeers and laughter of his rivals and enemies, and taken from her for ever either to the scaffold or to the long despair of the living death—no, anything better than that. Don Ramiero had kept his best argument to the last, and he had got it home. Whatever there might be necessary to prevent it, that catastrophe at least must not happen. Of what consequence was this lad's life or a dozen lives for the matter of that in comparison with the present and future happiness of his Mercedes?

Mercedes' right hand was lying on the rails. Ellerton's hand fell gently upon it, and the next second his arm would have been around her waist.

He stopped opposite Valdez and said quietly:

"Yes, my friend, you are right, that must not be. Rather than risk any danger to her I would even go to the extremity you suggested. At the same time I must remind you that even with the facilities which we have at our disposal it is not the easiest thing in the world to arrange for the disappearance of the son and heir of one of the best known men in the country. We are not in Peru, you know, nor have we got him there. Mere assassination, I think you will agree with me, is not to be thought of in such an absurdly over-civilised country as this, and as far as I can see deportation would be every bit as difficult and just as risky. Have you any idea on the subject?"

"I have been thinking, señor," replied Valdez, after a few meditative puffs, "that it would not be altogether impossible to enlist this inconvenient young man in our company of submarine toilers up north yonder. They, as you know, are to be trusted utterly since faith with them is a matter not only of wealth and comfort, but, as they well know, of life and death, and once among them down yonder in the bowels of the earth, fifty fathoms beneath the bottom of the North Sea, he would be as safe as though the condors had already

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picked his bones at the bottom of one of the gorges of the Andes."

"Friend Ramiero," said Staunton, dropping on the sofa and again taking out a fresh cigar, "allow me to congratulate you upon a most excellent idea. If you could only see your way to carrying it out without arousing suspicions, you will have made me your debtor for life. Permanent exile in the home of our trusty Cyclops will meet the case much more decently than assassination. We could make him work too. They say he has quite a hereditary genius for engineering, and as for escape, he might as well try to get out of a diving bell at the bottom of the ocean. The only question is to get him there. Have you any idea on the subject?"

"It may be difficult, but it may not be impossible," replied Valdez musingly. "Of course the main point is to get him on board the *Isola* without the knowledge of any of his acquaintances. Then the matter would be as easy as taking him into one room from another. Or, stay, permit me a few moments' thought. I think I see a means of arranging his disappearance, which will be as satisfactory to us as it will be convincing to the young gentleman's relatives and friends."

For the next five minutes or so Don Ramiero sipped his wine, puffed at his cigarette, and stared with fixed pupils at a little gem of marine painting on the wall opposite to him. Staunton saw that his active, subtle brain was hard at work, and so he respected his silence. Presently Ramiero dropped his cigarette in the ash tray, moistened his lips with wine, and said as quietly as though he were proposing a most ordinary commercial deal instead of a project for destroying the happiness of a family and condemning a bright young life full of the promise of youth, happiness and usefulness to the misery of a living death, to a doom worse even than that of the felon in penal servitude:

"I think I have it. I know you have always believed as I have done that the boldest measures are after all the safest and the best. I propose, therefore, that you should put off our trip to the South for a little, as you can easily do since they have abundance of metal to work on down yonder, take the *Isola* round to Cowes for a week, and meanwhile, let the señorita send out invitations in your name for a trip afterwards, say to the Fjords of Norway, and see that Mr. Ellerton junior is one of the party. Our friend Morton can easily manage that for you. I don't think there will be much difficulty in getting a party for the *Isola*, especially with the señorita as hostess. Half London will envy those who are invited.

"If you will arrange that, señor, and leave the rest to me, I think I shall be able so to control circumstances, that one night there shall be a cry of 'Man overboard!' raised possibly by myself. At the same time, or soon after, there may be a little accident to the engines which will make it necessary for us to come to at our old anchorage for an hour or so. I need hardly say that the man had not gone overboard, he will be below in a certain chamber that I need not mention, being duly prepared for a little dive in his sleep—and when he wakes it will be in the under world which owns you for its master. I trust you follow me?"

"Yes," said Staunton briskly, "I do. You are a genius, Ramiero. We will do it."

FIFTH CHAPTER.

Love at Second Sight.

"After all it must seem even to you—you who have seen so much of the world and all the chances and changes of this transitory life, if I may say so without irreverence—that we should meet again under such wonderfully altered circumstances. You don't seem even yet to quite recognise it, but I can assure you that it really is so.

"You were the boy and I was the girl. Surely you remember that afternoon when the Chilenos sacked and burnt Chorillos—when the warships were firing from the sea and the shells were bursting among the houses, blowing their roofs off—not that they mattered much, for you must remember that it never rains there, and many of them were only thatched with reeds—and how the walls of the houses burst out as though a volcano had broken out under them as it did once at Arequipa, and how a scream came through the air, and you, yes, I am sure it was you, caught a little girl—that was I—round the waist and jumped off the pier into the water with her and swam back to the beach—and how we found afterwards that the shell had smashed everything into ruins and killed everyone just there on the promenade in the front of the Marine Hotel. They told me afterwards what a dreadful ruin it was. But surely you remember, don't you?"

"Remember, of course I do. As if anyone could forget a thing like that. Yes, I can see every detail of it now. I remember the dull, hoarse bang of the gun and the scream of the shells in the air—and you, were you really the little girl that I got hold of and jumped into the sea with, because I thought it was going to kill us?"

"Us! I don't—or at least I don't think I thought then, Mr. Ellerton, that you were thinking very much about *us*—"

At that instant the sentence was cut short by the sudden flashing of the electric lights along the promenade deck of the *Isola*, on which Mercedes Staunton and Wilfrid Ellerton were standing, leaning on the rails just under the port end of the navigating bridge as the yacht was swirling smoothly eastward and northward along the Hampshire coast with the Spithead forts about three miles behind her.

As the lights gleamed out about them their eyes met, and for the first time in his life Wilfrid Ellerton looked into the eyes of a woman and saw in their deep, dark depths that revelation which comes at least once in his life to every man, and Mercedes, as she looked up into his, saw that which comes, alas, not always to every woman.

The distance between two human souls is really greater than that between the planets or the stars, and yet in an instant it may be bridged over infinitely more swiftly than the ray of light can connect world with world or sun with sun.

Thousands of millions of human beings have lived upon earth knowing as little of each other and caring as little as though they had lived upon different worlds, and yet in millions of cases it has happened that two of these beings have been brought together, oftentimes from the uttermost ends of the earth—and instantly, as they have looked into each other's eyes for the first time, the distance that was between them has been annihilated, and their souls have come together.

Between man and man and woman and woman, this coming together is called friendship, between man and woman it is called love, the greatest and the holiest and most sacred of all those mighty mysteries with which this little commonplace, human life of ours is so strangely surrounded.

Had the revelation come to them under different circumstances; had they been walking over one of the lonely moorlands, whose bleak solitude and lonely beauty formed Wilfrid Ellerton's earliest recollections, or along one of the high dykes dividing the rice fields and the cane patches which make green the valley of the Rimac from the sea into the grey-brown, barren hills of the Andes, then what their souls had said to each other with their eyes would have been repeated by their lips both in words and in that more eloquent language of love in which the lips are silent.

But the sudden flash of the electric light along the deck, followed by the sound of laughter and conversation as some of the *Isola's* company came out of the big drawing-room on deck, made that impossible. In a few moments they had ceased to be alone and were part of this same company, for nowhere is solitude more difficult than on board ship.

Mercedes' hand was lying on the rails. Wilfrid looked at it for just a moment. The next his own right hand fell gently upon it. If they had been alone his left arm would have been round her waist, and many things about to happen would never have come to pass. As it was there was only time for a swift pressure and another glance from soul to

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soul through their eyes, and they had to leave the rail with the fateful words unspoken, so that Mercedes might join her guests and continue her duties as hostess.

For the next two days Wilfrid lived in a state of mental exaltation, which was no less wonderful than it was delightful to him. When he met Mercedes on deck the next morning before breakfast, she was walking arm-in-arm with Lady Maud Hyam, who, with her beloved young Hercules and several other members of Lady Medcalf-Mears' very exclusive set, were guests on board the yacht.

It was impossible, in view of her own recent experiences, for Lady Maud not to know the meaning of the swift half-shy, half-eager glance which passed between them as he raised his cap and said "good morning." She pressed Mercedes' arm ever so slightly, and as Mercedes turned and looked at her with a quick, bright flush and a startled expression in her eyes, she laughed, and said:

"Good morning, Mr. Ellerton, isn't this weather perfectly glorious? And what a lot of good it seems to be doing everybody. Just look what a lovely colour our charming hostess has got."

"Yes," replied Ellerton, rather awkwardly, for such a straight-spoken man, "but you see, Lady Maud, that if one couldn't look very well, and," he continued, after the briefest of pauses, during which he looked at Mercedes, "and, as you say, have a delightful colour, and feel as though this was really the best of all possible worlds, in such absolutely perfect weather, and on such a gorgeous yacht as this—where on earth or sea could you feel thoroughly fit, and therefore look it?"

"Just exactly my sentiments," said Captain Percy Iddison, who lounged up towards them just as this moment, tubbed and shaved and clad in immaculate flannels, careless, happy, and yet, though he knew it not, one of those unconscious instruments of Fate which, through the medium of just a few idle words, may alter the courses of other lives.

"Miss Staunton, and you, too, my lady," he began again, with a smile and a bow towards his radiant sweetheart, "I want you to allow me to take Ellerton away for a moment. "I have noticed that he is looking a little, well, flushed, almost feverish, in fact, and I have discovered a peculiarly soothing and generally delightful cocktail. The fact is, of course, that I want one myself, and I don't care to have it alone. It's a bad habit, you know, which one learns in those desolate places of the earth where it is sometimes easier to get a drink before breakfast than it is to get the breakfast itself."

"That, Percy," said Lady Maud, drawing Mercedes somewhat reluctantly aside, "is merely a specious excuse for quite unnecessary depravity. Still, I know it is not the slightest use trying to argue with a man on that subject, and so I suppose we shall have to let you go."

"And I hope you won't forget," said Mercedes, still laughing and looking first at Wilfrid and then at Iddison, "what they say in South America about cocktails."

"Dear me," exclaimed Lady Maud. "May I ask what *you* know about cocktails before breakfast?"

"Not guilty," laughed Mercedes in reply. "I have never tasted that form of refreshment in my life. It is only what I have heard my father say and there certainly seems to be a good deal of sense in it. It is this," she went on, with another look at the two young men, "one is enough, two are too many, and three are nothing like enough."

"Exactly!" said Ellerton. "Therefore, Iddison, it's got to be just one, and if we don't hurry up and get it the breakfast bugle will go."

Scarcely had the two young men strolled away, than Staunton and Ramiero Valdez came up out of the saloon and joined them.

If Staunton had only seen one of the glances that had passed between his daughter and Wilfrid during the brief conversation, the crime which had already been decided upon would never have been committed, and many things which came to pass in consequence of it would never have happened.

Another long instalment of this serial next week.

Your Editor Chats.

This week another adventure which befell Miss Sara Gillespie, in her flight from her pursuers, is related. Northampton is the scene of the episode, and all citizens of the famed boot-making town will be, I am sure, delighted with the photographs that are reproduced.

From all sides I have received intimations assuring me that great interest has been aroused in this series, and in letters from readers, there often recur the words "I only hope that the coming instalments will be as absorbing as the opening ones." Now, of course, I have had the privilege of already seeing the future episodes, and I can unreservedly say that nobody need have any fear that the realisations of their hopes will suffer in comparison with their anticipations.

Sara will relate in our next issue what happens to her at Leicester. There is no need for me to say anything in recommendation of this instalment, but I can promise you that it is a splendid one.

I have now an announcement to make which is of especial interest to residents in Leicester and district.

I want readers of that town who feel sufficiently interested in this series to help to make it known in their district, by handing a few leaflets to their friends. As an inducement for you to do so, I will offer a Gramophone to the Leicester reader who makes the best use of his leaflets, and a charming little gold-plated pencil case to *each* of the *twelve* persons who show the next greatest amount of ingenuity in the distribution. You may personally hand each leaflet to a friend, with a remark about "The Pursuit of Sara"; you may place the leaflets in conspicuous positions; you may push them through letter-boxes or doors; or you can do exactly as you think wisest and best. The prizes will go to those readers who distribute the leaflets in the most novel and helpful way; the number you get rid of is not of so much consequence. To obtain them, drop a postcard, with "Leaflets" marked in the top, left-hand corner, to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, W.C.

Our Gramophones are beautiful pieces of mechanism, and one of these musical instruments would be a boon to any household. They are fitted with a concert sound-box, and accompanied by two records.

Come, Leicester readers, make a good bid for that Gramophone, and the special consolation prizes. All of you have equal opportunities.

On page 560, the new serial story from the pen of Mr. George Griffith commences. It is a powerful romance, in which masterly crime plays an important part, crossing, as it does the path of love, totally contrary to the expectations of Isolo Staunton, criminal millionaire. It is an old adage that says that "the course of true love never runs smooth," and our new serial is an excellent illustration to its truth. As the story continues, the plot becomes stronger and stronger, till the great climax is reached. "A Criminal Millionaire" should appeal to all who enjoy reading good literature.

I will announce, as soon as possible, and I expect it to be at a very early date, the result of the recent "Juggled Letters" Competition.

Your Editor.

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A Wilful Girl.

Relating How She Won a Young Doctor's Heart.

"This can't last!"

Doctor George Gordon sprang from his chair with the words, and began to pace his office floor from wall to wall.

It was a miserable, drizzly November day, but Doctor Gordon's vehement exclamation had no reference to the weather. It was directed towards the unfortunate aspect of Fate in general, and his own affairs in particular.

Three weeks ago, full of hope and energy, he had started his practice in this little quiet street, and had begun his professional career. That is, he would have begun it, had any requisition for his services been made; but, with the exception of one or two cases, no hint or shadow of practice had fallen in his way. His funds were running low, his sturdy patience seemed to droop, at last, and hope no longer answered his misgivings with a smile. Worst of all, a terrible loneliness had fallen suddenly upon him—the forerunner of despair.

"It can't last!" he repeated desperately, pushing his fine white hands through his brown curling hair. And at that instant the door-bell rang.

Hastily opening a heavy volume or two, to convey the idea that his studies were suddenly interrupted, and assuming a calm, professional air, Doctor Gordon proceeded to the door.

This time it was neither peddler, book-agent, nor machine oil, but a lovely young woman, in a blue waterproof, with chestnut hair in glossy rings on her white forehead. She held a little boy by the hand—a boy who had evidently been crying loud and long, and was still in good condition for an indefinite continuation of the exercise.

"Doctor Gordon?"

The doctor bowed, and the young lady lowered her umbrella.

"I am glad we have found you in," she said, smiling, and disclosing two distracting dimples. "My little brother has crushed his hand. I want you to examine it, please. We feared there might be bones broken—it has been so painful."

"We shall soon find out," answered the doctor briskly, his elastic spirits rising wonderfully as he ushered in his visitors. "I was about to make a call or two" (which was true—he had intentions of going out for a cigar and a newspaper), "but nothing very urgent. Be seated, please. I will let in more light. Now, then, my little man; will you come here to me?"

"Tommy, dear," said the young lady, very gently and tenderly, as Tommy leant his head against her and began to sob, "let me see now how brave you can be. And doctor won't hurt you—I am sure he won't"—with an eloquent glance at the individual in question.

"Not one bit, or so very little that you won't mind it at all."

"And Dora will stay by you"—putting her arm round his neck and drawing him gently towards the consulting chair. "That's my own good boy. And to-morrow you will be ever so much better. Now, doctor, see, he is going to be splendid!"

To Doctor Gordon's credit be it said, he conducted his examination with coolness and cleverness, albeit this pretty creature hung over him enveloping him in her exquisite magnetism, and thrilling him deliciously now and then, as the folds of her dress touched him or their fingers met accidentally in their mutual attention to the case.

When the bones were declared to be intact, and the hand dressed and bandaged, then came the story of the accident's happening—in fact, almost half an hour of bright, pleasant talk; then thanks and gratitude, and—"How much must I pay you, doctor?"

The idea of paying him for this gleam of warmth and sunshine that had come into his blank and dreary life!

But he mentioned his modest fee in a business-like manner, and received it with professional ease. Such a dear little purse and such a slender, pretty hand, and such a kind, innocent, charming face! It was hard to think he might never see her again.

At parting he made an effort. As she opened her umbrella again and the blue eyes looked at him smilingly from a background of rain and mist and dreariness, he observed in an off-hand way:

"Please bring the boy in to me in a day or two. I shall want to examine his progress. Let me see—Wednesday—well bring him on Friday. Oh, not at all? I think he will do nicely now. Thanks—good-bye."

And as he looked after the trim little figure of his visitor he suddenly realised that he did not even know her name, except that part of it was "Dora."

It never rains but it pours. It both rained and poured on this eventful evening. To his surprise and deep thankfulness, the doctor received two other calls before midnight, and on the following day three more. He began again to feel of use and importance in the world. The blue waterproof, the dimples and smiling eyes, had brought him what the gamblers call a "streak of luck," or so he firmly believed.

When Friday arrived he was quite in a flutter of expectation, and sported a new necktie for the occasion. At half-past ten the office bell rang. It was the advent he hoped for.

"Oh, good morning!"

Fresh as the morning itself she looked, in a pretty costume of brown cashmere, with a sweeping feather in her hat, a bunch of sweet violets at her belt, and a world of light and sweetness in her eyes. Tommy, at her side, nodded quite tolerantly in answer to his share of the doctor's greeting.

"Such a lovely day. Did you expect us?" (Did he?) "Oh, yes, so *much* better. It is quite easy now—Tommy, isn't it? We are glad we came to *you*. Our old doctor—Doctor Briggs—was ill, and we did not know where to come—

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did we, Tommy? And I said, let us try here. How do you do, doctor. Are you well?"

By this time they were in the office, and she was regarding him with a friendly, somewhat thoughtful, scrutiny.

"Quite well, thanks."

"I thought you did not look so very well that other day, you seemed so pale. I suppose you work too hard. All you doctors do."

"When we are fortunate enough to have the chance. I believe I have grown pale longing for work. I am only just beginning here, you know."

"Ah," with a glance full of interest. "Are you a stranger, then?"

"Quite a stranger. I came from Somerset. All my people are there. I sometimes think it was a wild venture of mine to come to London to begin my profession."

"All your people? Oh, that is dreadful! Have you no friends here—*no* one?"

"I am entirely alone."

"How strangely you must feel. I should think it would be terrible to live like that"—with another long, thoughtful look. "Oh, well," breaking into a smile, "I am sure you will make a practice here. You will not mind it so much when you have plenty of business. *We* will do what we can to help you, and we know lots of people. Tommy, darling, take your hat off. Come here to me. I'll undo the bandage. Now, let Doctor Gordon see. I don't think he will lose the nails after all."

"Very satisfactory indeed," said Doctor Gordon. "I can see that you have followed my directions."

"Oh, yes; of course"—lifting up her earnest face. "He was very good about it. He let me bathe it and dress it, and I know it must have hurt him."

"He had a very gentle nurse."

The doctor was busy over the wounded hand as he made this remark.

"I tried to be as gentle as you were," was the quick response. "Your hands seemed so light and kind. It must be beautiful to be able to help people and relieve pain."

"Pain that can be relieved—yes," said the doctor, feeling quite charmed that she had noticed his hands, which, indeed, were well worth noticing, and accustomed to receive a good deal of his own attention. "If we could only reach mental suffering as easily."

"Ah! I know very little about that"—she shook her head with a pretty seriousness. "I've never had real trouble yet. It frightens me when I think how happy I've been."

"Frightens you? Why?"

"Because all my suffering is yet to come."

"Oh, mine isn't!" said Tommy, nodding with an air of triumph. "I've had lots of pain. I sprained my ankle once, and I fell down the cellar stairs, and a boy gave me a black eye, and the ear-ache and the mumps, and no end of tooth-ache. But this hand—that was worse than all. I think I am getting all *my* sufferings now."

"You and I, Tommy—we know what it is to have afflictions," said Doctor Gordon, with his hand on Tommy's shoulder. "Happy people, like your sister, can only wonder at us. It must be very nice to be so—so content and at peace with Fate."

"Don't you feel happy, too?" she asked, with womanly pity in her tone. "I should think you would love your profession."

"I do love it certainly; but it is not *all* my life. I want other things—friends, companionship. The struggle with poverty is dreadful when one is alone."

"You are not married?"

This question was asked with delightful straightforwardness, the candid eyes looked frankly into his.

"I have not that good fortune—yet."

They both flushed slightly; the young lady glanced away, and said quickly—

"Well, you will not *always* be alone, unless you wish to be. And I know you will succeed in your profession; your manner is so pleasing and sympathetic, you inspire confidence at once. And I am sure—I am very sure—you must be clever."

"Oh, thanks, you are too kind," murmured the doctor, as much astonished as pleased by this innocent, delicious flattery. "I owe you my heartfelt gratitude for your kindness—your encouragement. I was almost despairing. I shall always believe it was my good angel who sent you—and Tommy—to my rescue."

"It was *our* good angel, perhaps, who showed us how to find *you*," was the smiling, unembarrassed answer. "I felt an interest in you at once. I told mamma about you as soon as I went home, and she is coming to see you too. But now we must go. I will leave you my card, though, because"—with an arch look—"you don't even know my name yet. And I want to leave you this little bunch of violets, too, if you will accept them. I think there is such companionship in flowers, if one feels lonely or sad."

She disengaged the little bouquet from her belt and the doctor took it, and the kindly hand that offered it, into his own an instant.

"I don't know what to say to you—I can't express my sense of your goodness, so undeserved."

"Oh, that's nothing! I love to give flowers to people who care for them—that is one of my pleasures. Well, good-bye. Shall I need to bring Tommy in again—or is it all right?"

"If you could let me see him in three or four days from now," returned the doctor, with gravity. "It is not absolutely necessary, but if you have time, you might bring him in, and—a—a——"

"Very well. Some time next week then. Good-bye. I do hope you'll gets lots of patients—of course, I don't hope that people will be ill, poor things; but I mean that if they must be ill, I hope they will send for you. And don't feel lonely or depressed, remember. I *did* think you looked *so sad* that first day. Good-bye."

As soon as he was alone, Doctor Gordon took up the little square of pasteboard from the table and read, "Dora Hartley, 98, West Street, Kensington." He actually put it to his lips. Then he threw it down quickly, and hastily drew from the vest pocket above his heart a girl's photograph, at which he looked long and fondly.

"You would not mind, Clara, darling," he murmured, half aloud. "She is such an utter child."

The apology which Doctor Gordon offered so fervently to the portrait of his soul's idol, in extenuation of a kiss bestowed on Miss Hartley's printed name was merely the first of a long series of such apologies and protestations. During the next four weeks Clara's picture was in constant requisition. He bestowed on it confessions and explanations that would have astonished the original, to whom his semi-weekly letters conveyed no hint of the existence of "Dora."

But in the life of Doctor Gordon, Dora was an accomplished fact, and a wonderfully bright and important one. She recommended him right and left among her friends, and sent him some excellent paying cases, in which his usually superior skill made itself apparent. She even persuaded her mother, whose health was uniformly excellent, that she needed medical advice, and at once Doctor Gordon was summoned—the

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result, his instalment as family physician, and a pleasant revenue from Mr. Hartley's purse. Added to this, he was petted and made much of by the entire family. But Dora remained his special ally and friend. She used to run into his office on all sorts of pretences—sometimes escorted by one of her brothers (of whom there were five), sometimes by the huge Newfoundland dog, sometimes only by her own innocence.

Doctor Gordon had begun by declaring that Dora was "an utter child." Before long he discovered a certain tact and womanliness that astonished him. She would discuss his affairs with him in the gravest way, and make little practical suggestions, full of commonsense; give him hints as to the foibles and weaknesses of certain of the new people she introduced, and in innumerable ways, help and strengthen him. She made "tidies" for his chairs, pillows for his sofa, painted vases for his mantel, mended his gloves, darned his handkerchiefs, objected to his neckties, criticised his linen, in short, surrounding him with an intoxicating atmosphere of femininity that fascinated and bewildered him. Through it all she preserved her direct, child-like manner.

"You would not believe," she would say to him, with her elbows on the table beside him, and hands clasped under her white chin—a favourite attitude. "You'd not believe how much I liked you that first day. It seemed so odd—the very first time we met. Somehow I felt as if I had always known you, and oh! I knew very well we were going to be friends! At least, I made up my mind about it"—and then, without the slightest change of tone, "Do you think those curtains look all right? I imagine they ought to be fuller. If I were you I'd have dark-red ones. I saw some in Stewart's the other day." Or else, rushing in, flushed and smiling, she would say, out of breath: "Oh, dear, I can't stay, but I thought I *must* run in for a minute! I have brought you some oranges for your cold—they are lovely and sweet. I was just carrying some to old Mrs. Shannon—she's the dearest old thing, and her cold is terrible, worse than yours. Do, please, take care of yourself. I sha'n't have any peace till you are better—both of you."

Then in a flash she was gone again. She seemed especially anxious lest he should feel too keenly the loneliness of his life, and tried constantly to brighten his solitude with a thousand gentle cares and attentions.

He felt deeply touched, and blessed her from his heart for all her goodness, but his mind was full of uneasiness as he found himself forced to the conclusion that Dora was falling in love with him very fast indeed.

As their acquaintance progressed he could but notice a growing change in her manner—a sort of wistfulness and almost sadness at times, and his conscience smote him terribly that he had withheld from her the fact of his engagement. It seemed daily more impossible to divulge it without making himself seem like a villain, and yet to deliberately continue to conceal it was a villainy in itself.

As to the nature of his feelings for Dora, he was in a state of bewilderment. Her warmth of heart, her impetuous temper, her sweet, wilful, lovable ways, her very faults, were charming to him.

She was a constant study and delight; and yet, even if he were free—if he had never seen and chosen Clara—would Dora be the sort of woman he could wish to marry? He could not tell.

He only knew that the spell of her presence was upon him, and every meeting made the spell more strong.

Her family, too, seemed quite to accept him as their own, and to look upon his interests as their especial care. It was so pleasant to have friends of good standing, to feel himself no longer a waif and a stray in the great community.

But the price he paid threatened to be a hard one—the loss of his own self-respect. A time came when his conscience faced him with stern accusation, and commanded him to be true.

* * * * *

It was his birthday. Early in the morning there had come from Dora a pair of embroidered slippers and a lovely bunch of roses, and from each of the others some little token. His room was bright with pretty souvenirs, and the happy recipient sat brooding at his desk, wretched, penitent, torn with conflicting emotions—looking at Clara's photograph, and thinking, as usual, of Dora.

She had been so kind to him, so gracious and tender and generous, and now he must wring her guileless heart and stab her maiden pride, and lose her for ever!

He had at last made up his mind to write and tell her all—the paper lay spread before him, and he sat silent, thinking his miserable thoughts, and listening to the rush of the rain and the long, sweeping sigh of the wind.

He was trying to picture Dora as she would look when she read his letter. The sorrow and amazement in her sweet face; the blue eyes filled with passionate, regretful tears, or flashing scorn and anger; the little kindly, ministering hands clasped and trembling——

"Dora!"

Roused by some slight sound, he had turned and saw her in the room beside him. She was clad in the blue waterproof he had learnt to love.

The rain glistened on her hair, and her face was very pale; but she smiled a bright greeting.

"Don't scold; I *had* to come! I ran in by the alley. I was afraid some one might be here. It is just lovely to find you alone!"

Doctor Gordon looked at her with a sudden flush on his fair face. He rose; he could not trust himself to touch her hand.

"Take off that wet cloak," he said abruptly. "It is a terrible night for you to come out. What is the matter? Has anything happened?"

"Something is going to happen," she answered quietly, loosening her cloak and hanging it over a chair. Then with both hands she smoothed back the damp waves of her hair, and sat down in her favourite low chair beside the doctor's desk. He stood near her irresolutely a moment, but finally seated himself in his usual place.

"You look very pale, Dora. Are you ill?" He made a great effort to speak in his usual manner, but his voice trembled slightly.

"I am well enough—quite well; but," she pressed both hands against her heart, "like Hamlet, I can say, 'You little know how ill all's here.'"

Their eyes met in a long look, and a deep blush rose to her cheeks, but she did not avert her gaze.

"I—I was just thinking of you as you came in," the doctor murmured. It was not at all what he meant to say, but the truth has a habit of speaking itself at times. "I wanted to thank you for your beautiful flowers, and for—so many things. Dora, you have been more to me than I can—than I dare express. I wish you could know—could understand——"

"Do you think I have been good to you? Have I really made you a little bit happier? I longed to, because I—because you—— Oh, Doctor Gordon, you must let me speak to you and tell you!—my heart is so full. Don't think me wild or reckless, but there is something I must tell you!"

"Dora, Dora!" He caught her hand fervently in both his own. "I, too, have a confession to make. For weeks I have waited."

"Let me speak first," she said imploringly. "I came for that purpose. Doctor, I am going away from home; I am going in a few days—not to come back any more."

"You are going away?"

"No one knows of it—not even my own precious mother. I am going away—to be married."

The hand he had held so tenaciously was suddenly released.

"Married, Dora?"

"I did not tell you of my engagement. I thought perhaps mother had spoken of it. Yes, I have been engaged nearly five years; and I liked you first because your eyes are so like his—like Will's, you know. He is a doctor, too. He went away from London over a year ago to begin practice, just as you came here; and when you told me about being all alone, my heart went out to you so. I thought of my own poor

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boy; I knew how to sympathise with you and I longed to be your friend. I thought at once, 'If any one would take an interest in Will, and pet him and cheer him up and help him, how I *could* love that person!' And so I wanted to do everything I could for you. And I liked you so much, I *couldn't* go away and never tell you, nor say good-bye. Please—please don't look so sad! Are you angry with me? Do you think I am very wrong and wicked?"

"I! Ah, Dora, how much do you care for my thoughts of you *now?*"

"As much as ever," she said eagerly. "I have no friend in the world dearer than you are—you must know that. And will you tell mamma—will you talk to her? It is so dreadful to go away in this manner, but it must be done, sooner or later. If I should wait till Doomsday, they would never give their consent. Of course, when it is all over, they will forgive me and love me just the same. And you will coax mamma—won't you, doctor?—and say a good word for Dora when she is far away?" Her voice broke slightly, but she smiled bravely as she gave him her hand.

"Why must you go, dear?" he asked forlornly. "And what will become of *me?* I shall miss you so terribly, and you don't care at all. I can see by your eyes how happy you are."

"I am happy at heart," she answered earnestly—"very, very happy! I am glad I have decided. Surely, you must acknowledge my first duty is to Will, because I love him so dearly. He asks me to come to him, and it is my duty and my heaven to obey. My people will love him, too, bye-and-bye, when they know him better. They only oppose the marriage because they love me too much. I am sorry to leave you all, but I am, oh! *so* glad to go to Will!"

Doctor Gordon, holding the little hand between his own, looked regretfully in the little friendly face. Half an hour ago he was sorrowing for the pain he was about to inflict on this confiding innocent heart; and now the spectacle of her bright contentment wounded and angered him; his pride was terribly hurt. He had told himself passionately, that he would make any sacrifice, almost, to secure her happiness, and now that, without requiring the slightest sacrifice from him, she was supremely happy, he felt much injured and aggrieved.

"You mustn't be sorry," she said, very gently. "Of course you will miss me and I shall miss you—that is only natural; but we can write to each other, and as soon as I am forgiven I will come home on a visit, and I shall see you all!"

This and much more she told him in her gracious, kindly voice, trying to heal the wound that she began to think might have been deeper than she could have dreamt.

When it was time to part, she lifted her face and kissed him frankly and willingly, with a whispered: "God bless you, dear!"

For an instant Doctor Gordon's arms were round the damp waterproof and the slender figure beneath it, pressing them impartially to his heart. And then Dora was gone.

He sat quite a long time. Somehow, he had no need of Clara's photograph to strengthen him in his trial. He would not feel exactly at home in expressing his emotions to that calm and placid image.

Madeline Bridges.

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A JUSTIFIED BURGLAR.

A Story with a Moral to Husbands.

ARNOLD TODD must have become accustomed to it, for periodically burglars relieved him of all his pocket-money, diamonds and other personal *bric-a-brac* without ever being caught in the act or leaving any clue to their discovery. Nothing was ever taken belonging to Mrs. Todd, but, as that woman pathetically said, she had nothing they could take except her wedding-ring, which was on her finger, or her clothes, which would not have repaid the effort. For Mrs. Todd was a veritable household drudge. Her husband had houses and lands, as well as money in several banks, but he never gave her any of his wealth, and she had to beg for enough money to buy shoes and stockings for the children. Their clothes she made over from her own and their father's worn-out garments, and in making Mr. Todd's trousers into jackets for the little Todds she always managed to work the knees that bagged into the under side of elbows.

The burglaries did not worry Mr. Todd—if the truth were told—as much as they did Mrs. Todd. He usually waited until the stolen goods could not be recovered, then he purchased a new outfit and, after hiding them carefully every night for a few months he would grow careless and the burglars would give him another call. Mrs. Todd consistently promised to lie awake and watch, but she declared she must have been chloroformed, otherwise she would never have closed an eye.

"I should think, Mary," her husband complained, "that your anxiety about the children would keep you awake. Think what an effect it would have on them to see a burglar in their room!"

"But the burglars never go there," said Mrs. Todd faintly. "Children never have any valuables—at least ours don't," she added with unconscious sarcasm.

One night the unexpected happened. It was the turning-point in Mr. Todd's destiny. At the hour when he should have been sleeping the soundest he suddenly awakened and saw by the dim night light a strange figure in his room—that of a man muffled in a black cloak with a slouch hat drawn over his face and a silk muffler round his neck and chin. He was rifling Mr. Todd's pockets. Mr. Todd did not own a revolver. He would not have killed a man to save all his wealth, much as he loved it. He lay still for a moment, thinking how to surprise the burglar, then, having made up his mind to a plan, he put it into immediate execution. He leapt from the bed with a bound that took him into the middle of the room and pinioned the burglar from behind. A terrific scream rent the air. Todd held in a mighty grasp a limp, trembling form from which he tore the disguising cloak, revealing the partner of his joys and sorrows, Mrs. Todd.

"Mary!" he gasped. "Mary, you?"

"Yes, Mr. Todd, me." She turned and faced him. "Oh, you needn't be surprised. Where did you suppose I got any money if I didn't either steal it or beg it, seeing that you never gave me any. If I wanted a penny to put in the contribution box on Sunday I had to ask you for it, and explain what I was going to do with it. You never gave me a sovereign in your life without expecting nineteen shillings back in change."

"Mary!"

"It's the truth, and you know it, Arnold. Instead of making me a regular allowance, as any husband ought to, you make me save and scrimp and go without everything but food. Many a time I've left my empty purse lying about hoping you would take the hint and fill it. And you never did. And all the time you carried gold, silver and notes in your pocket—and bought what you wanted."

"You might have taken it without disguising yourself as a burglar, Mary."

"You would have suspected me, and how long could I have kept the money? No, the burglar was more welcome to it than I would have been. But I never dreamt that you would wake. I meant to jump out of the window if you did see me. Now, I do not care for myself—I am only sorry for you. The man who can drive a woman to such straits is to be pitied. I have as good a right to the money as you have—I helped to make it, and there is no law to convict a wife for stealing from her own husband."

Mr. Todd was seeing things past and present, and in those few moments of time as the dying do—clearly and without prejudice. He took his wife in his arms.

"You are nervous and tired, dear," he said. "Lie down and compose yourself to rest. I see, Mary, that I am the real burglar—I have robbed you of your earnings and your lawful dues. Before I sleep you shall have a bank account in your own name, and I will never ask what you do with the money. And you can give up being a burglar for good and all."

Henry Haines.

"AND you permitted this strange man to kiss you?" "No, mamma; he didn't give me time."

"IF you had no idea when you could get married, Tom, why did you propose?" "To tell the truth, dear, I had no idea that you would accept me."

MR. HIGHLIFE: "My dear, I'm going to turn over a new leaf!" Mrs. Highlife: "That's right. James says when you came out of your club last night you turned over a couple of pages."

"JOHN," whispered the good woman in the dead of the night, "there are burglars downstairs!" "You go down, dear," replied John, sleepily; "they wouldn't dare to strike a woman."

ARDENT SUITOR: "I lay my fortune at your feet." Fair Lady: "Fortune! I didn't know you had money." Ardent Suitor: "I haven't much, but it takes very little to cover those tiny feet." He got her.

AMBIGUOUS.—MRS. GRUE: "Henry, do you think you would ever marry again?" Grue: "What! After having lived with you for eleven years? Never!" (Mrs. Grue would give something handsome if she only knew just what he meant by that.)

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It Requires Practice.

Angela (to whom Edgar has been proposing): "Tell me, Edgar! Did you ever say anything like this to any woman before?" Edgar (in a burst of honesty): "My dear girl, do you think it could be done like that the first time?"

He Was a Bit of a Bore.

Reggy: "Do you really believe that absence makes the heart grow fonder?" Miss Brady: "Oh, yes, indeed. I think twice as much of you when you are somewhere else."

He'd Cause for Remembrance.

"Isn't it sad," asked the young lady romantically, "to think of the roses of yester year?" "It is," replied the young man emphatically; "I have an unpaid florist's bill for £10."

Worth the Trouble.

Cleverton: "Miss Twilling rejected me the other night, but she let me kiss her before we parted." Dashaway (reflecting): "I think I'll go round to-night and propose myself."

Well Experienced.

Paterfamilias: "And could you support my daughter, sir?" Her Lover: "I have two strong arms." Paterfamilias: "But can they support her?" Her Lover: "They often have, sir."

There Were Others, Too.

Mr. Gillis: "Surely, Miss Gray, you haven't forgotten me already? Why, I proposed to you at the seaside last summer." Miss Gray (much puzzled): "Can't you recall some other incident?"

And Ethel Blushed Vividly.

Tommy: "Yes, cats can see in the dark, and so can Ethel, 'cause when Mr. Wright walked into the parlour when she was sitting all alone in the dark, I heard her say to him, 'Why, Arthur, you didn't get shaved to-day.'"

Economical Wifey.

Husband: "Have you done your best to economise this month, Mary, as I requested?" Wife (brightly): "Oh, yes; I spoke to the grocer, the butcher, and the landlord, and got them to put off sending in their bills till next month."

He Has a Wife Now.

She (insinuatingly): "Are you looking for anybody, Mr. Johnson?" He: "Yes, I am looking for my wife." She (coquettishly): "I didn't know you had a wife." He: "No; that's just why I am looking for her." And he found her there and then.

Those Girls Again.

May: "He's awfully inquisitive. He tried his best to find out how old I am." Fanny: "Yes, he admitted that to me." May: "And just for fun I told him I was thirty-four. Did he tell you that?" Fanny: "No, but he did say you were the most truthful girl he had ever met."

A Very Convenient Arrangement.

Miss Manyseasons: "No, Mr. Bloom, I cannot be your wife, but I will be a sister to you." Mr. Bloom (youthful adorer): "You are very kind, and I know my mother will like that arrangement. She has often said I would have been a better man if I had had an elder sister to look after me. When will you begin your duties?"

So It Seemed.

Jack: "Does Miss Smythe return your affections?" Simon (tearfully): "The unopened envelope seems to indicate it!"

A Satisfactory Arrangement.

Miss Riche: "One can be very happy in this world with health and money." Suitor: "Then let's be made one. I have the health and you have the money."

Symptoms of Distress.

Mr. Jones: "That young Snodgrass seems like one of the family." His Only Daughter: "How so, papa?" Mr. Jones: "Why, he looks scared when your mother's anywhere near."

Drew His Conclusions.

Sandstone: "Weren't you dancing with Miss Calloway last night?" Fiddleback: "Yes; how did you know?" Sandstone: "I saw her going into a chiropodist's this morning."

Would Cause Excitement.

New Hubby: "I'm sorry, but I really can't let you see my wife if you wear that beautiful new hat. She's quite ill, and the doctor has expressly said that nothing must be allowed to excite her."

Then They Recommenced.

Wife (repentent after a little breeze): "If I were to die, Phil, what would you do?" Phil (sulkily): "I'd be nearly crazy, of course." Wife: "Would you marry again?" Phil: "No; I wouldn't be as crazy as that."

Worse Luck Impossible.

Patience: "Did you say Daisy is about to take her thirteenth husband?" Mabel: "Yes, I did." "Isn't she at all superstitious?" "Oh, yes; but she knows her thirteenth can't be any worse than the other twelve."

Expenses Not Allowed.

"Come, my darling," said the impatient lover at the foot of the ladder. "It's no use," replied she. "The elopement's off." "Why? What has happened?" "Papa absolutely refuses to advance the money for our travelling expenses."

"Popping" the Question.

"Did Miss Flyppe receive many proposals when she came out?" "Many? Why, receiving proposals got to be a habit with her. In a very short time she couldn't even hear a soda-water bottle pop without exclaiming 'This is so sudden!'"

Considerate Boy.

Stern Parent: "Your mother tells me you have been naughty again, and, therefore, I shall be obliged to punish you." Troublesome Son: "Wh—why can't ma punish me herself, dad? I don't s—ee wh—why you should have to d—do all the odd jobs!"

Speaking from Experience.

Mr. Hardnut: "I admit, sir, that my life has not been what it should be, but I truly and unselfishly love your daughter, and if ever I give her a moment's pain I hope I'll be made to suffer torture for it." Old Gentleman (warmly): "Oh, you will. You don't know her."

No More Love Letters of 'Liza.

She was doleful—oh, so very doleful. "John," she said, "I don't believe you ever really loved me at all." "Why?" he demanded. "Because," she replied, "I've been over all your old love letters, and while they seemed all right at the time, they actually aren't worth publishing in a book."

She Altered Her Decision.

"And so," said the young man, "you say you cannot marry me because I am too young?" "That is my reason," averred the girl. "Surely you do not mean me to understand that you consider yourself too old to marry me?" he murmured diplomatically. Looking at it in that light, she concluded that she had been too hasty.

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Year after Year.

Who has not read the remarkable letters from working men and women which, day after day, and year after year, are being published in this and thousands of other newspapers throughout the United Kingdom respecting the undoubted merits of Dr. Tibbles' Vi-Cocoa as a Food Beverage?

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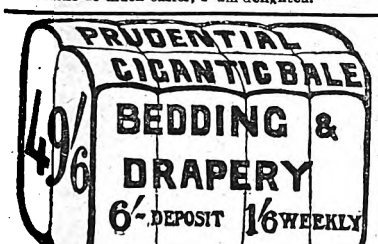

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8/9 **Feather Boas**; bankrupt stock; special bargains: real Ostrich Feather Boas, beautifully curly; perfectly new, in box; colours: grey and white black and white, and natural.

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21/- **Lady's** solid gold **Keyless Watch**, jewelled in 10 rubies, beautifully engraved case, splendid time-keeper; 10 years' written warranty; week's free trial.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

The Morning Vision.

"H. S. I. F." writes, "I meet on the way to business every morning a young lady whom I much admire. I have not yet had courage to say more than 'good morning' to her. What is my best way to get into further conversation?"

* * * * *

If you have got so far as to say "good morning," I do not see why you should not take an early opportunity to remark on the weather. Then perhaps she travels by a certain train, or 'bus, in which you might accidentally find yourself sometimes. If you get so far as to be on speaking terms with her, you should try to get to know her relations. How to do that must depend on circumstances, and if you have any mutual friends. You will best be able to judge that yourself.

Too Effusive?

"DOUBTFUL" is very hard to please. She has kept company with a young man for three weeks, and finds him very demonstrative. He constantly goes to see her, and wishes her to become engaged to him. He is in a very good position, and his family are wealthy. This all seems most fortunate, yet "DOUBTFUL" is haunted by fears. "Can his affection," she asks, "be true and lasting, when he is so demonstrative? Would she be wise in becoming engaged to him?"

* * * * *

I do not see, "DOUBTFUL," why his affection should be any the less sincere because he seems able to show it visibly. Don't consent just yet to an engagement, as you evidently have not made up your mind whether or not you love him. Ask him to wait awhile and repeat the question later, when you will be more certain on the point. Three weeks is not a long time to have known him, and you should see how long his affectionate manner lasts.

Etiquette in Calling.

"I MET two very nice girls at a party recently," writes "EDWARD." "Their mother was present, but I was not introduced to her. We got very friendly, the girls and I, and on parting, one of them said to me: 'You must call and see us when in our direction,' giving me their address, which was in the country. Now is that a proper invitation, seeing that I do not know the mother?"

* * * * *

It would have been better if you had met the mother, and got the young lady to confirm the invitation in her presence. You could then have suggested a suitable day to call, if convenient to them, and made the arrangement on a formal social basis. As it is, you might find it awkward to call only on the girls' invitation, especially if they were not at home. In your present position, I should write to one girl, an ordinary chatty letter, and leave it to her to confirm the invitation on behalf of her mother.

Wanted, a Chaperon.

"LONELY BACHELOR" lives in rooms by himself. He knows several girls, but of course cannot invite them to tea, while he often visits them at their homes. How could he invite them to his home without breaking strict etiquette?

* * * * *

The best thing would be for my lonely correspondent to ask his sister, mother, or aunt to stay with him, and then to invite his lady friends when she is there. It would not, of course, be quite right for him to ask them without some such chaperon, though people who call themselves "Bohemians" have long ago discarded such formalities.

A Fickle Girl.

"JACK" had kept company with a girl for six months, and during that time found her everything that could be desired. After three months' courtship, however, she gradually seemed to change. He has since found out that she was constantly meeting other young men without his knowledge, and when he remonstrated with her, she passed it off as "mere jealousy on his part," and continued the intimacy with them. "JACK" now feels that he no longer loves her, but only likes her. He can no longer rely on her being true to him.

* * * * *

I imagine the girl has grown tired of you, "JACK," and that being the case, you had better let the matter drop. As you find you no longer love her yourself, I should cease to try to bind her, as she is evidently a bit of a flirt.

Should He Marry?

"T. L." writes: "I am a tradesman, earning 28s. a week during the summer, but my trade is very bad in the winter, when I only earn £1, and sometimes I am thrown idle. I have met a girl who is an orphan, and very poor, and I would wish to marry her. Should I ask her to wait till I am in a better position—perhaps a year?"

* * * * *

If she is not dependent on you for support, "T. L.," it would certainly be better not to marry until you are in a better position. But if the girl is very poor indeed, and you would have to help her in any case, I think you would find that it would be better to marry soon. With economy, you should be able to make both ends meet even on your winter income, and no doubt a good wife would help you to do so.

A Trivial Offence.

"SOME months ago," write "MARIE and MADELEINE," "we met two young men of our own age, and kept up an acquaintance with them for some time. They said they had no professions, and, without any intention of offending them, we said we thought every man ought to follow some profession. We think they must have taken offence at this, as their manner became very cool towards us both, and they now only bow and pass on when we meet them. Would it be forward for us to stop them and explain that we meant no offence? We both grew very fond of them, and they used to take us about a lot."

* * * * *

Yes, I think no harm whatever would be done in your speaking to them next time you meet. What you said was quite true—every man ought to have some occupation, and I don't think men who are absolutely idle ever make good husbands. If they were offended at your saying so, they must be very sensitive. However, explain your intentions by all means, and leave it to them as to whether they care to resume their intimacy with you. It seems a trifle to have separated you, in any case.

Cynthia.

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1. *Who wrote Robinson Crusoe?*
2. *What famous British soldier is known as "Bobs"?*
3. *Who is your favourite hero (not fiction), and why?*
4. *Who made most runs in first-class cricket this summer?*
5. *Which is your favourite book, and why?*
6. *When was King Edward VII. born. Give year and day?*

The Second Set of Questions will appear in THE BOYS' LEADER (1d. every Tuesday), on Tuesday, November 10.

It will be noticed that some of the questions call for an expression of opinion only, and others you will have to search for in books.

Cut out and paste these questions on a sheet of foolscap paper numbering it No. 1. Write your reply to No 1. immediately below, and then follow with No. 2, and so on, saying in what book you found the information and who helped you to find it.

Anybody may help you provided you say who. No competitor must be over 21 years of age. No reply must exceed fifty words. Keep all replies until the last set appears and until we tell you to send them in. Write plainly in ink on one side of the paper.

HINTS

Most towns and even villages have now a Reference Library, so it will be easy to get access to books.

Parents and friends may be able to tell you many of the replies, and you can use this information provided you tell us how you obtained it.

This competition will be a valuable education for a boy or girl, even if they do not wish to enter for the prizes.

The two successful competitors will be given the choice, after we have arranged with their parents, of entering one of the following departments of our offices:—The Editorial Department, the Art Department, the Counting House.

Should the winners live outside London, we have no doubt we shall be able to arrange with their parents as to their residence.

At all events, here is an opportunity for some boy and some girl to put their feet on the first rung of Fortune's Ladder, and we hope every parent who has his child's interest at heart will make an effort on their behalf.

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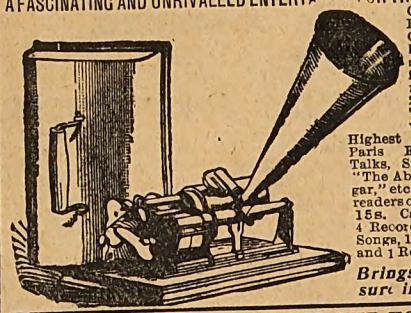

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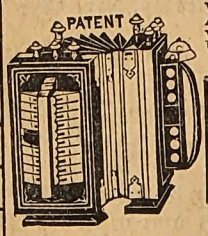

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 775.] Week Ending November 7th, 1903. [One Penny.

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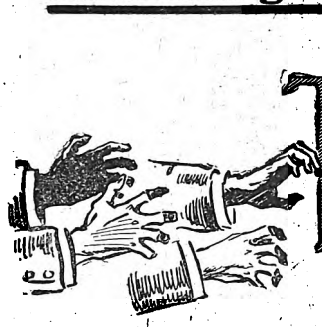
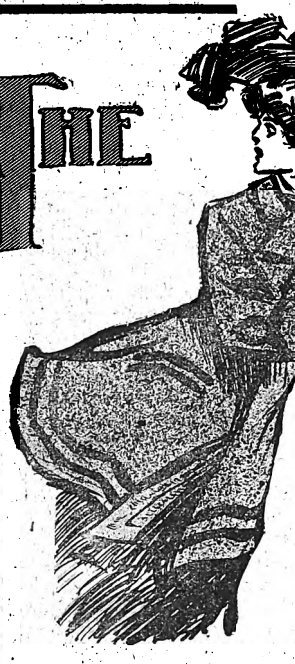


THE PURSUIT OF SARA



For New Readers.

Miss Sara Gillespie, the relater of these experiences, was a typine in the firm of Templeton & Co.

The partners in the firm, Mr. Templeton, Mr. Harrington Shackell, and Mr. Rigby Starr, treated Sara most courteously, especially the senior partner, who, before very long, induced her to tell him all about her absent lover, Noel Masterman.

Noel was the nephew of Sir Francis Masterman, who in his will left him a thousand pounds. With this money he intended to buy a doctor's practice, and to give up the situation he was holding, that of medical attendant to a gentleman who was travelling on the Continent.

He came home to England on the death of the Baronet, but was soon recalled by telegram to Nice, as his patient had shown bad symptoms.

Noel was, however, loth to give up the idea of purchasing the practice he had in view, so, leaving the thousand pounds with them in notes, he signed a document authorising Templeton & Co. to act for him.

By a piece of trickery the firm converted this into a document authorising them to deal *with his whole estate.* He was heir to the baronetcy, in the event of the present holder of the title, Sir Herbert, his cousin, having no heir.

The next day Sara overheard the three partners gloating over the probable success of their schemes.

Then she was amazed and horrified to hear Shackell relate how, posing as Sir Herbert's valet, he had murdered the baronet in cold blood, and had been most careful to leave no clues behind him.

Little by little she understood the full meaning of the vile plot the scoundrels had in hand.

Her betrothed was now Sir Noel Masterman, and Templeton & Co. had full power over his estate!

She resolved on a bold scheme—to get possession of the notes and the document. Bursting into the room, she eluded her astounded employers, seized the precious papers, and fled.

Besides the £1,000 in notes, she had about five pounds with her. Sara wired to Noel to return at once, and then she took train to Bedford.

While there a murderous attack was made on her by Rigby Starr, disguised as a nurse.

He endeavoured to push Sara into the river by Newnham Bridge, but in his eagerness he was nearly drowned himself.

Sara escaped, and, still retaining the all important paper relating to her lover's inheritance, made her way to Northampton.

Templeton & Co., she knew, would leave no stone unturned to find her; no course would be too desperate for them to take in order to regain the document.

At Northampton Sara rescued a little boy from death, and thereby gained the devoted friendship of a young girl namep Maggie Dunkley. To her she confided all her troubles.

While strolling in Abingdon Park, Sara encountered a villainous-looking man with red-hair.

She was told that he was a keeper in a lunatic asylum, and later she found out that Noel was detained as a patient in that asylum!

Madly she intreated for his release, but all in vain! Then the red-haired man told her that he would aid Noel to escape, and told Sara to be on the racecourse the next morning at five o'clock.

Thence Sara went. Suddenly she was seized from behind! Before her, she saw Noel gagged and bound! A man was holding a pistol to his head, and a voice exclaimed:

"Tell me where the papers are before I count ten, or—your lover dies!"

The speaker was Harrington Shackell!

Suddenly she saw a man on horseback galloping towards her. How could she gain time, till her possible rescuer could reach her? "Help," she screamed.

"Eight," said Shackell, and the trigger of the pistol held to Noel's head was raised.

The horseman spurring his steed drew nearer.

"Nine! Is he to die?" cried Shackell.

Sara tried to answer, but her voice was strangled in her throat. Only a hoarse murmur came from her lips. She could not speak; she could not even make a sign.

A second, but a second, and her love must die!

Ten—and the fatal shot was to be fired!

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THE PURSUIT OF SARA

HEMMED IN AT LEICESTER.

At the last moment with the word—that fatal "ten," the signal for my lover's death—trembling on Shackell's lips, a conviction, strange and startling, came to me. Something, perhaps a turn of his head, maybe a look in his eyes, or, as I like to think, the intuition of my love, laid bare the fact that the man at whose head the pistol was pointed *was not Noel!*

With a cry I broke from my captors.

"Fire!" I shouted; and again "Fire! That's not Noel Masterman, whoever he may be!"

For a second a blinding fear that after all I was mistaken, sent the world spinning. The next, Shackell turned on Noel's substitute and reviled him.

The other, throwing the loosely knotted cords from arms and chest, replied in kind. The two had almost come to blows, when Shackell, suddenly remembering, missed me.

"Where's the girl?" he yelled, striking at his men who stood about, idly regarding him. Then, as he caught sight of my vanishing figure, "Hurry, make haste, she must not get away. Confound you, why don't you run, you miserable idiots!"

Heading the chase he raced across the turf. Swift he might be, but I was lighter-footed. The horseman I had seen in the distance came nearer, closer, stopped.

"Up you get, missie!" Jim Goodman's strong arm swung me lightly to the saddle before him. "Now, then, Tom," to the boy who ran beside him, "get back and tell my girl the lady's safe. Off!" He waved his whip, shook the reins on the brown mare's neck, and like the wind we tore away, until the shouts of Shackell and his crew grew like the yelping of a pack of hounds in the far distance.

"Maggie was bothered about you," he explained, when at length he judged it safe to draw rein and take a breathing space. "At five in the morning the race-course is a queer sort of place for a girl to go to, and she scented danger. She came down to me at the stables, roused me up, and started me and Tom off after you. I'm glad I came, too, they were a roughish-looking lot of chaps for you to be amongst, missie."

"I can never thank you enough for coming. You and Maggie."

"It's nothing," he remarked, as though he had rescued persecuted people from his birth upwards. "I'd do more than that, for anyone who'd been a good friend to my Maggie."

"Where do you think I had better go, Jim?" I asked.

"You mustn't come back to Northampton, that's certain," he answered, "unless"—his voice grew hard—"unless you ride straight to the police-station and give those chaps in charge."

"I can't do that," I faltered. "I *daren't!* It may seem strange to you, but indeed it's no wrong or shameful reason that stops me. Maggie knows," I added, "and she approves."

"If she thinks it's all right, missie, I won't say any more. All the same it would be a deal simpler to go to the court and have 'em put in gaol, than to run away. The chances are they'll find you out again, so I understood Maggie to tell me, and then what are you going to do?"

"I can do nothing but hope and, and—fight," I answered, my voice shaking. "It's not for my own sake, Jim, but for my sweetheart's. I have something belonging to him, something I took—or, as they say, stole—from his enemies, the people who pursue me. I daren't go to the police, all I can do is to fight on and on until he comes back. Until——" A sudden fear made me start and all but overbalance.

"The papers, Jim!" I gasped. "I left some papers with Maggie before I came out."

"Here they are, missie, all safe and sound. Maggie gave them to me the last thing. If you don't mind, I'd rather she didn't have the keeping of them any more, miss. What I can do for you myself I will, but if *she* should come to any harm——"

"Don't worry," I interrupted. I promise you Maggie shall run no further risks."

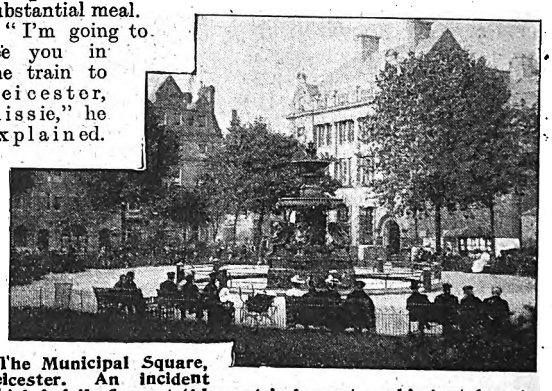
Jim murmured his thanks, and tried somewhat awkwardly to excuse himself for his anxiety. I did not aid him in his endeavours but let him flounder in a sea of apology. I acknowledged the justice of his request, but I was hurt none the less on its account. It seemed as if I were destined to be a sort of female Ishmael, outcast and alone.

At Jim's suggestion I dismounted at a little country inn some miles out of the town, where, he said, I might in safety spend the rest of the day.

"The landlady knows me and Maggie," he explained; "as a friend of ours she'd be pleased for you to stay. I'll tell her you've been travelling and want some hours' rest."

I was shown to a room at the top of the house, and, flinging myself on the bed, fell into a deep sleep, from which I did not wake till close on six o'clock. At seven the faithful Jim reappeared, and under his care I descended to the coffee-room and partook of a substantial meal.

"I'm going to see you in the train to Leicester, missie," he explained.



The Municipal Square, Leicester. An incident which befalls Sara at this spot is in next week's instalment.

"I'd advise you to go to a hotel for to-night, it will be safer for you than lodgings. The bigger the place the more people in it, and the less chance for anyone to kidnap you. Meanwhile, here's five pounds from me and Maggie, which you can pay us back when better times come. It'll keep you going for a bit. If you want more you must let us know. You'll write to Maggie?"

"Of course; directly I get to Leicester. Do you think it wise to go to such a large place?"

"Much safer than a smaller one. Besides, from Leicester you can keep in touch with us. Maybe a letter will come from your sweetheart, and we should want to bring it on at once."

I thanked him for his kindness, and sent many messages of love and gratitude to Maggie. At any rate I left Northampton less forlorn than when I came. I had found friends, faithful, loving-hearted people to whom I could turn in distress, sure of help and sympathy.

It seemed a long run from Northampton to Leicester, and in spite of my day's rest I felt terribly fagged when, dazed by the clatter and din of the big station, I found myself at my journey's end.

Mindful of Jim's instructions, I appealed to the porter, who seized on my bag with the avidity of a bird of prey, and asked if he could recommend me a hotel.

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He glanced me up and down, and after a moment's thought, suggested that there was a temperance hotel opposite the station.

Visions of "Pearce and Plenty," eminently clean but to my mind inhospitable, rosebefore me.

"I don't much like temperance hotels," I faltered.

"There's the George, but"—he paused, "you're very young," he said with a fatherly shake of the head; "you'd better go to the Temperance," and shouldering my bag—Maggie's last gift—he led the way up many flights of stairs out into the street, across the road, and into the hall of the hotel.

I was located in a room at the top of the house, at the extreme end of a very long corridor. Furnished in the approved fashion of hotels, lit by a dim gas burner, the surroundings were not calculated to rouse my drooping spirits. However, I felt better after supper, and lay down to rest with a quieter mind than I had hoped to enjoy.

I awoke some hours later, my heart beating violently, my nerves a quiver, my whole being stirred by the sense of danger. I started up, crouching on the side of my bed. What had roused me? In what subtle fashion had my nerves been quickened to a consciousness of peril?

In the silence of the night, far, far down the corridor, I heard a soft, shuffling sort of tread. Nearer it came and nearer, each second hastening its approach. Frozen with the fear that comes in the night watches, I shivered, clasping my fingers round my throat that I might feel the contact of warm, living flesh.

What was it, man or beast? that shuffled down the corridor. My room—the last—lay at the end of an abrupt turn in the passage, and was some yards distant from the rest. As I realised this I remembered with a dismay so sharp as to cause physical pain *that I had not locked my door!*

I could not move. A wild fear that even as I reached the door and grasped the key, *the thing* would fall upon me, kept me still.

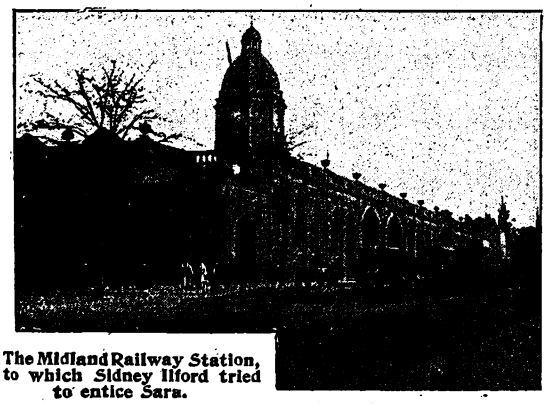
Slowly the curious, halting feet came along the corridor. Another minute they will reach my threshold; and then——?

I glance round for the bell, to reach it I must cross the room. It hangs upon the other side of the fireplace. I cannot stir. I cannot!

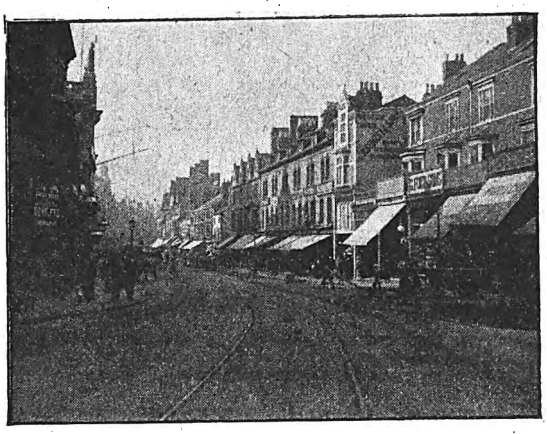
With the last effort of a rapidly paralysing will, I throw myself off the bed. Turning the key, I grasp it tightly and creep back, hiding under the clothes.

The steps pause outside my room. The door is softly tried, and in the silence I seem to catch the murmur of an oath at its resistance. Then comes a scratching on the paint. I throw back the bedclothes, and cautiously sit up. The dim light that streams through the window is suddenly intensified. The moon emerging from a cloud illumines the sky, and casts its beams with lavish splendour on the earth. In the clear, cold radiance the door shines silver. Fascinated, I watch the beams fall lower, lower till they reach the floor.

And there, ghostly and lean in the strange light, beneath



The Midland Railway Station, to which Sidney Ilford tried to entice Sara.



Granby Street, to which Sara went in order to dispatch a telegram to Maggie, telling her of her arrival.

the lintel of the door, curved upward, inward, like the talons of a bird of prey, stretched the *four fingers and a thumb* of a man's right hand.

It seems to my excited fancy that the door rises with the strain, that the fingers pressing with such cruel strength will lift it from its hinges. I hardly dare to breathe, the slightest sound may thwart my purpose.

Noiselessly and with infinite precaution I make my way to the dressing-table and feel for a dagger-shaped hatpin, which, sharp as a knife, is a valuable weapon of defence.

This hand that seeks to steal my lover's property—for that I feel is responsible for its appearance—shall not go empty away.

I stoop down by the door, poising the weapon carefully. And then with a quick movement stab the fingers with my pin. Bleeding and maimed, they are withdrawn, the footsteps shuffle back along the corridor—I am alone.

Reflection decided me that I had better keep silence as to my midnight adventure. Once again I must refrain from seeking help against my pursuers. Two attempts had already been made upon my life, as many upon my, or rather Noel's, property. All had failed. But the next—I sighed, my heart grew heavy. I decided not to leave Leicester, despite my fears. Hitherto I had fled before my enemies. This time I resolved to reverse my methods. I would stay in Leicester and defy the firm of Templeton and Co. to do their worst.

It was evident they did not intend to summon the law to their assistance; had they contemplated appealing to the police I should have been under arrest long since. They seemed to rely upon their strength and cunning to regain possession of the documents. It remained for me to defeat them by the power of love.

From the hotel I found my way down Granby Street, populous and bustling, to the Post Office, where I dispatched a wire to Maggie telling her of my safe arrival. My next call was at Wheeldon's, a large stationer's, with well stocked windows. My errand was to ask for employment. In a town like Leicester there must surely be a demand for typines. I was a skilled operator, and ought not to find a difficulty in getting a situation—until Noel returned.

The assistant stared somewhat at my request, and assured me there was no opening in that establishment, nor so far as he knew in any other.

Much depressed, I was turning to leave the shop when a customer at the other end of the counter came forward.

He had overheard my question. If I would forgive his interference he thought it possible he might be of use!

This, punctuated with smiles, and bows and flourishes of neatly gloved hands.

Very tall, with a slight, willowy figure, a fresh coloured face and a neat black moustache, despite his good looks and ingra-

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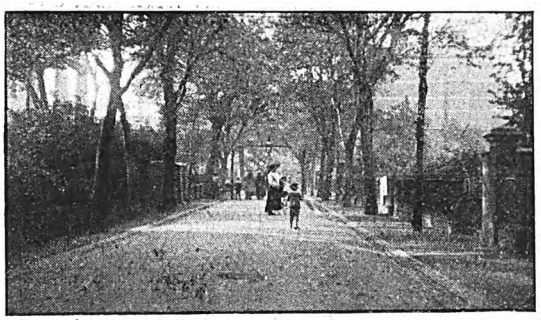

This is "The New Walk," Leicester. At this spot Sara had a most exciting adventure with Templeton himself, which will be fully described next week.

tiating manner the stranger did not favourably impress me. I looked him up and down, however, searched in vain for any trace of a likeness between him and one of the three partners, and finally decided he was well-meaning, if effusive.

"I heard only yesterday that Messrs. Cooper Corah, the big manufacturers, had a vacancy in their establishment for a young lady clerk. You might call at the office and inquire," he bowed again. "You might be successful, at any rate, you could try, I suppose," he tapped his left palm with the slender fingers of his right. "I suppose you have references and all that sort of thing?"

"I can offer the highest testimonials," I replied in the words of a ready letter writer. "There need be no difficulty as to that."

The stranger smiled severely, offered me his card, and bowed himself into the street. I followed, gazing absently after his tall figure.

The card bore the name of Sidney Ilford, and the address of a London club. I put it in my pocket and turned my steps in the direction of St. Margaret's Works.

Progress was necessarily slow; the Corporation was engaged in electrifying the tram service, and the roads for the time had become trenches filled with workmen, digging, hammering, clanging iron against iron in one continuous shriek.

The footpaths, encumbered by rubbish, were barricaded by huge mounds of gravel, and piles of timber. Round the clock house the din was at its height. Groups of pedestrians fascinated by the scene watched from the pavement, a solid mass of humanity—blocking the traffic, through which one had literally to fight a way.

From Granby Street and Gallowtree Gate I turned up Church Gate, exchanging the tall, prosperous buildings, wide thoroughfares, and bustling air of life for the stereotyped rows of red brick dwellings sacred to the artisan and operative.

I did not take the quickest route to Cooper Corah's factory. I missed my way, forgot my directions, and finally found myself in the middle of Abbey Park, within sight of the factory chimneys, but separated from them by winding paths and waving trees. A charming spot, the Park has an individuality that marks it out from kindred places of recreation. In the centre of the most populous part of the town, it is environed, by a forest of chimney stacks, that—over the flower beds, bright with many-coloured blossoms, over the water sparkling iridescent in the sunshine—breathe heavy clouds of smoke. The air throbs with the pulsation of vast machinery, the wind is charged with odours strange, indescribable, vaguely reminiscent of burnt leather—yet neither smoke nor the close proximity of toil can wholly mar the green quietness of this place of peace. Wrested from the encroaching tide of commerce, it lies tranquil and serene, held in the heart of the city's turmoil.

After some little trouble I arrived at Cooper Corah's, a large, white looking factory busy with the hum of many voices. I was directed to the counting-house, where I inquired if the firm were in need of a careful and accurate typine.

The gentleman interviewing me shook his head and assured me there was no vacancy of the kind in the establishment.

I pleaded that he might have overlooked the fact that such assistance was desired, but his denial was even more emphatic.

I left the place depressed at my failure, and irritated that I should have been sent on a fool's errand. What object could the smiling idiot in the stationer's shop have had in telling me such a string of falsehoods? It was evident he had invented the whole story. Love of interference would not explain, nor yet a malicious turn for joking. Could it be—

I stopped short. It was impossible he could have any connection with Templeton and Co. There was nothing to be gained by sending me to Cooper Corah's, *they* at any rate were not in league with my former employers.

By this time I had reached the churchyard of St. Margaret's, through which there lies a footpath. The beautiful tower of the old church rising above the sad discoloured gravestones loomed dark and stately against a background of blue sky.

The stillness of the scene took hold of me; here, in this place of the dead, the fact that I had life seemed, for the moment, wonderful enough to balance all my troubles. And then, out of the stillness that surrounded me, there came the sound of dragging footsteps that shuffled softly down the path.

Where had I heard the tread? My heart contracted, I felt again the terror of the night. That soft and stealthy step had passed down the hotel corridor, had paused outside my door.

With a cry I turned and faced—Sidney Ilford!

"Were you successful in your application at Cooper Corah's, Miss Gillespie?" he said, smirking.

"How do you know my name?" I asked, moving away.

"For a very sufficient reason," he returned. "I will give you full particulars if you will grant me a few minutes' conversation."

"I have not time," I answered, catching at the first excuse. "I am in a hurry, I wish you——"

He stayed the word upon my lips. Gripping my arm with his left hand—he had good cause to spare his right—he bent his head so that his face was level with my own.

"If you are wise you will hear me now," he said.

"I do not know you," I answered. "Let me go," I raised my voice. "Help!" I cried, urged to desperation. "Help!"

"If you call again, as Heaven is above us, I'll whistle for a constable and give you into custody. On what charge?" he laughed insultingly. "The police will know, at all events," he sneered. "Such an accomplished thief as yourself cannot hope to escape recognition."

As he stopped, he took a paper from his breast pocket and handed it to me, still keeping a tight grip on my arm.

"Read," he said, "it will interest you."

From the document, in a printed notice, there stared at me a hideous and distorted likeness of myself! With a cry I grasped the paper tight, and read, my cheeks aflame, the description of my face and figure that succeeded.

"Height 5ft. 6in., broad shoulders, slim waist, small feet and ankles. Red hair, green eyes, large mouth, good teeth! Anyone giving such information as will lead to the apprehension of the above will be rewarded with £100."

"This bill——"

"Is one of many," my companion interrupted. "Before to-night they will stare at you from every hoarding, face you at every railway station, haunt you in every street. Go—if you like"—he loosened his grip upon my arm, "but if you do, before to-night you will be lodged in gaol."

"Who are you?" I asked again. "What have you to do with me?"

"I will answer both your questions, but not here. It is impossible to converse on weighty matters in the middle of a public footpath. Let us sit down," and he pointed to a seat close to the wall, against which, ranged in solemn fashion, a row of tombstones reared their heads.

It was futile to combat the suggestion; I must know where I stood in regard to this unexpected ally of my enemies before I could hope to defeat his attack.

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"I suppose you are employed by Templeton and Co.?" I asked, seating myself as far as possible from him.

"I am an agent of the firm," he answered cautiously, "and as such, I have heard of the disappearance of their late typine—with notes to the value of a thousand pounds."

"You will, if you please," I answered promptly, "drop this style of conversation and speak plainly, or not at all. I took the notes, also the paper that Noel Masterman was entrapped into signing. You know I took them, as you know also why I did so. You are aware, no doubt, that Messrs. Templeton and Co. have tried to murder and to rob me. They have failed as you"—I looked at his right hand—"have failed also. Don't trouble to deny it!" I cried angrily. "You tried to break into my room last night. Proof?" I laughed scornfully. "There," I answered, and struck at the fingers of his right hand with my glove.

"You shall pay for that," he snarled, the mask thrown off. "I vow you shall pay——"

"You waste time in threats," I interrupted. "Let us come to business. What are your—terms?"

"Either you deliver to me the bank-notes and the document signed by your lover, or you return with me to London to await Templeton's instructions."

"If I refuse?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Before night, I again repeat, the town will be flooded with these bills."

"I don't believe you. It would be too great a risk for the firm to have me arrested. I know too much."

He grinned maliciously.

"To have you arrested on the charge of stealing the notes and the document would be a foolish proceeding of which my employers are not capable. The charge preferred against you would be that of misappropriating some £5 of the money given to you for office expenses. In other words, embezzling the petty cash. How does that strike you, Miss Gillespie? What sort of defence would you, an absconding clerk, masquerading under false names, have to offer? Whatever charge you brought against your late employers would redound to your discredit, not to theirs. Besides"—he gave me a side look from his crafty eyes—"besides, nothing you said could be proved. It's not likely you're such a fool as to carry the papers about with you," he paused, and I felt his glance burn into mine. Not by so much as a tremor did I betray the anxiety the question caused me. If he gained a hint that at that moment I had the papers, he would—I knew it—close with me in a frantic attempt to gain them.

"No," I said calmly, "I'm not so silly as that. I'm like an advance agent, always a town ahead. I left the papers"—I paused as if confused, and bit my lip.

Mr. Sidney Ilford made a note of my slip, and no doubt decided to communicate with the firm's representative at Northampton, so soon as he was through with me.

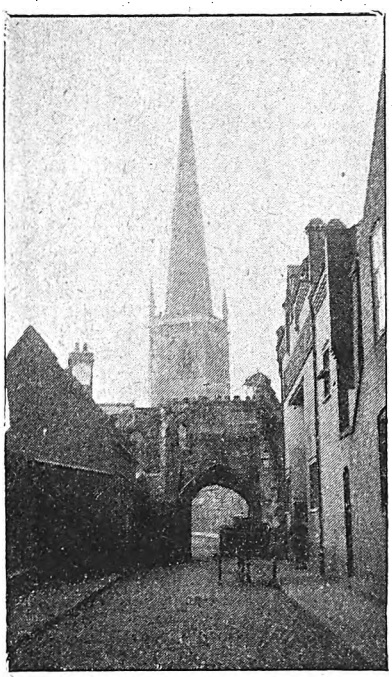
"Am I to give you in charge or not?"

"You haven't the power," I answered, fighting desperately. "I can prove you were not my employer."

"Pardon me," his suavity of manner had returned, "you are mistaken. As it happens I am a director of the company that employed you, and as such I can have you detained on suspicion. Once you are in confinement, if only for four-and-twenty hours, the game is ours. We know all your movements, where you went, with whom you stayed, since you left the office. We shall discover the whereabouts of the papers almost immediately. Meanwhile, you will be committed for trial on the evidence of the respected man of business, Mr. Templeton, found guilty, and sentenced to imprisonment."

"Against that you suggest I should accompany you to London? What advantage should I get from the latter course?"

"You would be spared the ignominy of a trial, and the disgrace of imprisonment. You know enough of the firm, Miss Gillespie, to understand that when I say you will be found guilty, such will be the case. There is, however, a third alternative; give me the notes," he stretched out his maimed right hand, "you can make better terms with me than Templeton. Tell me where the notes are to be found. And, and"—his face worked convulsively, his eyes shone with cupidity—"you can keep the paper," he said hoarsely. "I don't require that, it's the notes I want. Give them to me, and I will tell you where you can find your lover. It's the last chance you'll have, Miss Gillespie. Where are they?" He brought his face close to mine. "Only tell me and you shall be with Noel Masterman this afternoon."



Church Gate, at which point Sara made a daring and successful attempt to escape from Ilford.

The temptation to yield was terrible. All that I had endured, the terror, the pain, the agony of fright, the apprehension of discovery combined to weaken me. After all a thousand pounds was a small price to pay for happiness. Noel would not grudge ten times that amount. Should I consent? The eager face watched mine.

I turned upon my tempter fiercely.

"I will not give you the notes," I answered hotly.

"Then——"

"Neither will you give me in charge," I interrupted. "I have made my choice. I elect to go with you to London. Come," and I rose prepared to accompany him.

My decision seemed to surprise, not to say disappoint him, and he wasted some time and eloquence in trying to induce me to accept his terms. At last, with a bad grace, he resigned himself to the inevitable and leaving the churchyard, linked his arm in mine, and led me in the direction of Granby Street.

"We'll go by the Midland," he said, "there's a fast train to London about one, I think."

It wanted but a quarter to the hour, yet he did not seem to hasten, and I judged he was in some perplexity how to act. It struck me as possible that Templeton might not be best pleased at the turn things had taken. Probably he was not in London; he might be engaged in some transaction in the provinces, which he would not care to leave.

In that case, I thought, it would be doing my former employer a kindness were I to make good my escape. That I had not the slightest intention of accompanying Mr. Ilford to London, I have, I trust, made sufficiently plain. I only watched my opportunity to break loose from my captor and take refuge in flight.

The opportunity came quickly. At the corner of Church Gate our progress was stopped by a dense mass of men and women watching the men at work upon the tram-lines. It was the dinner-hour, and every one curtailed their leisure to inspect the progress of the alterations.

In the middle of the crowd I threw my whole weight upon Ilford with such a sudden jerk, that, staggering, he involuntarily threw up his hand. Snatching my arm from his

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grasp, I flung myself heavily among the crowd around us. Rushing, dodging, I forced a way until I reached the front rank of the throng and essayed to make my way along the street.

Immediately Sidney Ilford yelled out the cry of "Thief, stop thief!" A thousand throats took up the cry, eager for pursuit as a pack of wolves. At the cry I changed my course, and, doubling like a hare, fled across the road; over the stones, the rails, the rubbish that made the way all but impassable I fought a path, until I reached the pavement on the other side.

There—Heaven bless him—some kind Samaritan made way for me, and tried to stop the chase, that, yelling at all top speed, came after me. Down Gallowtree Gate, the road growing clearer and my pursuers closer. Gasping I fled, Noel's name on my lips, Noel's paper at my heart.

Down Market Street, barely escaping the clutch of greedy hands, over the cobble stones into the Market-place, thronged with stalls. It was Saturday, and end to end they stood, loaded with meat and vegetables, sweetmeats and cakes—and everything the busy housewife wants to buy. My heart in my throat I dodged between the stalls, overturning bales of merchandise in my mad flight. There never was a busier market than Leicester upon Saturday. The place was packed, one could walk upon the people's heads. The chase let loose, charged marketers and stalls with a great rush so that neat, well-adorned barrows, thrown helter-skelter one against each other, collapsed and fell with a crash on the ground.

Meanwhile with panting breath I crept behind a large capacious stall hung with lace curtains of all sorts and prices. The proprietress, a stout comely woman, took pity on my frightened face.

"Here," she said shortly, and pushed me underneath a pile of goods stacked in a corner close against the awning By this time the pursuit had cooled; faced by infuriated hucksters, the friends of "justice" felt their enthusiasm abate. They slunk off rapidly, leaving Sidney Ilford to continue his search alone.

Once or twice I thought I heard his voice, and felt a chill run through me. Gradually, however, my apprehension died away, I emerged from my hiding place and sought my protector.

In the middle of my earnest thanks, a shout arose from the neighbouring streets.

"Fire," screamed the crowd. "Fire!" The cry was taken up, repeated on all sides. With one sweeping movement the crowd, gathering at the cry, poured down Gallowtree Gate and Granby Street, to where a thick cloud of evil smoke darkened the sky.

Yielding to the attraction wielded by the very name of "Fire," I abruptly left my shelter and hurried from the market to the blazing pile—a shoe factory in Campbell Street. The building was well alight. Luckily there was no fear of loss of life, all the hands had left the place an hour ago.

At last, however, a fire-engine made its appearance; ladders were run up against the building, and some attempt made to subdue the flames. By this time another engine appeared, and under the direction of a grey-bearded official, whom the crowd greeted as Superintendent Ely, the pumps were got to work.

But the fire had too firm a grip upon the place to give way easily. The air was dense with smoke, the flames shooting through the roof were fanned by a strong breeze, that cast the charred fragments of slate and brick upon the crowd below. The place was getting all too hot for safety. It occurred to me that from the back windows of the hotel I could command a safer view than from the street.

Pushing a path through the crowd, that somewhat stolidly lined the road, I made my way back to the hotel. The house was in an uproar, the factory was in too close proximity not to raise a feeling of alarm.

The corridors were dripping with water, exuding from the pipes that had been pressed into the service of the brigade. Through a landing window the glare in the sky was frightful to behold; I hurried up the staircase, fled down the corridor, into my little room—hot with the raging of the fire.

From my window I looked over the roof of the Post Office, from which a hose was playing on the burning pile. On the roofs of the adjoining building men stood shouting directions to the firemen. A huge sheet of flame, red-hearted, yellow-tipped, hung like a curtain between earth and sky. The water playing from all sides, seemed to have no effect. I thought the factory doomed. Engrossed with the sight, I hung over the window-sill,

The crowd watching the men at work on the tram lines.

and oblivious of all save the burning pile, did not hear soft steps outside my door. Not till the grating of the key in the lock *from the outside*, warned me of danger, did I realise what had happened. Sidney Ilford had traced me to the hotel and had fastened me a prisoner in my room!

For a moment I hesitated whether I should peal the bell and summon the assistance of the servants.

Ilford had possibly left the hotel either to communicate with Templeton or to fetch the police. My chance of escape lay in his absence. If I called for help it would mean a delay in leaving the place.

There was a telegram lying on my table. It read:

"Important news for you. Coming to-morrow.—MAGGIE."

News—that meant news of Noel. Maybe he was in England. Perhaps we would be with me to-morrow, nay this very afternoon. In a passion of joy, I kissed the precious words.

I was a prisoner in my room. Useless to try and force the lock, futile to ring the bell. There remained but one way of egress—the window. From a great height I looked down on slanting roofs of slate, slippery with water. To the left the factory blazed on high, to the right—I drew back, a scream of horror broke from my lips. From an adjoining building two men were manipulating a long ladder in the direction of the hotel. In the confusion of the fire, fearing that theirs would be the next house attacked, none paid heed to the doings of frightened householders, men pumped water, erected ladders, directed a hose as pleased them best. The ladder that slowly but surely was approaching the direction of my window was supported by a tall, square-shouldered man, under the directions of a man some years his senior. And in the two I recognised Richard Templeton and Harrington Shackell!

The ladder which reached my window was steadied into position. Try as I would I could not displace the iron that rested on the sill. A slight boyish figure set his foot upon the lowest rung. Rigby was coming towards me.

A sudden burst of smoke clouded my view, so hot, so close were the flames that they scorched my cheeks and seemed to burn my eyes.

When I looked again Rigby was nearer. I caught the gleam of a weapon in his hand.

"Help! Help!" I scream, and know no help can come.

And then, with blind fury I throw myself against the figure clambering now into the room.

(The Leicester episode concludes next week.)

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Faint Heart and Fair Lady.

How a Man Pleaded for his Friend.

ONCE Harry Tiverton and James Ridgemore were bosom friends. Something happened; they were never seen to speak again and they cut one another dead whenever they met. This is the curious story, never before related, of their estrangement.

One evening Tiverton sat in his sanctum—called by courtesy his study. He was a reader, a voracious reader, but chiefly of the lighter forms of literature. What life lacked for him in romance he found between the covers of novels.

Unannounced, as usual, Ridgemore entered. They warmly shook hands, and Tiverton pulled forward a second armchair. There was clearly a more than common understanding between them.

"You've been quite deserting me, Jim, of late."

"I've not dropped in this week, if that's what you mean."

"Nor last week either! What's been amiss?"

"I'll tell you. It's nothing very serious, but—let me light up first!"

Satisfied that his pipe was alight, Ridgemore continued:

"Something has occurred, Harry, which I reckoned entirely impossible."

"You've come into a fortune?"

"I suppose I have—a piece of good fortune anyhow."

"You're promised a rise at the office, eh?"

"Nothing so material! It's a trifle hard to tell you, old friend. Got a good novel there?"

"My dear chap, you make a statement that raises my curiosity to boiling point, and then calmly suggest taking up a book."

"I didn't mean that, Harry. You're a novel reader. You know something of the hearts of men—and women. I think you will understand me."

Tiverton looked at his friend with a perplexed air. His manner was mysterious and slightly nervous.

"I don't know you, Jim, in this serious mood."

"Nor I myself. The whole thing has just turned me upside down. The fact is—I am in love."

The candid and unexpected announcement caused Tiverton to edge his chair a couple of inches away in surprise.

"Don't shun me as though it were measles," the other humorously observed.

"You've astonished me—I confess it. But my congratulations are none the less sincere, Jim." He held out his hand. "When did the engagement take place?"

"I never said a word about an engagement. The two things don't naturally follow in the least. You shouldn't jump to conclusions."

"I see. The course of true love not running entirely smooth, eh, Jim?"

Ridgemore nodded. His pipe had gone out. He paused to relight it.

"I wish I could help you, old fellow."

"Probably you can, Harry. I don't understand girls—have never pretended to. If I'd had a sister of my own it might have been different."

Tiverton looked sceptical. He had four sisters of his own, and they did not help him one whit to understand the sex. He kept silent.

"My case is just this, Harry. I love the girl, but don't know in the least her feelings towards myself. The usual advice in such circumstances is to go in and win, but I'm a nervous, backward chap and simply can't move without knowing a bit first how the land lies. It's in that I think you can help me."

"My dear Jim! Why, I don't even know the girl!"

"Yes, you do."

"It's not—er—one of my sisters?"

He advanced the idea with a certain timidity.

"No, don't look so anxious, Harry. I've no designs in that quarter. But you're pretty warm. It is a relative of yours—your cousin, Nellie Mayo."

Tiverton's pipe dropped from his mouth into his lap, then on to the floor. He did not trouble to brush away the ashes which were distributed over his clothes in its fall.

"That little kid!"

Ridgemore looked slightly huffy.

"She's not so very little."

"It seems only yesterday she put up her hair and took to long frocks."

"She's twenty-one next year, Harry, and only half a head shorter than myself."

"I beg pardon, but I've always looked upon her as a youngster. And to think that you're in love with her!"

"Is it so very queer?" Ridgemore's tones were not very conciliatory.

"Forgive me! I did not mean to put you out; it was the surprise. Well, she's a decent girl and pretty, very pretty, some people have said."

The other's face wreathed itself in smiles.

"You're right, Harry. And she's good, isn't she?"

"I believe so. But how can I help you? It's hardly in my line."

Ridgemore pointed to the rows of novels.

"And you've devoured all those. I simply want you when you meet her next to find out how the land lies. You will do the thing tactfully, I know. Introduce my name in conversation and get to know somehow what she thinks of me."

"But what good will that do?"

"It will encourage me to proceed. She has rather a shy manner; I'm shy, too, and can't get behind it. But when I know that she really does care for me, I sha'n't be nervous any longer."

Tiverton looked reflective.

"It's rather a queer thing to ask, Jim. You don't wish me to disclose your feelings towards her?"

"By all means if you think it will help matters."

"But if things miscarry?"

"They won't. You're far too level-headed for that. Well, Harry?"

"Yes, I'll do it."

"Thank you no end! You're the best friend I ever had. I shall owe you everything if all goes right. Let me know, won't you?"

* * * * * *

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"It is good of you, Harry, to bring me here."

"Not at all! I'm glad you are enjoying yourself."

"It doesn't seem to you a waste of a precious Saturday afternoon?"

Tiverton thought of his important mission.

"I could not employ it in any better way, Nellie."

They were seated in Hyde Park on the banks of the Serpentine. Before them the water, smooth as a mirror, gleamed in the sunshine. On its surface several boats were gliding, but the weather was too hot for energetic rowing. The fresh green of the trees showed up against the blue sky, hardly flecked by a cloud. It was a perfect day and Nature was in her most sentimental mood.

Tiverton congratulated himself. He had come to the very spot to open the subject engrossing his mind. He felt himself burning with zeal for the success of his friend's suit. Ridgemore was a fortunate fellow.

"One might be twenty miles from anywhere instead of in the heart of London," Nellie Mayo dreamily observed.

"If you listen very attentively, you will hear the roar of 'buses at the Marble Arch."

"Don't be horrid! This is fairyland. Perhaps you will take me for a row presently, Harry."

"Perhaps—when the sun goes down."

"Ah, you're lazy."

"No. But I want to have a good talk with you first. One can't chat properly when toiling with the sculls."

In her cousin's eyes, Nellie had acquired a new importance. He scanned her features. They were far prettier than he had ever imagined, and in this summer costume—a white dress and a pink sun hat—she looked absolutely bewitching. Perhaps, after all, the fact of Jim being "gone" on her was not the wonder it seemed.

But it was time enough to open proceedings.

"Do you know something, Nellie?"

"What do you mean? Oh, isn't this place a dream?"

Ignoring her second question, Harry replied only to the first.

"Why, Nellie, that you're getting quite pretty."

"Nonsense! I wish you would be sensible."

Yet she could not disguise the pleasure in her eyes.

"But you are. There, I shouldn't be at all surprised if some fellow fell in love with you."

"You are too absurd, Harry."

"I mean it, though—every word of it."

His glance lingered on her head. What pretty ringlets of hair! What a well-shaped ear, like an island in their midst! How delicate and white a neck, and what a rosebud of a mouth! He involuntarily began to hum the tune, "Lucky Jim."

Nellie checked him.

"Hush, Harry! I mean, don't spoil the beautiful quiet." A pause. "I say, you weren't chaffing just now?"

"I'm not given to chaff. You *are* pretty, and I know a fellow who——"

He stopped. Wisdom dictated more cautious progress at this juncture. Too sudden a disclosure of Ridgemore's ardour for her might upset the girl.

"Well, what?" She could not wait for him to proceed.

"Thinks a tremendous lot of you."

"Oh, Harry, who?"

But he only laughed.

Nellie was growing visibly excited. There was a fine colour in her cheeks, and her eyes glistened. Tiverton felt more and more interested in her. A surfeit of sentimental novels had worked its way into his youthful blood. He began to draw upon his recollections of various episodes in them.

"Ah, Nellie, when love seizes a fellow, it lifts him up to the skies."

"I know the feeling a little bit."

"You do? Then I needn't explain."

"Oh, please do! I like it!"

"Well, you feel warm all over and most awfully jolly. And you vow to be such a decent fellow—to be worthy of her, you see."

Nellie's lip was trembling, and the colour in her cheeks matched the shade of her hat. Tiverton drew further and further upon his imagination.

"You sleep with her photograph under your pillow, and kiss it half a dozen times directly you wake up in the morning."

"I haven't had mine taken—er—since I was quite young."

"Then you must at once, Nellie. You don't know how someone would appreciate it."

Suddenly Harry felt a small gloved hand gently pressing his own. It was evidently Nellie's way of showing her appreciation of his gratifying remarks. Ridgemore's success was assured now; she was a girl with a heart.

"Oh, Harry, why didn't you tell me this before?"

"I? How could I?"

"I don't know. But it would have been nice to have known before."

A man came up and demanded twopence for their seats.

Tiverton paid the money and was glad to see his back, Nellie played with the handle of her parasol. She was evidently brooding deeply over something.

"Harry!"

"Yes, Nellie!"

"I wonder if you saw *Scrappy Bits* last week."

"It doesn't often come my way. What was in it?"

"It was so silly. I didn't agree with it in the least."

"What did it say?"

"That first cousins shouldn't marry."

"Gracious goodness! Nellie! You don't suppose—why——" He stopped, speechless.

"No, Harry, it's all right. As I said, I don't believe it a bit. You know I've loved you for years, don't you, dear?"

He stammered something which she construed into assent.

* * * * *

When Ridgemore came down to breakfast on Monday morning, a bulky letter from Tiverton lay on the table. For a minute or so he fingered the envelope. What had caused Tiverton to write so lengthy a communication? He nervously broke the seal.

There was a long preamble, apologetic in vein. Why could not Tiverton, with such hazards at stake, come more quickly to the point? He read impatiently on.

An uneasy suspicion took root in his mind.

"I implore your forgiveness, Jim, for what I am going to tell you," the letter read. "You know the interview with Nellie was not of my own seeking; I sought it out solely on your account. All, as I imagined, was proceeding so nicely for you, when there was a stunning revelation. Prepare yourself for a shock, old man! Nellie told me that she loved *me* and had done so for a long time. We are now engaged to be married."

Incredulity—dismay—anger flitted across Ridgemore's face in rapid succession.

He tore the letter to bits and threw it into the grate.

As he brushed his silk hat for the City, he said to the cat:

"There, if you want a thing done properly, you always have to do it yourself."

The cat blinked.

And that is why Harry Tiverton and James Ridgemore, once bosom friends, never now speak to one another.

Herbert Jamieson.

MISS PASSEE: "I should like to see a young man try to kiss me." Miss Young: "You cruel thing!"

SHE: "Shall I sing 'Then You'll Remember Me'?" He: "Yes; but, Ethel, don't forget that I want to remember you as kindly as possible."

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A Girl's Boast.

How Joan Mortlock Tried to Carry it out and what Came of the Attempt.

"SHE ought to have been a boy!"

Richard Mortlock thought of the words of the head-mistress of the Mount School for Girls as he watched his nineteen-year-old daughter romping about the lawn with her great dog. The very picture of health, youth, and exuberance of animal spirits! Dark hair, sparkling eyes, cheeks with a touch of carmine, well-rounded figure scarcely above the medium height, and full of natural grace and suppleness. Richard Mortlock thought of the bygone days when his wife and Joan's mother had appeared to him as the central figure of a picture that had much similarity with that upon which he was gazing, and his eyes grew moist.

"No! It's wrong!" he murmured. "Miss Jevons doesn't understand. Joan has as much roguishness in her composition as most boys, and she dearly loves a little fun, but to say that she ought to have been a boy is wrong! To turn such a charming piece of humanity into a member of the opposite sex would be a mistake! Although I say it as shouldn't, as the village people remark, Joan will perform a greater and better duty as she is, by bestowing her wealth of affection and energy upon some worthy man, and urging him on to greater things than he would be able to accomplish without a wife, or with one who has less mischief in her composition than Joan!"

He smiled, and the moisture that had crept into his eyes was gone. His smile deepened as he saw her racing the dog to the end of the lawn and away to the spot where a small river flowed past the grounds of Mortlock House. Then he saw her gather her skirts together and he uttered an exclamation of anxiety. He made a step forward as if to pass out of the window in pursuit, but stopped immediately. The girl and the dog had made a leap and had alighted on the opposite bank, where Joan faced about and waved her hand airily towards her father.

Mortlock answered the greeting, then turned back into the room and seated himself in a really easy-chair. That trifling escapade had caused a change in the train of his thoughts.

Joan's animal spirits might cause her to run the risk of bodily harm. Might it not also happen that her mischief-loving propensities, in conjunction with her unsophisticated ideas, would lead her into other dangers—dangers of the heart or soul?

"I should not have the slightest misgiving if she were—if she saw things as clearly as some girls do, but she is somewhat too trustful!" mused Mortlock. "I ought to have a feminine relative here with her, but I don't care to damp Joan's spirits by tying her to the society of someone much older than herself!" He sat staring at the carpet for several minutes, then he shook himself and arose with a laugh. "I am foolish! Joan has enough wit to take care of herself and not permit her boisterous energy to lead her into any madcap act!"

The object of Richard Mortlock's solicitude certainly seemed able to take care of herself, but how far this confidence was justified will be seen in the sequel.

On the following day there was to be a gathering in the Abbey ruins, a kind of garden party, where the Rector would have tea served and the young people would enjoy themselves. Joan was looking forward to this afternoon's pleasure; it was something to do, and there would be an opportunity to see the Rector's guest, of whom she had heard much from her friend, Edith Graham. That young lady, some two summers older than Joan, called at Mortlock House in the morning to ascertain if Joan were *sure* to be there, and it was that call which caused the trouble to commence.

"Of course I am sure to be there!" declared Joan emphatically. "It will be grand. I am dying to see this handsome stranger, naturally! What is he like?"

"Handsome! That sums it all up!" replied Edith with a laugh. "He has just one defect; he is coldly polite to ladies, and rumour has it that he is invulnerable to the charms of feminity!"

"Is he?" cried Joan, laughing in her turn. "Well, he must not think that he is so superior a being and that the members of our sex are so inferior!"

"Oh, he isn't at all like *that*! But he appears to be one of those men who—who are not easily captivated!"

"Wouldn't it be fun to see him a captive to the charms of one of us!" cried Joan, clapping her hands. "I wish——"

"One of *us!*" echoed Edith. "Why, you haven't long left school."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of myself!" said Joan truthfully. "I was thinking of the others. And yet," she continued in a tone of mingled vexation and jest, the former sentiment having been caused by Edith's rather sarcastic observation, "why shouldn't even poor little I be capable of doing it? I should like to do it just for the fun of the thing! It would be grand to make this invulnerable man surrender at discretion! I have a good mind to try!"

"You might as well spare yourself the trouble; you will not succeed!" said Edith Graham coldly.

Joan's eyes flashed; those words were really a challenge, and they aroused all her spirit. The idea was one calculated to afford scope for her mischief-loving propensities, which was another inducement to carry it out. Without fully estimating the significance of her words, Joan burst forth with:

"I'll do it! I'll bring him to the proposing point, or I'll forfeit my next Christmas box from papa in favour of the county hospital!"

Edith Graham laughed a trifle hysterically because, as she gazed at the flushed face and small figure, she could not prevent herself from inwardly acknowledging that Joan stood as good a chance as anyone of accomplishing such a task. They separated with a friendliness which, it must be confessed, was not quite genuine, and Joan set her lips firmly together, shut out all misgivings, and prepared to carry out her boast! Yes; it was a boast and she was wrong to have made it, but she would go through with it!

The afternoon was an ideal one for such an occasion. The sun shone on the hills and dales of the ground which had once been the domain of saintly men and, prior to that, a castle fortress. Wild flowers grew at the foot of the ruins of ancient walls, ivy-covered some of them, forming themselves into shady nooks, the grass of the flat land was velvety, and here and there divided by a parterre of cultivated flowers. Seats were fixed about the ruins for those who desired to rest without sitting on Mother Earth.

Joan was full of gaiety; her lithe form moved swiftly about the grounds and attracted general attention. Joan had been briefly introduced to the Rector's guest, who had bowed in the

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most polished manner, but had otherwise not been much interested in her, to judge by appearances.

Mr. Frank Spencer had disappeared; he seemed to be one by himself and was probably enjoying a pipe in some quiet nook. "From which I shall promptly haul him!" murmured Joan with determination; "a man mustn't think that he can escape the civilities of society in that way!"

Quite suddenly, in turning a corner, she came upon him; in fact, she nearly tripped over his foot as he sat with his back against an ivy-covered wall and his legs stretched at full-length. She hastily apologised, and he, not in the least disconcerted, lazily informed her that she "needn't mention it!"

"I have mentioned it!" said Joan. "I always think that it is rather absurd to tell people not to mention this or that when they have done it!"

"I shouldn't think so deeply if I were you! It's hard work and causes wrinkles!" he returned imperturbably.

She looked at him searchingly, but he gave no trace of his feelings, and she could not make up her mind whether he was quietly chaffing her or not.

"Thinking again?" he inquired, as she did not speak, and Joan was piqued to find that her eyebrows had contracted in meditation.

"I was thinking that you would make a good picture of——" She stopped herself abruptly, before the acid little speech was finished.

"Laziness!" He finished it for her nonchalantly. "You were going to say that, weren't you?"

"I intended to say 'indolence.' It's more polite!" she returned, with a mischievous twinkle in the expressive eyes which he did not fail to notice.

"It is very comfortable here!" he said, with an attempt to excuse himself. "I cannot ask you to sit down, as there is no seat. Pity, isn't it? I am sure we could pass a few minutes very agreeably in conversation; we understand each other tolerably well, do we not?"

Joan opened her lips to reply, checked herself, and then decided to say it, which she did with an air of defiance.

"Most gentlemen, less indolent, would have made another suggestion; but I can understand that it would require too much energy on your part!"

"By Jove! That's an arrow-pointed little speech, Miss Mortlock, but I'll own that I deserve it!" He sprang to his feet. "May I walk with you for a minute or two through these lovely grounds? I will not bore you long with my presence!"

Joan felt her face grow crimson. He would think her very forward! She must check her capacity for making a quick retort!

"I can't refuse, since I have really asked for it!" thought Joan, feeling uncomfortably warm.

So they strolled about the grounds for nearly half-an-hour together, till they came upon the Rector and a small party who engaged them in talk, and Joan contrived to slip away.

The half-hour with Mr. Frank Spencer had been a very agreeable one; she had forgotten her discomfort and they had chatted and bantered one another in true friendly fashion. He had received a brilliant education and she was by no means a vapid schoolgirl.

They met every day for the next week, either at some social gathering or while out on an errand or taking a constitutional along the country road. Somehow, Joan felt that she looked forward to these meetings, and she was disappointed on the one occasion when they did not have a minute or two in private conversation. She wanted to tell herself that she was pursuing her plan, but this was not exactly tasteful to her; and when she tried to examine her sentiments and find an explanation for this desire to see Frank Spencer, the answer that came to her mind caused her to blush at her own reflection in the mirror, and to call it "an absurd idea!" So she continued to look for the time when she would meet him, and to refuse to understand why she did so!

He met her one day about a mile from home and they walked together in the direction of Mortlock House and the Rectory. When those two commenced a quiet chat it was like knocking flint against steel, for sparks would fly very quickly. Spencer took a delight in exciting sharp retorts from this impulsive girl, and she tried to galvanise him into life, as she said.

"Don't you think I have idled my time away quite sufficiently here, Miss Mortlock?" he asked quizzically. "I ought to be devoting myself to some more useful occupation, eh?"

But Joan did not reply. Her power of speech seemed to have deserted her for the moment. Her face was averted, or he would have seen that it went pale, and afterwards became more red than before. Going away? She thought she heard him say that he was going away to-morrow! And what about her boast? No, it wasn't that which disturbed her. It was—nothing, nothing, nothing! How silly she was!

"I shall be sorry to go," he was saying. "It has been very pleasant here, but I must return. It isn't fair to leave a sweetheart so long. I am afraid I haven't treated her fairly, as I promised to be back about a week sooner. I wonder if she is capable of jealousy? Hardly, I think! I feel sure that she would like to see you, Miss Mortlock. I have to——"

"That is father's trap," interrupted Joan in a shrill voice, that was not at all like hers. "I can ride home now, thank you!"

Richard Mortlock came up at a trot and exchanged cordial greetings with the young man.

"I can give you a lift if you are going straight back," he said. "I think we can squeeze three persons on this seat!"

Frank Spencer looked at Joan and waited for her to second the invitation; it struck him that he would not object to the squeezing if she would only glance at him with that roguish flash of the eyes! But there was no answer to his gaze.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Mortlock, but I prefer to walk this morning!" he said politely, but he could not altogether repress the ring of disappointment which struck Joan's ears very strangely.

Joan, much to her father's surprise, complained of a wretched headache and did not come down from her bedroom after lunch. On the following morning she did not look at all well, and Mortlock was much concerned, but Joan would not let him send for the doctor. "I shall be all right again by to-morrow, papa!" she told him. Mortlock wondered and wondered at the cause, and his heart grew a trifle heavy with the suspicion that it was a love trouble.

It is questionable whether any girl ever felt more wretched than Joan. She had faced her trouble squarely and she had realised the truth.

She had deliberately set out to bring this man to her feet with no more praiseworthy object than that of carrying out a boast born of her own love of fun and the vague challenge of an envious girl. She had been caught in her own trap, for—she loved Frank Spencer! Why should she conceal it from herself any longer? She had grown to love him with an ardour that almost startled her now that she recognised it. And he? He had fought her with her own weapons. He had made her love him, and he must know it, and yet he had a sweetheart at home!

She would lose her £10 note, and be laughed at into the bargain, but what was that compared with the loss of Frank? How dreary life would be in the coming days without him! She shivered as if the cold grip of winter were upon her, but the next moment it seemed as if the air of the room would stifle her, and she went out into the spacious grounds.

The Joan who walked wearily through the garden and into the shrubbery beyond was a different being from the merry, emancipated school-girl who had tripped so lightly along those very paths three weeks or so previously. This Joan was more of a woman, with a woman's emotions and knowledge of some of the bitterness of life. Love had caused the transformation, and the disappointment of a love wrongly given had occasioned the fuller knowledge of the fact that

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life is a serious journey along the unknown. And Joan began dimly to realise that the joys of life are made greater by contrast with its sorrows.

She reached a small opening, a circular space of about a dozen feet in diameter, on one side of which a seat had been placed by her father. It was so quiet there, and Mr. Mortlock liked to retire to this spot occasionally and smoke his pipe. Joan threw herself on the wooden form and leant against the hedge at the back; she closed her eyes and tried to imagine what life would be without Frank. In utter weariness she must have fallen asleep, for she was awakened by a touch. She opened her eyes and saw Frank Spencer trying to balance her hat neatly on her head without rousing her.

"Now, you should not have moved!" he observed reproachfully. "It fell off and you were exposed to the sun; so I was trying to put it on without disturbing you. You have spoilt the picture by jumping up in that fashion!"

He was looking at her with such evident admiration that the girl's face grew red at his heartlessness.

"How dare you come here?" she asked, trying hard to repress the tears of vexation. "You have no business here!"

"Oh, haven't I?" he said imperturbably. "I think I have. I've come on very serious business! I should like to know why you treated me so shabbily yesterday, when your father came up!"

"I treated you no worse than you deserved!" she retorted.

"Two blacks don't make a white," he returned, not in the least disturbed. "If I had treated you shabbily, which is not the case, it didn't right matters when you followed a bad example, or thought you were following it. Now I want to know why!"

"I shall not tell you!" she cried fiercely.

"You must!" he said, approaching her.

"I shall not!" cried Joan again. She tried to get away from him, but the seat was in the way; and, somehow, she did not care to remind him of what he had said. "Please leave me!"

"Not till you have told me that you love me as madly as I love you, Joan!" he said, all his assumed coolness gone.

She felt his arms grasping her; she struggled against his embrace, but she was helpless, and in a second he held her captive, his eyes gazing into hers, his lips close to hers.

"May I take a kiss to seal the compact?" he asked passionately.

She bent her head still further back, and, in desperation, gasped: "Wait till you see your sweetheart at home!"

He relaxed his grasp in sheer surprise, and she released herself, standing erect before him, defiant though in tears, and panting for breath. She was a perfect picture, and his amazement and annoyance melted away under the spell which her appearance cast over him.

"There is some blunder!" he said gravely. "It is very stupid of me to call her my sweetheart, but I never thought that it would lead to such a scene as this. Joan, surely you didn't think me such a rascal as to make love to two women at once?"

Joan grew more confused than ever, but Frank came to her relief.

"It was all my fault, Joan, of course. Sit down here with me, and I will explain. My widowed mother has been wanting me to marry for the last three years, but I have never felt the slightest inclination to fall in love with anyone. But the dear mother insisted every little while that she would like to see me settled with a good wife. I always laughed it off, and one day I told her, just to tease her, that I should always regard her as my sweetheart and should never want another. And I have kept up the fun ever since, calling her sweetheart so commonly that I say it unconsciously, much to the amusement of my friends.

"So, Joan, you see that my sweetheart at home is my mother! And I can assure you, dear," he added tenderly, "that she will be most happy to resign the title and position in your favour."

He placed his arms round her once more, and Joan, all blushes and repentance, was yielding to his embrace, when a horrid thought crossed her mind.

"Oh, I cannot!" she moaned, burying her face in her hands. "What will they say? They will think me a designing creature and call me horrid names, and tell anybody that I didn't love you one scrap, and that I married you to carry out a boast, and——"

"Dear me! What dreadfully bad grammar you are using, to say 'and' so often," he interposed in a droll tone. "Better tell me all about it, because I am not going to lose you if I can help it."

Thereupon Joan unburdened herself, with half-averted face, and told him what had passed between Edith Graham and the mischief-loving girl that Joan Mortlock used to be.

"Oh, is that all?" he inquired, with a smile. "Well, we won't worry about that! I think we had better say that the result of the battle was a compromise, and that we will make the donation to the hospital jointly. It seems to me that such a proceeding will disarm all who might desire to say unkind things. So we will call it settled, and now, as we have cleared away all obstacles, I'm going to have that kiss!"

And he had it, followed by others, so that there should be no mistake about the binding character of the compact!

Geo. Day.

She felt his arms grasping her. She struggled against his embrace, but she was helpless.

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AN INTERRUPTION.

Telling Why a Girl Altered Her Mind.

THE many exciting and merry features of the long day that had just passed had tired the passengers of the s.s *Imperial*, and one by one they left the saloon to seek their bunks, to dream of the Old Country, whose shores they would be able to discern when they rose in the morning. In a short time the saloon was empty but for two.

A young woman, as fair a specimen of her sex as the most exacting critic could wish for, who was seated at the piano, situated at one end of the cosily-lounged, white-and-gold decorated room, playing a soft melody, and a man tanned with two years' wear of war, and exposure to a strong African sun, who was leaning over her, watching the deft fingers manipulating the keys.

The last few notes of the air sounded on the piano, and the player leant back on her stool, and looked up at the man with a smile. He did not say a word, but with a strange, tense look flashing across his face, suddenly bent his head, and kissed the red lips so near his own. For one moment of awful tension Alison Cartwright gazed at him with an expression of horrified amazement, and with a look in her eyes as if something had just been revealed to her that cut her heart in two.

Then of a sudden she leapt to her feet, and stood facing him with a countenance like marble, so still and stony was it.

"How did you dare, Mr. Carstairs?" she gasped with an effort. "You coward!"

The man's face went ashen, and he opened his mouth as if to speak, but a look in the girl's eyes kept the words from coming. His head slowly dropped to his breast, as if he acknowledged the truth of the epithet that no one of his own sex could have rightly bestowed upon him.

There was another dead silence for an instant, then the woman turned on her heel, and ascended the broad staircase leading to the berths, with not so much as a glance behind at her companion, who had thrown himself into a lounge, with hands covering his face.

He remained in this attitude of dejection, while the marble clock on the mantelpiece ticked away half-an-hour, when there came a loud shout of horror from above, followed by a crash that shook the liner from end to end. Rushing on deck Carstairs saw the great outline of another vessel just disappearing into the darkness.

A loud sucking noise below, and the smashed bulwarks on the *Imperial's* port side told a silent tale of what had happened. In the darkness some other vessel had collided with her, to what extent he knew not.

The truth was soon out, for with a calmness that did much to soothe the terrified passengers, the Captain gave orders for the boats to be manned. Quickly they were released from their thwarts and lowered to the water level, and the passengers took their seats.

Dick Carstairs was about to get into one of the boats, when a thought entered his mind that seemed to run through his veins like molten lead. "Where was Alison Cartwright?" She had not entered the boats; he could swear to that. She must still be below!

Caring nothing for the risk he was running, he rushed along the deck, and down the stairs. At the bottom he stumbled over some prostrate form, which was lying full length at his feet. It was the girl, and to all appearances she had fainted.

Gathering her up in his strong arms Carstairs tore up the stairs again, and along the deck, but except for that terrible sucking noise there was no sound, and Carstairs' heart almost stopped beating as he realised that they were alone on a sinking ship.

For a moment the terrible fact robbed him of his senses, but the noise beneath the deck was becoming more threatening every minute, and some quick action was imperative. The words of one of the A.B.'s that had been addressed to him only that morning occurred to him at this juncture. "Yes, sir," the man had said, "them there seats 'ull float like a cork, but they 'll only 'old one of your size."

He had been speaking of the seats on deck which were built on the pontoon principle, and would act as a life-saver in a case of extreme emergency.

There was one thing to do, and Carstairs did it. Laying the senseless form of the girl upon one of the seats, he lowered it gently into the water, then plunged in beside it. Guiding it with his two hands, he kicked out strongly with his feet, and gradually pushed the miniature raft away from the doomed vessel. They had drifted fifty yards when a deafening hissing report came from behind, and a violent commotion of the waves announced the fact that the s.s. *Imperial* was no more.

"Poor old girl," murmured the swimmer. "Her death was a sudden one, but it looks as if two of her passengers were going to make up for it in the matter of time."

This view of the matter was grim, but only too near the truth, for the wind had risen suddenly, and the waves were beginning to get more choppy and more boisterous with every rise and fall, and though Carstairs tried hard to steady "the raft," as he inwardly termed the floating seat, the waters were too strong for him, and it began to rock in an alarming manner.

The see-saw motion and the occasional lapping of spray over her face restored consciousness to the feminine passenger; a low shuddering sigh shook her form, and Carstairs heard her whisper freely: "Oh! how could he? And I thought him such a gentleman,"

Though his tan deepened somewhat, Dick took no heed of the reproach, but placed his wet hand on her forehead. The cold touch roused her thoroughly, and she turned her head towards him, and opened her eyes.

"Mr. Carstairs! Oh, where are we?" she asked fearfully.

"Don't be frightened, Miss Cartwright," he said, in as soothing a tone as possible. "The *Imperial* collided with another boat and sank in ten minutes."

"But the other passengers?" she asked quickly. "My uncle and aunt. Where are they? For pity's sake do not say that they are drowned."

"Don't distress yourself, Miss Cartwright, they are not dead," Dick answered cheerfully. "All the rest of the ship got away safely in the boats, but I——"

He paused, puzzled for the minute to describe the incident correctly, and over the girl's face flashed a quick look of understanding."

"*You came back for me,*" she whispered, in a hushed tone.

Carstairs saw a glistening drop in each of her eyes, and the sight paralysed his tongue, so he said nothing.

The moon was rising now, and in her pale light, Dick looked about him. But on every hand there was sea, sea, nothing but sea, and a lump came into his throat at the sight. Not for his own safety, he had risked that many a time in the land he had been coming from—was not his name embellished with those coveted symbols, V.C. ?—but for the safety of the girl on the feeble raft, that was floating beside him.

He said a few gentle words of hope to her, and besought her

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to get some sleep, but she refused even to try, and wanted to insist upon him having a rest on the fragile seat, while she swam beside it for a distance, a suggestion which he laughed at.

Slowly the long night wore on, while the waves grew higher every minute, and Dick found it more difficult to keep his frozen fingers on the arm of the seat as time went on. Now and again the misery of this endless bath in the cold ocean prompted the thought within him to let go and sink quietly into the waves and end it all, but the woman seemed to divine his intention. Whenever it rose in his mind a look from her beautiful eyes would banish the thought. One of these looks seemed to Carstairs to hold more than a reproach, and his eyes brightened as he swam nearer to her side.

"Miss Cartwright," he said quietly, and though he tried hard, his voice would shake slightly. "Have you forgiven me for the insult I offered you last night?"

The answer came softly to his ear above the hiss of the waves.

"Yes, Mr. Carstairs, freely."

"It was a coward's trick," he said hoarsely, "but something made me do it—Miss Cartwright—Alison—if—I—we live through this, will you be——"

In his excitement he had loosened his grip somewhat, and with a roaring gurgle a giant wave seized him. He struggled hard to free himself from its grasp, but the long hours that he had been submerged, and the power of the wave, crushed the remains of his strength, and the last glimpse the girl on the raft had of him showed his face white and despairing under the moonlight, yet with a look of great hope in his eyes.

* * * * *

"Good Heavens! Surely it can't be! By Jove, it is though! Carstairs, old man, where the dickens have you sprung from? Why, do you know that all England has been mourning you as dead? Poor old chap, how bad you look!"

Dick Carstairs, with no tan on his face now, but with an alabaster colour in its place, smiled feebly at the speaker's remarks, especially as they had been uttered in a tone that the whole thoroughfare could hear distinctly.

"I don't expect that I look the picture of health now, Deering," he answered, as brightly as his feelings would allow. "You see, I've been ill for the last six months."

John Deering looked sympathetic, and his jolly face grew longer than it had been for many a month. Suddenly it relapsed again to its usual joviality, and he gave Carstairs a thump on the back that reminded that individual of the collision on the *Imperial*.

"I know just the thing to pick you up again, old man!" he roared excitedly. "Come down to 'The Denes' with me. You know the mater will be delighted to see you, and our Bedfordshire air will brace you up again in a twinkle. Now don't say 'No.'"

Deering spoke the last sentence in a most piteous tone, and Carstairs felt he could but do as his friend asked, moreover, he had experienced some of the hospitality of the Deerings before, and he knew none to excel it.

A couple of hours later and he was chatting to a beautiful, silver-haired old lady in the drawing-room of her home. Deering's mother had greeted him in so excited a manner as to puzzle Carstairs. To his mind it seemed as though she had some mysterious delight in knowing that he was not dead.

She would not allow him to be carried off to dress, but banished her son alone to the dressing-room with the plea that she had something for her guest's private ear. When the door had closed the old lady seized Dick by the arm, and leading him to the conservatory, thrust him inside with a chuckle of glee.

Carstairs, with a feeling of bewilderment, looked around him, and the sight of a figure in a basket-chair beneath a huge palm set his pulses throbbing heavily. At the sound of the door closing the figure looked up, then sprang to her feet with a gasp.

"Mr. Carstairs—is—it—you?"

The conservatory was dark, and Dick could only see the outline of a slim figure dressed entirely in black, but he knew the voice. He had last heard it half a year ago, when he and its owner had been together on the bosom of the waves of Biscay.

"Miss Cartwright! Oh, thank Heaven for its mercies!" he said fervently.

Then, striding across the floor towards her, he looked into her face as if to satisfy himself that he was making no mistake. The girl returned his gaze, her eyes were shining with a deep thankfulness.

"I never thought to see you again, Mr. Carstairs," she said softly. "Will you tell me how you escaped?"

He bade her sit down again in her chair, and drew up another beside it.

"It is not a very long story," he answered, "but how I am alive now is beyond explanation. That brute of a wave seemed to knock all the strength out of me, and all my efforts to get back to you were unavailing. Yet somehow or other I managed to keep afloat as long as I can remember. But I must have lost consciousness, for I woke again to find myself in a pretty little bed in a house on the French coast, as I learnt afterwards. I had just time to see two people beside the bed and to hear a joyful exclamation in French, when darkness came again.

"I was ill for weeks, good old Madame Pautier and her husband told me later, and when I recovered my memory had gone. These good people kept me there for six months, until everything came back to me suddenly two days ago. They said that I had been found insensible on the beach, but of you they had seen or heard nothing.

"I thanked the good peasants for their great kindness, and got back to England as fast as boat and train could bring me, and John was the first friend that I met. That is all the story, but it is a miracle that I am still alive. Can I hear yours, for since I recovered my memory, I have been half mad to know whether you were alive or dead."

The girl nodded consent.

"When you disappeared," she said gently. "I felt inclined to drop into the sea and stop there, but the hope that you would still live kept me on that dear raft until daylight came, and a homeward bound liner sighted me and picked me up. When it reached port I made inquiries everywhere about you, for I owe you my life, but no one came forward with anything to tell, and after a time I had to think that you were d—dead."

A quiver seemed to run through her frame, and insensibly she touched her black dress. Carstairs felt his heart leap within him, and he bent forward and took one of her hands.

"And you wore black because you thought I was dead?" he asked hoarsely.

She did not answer him, and Dick rose from his chair and knelt beside her.

"Do you know what question I was going to ask you, Alison, when that wave separated us?" he asked in a whisper.

A swift flush crossed the girl's face, and she lowered her eyes before the expression in his.

"I—I think so," she murmured weakly.

"And if I were to ask you that question again, darling, would you give me the answer I long for?"

Her lips scarcely moved, yet a word came to Carstair's ears that for all its weakness of sound, meant more to him than aught else in the world. It was "Yes."

Arthur Edwards.

To Story Writers.

We shall be pleased to consider complete novelettes of about 20,000 words in length, and to pay cash down for those accepted. Manuscripts must be type-written (or very legibly hand-written), and should be sent to The Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Postage for return of MSS., if unsuitable, should be inclosed.

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UNSOLVED LOVE PROBLEMS.

No. I.

THE AWKWARD PREDICAMENT OF EDWARD CLEMENTS.

(A Prize of One Guinea is Offered for the Best Way Out of the Difficulty. See "Your Editor Chats.")

It was a prematurely warm day in February, and pretty Kitty Treloar, full of the insolence of youth that takes life, sunshine and flowers as its right, came along a field-path leading away from the newly "exploited" suburb of South Dealing.

She could hardly keep her feet from dancing, and her voice from singing, so full of joy did the spring fill her.

"Come on Rover, now for a race."

And away they flew, the one as joyous as the other. But with a sudden recollection she stopped and, straightening her hat, said:

"I hope that ridiculous Ted Clements is not waiting at the next stile."

Sure enough at the next stile, there was a young man, to no outward appearance ridiculous except in so far as he was young enough to blush immoderately at the advent of a charming, mischievious girl.

"Why, Mr. Clements! How you startled me! It is curious I should meet you on this lonely walk."

Ted would have liked to reply that since he knew it to be her favourite walk, he had met her there, on an average, three times a week, but he had not the courage, so only stammered something about its being "the only real country walk about there."

"Do you love the country also?" she said. "It is very beautiful to-day, and I, and the birds, and Rover, are all enjoying it. Hark!" she continued, well content to make the conversation and let him admire her—"hear how they sing, and see how the primroses are all coming out, for all the world as if we should not be hiding our blue noses in furs next week, and seeing everything black and shrivelled with the frost."

Her laughing face confuted the pessimism of her words, and Ted, casting about in his mind for suitable words with which to introduce the avowal that had been trembling on his lips for weeks, began (how many proposals have been ushered in by these lines?):

"*In the Spring a brighter iris gleams upon the burnished dove,*
In the Spring——"

But Kitty interrupted:

"Just so."

"*In the Spring a young man's fancy, lightly turns to thoughts of love.*"

"The secret of happiness is, take everything lightly, whether 'tis measles or love."

Ted's sentimentalism vanished, as she meant it should, but a righteous wrath arose in him at her sacrilegious words.

"Miss Treloar, are you never serious? Do you not believe a man's destiny is to love, to find the only true happiness in giving his whole heart unreservedly and for ever to some beautiful and noble woman?"

For all answer she sang mockingly:

"*Oh, love for a year, a week, or a day,*
But alas for the love that loves alway.

"At least it would be 'alas,' if anybody ever did it, except in poetry and novels. It doesn't work in with present-day life."

Ted was boyish enough to feel exceedingly annoyed at her teasing words, which he took as a personal insult, feeling sure that "he loved as never man loved before," and so, being annoyed, he forgot to be shy and spoke out like a man.

"Miss Treloar, *I* love *you*, with all my heart; and as I love you now, so I shall to the end of my life."

Somewhat abashed at his earnestness, Kitty stammered a little, though she replied saucily:

"That's a bit rash—you have not got to the end of your life yet."

"Oh, you may mock at me if you please," he cried, reckless in his wrath, "you don't know the strength and unchangeableness of a man's love, but I think you might give a man of my age credit for knowing his own mind."

Ted was young, but Kitty was younger, and she could not help admiring him in this mood more than in his former bashful stammering attitude toward her, so nineteen murmured softly to twenty-one:

"I did not mean to hurt your feelings—I—I beg your pardon."

Her unwonted humility brought him tumbling down off his high horse, he turned suddenly and seized her hands, saying in a trembling voice:

"Kitty, Kitty, do not beg *my* pardon, it is I who beg your pardon, and your love. You are the most beautiful and charming girl in the world, and I do love you so much. Can you not love me a little bit? Oh, Kitty, darling, say yes," and in his eagerness he tried to draw her to him.

For a moment it seemed as though she might yield, but she recovered herself and said:

"I can't say yes, because I—I don't love you."

"But you will?" he interposed eagerly.

"No, I sha'n't," she replied, shaking her head obstinately.

"You might wait a bit and try," he urged, hope dying out of his eyes. "Lots of girls don't love fellows at first."

Kitty, now quite mistress of herself and keeping him at arm's length, had quickly made up her mind.

"I don't think I should," she said dispassionately, "and I am not going to try. I don't want to love anybody yet, I want to enjoy myself a bit longer."

An older man who knew the world would have seen an unconscious pathos in these words, Ted (with whom she had flirted for some months) saw only selfishness.

"Enjoy yourself!" he cried, and then lashing himself into a fury, as she smiled and nodded, he went on, "Yes, go on enjoying yourself, go on leading more foolish men to love you, and then laugh in their faces; go on exacting admiration and attention from all and giving nothing in return; go on enjoying yourself, and let *me* go hang!" and he turned quickly and walked off in the opposite direction.

The words were bitter, but he had some cause to feel bitter as even Kitty herself acknowledged as she gazed after him with tears in her pretty eyes.

"Poor fellow, he was very rude, but he seems to feel it more than I thought he would."

A week later she heard he had gone to join a brother on a banana plantation in Jamaica, and the feeling grew gradually upon her that life was very blank now that he was gone.

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and she wished he had been in less of a hurry to put the ocean between them.

A year passed, eighteen months passed, and Ted Clements taller, broader, and manlier, but thinner, and more tanned, was seated in his brother's cool verandah, smoking and reading home letters.

One, from his sister, contained the following words:

"By-the-bye, your old love, Kitty Treloar, has been quite ill. She has had at last to go away to some foreign cure place, but has come back looking rather worse than better. Mrs. Treloar, who is completely wrapped up in her, seems very upset about it."

He let fall the paper.

"Kitty ill! It does not seem possible. That bright, merry little girl!"

All his resentment against her had died out with his love, and that was no more than a tender recollection at the end of a year. For some months he had thought life held nothing more for him, that his heart was broken, and that all women were frivolous, light-minded creatures, not worth an honest man's love. But change of life and scene and plenty of work worked wonders. First he found comfort in work, then beauty in the world, then joy in living, and lastly a certain Miss Elsie Braithwaite had caused him to doubt the truth of his heresies about women.

Now, therefore, he thought condescendingly:

"Poor little Kitty! Well, I was very angry with her once, but I am not sure now that she did not do me a good turn after all. She was quite right, she was too young, and so was I. Ridiculous! What do nineteen and twenty-one know about life? Now, it is different with twenty-two and nearly twenty-three. Those are ages when one is really competent to choose one's life partner," and he went off into a not unpleasant reverie.

At last he roused himself.

"Hullo, here's a strange handwriting, but with the old postmark, South Dealing. Who can it be from?"

He opened the letter and glanced at the signature, "S. M. Treloar—Kitty's mother, by all that's wonderful! What can she be writing to me about, and he read as follows:

"DEAR MR. CLEMENTS,—*I fear I am going to do something very unusual, but I feel I can dare anything for my daughter's happiness—it may be her life. Still, before I go any further I must beg you to believe that I am writing this letter quite unknown to her. To continue, I hope you will excuse my saying that I am aware that my daughter refused you last year, and I must add that I did not think she treated you well in the matter, as we had all thought she intended to accept you, and no doubt you thought so also. Surely one can forgive such a mere child for not knowing her own mind. Ever since you went away so suddenly, she has drooped and pined—nothing does her any good. The doctor says she has something on her mind, and unless we can remove the trouble he is afraid the consequences may be most serious. I think I am justified in saying she would give you a very different answer now, if you were to ask her again. Oh! Mr. Clements, to one of your constant nature, I feel I need not apologise for writing what will bring about your happiness as well as hers.*

"*If it is impossible for you to come over at once, perhaps you would write to her, or to her distracted mother,*

"S. M. TRELOAR."

"Here's a go," said Ted, staring moodily out into the brilliant sunshine beyond. "Ask her again—but I have no desire to—and then there is Elsie Braithwaite. Hang it all, I can't. My constant nature—and it's not more than a year ago. The old lady seems so sure I shall still feel the same and no doubt Kitty does too. When I remember what I said to her I feel an awful cad to have changed so soon. 'Pon my word I'm in a beastly hole which ever way I look at it. If I say I still love her and want to marry her, I shall be telling a lie, and if I refuse to do so, I shall be acting like a cad. Good Heavens! What is a fellow to do?"

L. Hughes.

Your Editor Chats.

"THE PURSUIT OF SARA" is causing a great deal of excitement. The very novelty of the revelations has appealed to thousands of people, and especially is this the case in those towns directly connected with her flight. All will admit, too, that Miss Gillespie is gifted with the power of describing her experiences graphically, and this is, of course, another important factor in the great popularity of the series.

She herself is highly delighted that her narrations are so entertaining, but when she called to see me in my sanctum the other day, she mildly rebuked me on the ground that I had flattered her in this column by calling her a heroine. Such is modesty!

THIS is just a reminder to readers in Leicester and district, in which locality the episode told in this number takes place, that a splendid Gramophone and *twelve* charming gold-plated pencil-cases are offered them as prizes in a simple competition.

I have had printed some very pretty leaflets, on one side of which is a reproduction in colours of this cover, advertising "The Pursuit of Sara."

Now what I want Leicester readers to do is this. Write me a post-card, addressed to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, W.C.," with "Leaflets" marked in the top left-hand corner, asking me to send you a small supply of this advertising material. Then you must, in the most ingenious manner you can think of, distribute these to the best advantage. It does not matter *how* you get rid of them as long as the way is helpful to the cause.

When you have distributed your leaflets, write to me and explain your method of doing so. *No replies must come later than first post Wednesday morning, November 11th.*

I WILL then decide, and, of course, my decision is final, which reader's attempt has been most beneficial to the paper. To the best one I will award the Gramophone, and to each of the *twelve* next a gold-plated pencil-case. I should advise you to apply for the leaflets early.

ON the opposite page appears an Unsolved Love Problem, the first of a series.

I am offering *a prize of one guinea* to the reader who sends me, not later than Friday, the 13th inst., what I consider the best way for Edward Clements to get out of his dilemma. The solution should be written in about one hundred words.

State as clearly as possible *why* you believe your solution is the right and honourable thing for him to do, and back up your statement by good, lucid arguments. Replies must be written on one side of the paper only.

Mark your envelopes "Love Problem" in the top left-hand corner, and address them to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C."

Do not forget that the last possible day on which I can receive replies to Problem No. 1 is Friday, the 13th of this month. All arriving after that date will be disqualified.

Your Editor.

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POWERFUL NEW ROMANCE. **START TO-DAY.**

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

INTRODUCTION.

CAPTAIN PERCY IDDISON and Lady Maud Hyam, his *fiancée*, are present at an "At Home" given by Lady Medcalf-Mears.

There they meet Isolo Staunton, the lion of the hour, a multi-millionaire, and styled "the modern Monte Christo." The curious feature about him is that, although he is admitted to the very cream of society, nobody knows his past nor how he accumulated his vast wealth.

Wilfrid Ellerton, a fine young fellow, a worthy son of a worthy father, is also there, and is introduced to Iddison.

The latter notices a remarkable streak of white hair on the other's head, running from the front of the left ear down to the base of the skull.

Isolo Staunton also sees this, but it causes him a great deal more anxiety than it does Iddison.

He knows the cause of that streak! He knows why that white hair is present on the head of one so young! He remembers how, when he was Isolo Zuarez, an escaped convict from the Chincha Islands, he was adrift on the ocean in a small boat, together with a man and a boy.

The sun was blazing hot, and there were scarcely any provisions left.

The other man was half dead, and Staunton remembers how he intended to kill him outright so that he should give no further trouble, when the boy hotly intervened.

"Put down that axe," he had cried; "it's murder!" He had lifted the axe and the boy had jumped at him. In doing so he had slipped and the weapon fell on his head!

Both Isolo Staunton and Wilfrid Ellerton were rescued from their peril—but the blow the boy received had rendered him unconscious of all that had happened.

He had never since remembered.

The question that worries the criminal millionaire as he leaves Lady Medcalf-Mears' house is this—would his memory return?

If it should—what a grim irony of Fate it would be.

Staunton's blood is Spanish, his father has been President of Peru, and the ideal for the accomplishment of which he is amassing his many millions is to see Spain reinstated again as Queen of the Seas and Mistress of the East and West!

And now his ideal, his freedom, perhaps his very life hangs on the memory of a mere lad of twenty-three!

If Ellerton remembers the episode on the ocean it will mean, at least, a return to the Chinchas as a convict!

Staunton goes to his magnificent yacht, the *Isola*, lying alongside the Ocean Quay, Southampton, to talk the matter over with his right-hand friend and confidant, Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia.

The latter was another blue-blooded Spaniard, and he was the only person living to whom Isolo Staunton had told the story of his life.

The millionaire tells Valdez of this awkward coincidence of his meeting Ellerton again, and asks his advice.

Valdez strongly urges Staunton to go to extremes to get Wilfrid out of the way, but Isolo is not willing to compass the boy's death.

Then Don Ramiero advises the millionaire to invite to the yacht a Society party, for a trip to Norway. Ellerton is to be one of the guests, and during the cruise steps are to be taken for his removal.

To this plan Staunton agrees and the invitations are sent out.

Mercedes, the beautiful, fascinating daughter of the millionaire, is to do the duties of hostess, and among the guests are Captain Percy Iddison and Lady Maud Hyam.

When Mercedes and Ellerton meet, the former recognises the latter as the boy who rescued her from death once, many years ago in Chili.

"Do you remember," says Mercedes, "that afternoon when the Chilenos sacked and burnt Chorillos—when the warships were firing from the sea and the shells were bursting among the houses, blowing their walls out as though a volcano had broken out under them as it did once at Arequipa, and how a scream came through the air, and you, yes, I am sure it was you, caught a little girl—that was I—round the waist and jumped off the pier into the water with her and swam back to the beach—and how we found afterwards that the shell had smashed everything into ruins and killed everyone.

"They told me afterwards what a dreadful ruin it was. But surely you remember, don't you?"

"Remember, of course I do. As if anyone could forget a thing like that. Yes, I can see every detail of it now. I remember the dull, hoarse bang of the gun and the scream of the shells in the air—and you, were you really the little girl that I got hold of and jumped into the sea with because I thought it was going to kill us?"

"Us. I don't think, Mr. Ellerton, that you were thinking very much about *us*——"

The two are drawn together by the bonds of love, and many are the glances that pass between them.

If Staunton had only seen one of these, the crime which had already been decided upon would never have been committed, and many things which came to pass in consequence of it would never have happened.

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SIXTH CHAPTER.

Soul to Soul.

THE rest of the day passed just as pleasantly as one would expect a day to pass, afloat on a summer sea on board what was, perhaps, the most luxurious craft in existence. But there was no chance of a renewal of even that unspoken intercourse which had been so strangely and unexpectedly established between Mercedes and Wilfrid Ellerton. Still less was it possible that their lips should translate into words what their souls had already said to each other through their eyes.

To begin with, the little incident that had taken place before breakfast had a very natural and decided effect on Mercedes Her instinct told her that Lady Maud had divined the secret which so far she had scarcely dared even to confess to her own consciousness, and the knowledge of this discovery had at once set her maidenly pride in arms. She felt that she had allowed the dearest secret that a woman can have, to become known even before she was quite certain that she had the right to possess such a secret at all; and therefore when, soon after breakfast, Lady Maud laughingly asked her whether she might congratulate her, she somewhat unexpectedly cut her short with a quick little gesture of frankly girlish petulance, and said, almost coldly:

"There is nothing that I know of, Lady Maud, that you or any other can congratulate me upon except, perhaps, upon the fact that I happen to be the daughter of the kindest and most generous of fathers, and that—well, in short, that I have the happiness of being Mercedes Staunton and the pleasure of being your hostess."

There was no possibility of mistaking either the tone or the meaning of the words, spoken as they were with that indescribable dignity that perhaps only Spanish blood can give to speech. Lady Maud at once saw that she had made the grave mistake of treading on what was evidently, for the present at least, forbidden ground, and so, being a young woman of more than ordinary common-sense and social experience, she begged pardon very prettily and in a quite non-committal way, and there the subject dropped.

Naturally the effect of her ill-timed remark was to produce exactly the opposite result to that which she would have wished for. When Mercedes met Ellerton about half-an-hour later she received him with an almost chilling reserve which astonished him almost as much as it hurt him, and so the words which he was so eager to speak remained unspoken, and once more a few trivial words carelessly uttered became, as it were, wheels in that vast machine which so remorselessly spins and weaves the web of human destiny.

It was again the Honourable Percy Iddison who, quite innocently and with the best of intentions, constituted himself the instrument of the Fates by getting up sports after the manner of passengers on ocean liners; and these, on the suggestion of Don Ramiero Valdez, were followed by a concert and dance in the evening, and so, during all that fateful day there came no opportunity for that little explanation whose results might have been so momentous.

But Lady Maud, still true to her conviction in spite of her hostess' almost studied avoidance of Ellerton, had made up her mind to undo, should that be in her power, the somewhat grave error which she now felt more than ever guilty of, and to this end, in the interval between the concert and the dance, she enlisted the by no means disinterested services of an almost equally responsible offender.

"I am perfectly certain, Percy," she said, in a low but nevertheless quite impressive tone as they were leaning over the after-rail, "that this is a clear case of love at first sight, which it is the bounden duty of people in our position to do our utmost to bring to its only proper conclusion, especially as I have an idea that both of us have already done something, quite unconsciously, to hinder, or at any rate to divert the course of true love—I, by a very foolishly premature remark I made this morning on the subject of congratulations, and you by making everybody so busy over these precious sports that the necessary *tête-à-têtes* were quite out of the question."

"All right, Maud. What do you want me to do?"

"Oh, it's only quite a trifle, but I want you to be careful, because its consequences may be very important, and, if the action of the little comedy isn't timed exactly, the plot may fail altogether. That sounds a little mixed, but of course you see what I mean."

"So far, yes," replied the other unconvincingly, "and now suppose the sweetest of conspirators reveals her plot to her most devoted accomplice."

"Don't be silly, Percy, it doesn't suit you," said Lady Maud in a superior tone, but at the same time slipping her hand through the arm that was resting on the rail. "You are never such a hopeless failure as when you are trying to make pretty speeches. Please don't forget that you would never have got through a certain proposal if I hadn't been shameless enough to help you."

In an instant he was seized by powerful hands, a rug was thrown over his head, and he was flung to the floor.

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"It's very simple, dear, but it must be done carefully, and we mustn't raise any suspicions. When the dance is over I am going to inveigle Mercedes up on deck for a breath of sea air. You must watch us and manage to get Mr. Ellerton on the same part of the deck a few moments later."

The Honourable Percy entered heart and soul into the plot, and although the veriest novice at any sort of intrigue which could not be carried out on a battlefield, played his part so well and with such apparent unconsciousness that even Mercedes herself did not suspect anything till Ellerton, who had managed to direct their stroll to the same part of the deck, now happily vacant, on which their unspoken declaration had been so strangely made, stopped and said with such sudden seriousness that it took her completely by surprise, and for the moment compelled her attention:

"Mercedes, you remember what our hearts—our souls, I hope—said to each other here last night?"

The glow of an electric light just above them showed the flush that sprang into her cheeks and the flash in her eyes as she turned them swiftly up to his. She took a step aside to the rail, half turned and faced him, and began in a voice which she vainly tried to keep steady:

"Mr. Ellerton, have I ever given you the right——"

"That is exactly what I have felt myself in honour bound to ask you," he interrupted in a tone as low as hers, yet vibrating with such an intensity of passion that its force instantly swept away the little artificial barriers which Lady Maud had so unwittingly raised for the moment between them. "Unless my love, or, perhaps my presumption, had completely blinded me, your eyes said so last night, and surely they would tell the truth?"

"They did," she whispered, moving towards him ever so little. "Yes, they did, and why should my lips deny it? It was only something that Lady Maud said this morning that, well, vexed me because I thought she had found out, and so——"

"Oh, don't bother about explanations now," he interrupted again, speaking very gently and once more laying his hand on hers as she rested it on the rail. "No doubt you were quite right, though it hurt me a bit; still it was worth a thousand times that to hear you say those two words and to know—what I think I know now. Confound those lights," he added, with sudden inconsequence.

"Why, what is wrong with them?" she asked innocently.

"I want either solitude or Egyptian darkness for about five minutes," he whispered, closing his hand over hers again. "Surely you know why. Heavens! how lovely you are, my beautiful Mercedes!"

"Am I? Then I am glad of it—for your sake," she murmured, her warm Spanish blood flowing swiftly up from neck to brow. She leant back against the rail and laughed softly:

"And so that is why you want the solitude or the Egyptian darkness? What a very unconventional wooing, though! Of course you did begin years ago in the strictly conventional way by gallantly saving my life?"

"Here comes Papa along the deck with Don Ramiero. You won't say anything about it to-night, will you, Wilfrid? There's plenty of time. Let us keep our secret to ourselves for just a little. You know it's a luxury that I, at least, haven't enjoyed before."

"Of course—darling! Is not your wish law now? But if I don't get a kiss soon I shall——"

"No you won't, whatever it is. You have made me feel quite shamefully forward enough for the present. Now please talk about something sensible."

They sauntered on towards Staunton and Valdez, who were puffing slowly at their cigars and talking in low-toned Spanish. It may have been that the Spaniard's keen eyes saw something that escaped his master's as Mercedes and Ellerton strolled past them, chatting about odds and ends of happenings at Cowes. Possibly he did, for he there and then resolved that what had been decided on as to Ellerton's departure to the under-world, should be accomplished without further delay.

The new-made lovers continued their stroll—changing the subject of their conversation the moment they got out of earshot of the other promenaders—until four clear double-strokes on the bell under the navigating-bridge warned them that it was midnight.

"Heavens! Is it as late as that?" exclaimed Mercedes. "I must go below at once or papa will be coming to look for me. Come—Wilfrid, I really must. Why, we nearly have the deck to ourselves."

So they had, at least the after part of it behind the "Council Chamber," and Ellerton was not slow to grasp the possibilities of the situation.

He stopped and the next instant she felt his arm stealing round her waist. For a moment she recoiled, for it was the first time she had felt a man's caress save her father's. Then she remembered that she had already spoken her surrender, and so she yielded.

"Then we will say 'Good night' here," he said, in a whisper as he drew her close to him. "Good night, Mercedes—my darling!"

"Good night—dear!"

She looked up at him, her eyes shining in the moonbeams and her face transfigured in the clear white light, and then their lips met in that eloquent silence in which alone soul speaks to soul.

SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Imprisoned Below!

When Wilfrid Ellerton had said good-night to Mercedes at the entrance to the saloon, he took a long cigar out of his case, lit it, and strolled away aft again to think as quietly as his thrilling pulses would let him about this new-found glory of happiness which had so swiftly and unexpectedly shone into his life, and to wonder dimly what he had done to deserve it.

He had always looked upon himself with perfect modesty as a quite ordinary young man to whom the kindly Fates had given it to be born the son of a millionaire, and therefore with far brighter prospects in life than the son of a poor man would have had. For all he had known so far, his friends and acquaintances had just about the same opinion of him, and yet here without, so far as he could see, the slightest merit or desert on his part, the first love of such a girl as Mercedes Staunton had been suddenly, almost without warning, bestowed upon him.

He had perfect health, unsullied youth, an education which was by no means covered by his brilliant school and University career, and the crowning advantage of his father's name and vast wealth; and yet, such was his worship for his strangely-found love that, even with all this in his favour, he looked out into the future with a diffidence which he had never experienced before.

"Good evening, or, I suppose it would be more appropriate to say 'Good morning,' Mr. Ellerton," said a low, softly-modulated voice at his elbow as he was leaning on the after-rail, looking out over the glittering sea-path towards the rising moon and dreaming of unutterable happiness. "A very lovely scene, is it not? And yet those who do not know say that there is no beauty to be found in these northern latitudes of yours."

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A swift whiff of smoke from a very excellent cigar accompanied the words. He turned with a feeling of almost fierce resentment at the interruption of his delicious reverie, and saw Don Ramiero standing beside him.

"Oh, yes, very pretty indeed," he replied, not very graciously; "but for all that I was just thinking that it's about time to turn in."

"Then, in that case, I trust that you will be inclined to defer your thoughts for a few minutes," replied the Spaniard pleasantly, "for, truth to tell, I have just come from our host, who is at this moment with the Captain on the bridge, to ask if you will do him the pleasure of joining him in just one more liqueur or a brandy and soda and a cigar in his own private sanctum here, which I do not think you have yet visited. If you will come with me he will join us in a minute or two."

Under other circumstances Ellerton would have been inclined to make a polite excuse on account of the lateness of the hour, but in view of the interview which he intended to have at no very distant date with his host, that was, of course, quite out of the question, and so he tossed his half-smoked cigar into the sea and said with very real pleasure:

"Thanks, that is exceedingly kind of him. I shall be delighted. After all, one need not be very particular about hours on such a delightful cruise as this. I was only wondering this evening what this place was," he went on, looking at the structure under whose shelter Mercedes had given him his first kiss.

"It is the one apartment in the yacht that our host reserves for his own use," replied Don Ramiero, as he led the way to the door, looking the while keenly about the now deserted decks, "and I can assure you, Mr. Ellerton, that it is not all of his guests who are invited to share his privacy in it."

"Then, of course this is an honour which I shall most highly appreciate," laughed Ellerton.

"The Señor, as we of his intimates call him among ourselves," murmured Don Ramiero, as he opened the double doors by means of the lever handle and an invisible spring, "no doubt has the best of reasons. He is not a man who makes mistakes in the choice of his friends. Will you do me the honour of going in first? The doors are a little difficult to manage."

"Thanks," said Ellerton, as he stepped over the high combing or threshold which is intended to keep the water out of deck cabins in heavy weather.

Just as he raised his foot from the outside deck the Spaniard gave him a sudden thrust forward between the shoulders. He lost his balance and stumbled with an exclamation of angry surprise into the dimly lighted apartment. In an instant he was seized by two powerful hands on each side, a rug was thrown over his head, and he was flung to the floor.

He struggled and tried to shout, but as his assailants forced him over on to his back, the rug, where it covered his face, was drenched with a pungently sweet-smelling liquid. As it soaked through he gasped once or twice for breath, gave one more desperate struggle to free himself, and then his limbs grew heavy, all the blood in his body seemed to rush to his head for a moment and flow back again as quickly; his breathing grew longer and quieter in spite of his will. Then came a swiftly fleeting dream of Mercedes and her melting eyes and trembling lips—and then darkness and oblivion.

A few moments later Don Ramiero's high tenor voice sounded shrilly along the deserted deck, shouting:

"Man overboard! Man overboard! Help! get the boats out! Stop the ship! For God's sake, stop the ship! Mr. Ellerton has fallen overboard!"

Almost instantly his words were echoed, not as an appeal, but as an authoritative command by Isolo Staunton, who had flung the door of the Captain's room under the bridge open and rushed out on deck.

"The bridge, there!" he shouted. "Dead slow—stop! Mr. Marshall, have the hands on deck and get the boats out at once. Great Heavens, how can that have happened? Valdez, come here and tell me about it. Steady, there, men. Not too much noise. We don't want to alarm the ladies. You can pick him up before they know anything about it if you're smart. A hundred pounds to the man who gets hold of him first. Handy now, with those boats!"

While he was speaking the telegraph had tinkled imperatively in the engine-room, and a swift shudder ran through the beautiful fabric of the yacht as the propellers slowed and stopped, and her twenty knots were reduced to ten, and five, and two, and nothing, until she began to drift slowly astern.

Meanwhile the soft "pad, pad" of many naked feet

She laid her hands on her father's shoulders, and looking him full in the eyes, said: "Is that true, father? Is he really—dead!"

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sounded along both sides of the deck, orders were given in low, clear tones; the davits swung outwards, the crews climbed like so many cats into the boats, the falls whistled through the blocks, and they fell almost simultaneously into the water. The tackles were unhooked, and away the four boats sped astern on their eager search for what they would never find.

By this time Don Ramiero was telling Staunton, the Captain, and the First Officer in agitated tones how Mr. Ellerton, leaning too far over the stern-rail to watch the smooth action of the turbine propellers, had overbalanced himself just at the moment that the yacht gave a little pitch aft, and, before he could put out a hand to save him, had disappeared into the foaming wake that the flying yacht was leaving behind her. Then he had shouted for help—to stop the vessel—and that was all. Everything had happened with such appalling suddenness that he was still half-stunned and could hardly realise the calamity.

The recital was a perfect piece of acting, and Isolo Staunton never thought Ramiero Valdez a more valuable ally or a more accomplished scoundrel than he did while he was making it.

The sudden slowing-down and stopping of the yacht had, of course, aroused the guests on board who were going or had already gone to their berths, and a few of the men and one or two ladies who had not yet retired came up on deck to ask what was the matter. But, for quite essential reasons, discipline was as strict on the *Isola* as it was on board a man-of-war, and so, in accordance with Staunton's hurriedly-whispered instructions, the Captain came to the saloon-entrance where they were gathered, and said in his most genial tones:

"Nothing serious, I can assure you, ladies and gentlemen. Only a heated bearing which will take about half an hour to put right. Just the sort of accident that may happen every day even to one of His Majesty's ships, and, as our time is our own, it is, of course, the merest trifle. Pray don't allow it to interfere with your night's rest."

The officers and quartermasters within hearing heard the glibly-spoken lie without moving a muscle, and so the guests were satisfied and went below again.

Only Percy Iddison wondered why a triple-engined, turbine-driven yacht should be stopped for a single heated bearing, and only he happened to notice that four of the boats were missing. It immediately occurred to him that one of the sailors might have fallen overboard, and that their considerate host did not wish to frighten his lady guests. Of course the rescue would be a matter of no difficulty with such perfect equipment and in a smooth sea, and so, being accustomed to discipline himself, he concluded that it was no business of his to interfere, wherefore he held his peace and went below again with the rest.

But the next morning the truth, as Don Ramiero Valdez had arranged it, had to come out. Wilfrid Ellerton did not join the guests as usual in the before-breakfast promenade on the upper deck. Inquiries were made for him and by some mysterious means—no one quite knew how—it became known that his berth had not been occupied during the night. Then Iddison, with something like the feeling that he remembered from his first battle, thought of the missing boats, which were now all in their places again, and of that curious stoppage of all the engines for one paltry heated bearing.

As a matter of fact, he had been looking for Ellerton, with whom, in virtue of the little plot in which he had taken part the night before, he felt that sympathy which between men is akin to friendship, in order to invite him to the early morning cocktail, and not finding him, he had had it by himself.

As he came out of the smoking-room he saw Staunton and Don Ramiero, looking very serious, coming from the direction of the saloon entrance. He took three or four long, quick strides towards them and said abruptly:

"Mr. Staunton, Ellerton is not to be found anywhere on board, and I hear that he did not sleep in his berth last night. Is that true? Has anything happened to him?"

It so came to pass that just at this moment Mercedes strolled past with Lady Maud, to whom she had been apologising for her "foolish rudeness" the day before, and also imparting the most interesting information that one engaged young woman can tell and another hear. They heard Iddison's question and instantly stopped. Lady Maud looked at Mercedes. She was white to the lips. She stared wide-eyed at her father and began to sway a little from side to side. Lady Maud at once flung her arm round her and drew her close to her side. Then Staunton spoke.

"I most deeply regret to be obliged to say, Captain Iddison," he began in a tone whose emotion was most wonderfully simulated, "that last night we deceived you—I hope you will allow me to say with the best of intentions, especially as regards our lady guests—when we told you that our stoppage was due to a slight accident to the engines. The sad truth, which I am now compelled to tell you and my other guests, is that Mr. Wilfrid Ellerton fell overboard shortly after midnight, almost within reach of my friend, Señor Valdez, and that all our best efforts to save him were in vain. You will, I am sure, forgive the deception, for we hoped——"

Before he could utter another word Mercedes had shaken herself free from Lady Maud's arm. She crossed the deck with rapid steps, laid her hands on her father's shoulders, and, looking him full in the eyes, said in a whisper that everyone could hear:

"Is that true, father? Is he really drowned—dead?"

For an instant he looked at the lovely, piteously pleading face of the only being on earth that he loved, and, as he did so, the fatal truth struck home into his soul. His face blanched and his eyes fell before hers. But there was no going back now. What was done was done, and so he replied as steadily as he could:

"Yes, Mercedes, most unhappily it is true!"

"Merciful Heavens!" she murmured. "My life was his, for he saved it—and I loved him—and we only knew last night—and now he is dead—so soon dead!"

And before he could catch her in his arms, she had fallen fainting at his feet.

EIGHTH CHAPTER.

.. In the Council .. Chamber.

As Mercedes fell to the deck her father stooped and lifted her in his arms. For a moment his eyes met those of Valdez, already blank with amazement and fear, in a glance so full of horror and involuntary reproach, that his accomplice shrank away from him for the moment like a criminal suddenly faced with clear proof of his crime. Then he turned and walked rapidly away towards the saloon entrance, saying that he would call Miss Staunton's maid and summon the doctor.

He seemed to pass through an eternity of terrifying emotions during the next few minutes, but they were more of fear for the consequences of his crime than horror of its callous and inhuman wickedness. He knew now that his keen instinct had shown him the truth. He knew that the doomed man loved the daughter of the Lord of the Underworld. That of itself would naturally have been of no moment to him whatever—but the brief, yet terrible scene which he had just witnessed had also told him that Wilfrid Ellerton's love either was already or sometime would be returned. Knowing this, he had deliberately hastened the fate which

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Isolo Staunton's own statement in the presence of his guests had made irrevocable. What would be his fate if this tyrant Croesus, who never forgave even a mistake, came to know of this knowledge?

It had all passed in a few moments, and yet, when they came to compare notes afterwards, it turned out that that swift exchange of strangely-meaning glances had been equally noted by both Lady Maud and her lover.

While she and Lady Medcalf-Mears went to the assistance of Mercedes, Iddison ran a long wicker-chair across the deck, and they laid her in it. By this time Don Ramiero had returned with the maid and Staunton's private physician, who always accompanied him on his yachting trips.

Like all the intimate associates and servants of this despot of an unknown domain, Dr. Eymar Billaud was a man of great ability in his own vocation, who possessed few, if any, moral principles which did not happen to harmonise with the interests of his employer. Isolo Staunton was wont to say in confidence to those who fancied that they were his trusted friends, that all he wanted was talent—genius, if he could get it. But he had no use for principle.

He was a Frenchman born in England and a graduate of both French and English Universities. A man who could pass in the society of both countries as a cultivated citizen of either, and who, save for his whole-souled and utterly heartless devotion to his science, was about as much of a man as he was a chimpanzee—to which poor relation of humanity he bore a quite suggestive facial resemblance.

He felt Mercedes' pulse, slightly raised one of her eyelids, and then, turning to Staunton, he said imperatively and in perfect English:

"Your daughter, sir, is suffering from a sudden and, I fear, very severe mental shock. She is only just alive. Let her be taken to her room at once and put to bed. I will prepare a restorative and make a further examination as soon as possible."

Without another look at his patient, he shuffled off to his own rooms on the main deck, and Mercedes was at once carried below. Lady Maud, who, among her many accomplishments, numbered a highly-trained genius for nursing, at once constituted herself head-nurse and saw that everything needful was done in preparation for the doctor's anxiously awaited visit.

Meanwhile Staunton, by a heroic effort of his imperious will, had regained sufficient composure to be able to say calmly, and yet, as Iddison could not help thinking, in a curiously strained, indeed, almost unnatural tone, to the dozen or so guests who were offering their politely expressed and wholly sincere sympathies:

"I need hardly assure you, ladies and gentlemen, how thankful I am for the sympathy which this sudden and utterly unexpected double catastrophe places me so much in need of. As you know, my daughter is not only my only child, she is all I have in the world, for she is motherless." His voice broke here with genuine emotion. There was a respectful silence for a moment, and he went on:

"Of the tragedy of last night I can hardly trust myself to speak. I will only say what I am sure you are all thinking—that a continuation of what was begun as a pleasure-cruise is now impossible, I and the yacht are entirely at your service, but I think that I shall be best consulting your wishes if I land you at the nearest British port, which I believe will be that of Edinburgh, from which I can telegraph the sad news to Sir Wilfrid Ellerton."

"I am quite sure, Mr. Staunton, that we all entirely agree with you. There is really nothing else to be done," said Lady Medcalf-Mears, to whom common consent had given, as it were, the social mothership of the little party.

Just then the head steward came and announced that breakfast was ready, as, of course, no bugle could be blown. The meal was a mournful function, made yet more so by the anxiety of waiting for the doctor's report. Staunton had shut himself up with his own bitter thoughts in the Council Chamber to wrestle with the ghastly situation which his deliberately-planned and ruthlessly-executed crime had created. He had given orders for Dr. Billaud to be sent to him the moment that the examination was concluded, but more than half-an-hour of torturing apprehension, mingled with impotent raging against the unforeseen penalty which had so strangely fallen upon him, passed before Don Ramiero opened the double doors and brought him in.

"Well, doctor," he said, in hard, strained tones, as they entered. "What is it? Brain fever? I may as well know the worst at once."

"My dear sir," replied Billaud, "I regret to say your daughter is suffering greatly. I cannot even tell you what the effects will be until they begin to develop."

"Not even what they may be?" asked Staunton, in a tone of almost pitiful anxiety.

"I do not care to prophesy," replied the doctor. "But from what I have seen the best that I can promise you is that there will be a period of acute delirium following the present condition of collapse, and that will be succeeded by a period of great weakness and depression, which will also be the period of the greatest danger. Fortunately Miss Staunton has an almost perfect constitution, and I have little fear of getting her through. There is, however," he continued, noticing a sudden look of relief in the hitherto dully staring eyes of his employer, "another contingency for which it will be necessary for you to be prepared."

"And that?" asked the millionaire, with a nervous start.

"It is quite possible," Billaud went on, the ghost of a smile flitting across his thin, almost ape-like lips, "that the ultimate development of your daughter's case, sir, may be this. I should first give you to understand that brain lesions resulting from severe mental shock——"

"Good Heavens, man, do you think I want to sit here and listen to a medical lecture?" exclaimed Staunton passionately, as he got up from his chair and began to walk up and down the room with quick, jerky strides. "Come to the point, please, and tell me straight out what more there is to fear."

Dr. Billaud was, not unnaturally, somewhat offended by the abruptness of the interruption, but he knew his position too well to resent it openly. Still he did not forget a prompt revenge.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said deferentially, "you will see that only my extreme interest in the case was leading me into technicalities, quite out of place here, as I admit. To be quite brief, then, it is possible that there may be a very great similarity between the mental condition of Miss Staunton when she recovers her physical health and that of the young gentleman whom, for the present, I suppose I may call my other patient."

The words were quietly, almost gently spoken, and yet they went home into Isolo Staunton's consciousness like so many hammer-strokes. There was no mistaking their meaning; but after one terrible look at Valdez which sent a shiver into his soul, he stopped in his walk and, stooping over Billaud with clenched hands as though he were going to strike him, said in a hoarse, shaking voice:

"What do you mean? Explain yourself clearly, can't you! Don't torture me any longer!"

"My dear sir," said the Frenchman, shrinking back a little into his chair, "nothing, I assure you, could be further from my thoughts. I will express myself in the plainest words. I have reason to fear that when your daughter recovers, although her physical and mental health will probably be quite perfect, the effects of the shock will be found to have completely erased the events of this morning from her memory, and that she will return to reason in absolute ignorance of the untimely decease of Mr. Ellerton which you so feelingly described to your guests before breakfast."

For a few moments the three men looked at each other in silence. Dr. Billaud sat with compressed lips and frowning brows, something like a judge who has just delivered a weighty decision. Staunton stood motionless, leaning against the table, gripping the edge of it with his hands. Then Don Ramiero crossed himself and murmured in Spanish:

"Heavens! if that is so, it will be the act of God! Señor,

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Señor, cannot the wrong be undone even now? He is down yonder alive and well. Can we not——"

"No!" shouted Staunton. "No, we cannot, thanks to your meddling! Was not the affair first arranged for to-night? Where was your authority to do it last night? Had you any reason? Did you suspect that there might be love between them? You have been a good and faithful servant, Ramiero, but if I thought you had done that without telling me, by Jupiter! you should go down yonder with *him* and never see the light of day again!"

Dr. Billaud turned and looked at Don Ramiero. His swarthy complexion had turned almost grey. His lips were trembling and his pupils were dilated by fear—for he had seen that underworld of which Isolo Staunton was absolute lord, and he knew how awful such a fate might be made. By a supreme effort he managed to steady his shaking nerves, and exclaimed, with a note of reproach in his voice:

"No, Señor, no! How could you think such treason of one whose life is lived only in your interests? No! On my faith and honour, I knew nothing of this!"

Fortunately for him his master was too heavily stricken for the moment to take much notice either of his words or the manner of their utterance; but Billaud never took his eyes off his face, and his keen eyes saw that he was lying. There was little love lost between the Spaniard and the Frenchman, who was by no means displeased by his discovery, which might possibly be useful later on.

"That will do, Ramiero," said Staunton, in an altered voice, as his sudden passion died down. So far as he liked and respected any man, he liked and perhaps, to a greater extent, respected his father's faithful friend and counsellor, and already he repented his outburst of fury. "I am sorry! No doubt you acted to the best of your judgment. But, alas, I fear that there is no repairing what you have done. Will there be no cure for my daughter, Billaud, should she prove to be afflicted as you fear?" he went on, turning quickly to the other with a glance which for such a man was almost pathetic.

"My dear sir and most generous patron," replied the Frenchman with an admirably simulated note of emotion in his voice, "there is only one thing that I would not do in your service, and that is knowingly deceive you."

He looked hard at Valdez as he said this, as though he would add: "as others of your faithful servants do," and continued, "But, pray remember, I have not said that this result is inevitable. I only fear it, and therefore it was my duty to tell you of my fear. But if it does come there is only one possible remedy for it—and that is impossible."

"The possible impossible!" echoed Staunton eagerly. "How can that be? Surely you would not indulge in paradoxes on such a subject. What do you mean?"

"I mean, sir," answered Billaud slowly, "that the only cure for such a malady would be that Miss Staunton should again meet and talk with a man who, by your own statement and your own judgment, is already as good as dead."

"My God, yes, that is true!" Staunton gasped as the pitiless logic of the physician's words was irresistibly borne in on his brain. "Was there ever such a hideous tangle spread for the feet of man? No, no, Billaud, you are right. It is cruel, deadly cruel, and to my own darling, too! But there is no help for it!

"Yes, it is done!" he continued, in his old imperious tone as though in this moment he had already risen from the depths into which he had been stricken. "As we make our fate we must accept it, good or evil. She shall forget him, even as the world will."

"Then I presume, Señor," said Valdez, rising with a very distinct feeling of relief, "that you wish the original plan to be duly carried out?"

"In every detail," replied the despot in his usual cold, even tones. "We are now heading for the Firth of Forth, which we should reach this evening. My guests will land at Leith, and I shall do the same, as I intend to convey the—ah!—the sad tidings personally to Sir Wilfrid. You will remain in charge as usual, Ramiero, and to you, Doctor, I shall intrust my daughter. You shall have the two best trained nurses that money can hire in Edinburgh, and then you will, of course, prescribe a sea trip and complete isolation for your patient. The *Isola* will then proceed to the Anchorage, where you, Ramiero, will get rid of your charge and then bring away any cargo that may be ready for you."

And so, in these few words, spoken as calmly as though he were issuing the most commonplace of sailing orders, Isolo Staunton, so far as lay in his power, sealed the earthly fate of the only man on whom his beloved Mercedes had looked with the melting eyes of love.

NINTH CHAPTER.

Suspicions!

WHEN the *Isola* reached Leith, which, thanks to her great speed, she did on the evening of the same day, Lady Maud parted very unwillingly from her charge, who, after Doctor Billaud had managed to administer the restorative he had prepared, had lain in a state of semi-consciousness all day.

In common with the other guests, she could not help thinking that the proposed arrangement was a somewhat strange one, especially in view of the fact that their host had decided to leave his daughter while she was in such a critical state, in order to carry the news of Wilfrid Ellerton's death personally to his father.

She had offered—nay, so far as the conventions permitted, she had almost asked—to go with her on the sea-trip which the physician had prescribed; but Staunton had declined so decisively, albeit most cordially, that she felt it hopeless to press the point. "He had the best of reasons for having every possible confidence in his friend Doctor Billaud," he had said; "and as he had made a point of having two trained nurses under him, Lady Maud would see that it was not only unnecessary, but impossible for him to avail himself of her most kindly and generous offer." After which, of course, there was nothing else to be said.

"I don't half like it, Maud," said the Honourable Percy, after a long pause, as they were strolling about the next morning enjoying the glorious view from the summit of Arthur's Seat.

"You don't like what, my dear Percy?" she asked. "Are you thinking about poor Mr. Ellerton and Mercedes?"

"Yes," he replied decisively, "and about our late host and the yacht and—well, about lots of things."

"Yes," she said; "I suppose that is only a natural thing for all of us to do under such terrible circumstances. For my part, I confess I have done nothing else since yesterday morning. But you have not answered my question. Surely you don't suspect anything—anything wrong, do you?"

"I can't say that I do or I don't," he returned, after another pause. "But for all that there are two things that I can't get over. In the first place, that fellow Valdez, who, for all his fine Spanish manners, I can't bring myself to like——"

"No, neither can I," Lady Maud interrupted quickly. "I'm rather glad we think the same on that point. Well?"

"Well, his story was that Ellerton, a young fellow who is not only a very good athlete, but who has been a sailor for some years, overbalanced himself and fell overboard like a baby or a drunken man from the deck of a yacht in a perfectly

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smooth sea. Now, does that strike you as being very likely on the face of it?"

"N-o, I can't say that it does, now that you put it that way," she replied in a somewhat awed tone, "but surely you don't mean there could be a possibility of anything like foul play. What earthly reason could there be for such a thing?"

"Then there was that look which Staunton gave Valdez when he picked his daughter up. Now, I've seen men stalking each other down like wild beasts; I've seen them blazing away at each other at close quarters; and I've seen them struggling together for dear life on the top of a precipice; but I tell you that I've never seen more concentrated hate and fury in one man's eyes, or more abject fear in another's, than I did yesterday morning in Staunton's and that Spaniard's. I've had very good reason, I can assure you, to know that men don't look at each other like that without some very good cause."

"Percy," said Lady Maud with a faint little smile, "there's one thing quite certain. You are distinctly in earnest on the subject."

"Yes, I'm what my young friend Fenning Brandon, the American Minister's son, you know, would call in dead earnest on this business.

"I've lots of friends here in England and all over the place, and the Governor and dear old Rollo and Queenie; —by the way, I wonder why *they* refused this mysterious millionaire's invitation on what I know to be absolutely false pretences, now I come to think of it?—have tons of influence and all that sort of thing, and I'll work it for all it's worth. Of course there may be nothing in it, but there'll be the sport of the hunt, anyhow, even if we don't kill in the end."

"My dearest of big boys and heroes!" exclaimed Lady Maud, stopping short and looking up at him with a dazzling smile, which made him wish fervently that the place was not quite so public. "That's splendid; and I believe you're right—I believe that there *is* something in it, and, as *my* American friend, Cora Kesteven, would put it, 'I'm right there with you all the time, if you think a woman's wit will be of any use and you'll have me?"

"Well, as we're going to have one another for better or worse before very long, and as you're several thousand times cleverer than I ever learnt how to be, we'll just make that another compact between us, and," he went on, taking her by the arm, "in a more suitable time and place we'll duly sign, seal, and deliver it. And now I'm hungry, and I don't think we shall be much more than in time for lunch."

"If there is one thing that I like about you more than another," she laughed, as she freed her hand from his arm and turned towards the sloping path, "it is that magnificent appetite of yours. I consider it a most happy augury for the future. It is almost impossible for a man with an appetite like that to be ill-tempered as long as it can be satisfied—and I hope I shall always be able to do that."

"I hope so," he said, as he pulled her hand through his arm, "you have no idea what a pig I am when I'm hungry. Hullo! Look down yonder, Maud, over the water. Is that our friend got away already? By Jove, he's been pretty quick about those nursing arrangements and the rest of it. Money again, I suppose. Let me have a look for a moment."

She took her hand from his arm and he got his field-glasses out of the case and put them to his eyes.

"Yes, that's the *Isola* right enough," he went on, as he focussed them, "and isn't she just spinning through it! Here, take a look. What a lovely craft she is! I should like to have young Billy's opinion of her."

"The young Billy" to whom he alluded was the Honourable William Anson Iddison, Lieutenant in the Navy, and presently second in command of His Majesty's Destroyer *Scorcher*. He was already, at twenty-two, the possessor of two medals, the Chinese and the Distinguished Service, and his most pious wish was for the promotion of his esteemed Commander to a position of dignity on board a cruiser. He loved the black, ugly, bull-nosed little *Scorcher*, and naturally wanted her for himself.

"Yes, there she goes," said Lady Maud when she had got the glasses right. "She is lovely, as you say. It seems incredible that anything so beautiful should be used for any evil purpose, so let us hope, for her sake as well, that we are wrong."

"With pleasure," he laughed rather grimly, putting out his chin a little, "but for all that I'd give something to be on board her this trip with Billy and two or three of his boys disguised as quarter-masters."

A good deal of light would have been thrown in places which Lady Maud and her lover were beginning to think so dark, if either of them could have listened to a parting conversation between Staunton, Don Ramiero, and Doctor Billaud in the Council Chamber half-an-hour before the *Isola* sailed.

For the first time in his active life, Isolo Staunton had repented him of the evil that he had done, not for repentance sake, but because of that greater evil which, all unknowingly, he had brought upon the one human being for whom his heart held a tender human feeling. He had passed a night of sleepless torment, raging vainly against what promised to be the inevitable consequences of his own act, till at last his love for Mecedes had overcome even his iron purpose, and for her sake, he had decided to run the tremendous risk of a compromise with Fate.

"I quite see the force of your arguments, gentlemen," he said towards the close of the conversation, "and I am entirely satisfied that you have been thinking only of my interests; but I have counted the risk, and for my daughter's sake I am prepared, in fact, resolved to take it. If the operation which you will perform, Doctor Billaud, does not restore your patient's past memory, then some excuse must, and shall be found, to bring him back to life. If, on the other hand, it does, then I shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing that his departure from the upper to the under world is not only necessary, but inevitable."

"Very well, sir," replied the Frenchman, "since that is your decision it shall be done. Señor Valdez and I have warned you, and therefore our duty in that regard is performed."

Thus was it decided that the captive on board the *Isola* should have one chance for his liberty and perhaps his life.

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

TO PARENTS.

THE Editor of THE BOYS' LEADER offers a situation in the offices of this firm at a salary of £100 a year to commence with to a boy, and a like situation of £100 a year to a girl.

The two successful competitors will be given the choice, after we have arranged with their parents, of entering either the editorial department, the art department, or the counting-house, so that every opportunity will be given to the boy or girl who shows any particular tendency towards one of these classes of work.

In addition to these two handsome awards, a further hundred consolation gifts will be distributed amongst those who come next. The conditions under which these offers are made are very simple. In THE BOYS' LEADER, published on Tuesday, November 3rd, will appear the following set of questions:

1.—Who wrote Robinson Crusoe?

2.—What famous British soldier is known as "Bobs"?

3.—Who is your favourite hero (not fiction), and why?

4.—Who made most runs in first-class cricket this summer?

5.—Which is your favourite book, and why?

6.—When was King Edward VII. born? Give year and day.

The boy and girl who most successfully answers all the questions set will be considered the winner.

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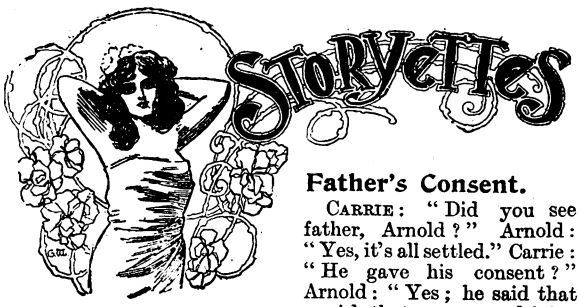

Father's Consent.

CARRIE: "Did you see father, Arnold?" Arnold: "Yes, it's all settled." Carrie: "He gave his consent?" Arnold: "Yes; he said that a girl that was out driving and yachting and bicycling as much as you didn't need much of a home, anyway. Not very nice, was it?"

When the Lights are Low.

SHE: "When is a comfortable position uncomfortable?" He: "When anyone enters the room suddenly."

She Was Tired of Waiting.

HE: "Ethel, what can it mean? Last night I dreamt that I proposed to you." She: "I should say that you are more sensible asleep than awake."

The Very Reason.

"WHY don't you think of marriage?" asked the gushing young thing of thirty odd summers. "I do," answered the cynic. "It's thinking of it that keeps me a bachelor."

He Proposed Once Too Often.

WIFE: "When you proposed to me, John, did you think I would accept you?" Husband: "Not the first time." "The second?" "I wasn't going to propose more than once."

More Bachelor's Advice.

"THERE are two kinds of girls a fellow should never flirt with." "Oh, really?" "The girls who are so young they don't know any better, and the girls who are so old they mean business."

That Settled It.

"No, sir," exclaimed the irate sire, "my daughter can never be yours." "Quite right, sir," replied the cool youth; "she couldn't possibly be my daughter, but she's going to be my wife."

Better Late Than Never.

"INTELLIGENCE has just reached me," began Mr. Blodger, as he sat down to the dinner table. "Thank Heaven, if it has at last," exclaimed Mrs. Blodger. The meal was partaken of in silence.

Then He Squirmed.

"IF you insist on breaking our engagement, Miss Fickle, I shall make your letters public." "You are welcome to do so, Mr. Scamper; there is nothing in them that I am ashamed of, except the address on the envelope."

A Distinction With a Difference.

ANGRY FATHER-IN-LAW: "Didn't you tell me when you married my daughter that you were worth £40,000?" Son-in-Law: "No, sir; I said that I could lay my hands on £40,000; but had I done so I should now be in gaol."

He Should Have Said "Less Beautiful."

RICH HEIRESS: "But, Captain Hawleigh, would you love me when I grow old and ugly?" The Captain (gallantly): "You may grow older, my dear Miss Crœsus, but you can never grow uglier." And he wondered why she rejected him.

A Reassuring Simile.

SHE was going away. "Oh, John!" she sobbed. "J-John, are y-you quite sure you'll m-miss me?" "Darling," replied her big husband, "I'll miss you as much as I do the morning train." Thus assured, she picked up her bag, and, with a weet smile, started for the seaside

Sisterly Love Again.

HE: "She looks as proud as though the whole world is under her feet!" She: "Well, she's right! Did you ever see her feet?"

Made a Name for Herself.

ISORA: "Your name is so curious." Azile: "Yes; I'm named after my rich aunt, Eliza; but I reversed it, as it looks so much nicer."

Severely Reprimanded.

WALTER (aged five): "Papa, when I grow up may I get married?" Papa: "My son, I regret to see you anticipating trouble so early in life."

How Very Provoking.

"HER marriage was a great disappointment to her friends." "Indeed?" "Oh, yes. They all predicted it would turn out unhappily, and it didn't."

The Chief Inducement.

SHE: "I don't want to marry you. I don't even want to talk to you!" He (a widower), eagerly: "That's the very reason I want you to marry me!"

A Competent Critic.

HE: "That must be a very interesting book you are reading." She: "Oh, it's awfully exciting! The heroine changes her gown six times in the first chapter."

There Had Been Rumours Before.

MAMIE: "I hear you are going to be married again." Edith: "Again? Why, I've never been married at all yet." "No; but I can't recall the number of times you were 'going to be.'"

Good Indication.

IDA: "Why do you like Harry? He kisses you so awkwardly." May: "That's just why I like him. If he went about it in a graceful manner I would know he had long been practising."

A Grievous Libel.

CUSTOMER: "Why doesn't Miss Robinson deal at your shop now?" Grocer: "One of my assistants insulted her." Customer: "How?" Grocer: "She overheard him telling someone that she was our oldest customer."

He Was so Considerate.

TOM: "Why are you so melancholy, old man?" Jack: "Miss Jones rejected me last night." Tom: "Well, never mind, there are others." Jack: "Yes, of course, but somehow I can't help feeling sorry for the poor girl."

George Would Not Object.

SHE: "Albert, I have come to the conclusion that I love George better than I love you, and——" He: "What about the engagement ring I gave you to wear?" She: "Oh, that's all right. George says he won't object if I wear it."

There Was a Reason.

MRS. MAINCHANCE (sentimentally): "I declare, darling, you hold the umbrella over me just as carefully as you did in our courting days—more carefully, if anything." Mr. Mainchance (prosaically): "I didn't have to buy your millinery in those days, Myrtilla."

His Courage Failed.

SENIOR PARTNER: "My dear Muller, you had the courage to save my daughter from drowning. You deserve to be rewarded. I will give you my daughter in marriage." Muller (bookkeeper): "It is really very kind of you; but I am not so courageous as you seem to think."

Real Economy.

ANXIOUS HUSBAND (at dinner): "Really, dear, turkey again? I'm afraid we won't manage at this rate!" Wife: "Really, dear, it's *all* management. I made so much turkey-stuffing that I had to order two more birds so that not a crumb should be left. Now you see how economical I am, you goose!"

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The Man and the Foolish Little Girl.

A Correspondence That Brought an Alliance.

ONCE there was a Foolish Little Girl—that is, people (mostly her friends) called her that, for had she not been besought by three different men to be a wife, and had she not an equal number of times refused? And they were very "eligible," these men—they had much to offer in worldly goods, were pleasant to look upon, and they loved the Foolish Little Girl. But she shook her wayward head and elevated her dimpled chin and said "No!" three times very distinctly.

One day she did something to amuse herself. She saw an advertisement like this, in a newspaper: "Correspondence desired with bright, refined young woman. Object, to pass the time. Address A. B., &c.," and she answered.

They exchanged two letters each and then became confidential. Now, odd as it may seem, one will often reveal things to a practical stranger, particularly if it be under cover of mystery and such circumstances as surrounded these correspondents, that one would never confide to one's dear friend. Thus it happened that after the second letter each told the other a few things.

Said the Man to the Foolish Little Girl: "I am tired of everything—I hate Society—I haven't money enough to travel the world over as I would like—and I hate people in general and girls in particular, for it's all the fault of a girl that I'm in this discordant tone of mind. I want to get interested in something and I hit upon this scheme as being original and cheaper than a trip abroad. It's already succeeding. Tell me something about yourself and how you came to answer my advertisement."

The Little Girl wrote back among other things: "Perhaps my reasons are similar to your own—perhaps I haven't any reasons, but whether I have or not I'm being amused and that is something that hasn't happened since last summer when I knew—well, him—just him—no matter who he was or why I lost him. Nobody knows of it. No one in my family would sympathise if they did, but perhaps you can, for you have learnt your lesson too."

Their letters were frequent and long after this and were not so very silly, all things considered. One day something quite exciting happened. The Man touched upon a certain incident of his past summer holiday.

"The quarrel came so suddenly," he wrote, "so like the proverbial thunderbolt from a sunny sky, and she had grown so dear to me that I couldn't realise all at once that anything so ugly could come between us. In my surprise the words of explanation came haltingly. She misunderstood, and before I knew it she had said a few quick sentences and left me there, trying to comprehend what had happened.

Exactly at this point the Little Girl's big eyes began to open bigger than usual, and soon she let the paper fall from unheeding fingers and stared and stared at nothing while strange scraps of things pieced themselves together in her mind. Then she came to earth again, picked up the letter and read it through to the end, where for the first time his name stood forth fully instead of the old "A. B."

"Why didn't I guess it before?" said she to herself. "Who else could ever write such descriptions of that dear old place? Why nobody but us ever knew about that cove in the bay."

Then a sudden thought made her eyes open big again. "I wonder—I won-der—I w-o-n-d-e-r——" Then a violent headshake—"why, no! of course he doesn't know."

But he did. He knew after the very first confidential letter. For she was a very Foolish Little Girl, and she wrote her heart out in those letters.

Then another thing happened. One day the mamma of the Foolish Little Girl found a note. Note said, "Mamma, dear—when I return I shall be Mrs. Alden Brice. He's the one in the golf suit that you hated so last summer. He isn't very rich and I know what you all will say. But it has to be."

She was not so very foolish after all! **May Harney.**

"Penny Illustrated Paper" says: "In 'ANTIPON' the world is made richer by a marvellous discovery."

The "Sheffield Independent" says: 'ANTIPON' is a preparation which bids fair to revolutionise medical science."

"ANTIPON"
PERMANENTLY CURES
the most obstinate cases of
EXCESSIVE OBESITY.

The Marvellously Successful Permanent Cure for Corpulence.

Illustrated London News. Everyone seems to know instinctively when one has too much or too little flesh upon one's bones, and the time may come to many when the burden grows oppressive and causes alarm. To such sufferers "Antipon" should prove advantageous, because it not only speedily absorbs and throws out of the system all superabundant adipose matter but increases strength and vitality.

Methodist Recorder. It is satisfactory to know that the new cure "Antipon" is the practical result of a specialist's researches and discoveries, so that reliance can be placed upon its efficacy.

Penny Illustrated Paper. In "Antipon," the great new permanent cure for corpulence, the world is made richer by a marvellous discovery. Cures or so-called cures, which purged and sweated the patient into a state of decline, are of the past. "Antipon" is something of a diametrically opposite nature, for whilst it is gradually absorbing and ejecting the gross deposits of superfluous fat which clog and debilitate the system and impede the action of the vital organs, it increases muscular strength and helps to revitalise the nervous system.

Weldon's Ladies' Journal. Readers troubled with *embonpoint* will find in "Antipon" a reliable and permanent cure, exceedingly pleasant to take, and, being a powerful fat absorbent, it dissolves and eliminates from the body all superfluous adipose, both the internal fat and the subcutaneous.

It also forms a strength-giving tonic, improves the appetite, assists digestion, and tones up the whole system, without the sufferer incurring any distressing restrictions as to diet.

The Lady's Pictorial. To reduce superabundant fat is of vital importance. The wonderful new fat absorbent known as "Antipon," performs this work promptly, safely and with permanent effect. It goes to the very root of the evil; destroys the superfluous fat that impedes the free action of the internal organs, also the subcutaneous adipose, abdominal and general, that gives such an unseemly appearance to the sufferer. "Antipon" causes no discomfort of any kind, and is a harmless liquid of pure vegetable ingredients, agreeably bitter and refreshing to the palate. The reductive action of "Antipon" begins at once, and within a day and a night of the first dose the scales will proclaim a decrease. When the figure has been denuded of all superfluous fat and the patient is satisfied that normal weight has been attained, the doses may be discontinued,

THE CURE IS COMPLETE AND PERMANENT.

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A WOMAN'S HATE.

The Story of a Lover's Disappearance and a Girl's Faith.

THE news spread like wildfire that Brian Wyndhurst had taken the cheque for one thousand pounds, drawn but unsigned, had forged the signature of the head of the firm, cashed the cheque and absconded. The excitement in the large office was tremendous; it came like a thunderbolt on all the clerks and employées; and when it was carried from the premises of Morgan and Sons to the ears of Marian Arnold, Brian's sweetheart, it seemed to stiffen every muscle and nerve in her body and turn her to stone.

For a full minute she stood in this apparently petrified condition, gazing at her aunt with eyes that saw nothing; then she sank in a limp mass on the couch from which she had hastily risen. When she had sufficiently recovered to ask questions, she demanded more particulars.

"The gentleman is a detective," responded Mrs. Arnold uneasily. "Do you think you can go through the ordeal, Marian? He will ask you all manner of things about Brian."

"I must go through it," returned Marian firmly. "In the interest of justice—and Brian! There is some dreadful mistake! He could not do such a thing!"

"Well, collect yourself, my dear!" exhorted Mrs. Arnold, still mentally troubled. "Brian always seemed a nice, steady young fellow, but they hint at betting and—but I'll show him in!" she added hurriedly, as she saw the colour coming back with a rush to Marian's cheeks and interpreted that circumstance as the raising of the storm cone.

Detective-Inspector Mostyn entered and took the proffered seat; he began his business tactfully, and it did not take him long to place Marian in possession of all known facts and all conjectures.

Brian Wyndhurst was a trusted clerk in the firm; he was the only son of the woman whom John Morgan had loved but failed to win. When Brian was left an orphan, with scarcely a penny in the world, John Morgan had taken him in hand. Brian had been educated and then placed in a large commerical office; it was tacitly understood that if he showed sufficient capacity, he would ultimately become a partner.

Every Friday it was necessary to draw £1,000 from the bank by means of an open cheque for the purpose of paying the clerks and factory hands who were in receipt of weekly wages. This was done early on Friday morning and a special cheque book was used for these wages cheques. It was part of Brian's duty to take charge of this cheque book in a safe; he would write the cheque and Mr. Morgan would sign it on Friday morning; occasionally, in order to be ready, the cheque would be drawn on Thursday evening, although not signed till the next morning.

Brian generally cashed the cheque, taking most of it in gold, some in silver, and a small proportion in notes; he was usually accompanied by another clerk and they drove in a cab from the doors of the bank to the factory, where most of the money was left, and then back to the office. Once or twice Brian had cashed the cheque alone, laughing when the grey-haired cashier shook his head disapprovingly at the probable danger incurred by Brian.

What had occurred on the present occasion? Brian had left the office as usual on Thursday evening, but he did not put in an appearance on Friday morning. It was nearly eleven o'clock when the firm received a telegram from him, to the effect that he was not well enough to come to the office. Thereupon Mr. Morgan had taken his duplicate key from the drawer in his private safe and had opened the one in Brian's charge where the cheque book was usually kept, in order to sign the wages cheque and have it cashed. To his amazement the cheque was missing! The counterfoil was duly filled up, but the all-important slip of paper was gone. Mystified, but not especially uneasy as the cheque did not bear the necessary signature, he drew another himself and went off in a cab with a clerk to the bank to cash it. On his arrival, he received the stunning intelligence that a cheque had already been cashed and was shown the one which he had missed!

It bore his signature; he knew it was a forgery, but it was so cleverly done that he could not detect any flaw himself till he had subjected it to a searching examination through a pocket microscope.

Explanations followed. A slightly-built young fellow had cashed it, alone; he brought a letter of introduction from the firm and had a cab at the door. He said that Mr. Wyndhurst was ill.

The letter produced was typewritten on the firm's paper and signed by John Morgan—another clever imitation. Inquiries were at once made and the police informed. Brian, it was found, had not returned home last night, but had wired to say that he would stay with a friend. His drawers at the office, as well as the safe, were examined, and the state of the contents suggested that Brian had intended to abscond. Further examination was being made in order to ascertain whether his books had been falsified and whether he had been guilty of other thefts, but everything was in order so far. The only clue was a paper, evidently written by Brian under the influence of some strong agitation; this paper was a mass of figures with odd letters, indicative of betting transactions, and it also contained the name of a woman, Clara Beale.

That was all. Could Miss Arnold say anything of Brian's movements on the previous evening? Had she—hem!—any reason to suppose that Mr. Wyndhurst had been betting or——

"He always condemned gambling in unmeasured terms!" declared Marian decisively.

The detective was on the point of observing that people sometimes strongly condemn a thing as a cloak, while they do that same thing all the time; but he remembered himself just in time.

"I have not seen Mr. Wyndhurst, or heard from him, since Wednesday evening," said Marian. "I expected him to-night and if he doesn't come, I shall conclude that some evil has befallen him! I fear it is so, for he is the soul of honour and would not be guilty of so wicked a crime, so great an act of ingratitude!"

"Precisely!" acquiesced the officer, just a little drily. He had heard of that sort of thing so often! Such confidence was creditable to human nature, but it wasn't business from his point of view! "Was he all right on Wednesday evening, Miss Arnold? Not worried at all, but just as happy and buoyant as usual?"

"He *did* appear somewhat worried," admitted Marian hesitatingly. "He said that he might have something to tell me soon, but"—she blushed—"I understood that remark in a way which you will not understand!"

"Exactly!" remarked the detective sympathetically, but

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looking much more alert. "Didn't explain what he was going to tell you soon, I suppose?"

"No! But surely you do not think him guilty? You are not looking for him in order to arrest him?"

Marian half rose from the couch in indignation, but dropped back again.

"We must find Mr. Wyndhurst, Miss Arnold,' was the evasive answer, "and then we shall get at the truth!"

The officer took his departure and Marian waited feverishly till the evening was far advanced, hoping against hope that Brian would appear; but he came not, and with a sharp pain at her heart she lay on her bed to pass the night in sleeplessness, and gradually forming the determination to join in the search herself on the morrow, if no tidings came of her missing lover. The morning journal brought her the intelligence that Brian Wyndhurst was suspected of the robbery and was being sought by the police with a view to his arrest.

Marian Arnold found herself face to face with a condition of things which demanded all her courage and which would have the effect of either crushing her and destroying her love for Brian Wyndhurst or transforming her from the simple, placid maiden into a woman of energy and determination. She was pretty, with attractive ways and a simple trustfulness calculated to charm a young man of such virility as Brian, just as his very manliness drew him to her as the one who would be capable of protecting her. She loved him, she had told herself, but she had never sounded the depths of her heart to learn how much she loved him. She was content to trust him, believing that he would do his best to make the path of life smooth for her, while she was filled with a mild determination to help him in his troubles and share his joys.

And in the course of a few hours, circumstances had effected a great change. This danger to Brian had removed the mist from her mental vision; she could clearly perceive those sterling qualities which had been but dimly visible to her; during the night of bitter anxiety and reflection she had probed the depths of her heart and had discovered the profundity of her love for Brian. The old placidity was gone; the Marian Arnold of that morning was a woman with a resolute countenance that denoted a set purpose.

Mrs. Arnold watched her niece with some anxiety; she was afraid that the girl would suddenly faint or go into a fit of hysterics; she was totally unprepared for what did occur, and it startled her a great deal more than a fainting fit would have done.

"Aunt," said Marian suddenly, breaking a long silence, "I am going out to-day to do what I can to find Brian!"

"But, my child, you cannot do anything!" expostulated Mrs. Arnold, when she had sufficiently recovered from her astonishment to be able to speak. "The detectives have the case in hand; they are more capable than you can be of——"

"I know," interrupted Marian quietly. "But there is one great difference between the detectives and myself—a difference which, I think, gives me an advantage. I am in love with Brian Wyndhurst, and love, although blind in some respects, is very sharp-sighted in others. I may find a clue which they have missed! They start with the assumption that Brian is guilty; I am confident that he is innocent. We shall view the facts from different standpoints. I am convinced that there is some plot against Brian!"

Mrs. Arnold remained silent; she did not feel so confident about Brian's innocence. He was a good fellow, but young men sometimes give way to temptation. However, she did not argue with Marian; twenty-four hours previously she would have spoken out boldly enough, but this Marian was not the niece of the past! So she held her tongue.

"I shall go to see Mrs. Mead, Brian's landlady; afterwards I shall call on Mr. Morgan!" declared Marian as she rose from the breakfast table. She had forced herself to eat in order to maintain her strength.

She carried her plans into execution. Mrs. Mead was somewhat perturbed by the visit at first, but she warmed to Marian when they were seated in her scrupulously clean, though humble parlour.

"So that is all you know?" queried Marian, fixing her keen

The Terrible Turk.

"He is a pitiless monster," writes one correspondent; and another, "Wherever he goes there is misery." Hard sayings, these, and all summed up in the word "unspeakable," applied to the Turk by Mr. Gladstone. It is matter for debate whether any nation is so bad as this. Of most people or things some good can be urged, but none of indigestion, which is responsible for more misery than a million Turks in arms could produce. It is the function of food to make rich, pure blood, and to sustain muscles, brain and nerves. When food fails to do this, the digestive organs are at fault, and only Mother Seigel's Syrup can set them right again. Seigel's Syrup is a gentle tonic, compounded of fruits, roots, and herbs, which assists nature to do its own work in its own way, regulating the system and stimulating the liver to healthy activity.

Marriage and Health.

Married men live longer than single men. So, at least, a study of the United States census returns would seem to indicate. But though marriage may be conducive to longevity, it certainly does not secure immunity from indigestion, biliousness, and the host of weakening and distressing ailments which have their origin in a disordered stomach and a torpid liver. Yet even that may be secured by the timely and regular use of Mother Seigel's Syrup, a natural tonic and digestant made of fruits, roots, and herbs. "For years I was a martyr to indigestion and biliousness, and was afraid to eat at all. Thanks to Seigel's Syrup I am now as well as I could wish to be." So says Mrs. Rose Warboys, of 100 Queen Street, Hitchin.

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eyes on Mrs. Mead, after the landlady had repeated the particulars already made known. "You can tell me nothing more, nothing? You know what has been said — that he betted and that the name of a woman, not my name, was found on a paper in his drawer?"

Marian, full of loving trustfulness in Brian, waited for an emphatic reply that would confirm her own views; but Mrs. Mead looked half frightened, and gazed confusedly at the carpet. "Poor girl!" she murmured; "I really ought to tell her, for if she has been deceived, she ought to know it!" Marian saw the landlady's confusion; it struck a chill to her heart, but she cast aside the doubt and pressed the question.

"Well, miss, it'll be best for me to tell you," she answered slowly. "Mr. Wyndhurst *did* have something to do with another lady, because she came here for him once, and I believe he met her elsewhere. I'll tell you what I know, but for goodness' sake you mustn't tell the police that you've got it from me! They would send me to prison for hiding the facts! But I did it to save him, for he was a nice young gentleman and perhaps it was a first false step and——"

"Tell me all!" demanded Marian, her cheeks paling. "You may help me to save him!"

The last remark was ambiguous, and Mrs. Mead interpreted it to mean that Marian Arnold wished to assist Brian to escape the consequences of his false step. Mrs. Mead was flurried and unable to reason clearly.

"I can't tell you much about what happened before the evening of Mr. Wyndhurst's disappearance, Miss Arnold. A young lady came to see him once, but she would not give her name; it was evening and she wore a thick veil. All I can say is that she seemed very upright—perky in her manner, too. I believe Mr. Wyndhurst met her elsewhere and had been on intimate terms with her. Mr. Wyndhurst has been worried lately, I am sure of that! Well, the night before last he didn't come home and a telegram came from him, as I have told the police. But I didn't tell them that I went out after the telegram came and when I got home, rather late, I found that someone had been in! Oh, I was sure of that; you see, I am very particular how I arrange my things and I hate to see chairs and mats and other things crooked. Now, the mat inside the front door was crooked! Of course, I never left it like that!"

"What does that indicate?" asked Marian judicially.

"Someone had been in, someone who didn't wish me to know it, and so had been extra particular about wiping his feet! He, or she, had shifted the mat in wiping his feet so much! I didn't pay any attention at first, thinking it was Mr. Wyndhurst come home, after all. So I went to his room and found it locked. It is never locked unless he is in bed. I left him alone till the morning, but as he didn't come out and didn't answer my knocks, I got a duplicate key which I keep in a drawer and opened the door. He wasn't there and the bed hadn't been slept in!"

"Well?" inquired Marian, with a trace of eagerness and anxiety.

Mr. Wyndhurst had been in his room and had changed his suit. He had taken one suit from the drawer and had put the other, the one he wore when he left in the morning, back in the drawer again. And in changing he dropped something on the floor without noticing it. I'll show you."

She went away and returned a minute later with a small stamp-photograph of a young woman. It was at the time when these little novelties were in vogue and many persons stuck them on letters to friends. Marian Arnold examined the picture critically and a pang of jealousy shot through her; she shut out the feeling in an instant, feeling ashamed of her momentary defection. The woman was strikingly beautiful, and even this little imperfect picture corroborated Mrs. Mead's statement that she was very upright. Mechanically she turned it over; on the back was written "24 B. W.". Those were Brian's initials, but it was not his handwriting, and what did the figures mean? Were they part of some cipher? The idea of a cipher occurred to her because Brian was fond of codes and ciphers, and they had amused themselves in their own correspondence with that kind of thing.

Mrs. Mead regarded all this as evidence of Brian's culpability, although she was loth to believe in it. Marian was puzzled by this last discovery, but she was more than ever of opinion that there was a plot against Brian. She soon quitted Mrs. Mead's parlour and hurried to the office of Morgan and Sons, where she saw the head of the firm.

Mr. John Morgan received her sympathetically; he had seen her before, and thought that she was likely to make Brian a sensible, loving wife; but this interview increased his admiration. She surprised him by her resolute air and keen insight. His feelings were the same as those of Mrs. Mead; he desired with all his strength to believe in Brian's innocence, but appearances were against the young man. He said so.

"It is wrong, Mr. Morgan! I am certain there is some plot and we shall prove it!" she cried vehemently. "At least, *I* will prove it, if others cannot. Love can succeed where mere official duty fails!"

"Really, Miss Arnold, you make me feel quite glad!" exclaimed the elderly man, taking her hand and pressing it warmly. "I entertain the greatest affection for Brian, and this affair—has—upset me!"

There were tears in his eyes when he ceased speaking, and he had to cough violently in order to recover his self-possession.

"Tell me the latest information," requested Marian. "Were the originals of the telegrams written by him?"

"It is his style, but not quite like his handwriting," replied Mr. Morgan. "It looks as if he were much agitated. The letter introducing the messenger to the bank was typewritten; the messenger himself had the appearance that seemed a mixture of femininity and masculinity, and he was dressed——"

Here Marian interrupted him, giving a description of the second suit, according to Mrs. Mead's words, and before Mr. Morgan could do more than exclaim "That's it!" she produced the stamp-photograph. "I should like the bank cashier to say if the messenger's features resemble those," she cried in agitation.

Then she told him all she had discovered. Mr. Morgan was amazed; but he pointed out sorrowfully that the police would take it all as further evidence of guilt.

"Never mind!" cried Marian warmly. "Let us get to the bottom of it, and we shall see. Have you got that typewritten letter?"

"The police have it, but I have a press copy and am studying it."

In response to her request he showed the copy.

"There is no doubt that it was done on one of my machines," he told her. "You will see that the bottom of the "n" is broken towards the end of the letter. The clerk who generally uses the machine discovered the break yesterday morning."

"You have a clerk named Jackson," said Marian quietly. "He can use the typewriter, but is not good at it and is not a correspondence clerk. He only uses one sort of machine. Was that letter written on that particular machine?"

Morgan reflected. Yes; he remembered the facts mentioned by Marian. It was the same machine.

"And he wrote that letter!" whispered Marian, leaning

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towards Mr. Morgan, as if afraid that even a whisper might be heard. "Brian has told me of one peculiarity of Jackson's typing and letter-writing; he always begins the first word of the letter under the "r" of 'Dear,' whereas most people begin farther in, so that the 'Dear Sir' stand quite clear. This letter is written in that way."

Mr. Morgan jumped excitedly from his chair. Touching the bell, he ordered the letter-book to be brought to him; an examination of the copies failed to reveal a single letter arranged in that way.

"That clerk must be watched and this portrait shown to the bank cashier and the police," said Mr. Morgan decisively. "Miss Arnold, we may hope yet."

"Yes," returned Marian slowly, "unless—unless they have murdered him."

"Heaven forbid!" said Mr. Morgan solemnly.

Two days elapsed, but the detectives, although they said they had an important clue, had arrived at no result. Marian herself had done some amateur detective work, but without success.

It was on the evening of the fourth day since Brian's disappearance that two people sat facing each other at a table in a fashionable restaurant; they were in a quiet corner and the place was almost empty, so they could talk freely in low tones. They were Jackson, Mr. Morgan's ledger clerk, and a woman who bore a striking resemblance to the stamp-photograph.

"I don't like this hanging about, Alice!" said Jackson moodily. "You doubled from Charing Cross to Calais with a Paris ticket; then went to Boulogne and came back in another guise. The police have traced you in that suit to Calais, but as you changed into feminine attire they lost you there. But I think that visit to Wyndhurst's lodgings and the change of suits was unnecessary."

"It made the case looker blacker against Brian, and that's what I wanted! I hate him for having refused me for that chit of a girl, and I have a dash of Spanish blood in my veins. When we have debts to pay, we pay them!"

There was such a fiendish glitter in her eyes that the weak-minded Jackson felt uncomfortable. He was in love with the beautiful demon; he couldn't help himself; and she had promised to marry him if he assisted her to have revenge on Brian.

"I have had revenge on him and on her at the same time with a goodly sum of money into the bargain!" she laughed. "They both suffer, and I glory in it! I have disgraced him! Oh, it is a splendid revenge!"

"It's too risky!" declared Jackson. "You were nearly caught by the landlady and you left the door locked. And I tell you, I'm confoundedly uncomfortable. It has just leaked out that you dropped a stamp-photograph on the floor!"

The woman said something angrily under her breath, and her manner was less easy.

"It's time we cleared out! You promised to marry me and that we should go to Mexico, where you had property. When are you going to carry out that promise? And where is my share of the £1,000? I ran a lot of risk!"

In her inmost consciousness the woman despised him, but he was a useful tool, and she had fooled him with a promise which she never intended to keep. She half regretted that she had returned to England, but she wanted to do further harm to Marian Arnold.

"All in good time!" she returned coolly. "I want to get Miss Arnold into the clutches of those who hold her lover, and then we will be off."

"Look here!" cried Jackson, paling. "I don't like this sort of thing. I hadn't any idea that you wanted to kill Wyndhurst, and I can't help to settle her as well! I can't!"

"I don't want you to!" said the woman scornfully. "Meet me at Dover two nights hence. You can travel by the nine o'clock from Charing Cross; I shall go sooner!"

After a few more remarks they left the restaurant. Alice Barfield was maturing a plot for the destruction of Marian, which she hoped to accomplish on the following evening.

But the best-laid plans go wrong at times, partly because the plotters have too much confidence in themselves. Alice Barfield planned to send someone to Marian on the next night with a mysterious message from Brian that would tempt Marian to venture into a trap; but on the next morning there arrived from Paris at the office of Morgan and Sons a note in Brian's handwriting to Mr. Morgan. It was to tell him that it was useless to search for the runaway, as he was beyond the arm of the law, and that to seek him would be to bring much greater disgrace on all concerned. That letter, which Alice had forced (as she thought) from the unwilling and desperate Brian under threat of a horrible death, was a terrible blow to John Morgan. It seemed to confirm his worst suspicions; in a hopeless sort of way he sent for Marian Arnold, and held the letter to her without a word.

Marian read it eagerly; she studied it excitedly; then, to Morgan's consternation, she waved it aloft with a triumphant laugh.

"He is not in Paris and he has not absconded!" she cried. "I can see that this letter was forced from him in order to throw us off the track; but an idea seized Brian and he finally consented, pretending to be unwilling all the time. He guessed that I might see the letter, and if I did that I should be able to read the cipher."

"Cipher!" echoed the bewildered John Morgan. "I see no hidden message or cryptogram. You're dreaming, my dear."

"Read every fourth letter in those words," said Marian, handing him the writing. "Every fourth letter written there goes to form a hidden message, and that message explains the figures and letters on the back of the stamp-photograph! He is kept a prisoner at 24 Bath Walk! Where is that?"

"Phew! About the worst street in the Metropolis, or in that part of it."

"We must rescue him at once!" said Marian. "They may kill him!"

The police counselled waiting till dark, and so it happened that while Alice was arranging to entice Marian into the same den, the girl was waiting near Bath Walk while a number of detectives raided the house and rescued Brian Wyndhurst, exhausted by exposure, ill-treatment, and anxiety, from the hands of the rascals who had been only too ready to do as Alice Barfield wished for a few pounds.

Alice, on learning from her female emissary, that Marian was out, had been seized by some misgiving; but instead of fleeing she had foolishly hastened to Bath Walk, where she was arrested just as Brian was released. She had the mortification, and fitting punishment, of seeing the meeting of the lovers.

Brian was taken to Mr. Morgan's home, where he received every attention.

The remainder of the plot was soon made public property. Brian had accepted an invitation and urgent request from Jackson to accompany him to a conversazione at a workmen's institute; but that was a ruse to get him into a lonely place.

He was drugged and conveyed to Bath Walk, and his keys were taken from him. He was stripped, and, on regaining consciousness, had to put on some loathsome clothing. Jackson took the office key and the key of the safe, while the woman took the key of his lodgings. It was Jackson who forged the signatures.

Jackson, on being arrested, volunteered all the information which the police wanted, but he gained little thereby. He was sentenced to two years' penal servitude. Alice Barfield suffered a heavier sentence, but she walked from the dock defiantly, unrelenting.

The bulk of the £1,000 was never recovered, but Mr. Morgan was not much troubled about it. As for Brian and Marian, they had suffered, but it had intensified their love, and, after a while, they even felt a little sorry for the accomplices who were wearing away some of the best years of their life in prison.

G. Merriam.

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This Bale contains Pair Full-sized heavy Whitney Blankets, 1 quilt, red and white, blue and white; White Honeycomb Marcella or Red Twill your choice; Pair Full-size White Twill Sheets, 2 Pillow Cases, 1 Bolster Case, 5 Toilet Mats, 1 Toilet Cover, 2 Turkish Towels, Pair Fine Lace Curtains, 1 White Table Cloth, 1 Fringed Damask Table Cover, 6 Dusters, 2 Tea Cloths—28 Articles 49/6. How to pay. Send 6/- only, we send Bale, carriage paid for approval; balance can be paid in six monthly payments of 6/-, and one of 7/6. If you pay balance on receipt, send only 38/6, saving 5/-. Address below.

55 ARTICLES FOR 25/- ON CREDIT.

Our Gigantic Parcel contains 6 Table Knives and Forks, 6 Dessert Knives and Forks, 12 Tea Spoons, 6 Dessert Spoons, 6 Egg Spoons, 1 pair Sugar Tongs, 2 Table Spoons, 2 Mustard Spoons, and 2 Salt Spoons. We send, carriage paid, on receipt of 3s.; balance 1s. weekly.

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KEEP A GOOD HOLD ON HEALTH

50 years' British reputation has proved PAGE WOODCOCK'S (WIND PILLS to be THE safe, sure & speedy remedy for Wind on the Stomach. Indigestion. Biliousness. Sick Headache. Palpitation. Depression. Nervousness. Languor, &c. Sold by all Chemists, &c., at 1/1½ and 2.9.

SMITH'S

SULPHOLINE LOTION

For clearing the skin from Spots, Blemishes, Redness, Roughness, giving a Beautiful Complexion and pleasing appearance.

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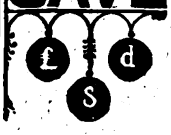
PAWNBROKER'S SALE

Every article in new condition.

SPECIAL BARGAINS UNREDEEMED.

A full list sent post free on application.



13/6 Gent's magnificent 18-ct. Gold-cased Chronograph Stop Watch, jewelled movement, perfect timekeeper, 10 years' written warranty; also fashionable curb (pocket to pocket) double Albert same quality (stamped and guaranteed), with handsome seal attached; three together.

12/6 Lady's handsome 18-carat gold-cased Keyless Watch, jewelled movement; exact timekeeper, 10 years' warranty; also fashionable long watch-guard, same quality (stamped and guaranteed) elegant West-End pattern the two together.

14/9 Furs.—Magnificent Alexandra Dagmar necklet and muff; beautiful real Russian sable hair, worth 4 guineas, not been worn; sacrifice for 14 9; approval willingly.

19/6 Genuine Italian Mandoline, by Stridente, Naples; fine tone; 21 ribbed, real rosewood, pearl and tortoiseshell inlaid, in saddler-made case; approval.

8/9 Feather Boas; bankrupt stock; special bargains; real Ostrich Feather Boas, beautifully curly; perfectly new, in box; colours: grey and white black and white, and natural.

10/6 Lustrous diamond and ruby Half-hoop Ring, set with 5 matchless doublet rubies and 8 real diamonds; solid gold, hall-marked.

7/6 Curb Chain Bracelet, with paddock and safety chain; 18-carat, rolled gold (stamped and guaranteed), in velvet case.

6/9 Brooch; very handsome 18-carat rolled gold, 3 swallows in flight; set lovely turquoise and pearls in case.

21/- Lady's solid gold Keyless Watch, jewelled in 10 rubies, beautifully engraved case; splendid time-keeper; 10 years' written warranty; week's free trial.

8/6 Fashionable Long Neck-chain; genuine 18-carat rolled gold (stamped), beautifully finished; very choice design.

9/6 Organ Toned Melodeon; magnificent 26/- instrument. 12-fold bellows (metal bound), 3 sets steel bronze reeds, and 4 acting stops, including Tremole and Diapason action; rich powerful tone, perfect order.

9/6 Necklet with Heart Pendant, very pretty Princess of Wales rope pattern; heart set with pearls and turquoise.

12/6 Magnificent 5-row Pearl Collarette; finest quality, mounted with four bars of lustrous Orient diamonds, in velvet-lined case.

Any of the above articles sent on approval willingly.

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PILLS.

You will EAT WELL,

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Sold everywhere in Boxes price 1s. 1½d. (56 pills) and 2s. 9d. (168 pills).

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to 'Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

Should Love Affairs be Kept Secret?

"SHOULD a girl tell her friends her love affairs?" inquires "GERTY." "I am just dying to confide in somebody my troubles and joys over my own affairs, but do not know whether it would not be unkind to my lover to make him a topic of conversation among other girls."

* * * * *

You are very wise and discreet, "GERTY." Certainly love affairs should not be the subject of "tittle-tattle." It is very unkind to a man to make him so pointed an object of interest to a lot of girls he does not know. If, however, you have one friend whom you can trust, I think you would be doing yourself much good by seeking her advice or consolation. Such feelings gain nothing by being "bottled up."

The Girl About Town.

"THE girl I am fond of," writes "GUS," "is a business girl, who attends an evening class three times a week. This means that she has to journey across town every night at a late hour. I am very nervous of her making these trips alone, yet could scarcely offer to see her home every night, as that would attract too much attention. Besides, I live in lodgings at the other end of the town. How would you advise me to act?"

* * * * *

I should change my lodgings, "GUS," and go to the neighbourhood in which she lives, if that is possible. If she is willing, there would then be nothing pointed about your seeing her home, as in any case you would be going that way. Neither need you always go to the door of her home, and thereby cause her embarrassment. Certainly a girl does need some kind of escort in crossing a big city late at night.

Should a Girl Tell Her Past?

"THE man who is now my *fiancé*," writes "ANNIE," "thinks that he is the only man who has ever kissed me. I have not denied this, but, as a matter of fact, I have had more than one previous love affair. Now to tell him this would, I fear, disturb his affection for me. Ought I, do you think, to tell him all about things, or should I leave it till later on?"

* * * * *

I think it is better to be candid now. It would be far better for him to know at the beginning all about your past affairs than to suddenly find out that you have been concealing things from him. It may be a blow to break the news to him, but if you do it carefully, he ought to be made to see that it is not unnatural that you should have attracted others. Besides he will afterwards admire you the more for being open with him, and what man is there whose vanity is not gratified by the thought that he has carried off in triumph a girl whom others have failed to win?

Asking a Girl Home.

"I AM very friendly with a certain girl," writes "CHARLIE," "but do not wish to propose to her until my people know her and like her. However, I do not quite know how this is to be managed, as I understand it is not etiquette for a man to invite a girl home without some chaperone."

* * * * *

"CHARLIE" is very sensible in his ideas. Certainly he had better postpone proposing until he has the approval of his family. As to inviting the girl to his home, "CHARLIE" should certainly include in the invitation one of her relations, her mother, sister, or brother, so as to place the affair on a formal social basis.

Friendship—Not Love.

"I AM very 'gone' on a certain man," writes "HELEN," "but every time we have discussed love and marriage, he has told me that on no account could he allow himself to go further with a girl than friendship. He pretends that he disapproves of marriage and says he will remain a bachelor. What am I to do to overcome such a feeling on his part?"

* * * * *

If you are really in love with him you have certainly done a good deal in winning the friendship of a man who poses as a woman-hater. In time, perhaps, you will persuade him to alter his views. But on no account try to draw him by petty devices, as such men are rarely attracted that way. Enjoy his friendship, and hope that in time something riper will result.

Not Jealous Enough.

"I AM worried, perhaps for a very absurd reason," writes "J. K. T." "My sweetheart is not a bit jealous. Whenever I talk of other girls I know, or have met, she just takes an interest in them, but never seems to be afraid of my carrying matters too far. Now do you think such a girl can be really fond of me? Is not jealousy a proper part of love?"

* * * * *

You are to be congratulated on having so very sensible a sweetheart. Evidently she has such perfect trust in you that the idea of your being unfaithful has never crossed her mind. No, jealousy is not a proper part of love. It is a very unpleasant and foolish passion, which does far more harm than good. However, don't try too hard to excite such feelings in your sweetheart. She might be deluded into jealousy, and such girls rarely forgive tricks.

Angling for Brothers.

"MOLLY" writes: "For some time I and my parents have lived in a small country village, where we have only very rarely been asked to visit our neighbours. It is six months since we last visited a certain family where there are five girls. The other day, a brother of mine (unmarried) returned from abroad. The day after his arrival we received an invitation to visit the family in question. How do you think I ought to view such proceedings?"

* * * * *

Evidently that family of girls had a business eye on your brother. It is, however, exceedingly rude and clumsy of them to show it quite so pointedly. To neglect you for six months, and then only ask you as a sort of cover for your brother, shows that they cannot be very desirable people to cultivate. You should decline the invitation, and save your brother from young ladies whose keenness to meet him is so badly disguised. At any rate, leave it to him to say whether or not he wishes to make their acquaintance.

Cynthia

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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A SITUATION WORTH £100 A YEAR

For a BOY. (Parents may help their Son to win.)

A SITUATION WORTH £100 A YEAR

For a GIRL. (Parents may help their Daughter to win.)

Offered by THE BOYS' LEADER, "The Paper a Boy can take Home." Published by the Proprietors of "Pearson's Weekly," &c.

The Editor of THE BOYS' LEADER offers a Situation in the Offices of PEARSON'S WEEKLY, THE BOYS' LEADER, &c., and a salary of £100 a year to commence with, to a boy; and a like Situation and Salary of £100 a year to a girl.

100 CONSOLATION GIFTS WILL ALSO BE AWARDED.

These will be offered by competition, and the competition is this:—

SIX QUESTIONS WILL APPEAR EVERY WEEK IN "THE BOYS' LEADER."

THIS IS THE FIRST SET.

1. *Who wrote Robinson Crusoe?*
2. *What famous British soldier is known as "Bobs"?*
3. *Who is your favourite hero (not fiction), and why?*
4. *Who made most runs in first-class cricket this summer?*
5. *Which is your favourite book, and why?*
6. *When was King Edward VII. born. Give year and day?*

The Second Set of Questions will appear in THE BOYS' LEADER (1d. every Tuesday), on Tuesday, November 10.

It will be noticed that some of the questions call for an expression of opinion only, and others you will have to search for in books.

Cut out and paste these questions on a sheet of foolscap paper numbering it No. 1. Write your reply to No. 1. immediately below, and then follow with No. 2, and so on, saying in what book you found the information and who helped you to find it.

Anybody may help you provided you say who. No competitor must be over 21 years of age. No reply must exceed fifty words. Keep all replies until the last set appears and until we tell you to send them in. Write plainly in ink on one side of the paper.

HINTS

Most towns and even villages have now a Reference Library, so it will be easy to get access to books.

Parents and friends may be able to tell you many of the replies, and you can use this information provided you tell us how you obtained it.

This competition will be a valuable education for a boy or girl, even if they do not wish to enter for the prizes.

The two successful competitors will be given the choice, after we have arranged with their parents, of entering one of the following departments of our offices:—The Editorial Department, the Art Department, the Counting House.

Should the winners live outside London, we have no doubt we shall be able to arrange with their parents as to their residence.

At all events, here is an opportunity for some boy and some girl to put their feet on the first rung of Fortune's Ladder, and we hope every parent who has his child's interest at heart will make an effort on their behalf.

THE BOYS' LEADER is the best paper a boy and girl can read. It is only a few weeks' old, but has already, by reason of its healthy tone, taken the first place in this class of literature; and articles and stories are contributed by **Jules Verne, George Manville Fenn, Theodore Roosevelt** (President of the United States), **Sir Henry Seton-Karr, M.P., Major Baden-Powell, T. P. O'Connor, M.P., Lord Ernest Hamilton,** the late **Max O'Rell, the Duke of Argyle, General Sir Evelyn Wood, G.C.B., &c., &c.**

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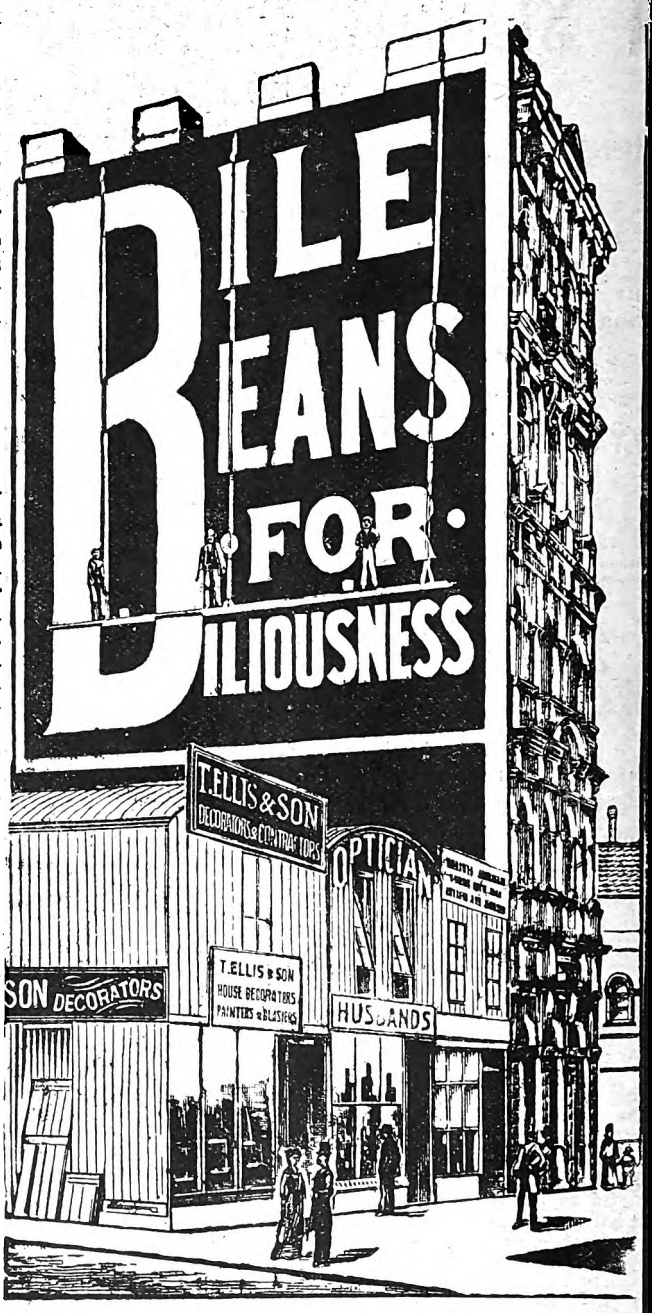
THE GREAT "AD"

OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST SPECIFIC.

THE accompanying sketch depicts a huge advertisement of the Bile Bean Manufacturing Company in Australia. The largest letter—the now world-famous "B"—stands forty feet in height, and compared with it the men of average height on the scaffolding appear to be mere pigmies. Bile Beans' most telling advertisement, however, is to be found inside the houses of the people, where the great army who have been benefited by them sing their praises and recommend them to others who suffer as they once did. The fame of Bile Beans has so far spread, and the manufacture of them so greatly increased, that the making and purveying of Bile Beans for Biliousness is now one of the largest medicinal enterprises in the world. This gigantic sign is a wonder of the advertising world. Bile Beans are a wonder of the medicinal world.



AUSTRALIA'S 40-FOOT BIG "B."

HOW BILE BEANS Cure INDIGESTION.

Many people fondly believe that if they can only get a change of air they will cease to suffer from indigestion, liver complaint, biliousness, or some similar ailment which may be troubling them. In this way vast sums of money are wasted every year in stays at the seaside or in the country. "I often went away for a change of air," says Mrs. Brown, of Park View, Leven, "but derived very little good from it, and in a few days I would have indigestion just as bad again. After any food I had most violent pains, accompanied with headache, sickness, and feelings of weakness. In the end I grew so debilitated that I could not do my housework. Sometimes I felt quite hungry, but I actually dare not eat because of the pain it occasioned me afterwards. Various doctors were consulted, and I took their prescriptions, but the relief I obtained was very meagre and only temporary.

"At last I decided to give Bile Beans a trial. Soon after beginning with them I felt I was improving, so I persevered. The relief I gained was marvellous, and after a short course I found myself quite restored to health. I can now eat any kind of food with relish, and I am never more pleased than when I am recommending to other sufferers the medicine which cured me."

THE MEDICINE FOR THE MILLION.

BILE BEANS for Biliousness are the finest family medicine, and promptly and permanently cure Headache, Constipation, Colds, Liver Chill, Influenza, Piles, Liver Troubles, Bad Breath, Indigestion, Flatulence, Loss of Appetite, Dizziness, Buzzing in the Head, Sleeplessness, Debility, Anæmia, and all Female Ailments. Of all Medicine Vendors, 1/1½ and 2/9 per box (LARGE BOX CONTAINS THREE TIMES QUANTITY SMALL SIZE).

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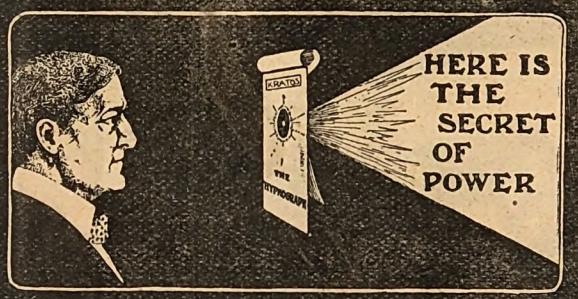
SHORT STORIES. 1D

This little photograph shows the part of the canal where the barge on which Sara was entrapped was situated.

No. 776. Week ending November 14, 1903.

11 NOV 1903

SELF-HYPNOTISM



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The Hypnograph works with any one straight away. It impresses the mind with wonderful quickness and precision. It supplies a glorious opportunity to rapidly develop your **Will-Power, Energy, Courage, Self-Confidence, Persistency, Concentration,** and all the qualities of mind which make for **Success** in life.

The Hypnograph is strictly scientific. It is to mental work what the compass is to navigation. It cannot fail to help you. Until you have used it you cannot realize what a wonderful and beneficial thing it is.

FREE. At present **The Hypnograph** is not for sale, but is offered free in order to create an interest in our practical books on mental subjects. If you are sufficiently interested to want **The Hypnograph** write for the free Illustrated Booklet "**The Power Within.**" enclosing 1d. Stamp for return postage.

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Doll when made up.

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585,209

During the year 1902 I had accounts with **five hundred and eighty-five thousand, two hundred and nine customers.** I do not suppose that a single one of this enormous number did business **merely to oblige me,** they sent their orders in full confidence that they would be well served and on the understanding that unless thoroughly pleased with the goods there would be **no obligation whatever to purchase.** Seven days are always allowed for approval, and if you are not entirely satisfied send the package back.

"I PROVIDE EVERYTHING."

If the goods are perfectly satisfactory you can pay for them as you prefer: **Cash or Easy Monthly Instalments,** full particulars of which are enclosed with each Catalogue, together with Order Forms and details of **Important Advantages offered to Cash Purchasers.**

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17. **Army and Navy.** A Catalogue containing Watches, Jewellery, Cutlery, Plate, Clothing, &c., specially compiled to meet the requirements of all grades of the services.
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19. **Harness and Vehicles** of every description.

An Agency for my Firm is a very remunerative way of using spare time to advantage. Write for particulars.

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 776.] Week Ending November 14th, 1903. [One Penny.

Fascinating New Series. Start To-day.

THE PURSUIT OF SARA

For New Readers.

Miss Sara Gillespie, the relater of these experiences, was a typine in the firm of Templeton & Co.

The partners in the firm, Mr. Templeton, Mr. Harrington Shackell, and Mr. Rigby Starr, treated Sara most courteously, especially the senior partner, who, before very long, induced her to tell him all about her absent lover, Noel Masterman.

Noel was the nephew of Sir Francis Masterman, who in his will left him a thousand pounds. With this money he intended to buy a doctor's practice, and to give up the situation he was holding, that of medical attendant to a gentleman who was travelling on the Continent.

He came home to England on the death of the Baronet, but was soon recalled by telegram to Nice, as his patient had shown bad symptoms.

Noel was, however, loth to give up the idea of purchasing the practice he had in view, so, leaving the thousand pounds with them in notes, he signed a document authorising Templeton & Co. to act for him.

By a piece of trickery the firm converted this into a document authorising them to deal *with his whole estate.* He was heir to the baronetcy, in the event of the present holder of the title, Sir Herbert, his cousin, having no heir.

The next day Sara overheard the three partners gloating over the probable success of their schemes.

Then she was amazed and horrified to hear Shackell relate how, posing as Sir Herbert's valet, he had murdered the baronet in cold blood, and had been most careful to leave no clues behind him.

Little by little she understood the full meaning of the vile plot the scoundrels had in hand.

Her betrothed was now Sir Noel Masterman, and Templeton & Co. had full power over his estate!

She resolved on a bold scheme—to get possession of the notes and the document. Bursting into the room, she eluded her astounded employers, seized the precious papers, and fled.

Besides the £1,000 in notes, she had about five pounds with her. Sara wired to Noel to return at once, and then she took train to Bedford.

While there a murderous attack was made on her by Rigby Starr, disguised as a nurse.

He endeavoured to push Sara into the river by Newnham Bridge, but in his eagerness he was nearly drowned himself.

Sara escaped, and, still retaining the all-important paper relating to her lover's inheritance, made her way to Northampton.

Templeton & Co., she knew, would leave no stone unturned to find her; no course would be too desperate for them to take in order to regain the document.

At Northampton Sara rescued a little boy from death, and thereby gained the devoted friendship of a young girl named Maggie Dunkley. To her she confided all her troubles.

In this town, Sara was led to believe that Noel was an inmate of a lunatic asylum.

In disguise, Harrington Shackell enticed Sara to the race-course, saying that he would rescue Noel for her.

Sara went, as invited, and another desperate attempt was then made by the firm to recover the papers.

They were, however, outwitted, and Miss Gillespie fled to Leicester. Here she met Sidney Ilford, an agent of the firm, who tried to get Sara to give up the papers to him.

He took a paper from his breast pocket and handed it to her, keeping a tight grip on her arm.

"Read," he said, "it will interest you."

From the document there stared at her a hideous and distorted likeness of herself!

With a cry she grasped the paper tight, and read, her cheeks aflame, the description of her face and figure that succeeded. It offered a reward of £100 to the person who arrested her! She was in a dire plight!

She just managed to run away from him. She reached her hotel to find an adjacent factory in flames.

Against her window a ladder was placed, and up came Templeton and Rigby Starr! In the latter's hand was a knife!

"Help! Help!" she screamed.

And then, with blind fury, Sara threw herself against the figure clambering into the room, and strove to force him back into the abyss below.

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THE PURSUIT OF SARA

WHAT HAPPENED BY THE CANAL.

LINKING my arm about his shoulders, I pressed him back with the strength that comes to all of us, even the weakest, at crises in our lives. Gripping the window frame—an inch or two above him—he strove to hoist himself, by sheer power of muscle, into the room. Leaning my whole weight forward, with a sudden jerk, I all but over-balanced him; involuntarily he let go of the frame, and, clutching at me for support, caught me round the neck.

The clasp almost throttled me; instinctively I staggered back, fighting for air.

This movement on my part gave him his chance. Like a flash he released me, aiming a blow at my head that all but knocked me off my feet. Blinded with pain and rage, I flew back to the window, slamming it down before he could withdraw his hand, so that he hung suspended by the wrist.

The cry of agony that broke from him was the signal for an onslaught on the door. Sidney Ilford, realising his partner was in danger, was fumbling nervously with the lock. In a second I crossed the room, jamming myself behind the door, so that when it opened I should be concealed from view.

The next minute the door flew back on its hinges, Ilford, with eyes and ears alone for Rigby rushed to his assistance. Darting from my hiding-place, I rushed from the room down the corridor to the landing, where, by good luck, I found the lift ready and waiting.

"To the hall!" I gasped. "I'm going out," and I settled my hat, somewhat askew from my exertions, straight on my head. When I reached the street, the suddenness of my escape seemed to daze me. It was but a minute since I was upstairs fighting a last forlorn and desperate fight for love and liberty. Now the struggle was over and I was free with the notes and document in my possession.

My mind, working quickly, mapped out a plan of campaign. Hurrying past Campbell Street, still blocked with the crowd of onlookers at the fire, I made my way down Granby Street to a hairdresser's on the right hand side of the name of Jackson, where I remembered having seen the legend "wig maker" in the window.

I had made up my mind not to be driven from Leicester, at any rate until I had seen Maggie and learnt the news she had to tell. In order to carry out my purpose, however, it was obvious that Templeton and Co. must be thrown off the scent. Hitherto I had been the quarry, they the dogs. Now it was time I should play another *rôle*. I would take a leaf out of their book, and so effectually disguise myself that they would not cast a second look in my direction.

After some difficulty I secured a wig that answered my requirements. Of smooth iron grey hair, it completely altered my appearance. From the hairdresser's I hurried to a chemist's, where I purchased a box of rouge, an eyebrow pencil, and a pocket mirror, while from a milliner's next door I procured a dowdy-looking "sailor" in black straw and a thin black veil. Laden with parcels I hailed a four-wheeled cab, and told him to drive down the London Road towards Victoria Park.

I waited till we were clear of the more crowded streets, and then quickly, though with apprehension, proceeded to fix on my wig. Straining my hair back from my forehead, I contrived to coil it into a neat, hard bump. It made my head rather an odd shape, but that was a secondary consideration. The grey wig, parted in smooth bands on my forehead, securely fastened, I turned my attention to the box of rouge. My natural complexion is pale, my skin dead white. By the time I had rubbed on plenty of red colour, deepened my eyebrows from pale brown to black, I do not think my dearest friend would have recognised me. I am sure Noel would have passed me by. In my black coat and skirt, my neat sailor hat and veil, I looked a middle-aged woman of healthy, if plain, appearance.

My toilette finished, I packed my hat into a parcel, and, stopping the cab, alighted on the outskirts of Victoria Park. The cabman, whatever he thought, made no comment on the alteration in my looks, but contented himself with demanding just double his legal fare.

I paid what he asked, then, turning into the park, quietly deposited my hat behind a clump of trees. Some ten minutes later, seated on the top of a tramcar, I passed Harrington Shackel tearing along the road at a terrific rate. He scanned the tram as it passed him, but his eyes passed me by indifferently; he did not know me!

Having dispatched a long and urgent wire to Maggie warning her against the renewed activities of Templeton and Co., and appointing the "Old Gateway" as our meeting-place for to-morrow morning at 12.30, I judged it time to get something to eat.

It was now close upon half-past four, the fire had died down, the crowd of sightseers dispersing thronged the streets.

A certain little restaurant at the corner of Campbell Street, "Bottini's," struck me as a pleasant refuge from the turmoil.

I entered and took a seat at the far end of the apartment facing the door.

I was half through an appetising meal of lamb cutlets and green peas, when my attention was arrested by the occupants of an adjoining table. I had paid but little attention to my surroundings hithero, thankful for a short respite from the danger and excitement that of late had been my daily portion. I had eaten my dinner oblivious of what was happening round me.

The sound of a sharp metallic laugh roused me. Turning my head, I saw, at the table next but one to mine, Templeton, Shackell, and Rigby Starr!

Forgetting my disguise, I was within an ace of starting to my feet and making a wild dash for the door. I only just saved myself from such an act of folly, and, trembling with the strain, I leant back half dead with fear.

"A wild cat!" cried Rigby, who had suffered most through my escapades. "I should like to throttle her."

"So you said before," interrupted Shackell, "you don't seem able to carry out your wishes."

"You've nothing to boast of," retorted the other, "she fooled you pretty well."

"For Heaven's sake don't quarrel," interrupted Templeton. "Time's precious, while you sit here and argue, the little cat may be making good her escape."

"No chance of that," said Rigby, "we're watching all the stations and the hotels. She can't give us the slip this time. Her red head's not easy to overlook."

"Leicester's a large place," said the senior partner. "A sharp-witted woman like her could contrive to lie low for some time."

"What do you think we ought to do, then?"

"We shall have to get at her through the people at Northampton. I've wired to an agent there, and told him to shadow the Dunkley girl till further orders. Meanwhile," he glanced at the clock, "we've other matters to discuss. Where's Ilford?" and he glanced sharply at Shackell.

"He's posted at the hotel. He persists in thinking Miss Gillespie will come back there to ask for letters."

"Maybe he's right. At any rate let him stay there for an hour or two. In all other regards," he lowered his voice and looked round cautiously, "things are very satisfactory. It could have been wished that the affair had been finished quicker, but——"

"Is the cash right? That's the question," said Starr.

The senior partner nodded.

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"Not a doubt," he said, "and now," he rose as he spoke, "I think we'd better be going. Tell Ilford to meet me outside the Palace Music Hall at eight o'clock to report. Starr can take his place, and Shackell"—the senior partner smiled—"you know what you have to do?" he queried softly.

Harrington nodded, and the glint in his eyes sent a shiver through my very heart.

I had made shift to continue eating my dinner while they talked, holding an illustrated paper as a screen before my face. As Templeton turned to go, however, I forced myself to lay the paper down. Now was the time to test the efficacy of my disguise. If they recognised me, it was better they should do so here in a public restaurant where, at any rate, I should be safe from personal violence, than in a more remote spot.

Slowly I raised my eyes and looked at them all three in turn. They glanced at me, but took no notice and passed through the door.

As for me, I could hardly believe in my safety—and their stupidity. They had been within a few feet of me, had looked at and criticised me, and—blessings on my wig and my beautiful red cheeks, had not known that I was Sara!

My spirits rose at the thought of my cleverness. I grew bolder, and decided I would go to the Palace at eight o'clock and endeavour to overhear what took place between Templeton and Sidney Ilford. I was so elated with my small success that I under-estimated the resources of my enemy. Templeton was far too old and too experienced a general to be outmatched by me.

I waited in Bottini's till a quarter to eight, watching the stream of customers that in little groups of two and three came there to dine. Horsey-looking men with pretty women, clergymen with badly-dressed wives, one or two actresses from the local theatre with their local admirers, and a sprinkling of commercial travellers.

The streets, full of life and motion, were at their brightest when I left the little restaurant. The crowds outside the popular music hall reminded me of London, and brought a pang of home sickness. The hall itself, tastefully decorated, and bright with paint and gilding, was crammed to overflowing at the commencement of the show, with an appreciative and hilarious audience. I caught sight of Templeton's tall figure at the box office, and after a discreet interval I took a ticket in the same part of the house as he selected—the stalls. It happened by good fortune that my seat was in the very row immediately behind his. There was a vacant chair beside him, and once or twice he glanced round the theatre as though looking for the person for whom he had reserved it.

Turning my head I saw at a table near to mine, Templeton, Shackell, and Rigby Starr.

The performance had not long commenced before the guest arrived. It was Sidney Ilford—as I had expected. Under cover of a "serio-comic" with full orchestral accompaniment, Ilford rapidly detailed his movements.

Leaning forward, my eyes fixed on the stage, my face set in a smile of expectant delight, I contrived to overhear the conversation without rousing suspicion.

"She's not been back," said Sidney. "But about half an hour ago a boy came along with a telegram. I told him I was expecting a wire and glanced at the envelope to see the name on it. Imagine my delight when I realised it was for our dear Sara. Ray is the name she's chosen this time, as I happened to discover when she came to the hotel. I watched the boy deposit the wire in the office, and came off here, leaving Rigby on the watch outside."

"What's the use of that?" said the senior partner. "You should have offered to take the telegram to her, said she was downstairs at the door, or something of that sort. Whatever is the good of leaving the thing in the office?"

"I had to," was the answer. "She's given explicit instructions that letters and wires are to be delivered to her personally. I heard her myself."

"Then what do you propose to do?"

"You must go at once to the hotel and explain that you're a friend of the family, that she's stopping with your wife, and that you've called for her bag and any letters there may be. They'll believe your story like a rocket, especially if you offer to settle the bill. It's no use for me to try the game on, staying in the same hotel they wouldn't credit it, and Rigby they would recognise as well. I brought him down to the office when he fell through Sara's window. You're the only person they'll believe."

"Meantime the girl may go back and claim it?"

"Impossible, Rigby's posted on the steps of the hotel. She can't pass without his seeing her."

"I suppose the wire's from Northampton?" said Templeton.

"Perhaps, unless——" Ilford's head drew close to the other's, and his voice dropped to a whisper.

In my anxiety to catch what he was saying, I forgot the need of caution and turned my face from the stage towards him.

In an instant Templeton observed me.

"Have you dropped anything, madam?" he said coolly. "You appear to be looking in this direction."

"My programme," I stammered. "I think——"

"Your programme is in your hand," he said. Then, in a loud voice to Ilford:

"We will resume our conversation later on. Our talk distracts this lady's attention from the stage."

Several people heard the rebuff and stared at me in the delighted fashion people adopt when a third party is rebuked.

I sank back in the seat, nervously clutching the unhappy programme. My eyes upon the stage I took in nothing of the performance. Figures came and went, sang and danced, and to me the whole show was a blank. My mind was fixed on one thing, and one thing only. How should I circumvent Templeton, how stop him claiming my wire?

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The number of a fresh turn went up. Templeton, glancing at his programme, announced that it was "Herbert Campbell."

"We may as well wait and hear him," he said.

Ilford nodded and laughed uproariously, as the great Herbert, in the garb of a policeman, walked, or rather waddled, on to the stage.

The two conspirators were safe for five minutes at least. If I left the theatre first, I should have a clear start. Once let me get out of the building, away from the blaze of light, the blare of sound, and some inspiration might come to me. But how could I leave without attracting their attention? I had already roused Templeton's suspicion, a move on my part would increase it. And yet, a middle-aged spinster—to all appearance I looked the part—could surely leave a music-hall without exciting comment. I might be shocked at the performance—alas! I had gazed with riveted attention at a short-skirted danseuse. What could I do?

Suddenly I started to my feet.

"I feel faint," I gasped, clutching hold of my neighbour, a dark, handsome-looking girl. "Please let me pass. I——"

"Lean on me," she answered readily. "Here, let the lady by, will you?" as one or two protested, "she's ill, poor thing."

"Shouldn't come to a hall, at her time of life," cried a shrill-voiced woman.

Careless of remark I clung to my pioneer, and passed down the row of seats in safety. Reaching the door I glanced back, and, to my horror, saw Templeton and Rigby preparing to leave.

"Thank you," I gasped, dropping the arm of the dark-haired girl. "It's very kind of you. I'm much obliged." and leaving her abruptly—and in open astonishment—I darted down the steps and across the road.

From where I stood I could see the entrance to the Palace plainly. I had not long to wait before Templeton appeared. In piteous indecision I watched the portly figure descend the steps, each minute gave me less time to act, brought him nearer to his goal—the wire that was lying at the hotel.

An urchin from the gutter, a pale-faced, keen-eyed Arab of the pavement nudged my arm.

"Mother's in gaol," he said in a hoarse voice, "and father's dead. I've no shoes"—he glanced at his bare feet—"and I'm hungry. Mother's in gaol."

He did not ask for money; only repeated his plaint, his eyes large and sombre fixed on mine. A sudden thought flashed through my mind.

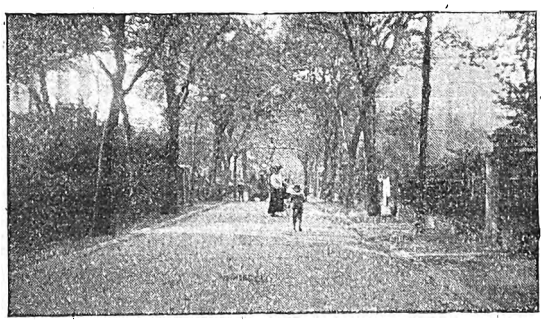
"You see that gentleman?" Stooping, I caught hold of the boy's arm, and pointed to the senior partner.

"Which?" said the boy, with an artful leer.

"That one," I repeated, slipping a shilling in the grubby hand. "That tall, stout man with the high hat and grey whiskers. Do you think"—I clutched the urchin tight—"do you think you could—upset him?"

"I might," said the boy stolidly, "for half a crown."

"Here's three shillings. He's a bad man, a wicked man



The New Walk, Leicester, where Sara encountered Templeton, who penetrated her disguise.

He wants to put little boys like you in prison. He wants to put me in prison too. If you can upset him, throw him down so that he is quite a long time getting up, I shall be able to run away. Will you do it?"

"I'll butt him in the stomach," he replied cheerfully. "He'll go down—wollop," and the little wretch danced mirthfully.

"Mind you've promised," I cried, as he darted from me—a frail craft on which to set one's hopes.

He grimaced in reply, and grasping a packet of newspapers under his arm, raced to the fray. Speeding across the road, head down, voiced upraised crying his wares, he charged full tilt against the senior partner, and, bless his little dirty face, sent him spinning in the mud.

Miss Sara Gillespie as she was before she assumed her disguise.

I waited for no more, but ran at top speed, a pace unbefitting a middle-aged spinster—down Granby Street, not pausing till I came within sight of the Hotel.

I walked boldly and unchallenged past Rigby Starr, up the stairs right to the office. There, just inside the window, I could see my telegram. The sight gave me confidence and courage.

"Good evening," I said boldly to the manageress. "You had a young lady, a Miss Ray, stopping here? She is my niece"—I cased nearer to the door that fenced off the office from publicity. "She's a good girl," I said softly, "but, but—just a little flighty. Her mother, who lives in Northampton, met her in Granby Street to-day and took her home. She sent me on to explain to you and fetch her bag and pay her bill. You see, she had differences at home. A young man? More than one, I fear." I shook my head and looked unutterable things. "My goodness me, if there isn't a telegram for her." I stretched out my hand, and, yielding automatically to the demand, the manageress handed me the wire.

"Is Miss Ray not returning?" she asked.

"Dear me, no, her mother won't let her away again in a hurry. What did you say the bill was? Thank you, that will settle it, I think, and I'll occupy her room to-night. Name?" I paused. "Dunkley," I said. "Miss Dunkley from Northampton. One moment *please*. If anybody should inquire for my niece—a gentleman, you understand—don't let him know she's left, he'll go off post-haste to Northampton and worry my poor sister to death. Tell him Miss Ray's here, and that she's gone to bed. You understand? Good night," and clasping my telegram I rushed—my excitement was too great for steady walking—up one staircase—just as Templeton and Ilford came up the other.

I listened to the senior partner's well-phrased tale, and gloated over his discomfiture, when at the conclusion of his speech he was informed that "Miss Ray was upstairs in her room and had received her telegram."

"There's a mistake somewhere," the manageress continued. "I've had a lady here just now, Miss Dunkley, who assured me that Miss Ray had been with her mother since dinner. Perhaps you'd better see the lady?" She rang a bell and sent a chambermaid to summon me.

"Go up to No. 63 and say they're wanted."

"Kindly say that Mr. Masterman is here," said the senior partner, and the indignation that I felt at the heartless lie seemed to choke me. Swiftly I hastened up the stairs. Another flight and yet another. And then across the dark corridor into my room, where having locked the door, I cast myself upon the bed.

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In answer to the maid's knock I sleepily asked "Who's there?" and in reply to her statement that Mr. Masterman awaited me, I bade her tell that gentleman "that I am not acquainted with anybody of that name."

I buried my head in the bed-clothes as her footsteps died away, and choked with hysterical laughter at the thought of the senior partner's face when she delivered her message.

"Checkmate!" I cried. "Checkmate!" Then, groping for the matches, I lit the gas and greedily opened the wire.

"I shall be with you to-morrow. Maggie Dunkley will not tell me where you are or I should come to-day. She fears I am an impostor. She sends this for me. Dearest, my heart's fond love, Noel."

From Noel, from my sweetheart! Dear Heaven, if I had failed in my attempt, if the telegram had fallen into Templeton's hands! And he will be with me to-morrow, all our troubles over, our sorrow past. The vile conspiracy that has separated us will be ended, done with at last.

The boy sped across the road, and sent Templeton spinning into the mud!

In a passion of tears, glad tears that spring from an overcharged but grateful heart, I kneel beside the open window turning my face upward to the sky. To-morrow the stars will shine upon us two together! The moon that casts its silver cloak over the blackened ruins of the factory will shine upon my heart and I—my dearest heart, my love, my Noel!

The wig that had done me such good service I plucked off and threw contemptuously aside. I let down my hair, and ran my fingers through its length. He loved it and admired it, therefore in my sight it was fair. To-morrow I should feel his arms about me, his dear lips upon my own. To-morrow——

Sunday dawned clear and bright. The bells chiming for early service woke me from pleasant dreams. It seemed to me an omen of good hope that the sun shone so pleasantly, that the air was warm and soft. Not until I was dressed did I remember with a shiver of compunction, that I should be compelled to put on that hideous wig. I came here last night as Miss Dunkley, middle-aged and grey-haired. I must depart in the same guise. Besides it would be more than probable that I should encounter one of the firm on guard outside the hotel. If I appeared red-haired and pale-cheeked, I should be discovered and my meeting with Noel prevented.

I was so excited at the prospect of re-union with him, that I forgot the conversation I had overheard in Bottini's restaurant. I did not remember that Templeton had spoken of having communicated with their agent in Northampton charging him to shadow Maggie Dunkley, wheresoever she might go.

Careless and light of heart I left the hotel, and all-impatient for the moment when my friend should tell me of Noel, hastened to the meeting place a good hour before the appointed time, and pacing to and fro in the shadow of the old gate, pictured the happy meeting that was in store for me.

Maggie, trim and neat in her Sunday frock and feathered hat, was punctual to the moment. Far too anxious to be prudent, I flew to her side, and heedless of hostile eyes, embraced her fervently.

She drew back astonished, as might be expected, from the clasp of the strange grey-haired woman.

"You don't know me, dear," I said, laughing. "Of course not, how should you recognise me? I'm Sara—Sara Gillespie. Look, and unpinning the sailor-hat I tore off my false grey locks, showing my own red hair as testimony.

I thought even at the moment that I caught an exclamation from the other side of the arch, but put it down in my heedlessness to the surprise that anyone might feel at the sight of a lady divesting herself of her head-dress.

"Dear goodness, you have given me a turn," cried Maggie, gazing at me as though doubtful even now of my *bonâ fides*.

"Where's Noel?" I cried eagerly. "Tell me, Maggie, what have you done with him?"

"I'm not sure, till I've asked you certain questions, if the young man who came *is* Noel," she answered. "Do you describe him, carefully, and I'll see if what you say agrees with the description I put down."

"Tall, broad-shouldered, clean-limbed. Dark brown hair, with a slight wave; clean-shaven, square white teeth, brown skin, and a lovely smile.'

Maggie grinned at my enthusiasm.

"I think it's all right," she said cautiously. "But to make sure I'd better repeat what he said. He told me that your full name was Sara Christabel Gillespie. Is that true?"

"Quite. You needn't worry, Maggie, it's the right man at last."

"You're sure? Remember you made a mistake before."

"Well, you shall be with me when I meet him, so if he is an impostor no harm can come."

"Very well, Jim thinks you'd better let him come as well. He'll bring Mr. Masterman along, and I'll go with you. What do you think of meeting him near the canal? It's pretty there, and nice and quiet. There are such lots of people in the parks on Sunday. Jim's sister-in-law has a cottage close to the waterside; we could go there and have tea."

"The canal or anywhere else so long as Noel is there," I answered. "Tell me, Maggie, why didn't he come with you this morning?"

"He wanted to," she answered, "but I was afraid. Jim said I must be sure that he's the right man before I let you see him. He's in Northampton now, waiting with Jim. He doesn't know I've come to Leicester," she added laughing. "I'm to send a telegram when I leave you, and when they get it Jim and he will set out at once. There's a train will bring them in about half-past three."

"Oh, Maggie," I cried half in despair, "you shouldn't have kept him from me."

"I like that," she answered angrily, "a nice state of things there would have been if I had brought the wrong one to you."

I realised the truth of the words, but, all the same, I felt a foolish sort of resentment that Noel had been kept from me. At length Maggie proposed that we should go to the house by the canal to wait there for Jim Goodman and my sweetheart.

"You'd better fasten on your wig," she added, "you'll be spotted at once without it."

I complied with the request, and together we set out for

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Mrs. Goodman's house, calling at the post office on our way. The house proved to be quite half a mile from the canal, and one of a row of cottages off the Abbey Park Road. The place was small, the children numerous and noisy. It seemed impossible for me to spend the time waiting for Noel in such uncongenial fashion.

"I shall go for a walk," I announced. "I'm too restless to stop indoors. I'll be back here at three sharp, Maggie."

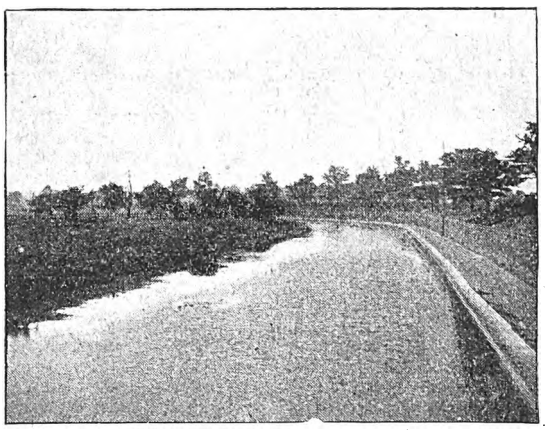
"Don't be late," she answered. "I'd better show you the spot where we arranged to meet. Jim thought you'd rather your young man shouldn't see you first of all at his sister's. It is not far, not more than ten minutes' walk."

She put on her hat and accompanied me with several small children across a stretch of meadow land to where the green-sward sloped to the water's edge. The towing path on the other side of the canal lay bare and brown in the bright sunshine. The scene was very beautiful, the day very pleasant.

"You won't mistake the spot?" asked Maggie. And then, "Don't you think you'd better wait with me at Gracie's? Suppose anything goes wrong?"

"Impossible," I answered. "You and Jim have been far too careful in your arrangements; I shall be back at the cottage at three."

I watched her figure cross the field, skirting a belt of trees and a pleasant hedgerow. Then, too restless and excited to remain still, I crossed the bridge a little higher up and tramped along the tow path till I reached St. Margaret's works. Leaving the water behind me, I tramped through the narrow streets till I gained the centre of the town. Leicester on Sunday morning after church is a sight worth seeing. All the work girls and operatives in their Sunday bravery throng the parks, the squares, and the principal streets. One hardly sees an ill-dressed girl; they keep indoors on Sunday!



The Canal, where Sara and Noel came so close together, and yet were powerless to communicate with each other.

The seats in the Municipal Square were gay with flowers, feathers, and silks; dainty toilettes, costly gowns met one at every turn. I found a vacant place on one of the seats, and found distraction for my thoughts in watching the scene around me.

Suddenly from a group of bright colours, a blue frock and picture hat detailed itself.

"Are you better to-day?" said a pleasant voice; "you *were* bad last night, poor thing!"

Glancing up I recognised the girl, who, thinking I was faint, had escorted me from the music hall.

"Much better, thank you," I returned.

"I was quite anxious about you," she went on, "especially after the funny way you left me. You looked quite scared; I couldn't understand why you ran off like that. This gentleman," she motioned to a portly-looking person standing with his back towards us, "this gentleman was as concerned as me."

As she spoke the individual referred to turned, raised his hat, and advanced to meet me. Then, if ever, I had need of all my courage, my resources. The man who stood with outstretched hand before me was none other than the senior partner, Templeton himself!

The impulse of flight seized me once again, my eyes refused to meet his searching glance, my voice, sunk to a husky whisper, was beyond control. I gripped the seat hard, and waited till the ground steadied beneath my feet.

"It is very kind of you to feel concern on my behalf," I said and my voice was thin and quavering. "Few people care to trouble about an old woman like myself. I ought not to have ventured in a music hall in my frail state of health."

"Did you enjoy the entertainment, Miss——" He paused interrogatively, and in the accent of his voice, the twitching of the upper lip that showed the yellow pointed teeth, I realised he had penetrated my disguise. But—and in that lay my chance of escape—it was evident the dark-haired girl was not one of his employées. He had introduced himself to her notice on the common ground of their concern for me. It was obvious that in the event of a scene she would be more inclined to take my part than his. She had friends with her, a party of girls and young men. While I remained with them I was safe from any attack.

I disregarded Templeton's request for my name and answered placidly that "a part of the performance had seemed interesting."

Then turning to the girl in blue I laid my hand on her arm.

"I wonder if you'll take pity on a lonely old woman and let her spend an hour with you? I like young girls, especially when they're pretty and nice as you. It would be a real kindness if you'd bear with me a while?"

"Delighted, I'm sure," said the young lady with a little giggle, and linking her arm in mine, she led the way across the square and in the direction of "The New Walk"—a broad path shaded by leafy trees.

Her friends, following our lead, walked close behind; Templeton beside us. Up and down the Avenue we paced, the senior partner watchful and alert, purring soft speeches to the girl in blue, who, flattered at his attentions, kept giggling and throwing glances at her friends. In the middle of the walk, we suddenly encountered a couple of the "blue girl's" admirers, they seized on her, evidently regarding Templeton and myself as intruders of a most undesirable type.

The senior partner seized the opportunity to draw close to me. Impatience got the better of caution, for once his acumen failed.

"Thief!" he said. "Thief! I'll have you in gaol before the morning."

In a second I flashed past him to the girl in blue.

"My dear," I said, "your friend," I pointed to the senior partner, "is, I fear, insane. He has just accused me of theft. I never saw the man before last night. It has upset me terribly. I must ask you to remonstrate with him. I'm sure," I turned to the young men, "you would not see an old woman abused before your eyes? He spoke of taking me to prison."

"He's no friend of mine," said the girl quickly.

"Then how dare he walk with you?" cried one of the admirers, facing up to Templeton.

"If you don't mind, my dear," I whispered, "I will go away. I cannot bear a scene. My heart's not strong, but really your friend's too outrageous."

Leaving the senior partner the centre of an excited group, I slipped down a side turning, and hurried into a church conveniently near.

Here at any rate I was safe, in sanctuary no one could touch me!

The clock had chimed the hour of three before I felt able to leave the building. I was weak and trembling, full of forebodings and bitterly repentant that I had not stayed with Maggie at the cottage near the canal.

I took a tram from the Clock Tower to Abbey Park and arrived at the street where Mrs. Goodman's house was situated

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twenty minutes later. One of the children met me at the top of the road. She ran towards me, her face alight with expectation.

"You're not to go home," she said. "I was to tell you that Maggie was waiting for you by the water, and that you must not go near the house because somebody was watching."

She ran off, having delivered her message, without giving me time to question her further.

I was half inclined to disregard the injunction; I had promised Maggie to call for her, and it seemed unaccountable she should have changed the plan. Still, it would be risky to disregard so plain a warning. Possibly one of the firm was at this moment lurking round the corner.

And yet I was undecided, and when at last I turned my back on the road, and walked alone to the meeting place, I did so with a heavy heart.

There was no sign of anyone at the rendezvous. Steeped in the calm of a Sunday afternoon the landscape was void of man or woman. In the distance a barge lazily drifted towards me, drawn by a patient looking horse that plodded on without a driver. A distant clock chiming half-past three, I ran up the slope eagerly searching the horizon. No one in sight, only the barge lazily drifting nearer.

Should I return to Mrs. Goodman's cottage? The idea was not feasible. I might fall into the hands of the enemy, besides, in my absence, Maggie and Noel might arrive.

Was it possible the message given by the child was a false one? She might have been bribed to deliver it. I was sure Noel would be waiting for me at the cottage.

Noel—I started round in the direction of the house only to pause in piteous indecision.

Perhaps I should meet him on the road? He would not know me in this hideous disguise. And yet I dared not deprive myself of the poor shelter it afforded me. Surrounded as I was with plots, hemmed in by foes, more cunning, more powerful far than I, it would be madness to abandon that which had once saved me.

As time went on, and still there was no sign of those I waited for, my mind grew apprehensive of a fresh plot. Perhaps Maggie herself had been deceived. It was possible that the man she saw was, after all, an impostor. She had been induced to make this appointment with me, in order to facilitate the scheme of my capture. And I—fool that I was—had played into my enemy's hands by refusing to remain at the cottage. For the sake of sentiment, because I wanted to spend a few hours alone, to dream of my lover and the approaching meeting with him, for the sake of idle folly, I had, it seemed, destroyed all possibility of re-union.

Where were they? I ran to and fro, scouring the distance with tear-dimmed eyes. Dear Heaven, surely I was not to suffer this great disappointment? Surely this time all would be well. My lips parched with anxiety, murmured his name, my heart, tired with the passionate throbs of fear that so perpetually convulsed it, thrilled with a fresh pang.

Suddenly the figure of a girl running towards me came into view. Close behind her were two men. The height and build were strange to me. They were gaining on the girl, who kept looking eagerly ahead. From the trees where I kept watch I could observe them plainly, but I was hid from view. As the girl came nearer I recognised her face and figure.

It was Maggie! Maggie pursued, I felt it, by the agents of Templeton and Co. My fears were realised. We had fallen the victims to a fresh conspiracy. In a little while they would catch sight of me, reach my side, and then, all efforts unavailing, the papers for which I'd sacrificed so much would be wrested from me, Noel's fortune taken from my hands.

I glanced round hopelessly. As yet I had not been perceived. There was a chance, the barest chance, I might escape them. The barge by this time had drifted to within a few feet of where I stood. I had but to make a rapid dart from the shelter of the trees—but a short distance from the water—and, jumping from the beach, scramble on board and trust to my wits to find a safe hiding place.

Swiftly I put the project into operation, I reached the water's edge, halloed to the boy who sleepily held the rudder, then, wading into the water, climbed cat-like up the rope trailing at its side. An awning stretched half down the deck made a sort of cabin. In a second I dived under the tarpaulin, and made for some sacks of flour behind which I crouched.

Something from the far end of the vessel moved towards me. I paid but little attention to the noise, my energies were concentrated on the figures running to the shore.

Of a sudden, from the darkness behind me, an arm shot out and gripped me by the throat. The next moment, bound and gagged, I lay behind the sacks—helpless and immovable.

My eyes left uncovered, through a rent in the tarpaulin, discerned the figures of Maggie, Jim Goodman, and, yes, my sweetheart, Noel.

With an effort that seemed to break my very heart strings I strove to free my hands, writhing upon the floor, I tried to fix my teeth in the handkerchief that closed my mouth.

Fool! Fool! I had walked open-eyed into the trap. I had of my own will parted myself from Noel and safety.

My lover's voice sounded across the water.

"Have you seen a lady pass this way?"

The sleepy boy murmured a negative.

Impatient at his stupidity, Noel seized the rope hanging at the side and, followed by Jim, scrambled, as I had done, on board.

From my side something moved. My eyes fixed on the light beyond the awning, saw the figure of Sidney Ilford gradually outlined.

In response to further questioning he replied that he had seen and heard nobody.

"I've been dozing for a bit," he said pleasantly. "There's not a soul about this afternoon."

"Could anyone have got on board without your knowing it?"

"Hardly, I think, still"—he smiled—"you can search the barge if you like."

Noel, feeling at a loss, stammered something about trouble.

"Not a bit," said Ilford. "Look by all means."

They searched every corner of the barge, except the corner where I lay concealed behind the sacks of flour.

"I'm very much obliged to you," said Noel. Then, turning to Maggie, "she must have gone back to your place, I suppose."

Maggie agreed. They seemed about to leave the vessel.

Then, but not till then, did the agony of my position come to me. I was here within sight, within sound of my lover, and I could not appeal to him! A red light danced before my eyes, many waters sounded in my ears.

"Noel, Noel!" I tried to shout, but my cries of agony were muffled into a sound so faint as to escape his ears.

I was bound hand and foot, gagged—and he, my lover, did not know it.

They would kill me, perhaps worse, they would take the notes, and the paper——

And then the cold hand of despair clutched my heart.

I was in the power of Templeton and Co. at last!

At length, shifted by my frantic struggles, the ropes that bound me hand and foot, loosened a little of their pressure. Slowly and with infinite pain, I rolled over and over—my bonds were still too tight for me to crawl—towards the opening at the end of the tarpaulin.

Gradually I reached the journey's end. My head thrust under the edge of the tarpaulin, I glanced up pathetically to where my lover stood.

Surely he will see me! He would not leave the woman that he loved, the woman who had risked her life for his to so cruel a fate.

My eyes, fixed on his, wildly, imploringly, sought an answering sign of recognition.

Another moment would decide my fate.

Would he see me, or——

Noel was going to leave the barge!

(Another instalment of "The Pursuit of Sara" next week.)

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..Robbed of a Lover..

The Tale of an Orphan Girl.

My father and mother died in India while I was a mere child, and I was left to the not-too-tender mercies of my father's maiden sister. She was the first of a large family; he was the last, so she was many years older than he. Of the intermediate brothers and sisters I knew nothing, and I have never seen or heard of any relatives on my mother's side.

Aunt Sophia was an austere woman with her own ideas of how a child should be brought up. I was kept practically a prisoner in the big house, standing in its own grounds; I seldom went beyond the boundary of those grounds. My education was undertaken partly by my aunt and partly by an equally austere, not to say sour, and elderly lady, who was dependent on my aunt's bounty, Heaven help her! Both were well educated, but utterly unfitted for imparting knowledge to a child. My spirit was well-nigh crushed under their rigid discipline, and I grew up timid, ignorant of the world, and, consequently, badly-equipped for what was to follow.

My aunt—strange creature!—finding that I did not share her views on certain religious matters, despite her assiduous teaching, turned against me when I was eighteen. I will not attempt to pass any condemnation upon her; I will merely say that she informed me that she had done all she could for me, but as I did not choose to follow her precepts any longer, and as I was now old enough to look after myself, we had better part! At first I did not know whether to be frightened or pleased at this unexpected offer of liberty, but after hurried reflection, I decided to leave her. I think she was surprised; she had probably counted on my being so afraid of the temptations of the world as to beg her to keep me; then, when she saw that I had made up my mind to go, she grew more stony than ever and insisted that I should find an abiding-place within twenty-four hours.

I had a guaranteed annuity of one pound per week, so I felt confident that I could manage to exist without Aunt Sophia. I went boldly to the rector's wife and told her of my dilemma; she took me in hand and finally arranged that I should live with Lady Thornhill.

"She will be so glad to have you, my dear!" said the clergyman's wife sympathetically. "She resides in another part of the country, my own native place, but she is staying with the Crouches here. She is a widow of forty, but as young at heart as any woman of twenty-three, and she likes to have young people round her. She tells me that she is looking for a companion, and that she will be delighted to have you. You will be treated as one of the family."

I hardly know what happened during the next few days; it seemed all hurry-skurry, and I awoke out of this waking dream to find myself installed in Thornhill Grange. How different it was from the old life! In the one place, solitude, severity, where a bright laugh would have seemed a sacrilege; in the new home, all was brightness and gaiety, happy voices and merry laughter!

The next event of my life was when I met Clifford Hazeldene at one of those enjoyable little parties which Lady Thornhill gave so frequently. "I hold that it is part of my mission in life to do my best to make other people happy, my dear!" said the amiable lady, a glorious smile illuminating that attractive and lovable countenance, "and, as I have plenty of money, I give these parties, which *do* make the guests happy for a time!" And I had not been at the Grange more than three weeks when I met him.

I have often wondered why I made such an impression on him! I have looked at myself critically in the mirror, but the reflection does not give a sufficient answer, I think. Neither then, when I was eighteen, nor now, when I am turned twenty-two.

It is difficult to describe one's self, so I will repeat Lady Thornhill's description of me, when she caught me surveying myself.

"A tall girl, with well-moulded figure, just blossoming into womanhood. Naturally graceful, but lacking the finish of graceful movement owing to insufficient training. Just a little awkward in society—also owing to defective training—but that very awkwardness is attractive. A wealth of silky, golden-brown hair, clear, soft eyes, betokening a capacity for great affection, a good complexion, cherry lips, such as ought to make a young man wish that it was Christmas and that a bunch of mistletoe were overhead, and——"

But I stopped her, flushing furiously, and I remember having felt vexed with myself that, at the last words, my thoughts should have flown to Clifford Hazeldene!

That such a man should attract me is not in the least surprising; I marvel that any woman could resist falling under the spell of Clifford Hazeldene! And, for that very reason, I ought perhaps to judge *her* leniently! He was my hero, my ideal! Tall, strong of limb and face, handsome; his eyes were the embodiment of frankness. He was a man who would shrink from nothing, if it were his duty. What more can I say of him? My hand trembles so violently that the writing is scarcely legible! My love!

Lady Thornhill, as hostess, introduced us. An indefinable thrill went through me as I felt the clasp of his strong hand and noted how gently it closed over mine. My eyes fell before his gaze, and I was almost too confused to act in the usual formal manner. I thought of the great Nasmyth hammer about which I had read, how it could do such great things and yet could descend so gently as to crack a nut without touching the kernel, and it seemed to me that Clifford Hazeldene was like that. He would be a strong protector and yet be so tender to the woman he loved!

Somehow it seemed to me that he sought me out during the evening, and I wondered that he could leave the more brilliant Society young ladies in order to converse with poor little me! I liked it; I was delighted, so delighted that I fear I answered foolishly sometimes.

My aunt had never taught me dancing, a defect which Lady Thornhill set to work to remedy without delay. I was an apt pupil, and, by dint of much practice, I acquired a fair amount of skill. Most men with whom I danced that evening must have been annoyed with my awkwardness, but Clifford was quite different, and I got on ever so much better.

We were seated in a corner, during an interval, and Clifford spoke.

"Do you know, Miss Deane, I am enjoying myself immensely this evening!" he remarked, and he glanced at me in a manner which I did not quite comprehend, although I was conscious of a slight burning of my usually pale cheeks.

"I think that Lady Thornhill's parties are very pleasant!" I responded simply. "She is always very pleased to know that her guests have had a good time."

"Y-e-e-s!" he said slowly, looking at me intently. "But I meant that I had enjoyed our brief conversation. You

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know a great deal more than most young ladies, whose talk is rather empty. I——"

"Oh, I do not know how you can say that!" I broke in quite honestly. "They have been out more than I have, and they must have learnt more than I."

"There is knowledge and knowledge," he observed enigmatically, "and I prefer your kind. You are more natural; they have assumed the veneer of Society polish. It is quite enjoyable to have a chat with you!"

If I had been more of a woman of the world, I should have seen more in his words than I did. I remembered that we had chatted on two or three subjects which some people call "deep" or "learned," and I could scarcely conceive that others had not studied in the same way. I glanced at him, for I was looking down at that moment, and the expression which I saw on his handsome face made me tremble.

At that very instant our conversation was interrupted. Mr. Morris came up with Miss Irene Hartford, and I was introduced to that other person who, with Clifford, was to play such an important part in my life story.

"I have brought your partner safely to you, Hazeldene, and I have come to claim mine!" said Morris genially.

I remembered that I was engaged to him for the next dance, and I understood that Miss Irene Hartford was Clifford's partner for that same dance. I experienced a sensation of envy, almost resentment, at the thought.

The next instant I was being introduced by Clifford Hazeldene to Miss Hartford. I thought that she was a lovely girl, almost queenly in her appearance. What chance had I against such an one? And yet—he had not followed her like a shadow, as he might have been expected to do! Any man might have been excused for falling in love with her at first sight!

Miss Hartford was charming and talked vivaciously, but the strains of the music sent us hurrying to our places.

I saw Clifford again that evening, and the few moments spent with him were full of ineffable delight. When I found myself in my room, after the departure of the guests, I asked myself what was the strange feeling at my heart, and the answer was a thrill that caused me to sink into a chair and clasp my hands to my heart to still its wild throbbing. I loved Clifford Hazeldene! I tried to tell myself that I was mistaken, that I did not know what love meant; but my heart cried out against such an answer. I knew that I was in love. Oh, the joy of it! Only those who have loved can realise the full significance of Tennyson's words, that it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all! I have gone through the sorrow of it since then; that sorrow would never have come to me but for my having loved; yet I would not alter it if I could, for then I should never have experienced that joy of loving!

He sought me out after that evening; he called to see Lady Thornhill and myself, and if he found me alone he was not displeased. We saw him at social gatherings, and he was always at my side as much as he could be.

I, too, looked for him and the day that passed without my seeing him was not a really happy one. I saw Lady Thornhill gazing at me curiously when she thought I was not observing her, but I understood that she viewed the course of events with approval. I scarcely dared believe that Clifford was in love with me—poor me! Yet there was no other explanation, and I was so happy!

So happy! Stay! Was it really so? There were times when a feeling of dread made me uneasy, and the cause of that sensation was Miss Hartford. She fell into the habit of calling to see dear Lady Thornhill; she was always very charming and affable, but I fancied that there was a strange glitter in her cold, grey eyes when she spoke to me. I felt as I imagine a bird must feel when fascinated by the gaze of a serpent! Instinctively I began to suspect some desing on my happiness.

Lady Thornhill was fascinated by the beautiful Miss Hartford; she pressed invitations on her. This was not to my liking, but there was no help for it. It spoilt my pleasant chats with Clifford, for she was so often there, and he was obliged to devote part of his time to her.

As often happens in such circumstances, the climax came quickly. I heard Miss Hartford's name coupled with that of Clifford Hazeldene; it was hinted that their frequent visits to the Grange were not without object. People had long thought that something might happen in that direction, so ran the gossip, and an interesting announcement might be expected at any time!

That rumour stabbed me to the heart, and it made me rebellious; why was I forgotten? Did nobody see anything in *me?*

I was cool in my bearing towards Clifford that evening, for it had occurred to me that I might, after all, have been mistaken. He seemed puzzled, and asked me to walk through the garden with him. I was about to refuse, but the look on his face changed the refusal into acceptance. He conducted me to a small bower, where we seated ourselves.

"What is the matter, Ivy?" he asked softly. "Why are you treating me so coldly?"

I tried to look boldly at him, but—— Poor, foolish me! I could not withstand that ardent gaze, and my eyes dropped in confusion, although I stammered, in a despairing attempt to resist. "I do not see why I should treat you with any extra warmth, Mr. Hazeldene!"

"Now, Ivy, you do not mean that! I know you do not, because your face contradicts your tongue! And you must call me Clifford!"

He took my unresisting hands in his; he bent nearer; but I would not lift my face—nay, my head sank lower.

"You cannot have been blind to the object of my visits, Ivy! See, I call you by that name. And I want you to give me the right to do so; I have acted the usurper in doing so hitherto, but now I ask for the right."

There was a depth of passion in his low tones which made my head sink a little lower, a little nearer to his breast. I knew what he meant, but I could not reply.

"I want you to tell me that you will be——" he began, but the sentence was interrupted by the sound of another voice.

"What a delightful place this is!" It was Irene Hartford's voice, and it seemed to transform the heat of summer into the frost of winter. "I hope I am not intruding, but Lady Thornhill wished to see Miss Deane, and I volunteered to find her. Oh, dear!" she sighed, as she dropped into the seat from which I had hastily risen. "I feel quite fatigued, and I must really stay here for a minute or two. Isn't it charming, Mr. Hazeldene?"

Clifford was bound to reply, and I ran off alone. As I ran along I recovered from my confusion, and I thought I saw things more clearly. That was some ruse of Irene Hartford's part. How long had she been there? How much had she overheard?

A swift expression of surprise passed over Lady Thornhill's face when I told her that I had come in obedience to her request, conveyed by Miss Hartford, but she said smoothly: "It was nothing important, but now that you are here, I wish you would do——" And then she mentioned some trifling thing which I have forgotten.

So Irene Hartford had robbed me of the full enjoyment of the sweetest moment in a woman's life! Clifford would repeat the proposal at the next opportunity, but it would not be the same.

They came in a few minutes later; Clifford was white,

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and I guessed that he was very angry at the interruption, while Irene Hartford was calm and equable. She spoke with unruffled serenity, but I detected a gleam of triumph in those grey eyes, and I felt revengeful.

Clifford surprised us by saying that he could not stay to take tea. He took leave of us; his leave-taking was very formal with me, but I understood why, or thought I did, and was content to wait for our next meeting. Then Clifford Hazeldene went—and he went for good!

I waited in vain for him on the following day, and the morning of the second day brought me intelligence which dazed me. Clifford had left Mayton and gone to London. I waited for some sign from him, waited with a sickening fear gnawing at my heart, but not a word reached me.

Irene Hartford called again on the third day; she was as queenly as ever. She came, as I learnt later, with the set purpose of dealing me the final stab.

"I dare say you were surprised, dear Lady Thornhill, that Mr. Hazeldene went to London so quickly?" she asked sweetly. "Well, I have a little secret to tell you. Our engagement is to be announced shortly, and our marriage will take place as quickly as the necessary arrangements will permit. It is to accelerate those arrangements that he went off."

Why should I dwell on those terrible moments? I shudder even when I think of them! I remember that I preserved a calm demeanour by a tremendous effort, in order to rob Irene of as much of her triumph as I could, but—oh!—the agony of it! After she was gone I became ill, and it was two months later when I was able to get about a little and was strong enough to be taken abroad by dear Lady Thornhill. I had brain fever, they tell me. Clifford and Irene were married in that blank interval. I resolved to make my home in the quiet Swiss village whither Lady Thornhill conducted me, and I am still here. Lady Thornhill, who knows all, comes to live here for some months in the year, and life passes without much excitement. I can do much good here, and in relieving the troubles of others I contrive to partly forget my own.

I had been here two years when I ventured on a journey to Zurich to spend a fortnight with Lady Thornhill at the Hotel du Lac. It was nearly a week after my arrival; it was a warm afternoon, and Lady Thornhill preferred to enjoy a siesta, while I took a walk in the direction of Worishoeen. I was thinking deeply as I walked along with a quick step, unmindful of the scenery, and I blundered against a man. I began to apologise hurriedly in English, forgetting where I was, but the words froze on my lips. It was Clifford Hazeldene!

"Ivy!" he exclaimed hoarsely. How ill and weary he looked! "Ivy, you here?"

I was on the point of asking him frigidly by what right he used my Christian name, but the unutterable weariness of his countenance stopped the words. The pang that went through me told me plainly what I had tried to persuade myself was false; it told me that I loved him as madly as ever. How strange is love! In that one moment I understood that all the hard thoughts concerning his perfidy had been unjust; as I stood facing him, I knew that he was loyal and true. I recognised that appearances were dead against him, but I no longer believed in them.

"Ivy!" he said again, more calmly this time. "Yes, I am glad that we have met. Come with me, just there, where we can talk unobserved, and I will tell you all."

Involuntarily I walked with him to a secluded spot, away from the road, where we stood facing one another. His weary face betrayed his agony, but he did not waver as he spoke.

"It is a miserable story, and it proves how—— No! I will pass no comment on the woman who bears my name, I will set forth facts.

"After you left us in the bower, sent away by a subterfuge, Irene laid down her plan with fiend—with deliberation, I mean," he said abruptly, adhering to his resolve and checking his involuntary slip. "She told me that I should never marry you, for she would prevent it. I rose to my feet to put an end to the interview, but she sprang to her feet and barred the exit.

"With a deliberate coolness which you cannot conceive, Ivy, she stated her plan.

"'I've made up my mind that you shall marry me,' she said, 'and I will force you to do so. You pretended to love me once, and I have a letter from you. I shall use that letter if you do not agree to my proposition. That letter will not do much of itself, but it will support other statements which I shall make, and cause them to look genuine!'

"After that outburst, Ivy, she told me that if I were once more seen with you, she would spread a horrible report that would blacken your fair name and mine as well; then she threatened to do it if I did not marry her as well as give you up. She gave me some details of her terrible plot, and I shuddered as I recognised how easily the lies would be believed, because they were so plausible. The world is naturally inclined to judge harshly, Ivy! I tried to find a way out, but I saw none.

"I left the Grange. Irene gave me no time. I was forced to announce our engagement, to save your good name and my own. I wondered that Irene should push it so far as to insist on my marrying her, but I found out. It was to prevent any possibility of union between us, and it was because, in her own peculiar way, she loved me. I was fascinated by her at one time, and I wrote an innocent letter to her, but the madness wore off as soon as that letter was posted.

"We were married and I left her. But she would have me near her; she is the more jealous of me because she has been unable to make me love her in spite of all her attempts. She worships me, I know, but my love is not for her.

"That is all, Ivy! It may cause you to think less harshly of me, and I repeat that I did it to save you, although you may think me a weak fool!"

What reply could I make? Some words, I know not what they were, surged to my lips, but Clifford clutched my arm and I followed his gaze. Irene was standing before us, a mocking smile on her lips, a wicked gleam in the grey eyes.

"So the old play is being acted!" she sneered. "So this is why Miss Deane lives in Switzerland, and why my husband wishes to live away from his own estate. I am sorry to spoil the play. It is a comedy, but it may turn to a tragedy! I think I now have very good proof of a statement I made some time ago, and I may as well make the world fully acquainted with the facts."

With those words she turned on her heel and walked away. I had expected her to make an attack on me bodily, for her usual calmness had vanished by the time she had finished, and her face was distorted.

Clifford and I separated, after he had assured me that he would do everything to prevent the execution of the threat and to shield me.

I heard indirectly that Irene was taken suddenly with influenza, followed by pneumonia, and that her husband attended her assiduously; perhaps that saved me. At any rate, I heard no more, although it was months before I dared to feel safe.

And so another period of more than two years passed. I am happier in the knowledge of Clifford's loyalty, but my heart was heavy for him.

And now, this morning, I receive a telegram signed "Thornhill," and it tells me that Irene has met with a fatal accident in the Alps. She was picked up dead.

I grieve for her untimely end, and yet—I cannot repress the feeling of happiness that comes over me despite my efforts to check it, for I know that at some future time Clifford will come to find me. Am I wicked? Will someone guide me aright?

Geo. Day.

SHE: "And what would you be now if it weren't for my money?" He: "A bachelor."

HE: "Her hair is like sunshine:" She: "Ye-es; it's brighter some days than others."

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A Race for a Rose.

Explaining What the Winner Won.

FOR pleasant anticipation, meagre realisation, flirtation, and perspiration, nothing can excel a midsummer picnic.

The picnic, like the circus, usually succeeds in breaking our last year's vows never again to attend it, cajoles us into a faint belief that we are to be entertained, and sends us home with a foolish irritating sense that we ought to have known better.

The last picnic I was allured into was o dreadfully genteel that, for once, I looked forward from the start to a dreary eight hours of refined and wearisome tranquility. It was conducted in the most perfect manner possible.

Two large open brakes, under matronly supervision, and under the protection of several male exquisites, bowled away to the grounds, carrying many pretty girls, in the most stylish picnic dresses imaginable. There was no unbecoming hilarity on the way out; and during the period before dinner, no tree-climbing, hat-decorating, or other excitement after we arrived.

The dinner arrangements were entirely too systematic. I thought, as I watched the caterer opening his neatly-arranged bundles and baskets, of the picnic dinners I had assisted at in my less dignified days.

I remembered one in particular, where we had enough cake to make a good-sized regiment ill, enough salad eggs to ballast a yacht with, and enough potatoes to satisfy a dozen Irishmen; and I remember quite vividly that on this particular picnic we had nothing but empty dishes to carry home. Such is the marvellous vigour and capacity of a juvenile appetite!

I anticipated that the beautiful monotony of the occasion would prevail throughout the day, but I was agreeably disappointed.

As the luncheon hour approached the gentlemen began to arrive, some in carriages, a few on horses, and finally a party of gentlemen on splendid bicycles. The latter caused no little excitement by their appearance thus, and they occasioned considerable disgusted envy among those who had chosen less athletic means of transportation.

The bicyclists were heroes, and they were sublimely conscious of it. They strutted back and forth importantly, or exhibited their skill to an admiring and amused feminine audience, or else lounged in studied attitudes wherever they could command the exclusive attention of some credulous girl.

Among them were two gentlemen who made me the object of much attention, not because of any intrinsic merit of my own, but because I was honoured with the friendship of the coldest and most exclusive heiress in "our set." The fact that Rosalind Brewster had selected me for an intimate friend and companion was quite as unaccountable to me as to anyone else; but the gentlemen referred to wisely refrained from speculating upon the nature of our friendship, and accepted me as the only means of reaching Rosalind's interest

It was evident to me that they were both deeply fascinated by her personal and financial charms, and that their peculiar relations with each other must inevitably bring about a "little unpleasantness."

Mr. Curtis was a gentleman born—that is, he was born in a family which had for some years been established in the best of Society; he had been abroad, had dissipated a fortune or two, and was rather lionised by a fast set of young gentlemen.

His guest, Mr. Henry Sedley, was a young Scotsman who had entertained Curtis some months in the North, and who had been South just long enough to appreciate the attractiveness of Southern girls.

Neither gentleman had made Miss Brewster the object of marked attention, partly out of respect for her, and partly because she would not permit it. The strange girl had a heart, and a good one, too, but she had thrown such a wall of suspicious reserve about it, that it was not generally believed in.

Both gentlemen had laughingly accused me of robbing Miss Brewster of all the warmth of sentiment she possessed, and Mr. Curtis boldly announced his belief that she was incapable of any depth of feeling.

Remembering these remarks, and prompted somewhat by a curiosity to ascertain where her choice lay between these two most persistent admirers, I rallied her myself upon her frigidity, and had the gratification at this memorable picnic of seeing her welcome both with unusual cordiality.

They were both charming men. Mr. Curtis was more dignified and had a readier tongue, but the Scottish gentleman made up in good nature whatever he lacked in wit, and in fine physique whatever he lacked in dignity. I had no choice between them, and I sometimes think she had none; but the event which seemed to decide her was so trifling, considering that it shaped the course of two human lives, and her choice was so persistent and true, that I, at other times, think it was made before she entirely realised it.

After dinner we four adjourned to a snug little summer-house on the shady side of the hill, and here indulged in the lightest gossip and Society common talk. Miss Brewster, being in a talkative mood, received the stock jokes and stories of Messrs. Curtis and Sedley, which, on ordinary occasions, were poured into my phonographic ear to be ground out to her afterwards; and I, being in the dispiriting position of a social necessity—a mere convenience as it were—without even the compensation of second-handed attention, very naturally pined. I yawned surreptitiously behind my hand several times, became bolder and blinked openly, and finally dropped comfortably off into an afternoon nap.

In this interesting state I remained possibly an hour—probably ten minutes—and, upon awakening, found that my spiritual absence from the party had excited no attention whatever.

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In fact, my existence was so supremely disregarded, that Mr. Curtis, in the temporary absence of his friend, was boldly offering his hand and heart to Rosalind. I was tempted to be honourable—to reveal to these young people that I still lived; but the thought of interfering with the first proposal Rosalind had ever received restrained me, and I let well enough alone.

He said earnestly:

"I realise that you have never thought of the matter, and you have probably never thought of me. I have no desire to intrude upon you in *any* sense, but you should know, at least, when and where you have inspired love. You should know that you are loved, even if you are untouched by any feeling yourself. Do not think that I spoke with any hope of winning you, Miss Brewster, for I have always believed you heartless."

"You are unkind, Mr. Curtis," she said reproachfully.

"I presume I am," he exclaimed, in a despairing sort of way. "I do not mean to be, however; I do not mean to give any such return for your gracious treatment of me; but your unfavourable reply has made me forget myself."

"I gave you no answer," she said gently. "You surprised me into silence. I have never suspected that you—that you or any other gentleman cared for me."

She blushed painfully and hung her head like a shy Society "bud," rather than like a well-trained *habituée* of three seasons.

While matters were thus—his indecision proceeding from necessity, and hers from choice—there came an interruption in the shape of a delegation from the main body of picnickers.

As I knew that attention would quickly be directed to me, I very promptly closed my eyes, and assumed the serene and amiable expression of one who dreams with an easy conscience.

Rosalind, who did not wish to be found guilty of a *tête-a-tête* with Mr. Curtis, came hastily over to where I was slumbering, and, without much difficulty called me back to life and propriety. I calmly yawned in her face, while the delegation informed us that Mr. Curtis was wanted to take part in an open bicycle race in the glen below.

The young gentleman declined on the ground that he was he only racing-man in the party, and that his presence in the contest would not only interfere with its being a closely contested one, but would discourage many from entering. This statement was, however, taken exception to by his friend, Sedley, and he was obliged then to accept the situation and the implied challenge.

We found upon returning to the grounds, that Mr. Curtis had acted more wisely in declining than we had given him credit for. As soon as it became know that he would participate, the contestants rapidly evaporated, until the list contained only his name and that of his friend Sedley. Their friendly rivalry on the "wheel" had never assumed the proportions of a race, and as opinion seemed to be quite evenly divided as to their capabilities for speed, the interest excited soon became greater than if a promiscuous scramble for first place had been in prospect.

A course was chosen so as to give us a good view of the start, it led up the road for about a half mile to a broad turning place, and had for a homestretch the smooth piece of turf directly in front of the grounds.

Neither Sedley nor Curtis made any preparation other than a careful examination of his machine, but the starters, timers, and judges were organised in the most elaborate style imaginable. To cap the climax of general interest and Rosalind's nervousness, I suggested that she might stand on a provision basket at the finish, and, as the winner passed her, hand him the rose she wore on her bosom.

This idea was taken up with the greatest of enthusiasm, and, in spite of her protestations, she was obliged to accept the position.

She accordingly took the place assigned her, and although she stood upon a very inappropriate pedestal, her statuesque grace and dignity commanded the admiration of those who ordinarily granted her only respect.

Realising that she must feel exceedingly nervous, I stood by her side and enrolled the services of a young student to assist in keeping up her courage.

As Messrs. Sedley and Curtis slowly passed by her on their way to the starting place, they politely doffed their caps, and I could plainly see in the latter's pale and excited face, and in the determined expression upon the young Scotsman's countenance that the race would be bitterly contested.

The young student informed us that it would be a "close thing, as Curtis had a fine record and Sedley was in beautiful condition." He also informed us that both men had expressed their determination to win at any cost, and that several of the party had quietly staked considerable money on the result. These remarks did not contribute at all to Rosalind's peace of mind, as they added to the sense of responsibility she already felt weighed down with. When everything was in readiness, two gentlemen held the bicycles in position, while a third, after giving a few instructions, said, promptly:

"Are you ready? Go!"

They went at first with the only impulse received from the starters, but quickening wonderfully at every push on the pedals, until they sped swiftly up the road almost hub to hub.

The student eyed them critically through an exquisite eyeglass until they passed from sight, and then turning to us, said:

"There is no nonsense in these mile sprints. Now, on a five or ten mile course, a man can save himself and win; but on a dash like this, you know, a man must put in from the start for all he is worth."

"Is there any danger?" Rosalind asked, nervously unfastening the flower on her bosom.

He shook his head in an ominous manner, saying.

"Racing doesn't kill men, but it uses them up terribly. I wouldn't be surprised to see them both completely winded."

After a brief period of time, Rosalind's anxiety was quickened by a movement among those who were further up the road, indicating the approach of the two cyclists. In a few seconds more they appeared round a bend in the road, and headed directly for us. The Scotsman was bending dangerously far over the handles, but was riding in a line as straight as an arrow's flight, while Mr. Curtis, although he sat erect, and appeared from his square shoulders and rigid arms to be exerting himself magnificently, was swaying violently from side to side, and was evidently losing ground. Suddenly, as they neared us, his pace slackened, and then he was seen to tumble headlong upon the turf.

Sedley came swiftly on, his face and eyes beaming with excitement and triumph, and dexterously caught the coveted flower from Rosalind's extended hand. As soon as he had passed, he wheeled around and was among the first to reach his unfortunate friend. The latter lay quite still for a few moments, much to our alarm; but as we approached, Mr. Sedley raised him gently from the ground, and in response to his inquiry, "Are you hurt, old man?" received a reply in the

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negative, so gruff and coarse that we felt no further apprehension.

The young Scotsman apparently did not notice this rudeness, for he gracefully placed the rose in his friend's hand, saying:

"I am content to have won the race. The rose is yours by virtue of your pluck and fair play."

Curtis drew away from Sedley and, flinging down the flower, said, angrily:

"If you content yourself with a victory so ill-gotten, you are welcome to the spoils."

"You don't mean to accuse me of unfairness?" Sedley asked gravely.

Curtis hesitated for a moment, and then, looking at his friend sullenly, said:

"Well, what else can I do?"

Sedley returned his glance with one of reproach, but said, coolly:

"I regret that you take such a view of it; you are certainly mistaken."

Rosalind picked up the slighted flower, and, fastening it upon Mr. Sedley's coat, said spiritedly:

"You have won this fairly, and by your magnanimous conduct, you have won it doubly."

There was a murmur of approbation audible, and Mr. Curtis, feeling that he was without sympathy, picked up his bike and walked angrily away.

As Sedley wheeled his bicycle slowly back to the grounds, Rosalind walked at his side, the student and I following.

The latter, who had been blazing with indignation from the crown of his little straw hat down to his patent-leather boots, exclaimed, rather loudly:

"The coward! He fell because he couldn't win!"

"It is not as bad as that," I said.

"You are no judge," he said, with characteristic effrontery. "I saw him put on the brake the moment he knew that the race was lost. He pulled up, and then took his time about falling. I tell you the fellow is a coward!"

My eloquent escort then launched out into an extensive dissertation upon the ethics of racing; and, encouraged by my silence, he talked himself into a mild form of bronchitis.

Under the cover of his conversation, I listened to that of Rosalind and her Orlando. She said:

"You evidently did not place a very high estimate upon my rose, since you were so willing to part with it."

"I see that you are unwilling, after all, to credit me with the sacrifice I made," he answered. "I should think that my hard struggle for its possession ought to convince you that I valued it highly; but it is just as well that you should not understand either my eagerness to win, or my motives afterwards in presenting *him* with the flower."

He was treading upon dangerous ground, and Miss Brewster, realising it, changed the subject skilfully.

"Will you do me a great favour?" she asked.

"With pleasure!" he replied unhesitatingly.

"It is that you forgive Mr. Curtis. I am glad that you have committed yourself in advance, for I am thus assured that he will be pardoned."

"You are taking advantage of my willingness to oblige you," he said gravely.

"I know that I am," she acknowledged, "and it is unfair in me to do so; but I feel that Mr. Curtis did not mean what he said—that he was betrayed by his chagrin and his temper to harsh words which he will afterwards deeply regret."

"You plead his cause eloquently," Sedley observed. "Such warm friendship is worth losing the race for."

She blushed slightly and said in a lower tone:

"I am perhaps going too far in my attempts to make peace. I am presuming upon your friendship."

"You are acting from the kindest motives, I know," he said, warmly; "but you are asking me to sacrifice my pride to his ill-temper, as severe a humiliation as you could impose upon me. As a proof of what I would do for you, I pardon him. I accept the inglorious position you wish me to take, but I cannot further accept of his hospitality. I shall leave for home at the earliest opportunity, satisfied that I should never have come."

He had laid aside his bicycle, and as they strolled on, Rosalind took his arm. He was a tall, solidly-built fellow, and she a slender, delicate girl, hence there was something in this silent expression of dependence which touched him. He said:

"I know that it is ungenerous of me to talk thus to you; but when a man acts as he has to-day—openly insults his guest—and the lady I most respect exonerates him, and even asks me to bow to his insolence, I feel somewhat disagreeable."

As my escort stopped while they went on, I heard no more; but I noted as I watched them that his manner seemed to grow less aggressive and hers more interested. They passed on slowly out of sight, while I, like a good girl, allowed them the freedom they were both hungering for, and at the same time impressed my young student with the idea that I was a "fearfully clever girl, you know," by listening with mummy-like attention to his collegial yarns.

I felt that the revelations of the day should greatly influence Rosalind in choosing between the two men, and reflected with no little satisfaction that if she did not succeed in patching up a peace between them, she would soon have to avow publicly a preference for one or the other.

"It's too bad that this business should end so unpleasantly," said my friend, relapsing into a live topic, "Curtis has ruined his own reputation and spoilt the visit of his guest. Sedley will go as soon as he can pack, and I don't blame him."

"He won't go," I said confidently. "I am willing to bet a pair of gloves that he will remain a month or more."

"I take you—that is to say, the bet," he responded with spirit.

* * * * *

The Rose was won, but not before the wager was. As I write there lies near me on the table a pair of long Bernhardt gloves of spotless white. I have been tempted to use them more than once, but at the giver's suggestion I am reserving them for Mr. Sedley's wedding, at which I am to be honoured with the office of first bridesmaid.

Madeleine Maurey.

WIDOW (tearfully): "Yes, my daughters are now my only resources." Friend: "Take my advice, and husband your resources well."

JACK: "I proposed to Nellie Sweetlyps last night, and——" Ned: "I know just when it happened. I saw you holding her hand when you did it." Jack: "You're mistaken; I wasn't holding her hand. She was feeling my pulse to see if my heart was really beating as fast as I said it was."

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UNSOLVED LOVE PROBLEMS.

A Prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

II.—THE MISTAKE OF MILLICENT HOWARD.

MILLICENT HOWARD was looking radiantly beautiful. Everyone agreed in that, and all, except one or two men biassed in favour of *fiancées*, acknowledged she was the loveliest girl at the ball.

Beautiful by nature, beautifully dressed, and a fairylike dancer, she was naturally engaged for every dance as soon as she appeared, and George Poole, her devoted admirer since childhood, was unable to obtain more than two valses to his name. How it happened that Graham Parker, who came after him was able to get the three for which he boldly asked, is a mystery only to be explained by a girl at a dance.

"Now," she said gaily, as Graham came up to claim his first dance, "this is number ten on the programme, so you may rest assured that I have already assented nine times to the statements that the room is hot, the floor perfection, the band charming, and, in general, the ball a great success, so those subjects are taboo."

"Well," he said as he placed her hand on his arm and they slowly began to valse, "may I say that the one thing more perfect than the floor, more charming than the band, and *the* success of the ball, is Miss Millicent Howard? Or are you tired of hearing that also?"

Millicent blushed brightly, but she turned off the compliment with a laugh. It was perhaps a little laboured, but she did not notice it, she was too perfectly happy at that moment to pick holes in anything, least of all in anything he should say to her.

They paused to rest a moment near where George was pulling his moustache in some natural jealousy at the undisguised happiness shining in Millicent's eyes.

Suddenly the electric light went out, and the brilliant scene was plunged in darkness. A hush, a stifled scream, and then girlish laughter and excited talk.

Then, piercing the darkness, a cry of "Fire!"

Instantly the room was a seething mass of human creatures fighting for their lives.

Someone cried out:

"For Heaven's sake go quietly, and all will be well!"

But in vain, the terrifying darkness and the smell of smoke, which grew more and more perceptible, seemed to have maddened everyone, and they fought almost like wild beasts to reach the doorway.

At the first alarm George had rushed to Millicent's side, and finding Graham had evidently been torn from her side in the rush, and hearing her cry piteously:

"Oh, please, where are you? I can't see anything, and I am squeezed up in this corner and can't move," he called out, "Miss Howard—Millicent—I am here and will take care of you. Trust yourself to me."

And soon she was clinging convulsively to his arm, trembling and almost fainting.

Love and peril taught George, quiet, unassuming George, the very last person Nature had meant for a hero, what to do.

"Millicent," he said sternly, "you must not faint, you would be trampled to death at once. Pull yourself together *directly*, and do what I tell you."

The authoritative tone roused her for the time at any rate, she fought bravely with the feeling of faintness and suffocation, and put it from her.

George found that behind him was a heavy velvet settee firmly fixed against the wall, so with some difficulty he scrambled on to that, and, bending over her, said:

"Now, put your arms round my neck, and I will draw you up out of the crush on to this place, where you will be out of immediate danger."

Obediently she locked her arms round his neck, while he clasped his round her slender waist, and, with a mighty effort, which seemed almost to crack the sinews of his back, he drew her out of the struggling mass of men and women.

The touch of her bare arms, the sweet warm weight of her lissom body in his arms filled him with a rush of joy no danger could quench, and holding her closely to him he murmured in her ear:

"This is a heaven worth going through much to obtain. Oh, Millicent, Millicent, if you knew how I love you! Let me die at this moment if you can never have love for me."

But Millicent hung in his arms a dead weight, he hardly knew whether she had heard his wild words or not, only fancied the clasp of her arms grew slightly closer, and, as his heart throbbed madly at the thought, he bent over her drooping head and caught the words—

"I love——" But then there was silence and he knew she had fainted, this time in real earnest.

For the first time George felt the desire to save his own life also. Hitherto his only thought had been of her, now he felt that life held possibilities of a joy he had hardly dreamt of, and it would be very bitter to lose it.

The firemen had arrived; the cries of the strong, the groans of the weaker, who were trodden under foot or crushed against walls, were growing less, some people had succeeded in getting out, and the work of rescue was being carried on as systematically as possible. Suddenly the flames burst out in the roof, and a lurid light was cast upon the ghastly scene.

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George's one thought at that moment was—"Thank God she can't see that!"

Worse than the wrecked room, the dead or unconscious bodies of those who had been laughing and talking so gaily only an hour before, were the faces of the living, tortured out of all human resemblance in the agony of that wild fight for the life that they felt was beyond the narrow doorway.

Strong men working at the outside were knocking a hole in the wall of the building farthest from the door, but the flames were gaining apace, and the smoke was stifling.

Looking round desperately to find a means of escape for Millicent and himself from a terrible death, George saw the moment the wall fell where the men were working not far from him. Seizing her in his arms, he made his way as quickly as he could to the opening, staggering under his burden.

As he drew near, another portion of the wall, loosened by the fire, fell, and, bending over his precious burden to protect her, he yet managed to thrust her into the arms of the first smoke-begrimed form that emerged from the opening ere he fell, struck senseless by the falling bricks.

Graham Parker, his dress-suit torn, his hands bleeding from their labours, his face blackened, and his hair singed, carried the poor girl tenderly out of the burning building.

The fresh air outside seemed to revive her, and opening her lovely blue eyes, she smiled up at him with a look of ineffable content, and, he could almost have sworn, with undisguised love.

"You have saved my life," she murmured, and then, as she awoke to the fact that they were out in the lamp-lit road, and she was in his arms, "Oh, put me down, please, I can stand quite well."

But when she came to try she found she could not stand without assistance, so, with his arm supporting her, he led her to where her frantic father was anxiously scanning the faces of the victims as they were brought out, with a sickening fear of finding hers among them.

"Millicent—and alive!" he cried joyously. "Thank God! And you, too, young man," he added, peering into Graham's face. "I don't know if you are anyone I know, but please stay with her a minute while I get John to bring the carriage round to this side street," and he was gone in a moment.

For some minutes they stood in silence, Millicent making several ineffectual attempts to say something. At last it came out hurriedly as she saw her father with his head out of the brougham window calling directions to the coachman.

"Graham," in a sweet, hesitating voice, "I heard what you said in that awful place," with a shuddering glance behind her, "and I want to tell you that I do love you, and that I have always loved you ever since I have known you, and now you have saved my life I could not let you go away without telling you what only my silly faintness prevented me from saying at the time."

Bewildered with what he heard, Graham could only press her slight form to him, and found no words in which to reply.

The carriage was there, Millicent's father wrung his hand vehemently, thanking him earnestly for what he had done, and cutting short his protestations that he had done nothing. Then Graham helped the blushing, trembling girl into the carriage, and she drove off waving a white hand from the window, while he went back to continue his work of rescue with his heart throbbing, and his brain in a whirl from the problem that was thus set him to solve.

"Millicent loves me? What ought I to do? It is clear that poor old George saved her life and proposed to her in the dark, and it is equally clear that she thinks it is I who have done both. It is the most awful fix a man was ever in. If I let things go on and say nothing, I am playing an awfully mean trick on George, who is my friend, and altogether sailing under false colours, and if I tell her she is mistaken I refuse her love, and put her to the shame of having confessed a love that was never solicited. Good heavens, what ought I to do?"

L. Hughes.

Your Editor Chats.

LAST week's instalment of "The Pursuit of Sara" concluded by leaving Miss Gillespie in a very perilous position, and this week readers will have the satisfaction of learning how she successfully escaped from her immediate danger, only, alas! to be led into another trap. Our "Sara" covers have been creating quite a stir, not only in those towns wherein the actual episodes occur but over the whole country.

NUMEROUS correspondents from everywhere in the British Isles have written to me concerning Miss Gillespie, and not a few of them ask the question, "Does a future episode happen in this town?"

Now I am sorry to say that I do not feel able to take you so far into my confidence as to tell you exactly where Sara gets driven to. Of course, many of you will perhaps be sorry to find that Sara did not penetrate into your immediate regions, but no doubt such of you will be consoled when you find that you are either personally acquainted with the places she does visit, and that any rate you have friends or relations there. I may state, however, that the scene of Sara's next thrilling escapade is the city of Birmingham.

FROM Liverpool I have received the following from "W. R. M." "We have formed a literary club here, and we think very highly of "SHORT STORIES." We take it in turns to read aloud to assembled club-ites a story from your bright little paper."

I am very pleased to learn that the members of this club have such a high opinion of SHORT STORIES, and I consider it a capital idea for one to read out the stories aloud. Now the long winter evenings are coming on, the club should flourish greatly, especially as I have some extra-special good matter in store for readers. Other clubs might do worse than follow the example of this Liverpool one, and I should like to hear if any do so.

ON the opposite page is another Unsolved Love Problem, entitled "The Mistake of Millicent Howard."

As in the case of "The Awkward Predicament of Edward Clements," the first of the series, which commenced last week, I am offering a prize of *one guinea* to the reader who sends in the most satisfactory solution to the problem.

The question which requires answering is this: "Should Graham Parker inform the girl of the true state of affairs, or not?"

Arguments, clearly stated, should not exceed one hundred words.

Replies must not reach these offices later than Friday, November 20th, and envelopes should have "Love Problem" plainly marked in the top left-hand corner.

ON pages 620 and 621, you will find two drawings depicting athletic young women. These are the first of a series, "The Girls of Great Britain," and I am sure you will find each picture interesting, and true to life.

Your Editor.

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POWERFUL NEW ROMANCE. **START TO-DAY.**

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

INTRODUCTION.

CAPTAIN PERCY IDDISON and Lady Maud Hyam, his *fiancée*, are present at an "At Home" given by Lady Medcalf-Mears.

There they meet Isolo Staunton, the lion of the hour, a multi-millionaire, and styled "the modern Monte Christo." The curious feature about him is that, although he is admitted to the very cream of society, nobody knows his past nor how he accumulated his vast wealth.

Wilfrid Ellerton, a fine young fellow, a worthy son of a worthy father, is also there, and is introduced to Iddison.

The latter notices a remarkable streak of white hair on Ellerton's head, running from the front of the left ear down to the base of the skull.

Isolo Staunton also sees this, but it causes him a great deal more anxiety than it does Iddison.

He knows the cause of that streak! He knows why that white hair is present on the head of one so young! He remembers how, when he was Isolo Zuarez, an escaped convict from the Chincha Islands, he was adrift on the ocean in a small boat, together with a man and a boy.

The sun was blazing hot, and there were scarcely any provisions left.

The other man was half dead, and Staunton remembers how he intended to kill him outright so that he should give no further trouble, when the boy hotly intervened.

"Put down that axe," he had cried; "it's murder!" He had lifted the axe and the boy had jumped at him. In doing so he had slipped and the weapon fell on his head!

They were rescued from their peril—but the blow the boy received had rendered him unconscious of all that had happened.

He had never since remembered.

The question that worries the criminal millionaire as he leaves Lady Medcalf-Mears' house is this—would his memory return?

If it should—what a grim irony of Fate it would be.

Staunton's blood is Spanish, his father has been President of Peru, and the ideal for the accomplishment of which he is amassing his many millions is to see Spain reinstated again as Queen of the Seas and Mistress of the East and West!

And now his ideal, his freedom, perhaps his very life hangs on the memory of a mere lad of twenty-three!

If Ellerton remembers the episode on the ocean it will mean, at least, a return to the Chinchas as a convict!

Staunton goes to his magnificent yacht, the *Isola*, lying alongside the Ocean Quay, Southampton, to talk the matter over with his right-hand friend and confidant, Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia, the only person living to whom Isolo Staunton had told the story of his life.

The millionaire tells Valdez of this awkward coincidence of his meeting Ellerton again, and asks his advice.

Valdez strongly urges Staunton to go to extremes to get Wilfrid out of the way, but Isolo is not willing to compass the boy's death.

Then Don Ramiero advises the millionaire to invite to the yacht a Society party, for a trip to Norway. Ellerton is to be one of the guests, and during the cruise steps are to be taken for his removal.

Staunton agrees to this and the invitations are sent out.

Mercedes, the beautiful, fascinating daughter of the millionaire, is to do the duties of hostess, and among the guests are Captain Percy Iddison and Lady Maud Hyam.

When Mercedes and Ellerton meet, the former recognises the latter as the boy who once rescued her from death, in Chili.

The two are drawn together by the bonds of love, and many are the glances that pass between them.

If Staunton had only seen one of these, the crime which had already been decided upon would never have been committed, and many things which came to pass in consequence of it would never have happened.

Don Ramiero guesses the position of affairs, and decides to hasten the removal of the man who might possibly do his master so much harm.

Wilfrid Ellerton, during the night, is, by a plea of ingenious trickery, on the Spaniard's part, secured and safely imprisoned beneath the decks of the *Isola*.

The rumour is the next morning circulated on board the yacht that he had fallen overboard, and was drowned.

When Mercedes heard the news—the glibly spoken lie—she fell fainting to the deck, breathing words of delirious love.

Then Isolo Staunton understands that his daughter has given her heart to the man he has doomed to a living death!

He is furious at Valdez for hastening the action.

Mercedes lies at Death's door, attended to with the greatest possible care by the yacht's physician, Dr. Billaud.

In consequence of the alleged accident, the ship's company is landed at Leith. But Lady Maud Hyam and her *fiancé*, Captain Percy Iddison, have suspicions of foul play.

Staunton decides to go and break the news to Ellerton's father personally.

He orders Billaud to perform an operation on Ellerton, to see if it be possible to restore his memory. Should that prove to be impossible, his life should be spared, and he would be restored to Mercedes.

Thus it was decided that the captive on board the *Isola* should have just one chance for his liberty.

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TENTH CHAPTER.

Ellerton Recalls the Past.

WHILE the *Isola* was clearing the Firth of Forth both the Captain and the First Officer remained, according to custom, on the navigating bridge.

Captain René Durtal was a Corsican. A little over medium height, the breadth of his square shoulders and the size of his muscular limbs made him look rather under it if anything. Black-haired and bearded, with piercing steel-blue eyes, and strong features, he was a man much admired for his undoubted manliness and strength; but if his hair had been clipped close and his beard and moustache shaved off—as they once had been in the prison of Ile Nou, in New Caledonia, his admirers would have been not a little shocked at the result. The bluff, hearty, handsome sailor would not have been recognisable in the brutal assassin whose mis-shapen skull and animal features would thus have been revealed. His age was a few years under fifty.

His second in command was a tall Englishman of about thirty-four. He wore a heavy moustache and neatly-trimmed torpedo-beard which effectually concealed the tell-tale weakness of his mouth and chin, and even made him good-looking beyond the average of men.

His name on the books of the *Isola* was Herbert Darfield. Before he joined her it had been Arthur Culworth, which was the name of a second-officer on one of the crack Atlantic liners who had been arrested for fraud and conspiracy in connection with the disappearance of certain mails and specie at New York. He had been released on heavy bail found by his present skipper, whom he had never seen before, and as he vanished within an hour the bail was duly estreated.

Every responsible officer on board the *Isola* was a criminal of some sort, convicted or otherwise, bound to his employer by the fetters of his own crimes and the fear of their consequences, as well as by the golden links of self-interest. As a matter of fact they were Staunton's purchased slaves, but he had made them rich beyond the reach of temptation, and so no man was better or more faithfully served than he.

"When we are well out of sight of the land, Mr. Darfield," said the Captain, "you can let her have full speed ahead. You will, of course, keep as far away from everything you sight as possible, but, if you must pass something, don't forget to slow down as usual."

He said this in excellent English, but with a decided accent, which the lady guests on board the yacht were wont to find "very interesting." His lieutenant touched his cap—discipline under Staunton was almost as strict as under an Admiral of the Fleet—and said:

"Very good, sir. And when we are well outside I presume that we shall steer as straight a course as possible for the Anchorage?"

"Certainly, my friend," replied the skipper, for, outside the demands of discipline, they were excellent friends. "The Señor's instructions are that we shall arrive there with as little delay as possible. As you know, we have a very important consignment on board, and, moreover, we have to get the poor Señorita into the blue waters of the Mediterranean as fast as we shall dare to make the *Isola* travel."

"Now I will go to lunch," he went on, as he saw the land fading swiftly away into blue mist on either hand. "You have the course; north-east two hundred miles, then due north to the circle."

He touched his cap in polite response to his lieutenant's salute, and went down the ladder to join Don Ramiero and the doctor in the smoking-room for the inevitable cocktail.

Darfield began his watch by walking several times back and forth on the bridge, thinking over the singular events which had happened during the brief cruise.

Presently, looking aft as he turned at one end, he saw the tall figure of a woman dressed in nurse's costume coming towards the bridge. He, of course, knew that two nurses had been engaged at Edinburgh for Miss Staunton, but he had been on shore when they came on board. Since then they had been below with their charge, and so he had not seen them.

He took another turn, and when he got back she was nearly under the bridge. He looked down instinctively, and saw a pale, almost white face, with firm, regular features made beautiful by a pair of deep grey eyes, which shone softly under long black lashes. The broad, low forehead was fringed with bright chestnut ringlets, curling out from under the little, close bonnet.

As the eyes met his they seemed to dilate and darken as though they were gazing upon some fearful object suddenly encountered. The woman's form seemed to shrink smaller and shorter. Her head went back and her hands rose to her temples. Her lips parted slowly. A gasping sigh came from between them, and he heard the faintly-spoken, almost inarticulate words:

"Arthur! Good Heavens, what does this mean?"

The helmsman in the close-shut wheel-house looked out through the plate-glass wall and saw the First Officer go grey under his tan, reel back from the rail, and then clutch it again. His lips moved quickly and jerkily, and his eyes were staring wide-open at something on the promenade deck, which the helmsman could not see.

What the white trembling lips were saying was:

"Janet! My lost, good angel! Janet, my wife! Dead and alive again! So old Yuill lied after all, as I thought he did, the scoundrel! Janet here on the *Isola*—this vessel of crime! My God—what's going to happen now?"

The woman only heard the first few words. When he called her "wife" her eyes were blinded by a swift rush of tears; her breast heaved and shook with a sob that wouldn't be choked back. The air seemed to grow dark, and, driven by a sudden dread of fainting, Janet Culworth turned and went back with unsteady steps towards the companion-way.

So it was that the husband and wife whom the shadow of crime had divided, as they both believed for ever, met again—for better or worse.

For the next three days and nights the *Isola* sped eastward and northward, and finally due north at a speed that would have astonished even those who had seen her do her twenty-two knots along the Solent, for she was flinging the ocean leagues behind her now at thirty-five. Yet, tremendous as the speed was, so perfectly were her engines balanced in her hull, that she swirled along as easily over the smooth summer sea as though she had been travelling twelve or fifteen.

In physical health Mercedes had improved even more rapidly than Doctor Billaud had dared to hope, and already her mind was reawakening under the gentle and skilful treatment of her nurses. Indeed, he already began to see a prospect of giving her back to her father when he met the yacht, as had been arranged, at Monaco, completely restored, saving only, perhaps, that one possibility which he still feared and yet hoped against.

But for that "other patient" to whom he had so callously alluded during the memorable conversation in the Council Chamber, there was now but little more hope, if any, than for the felon condemned to the scaffold waiting his doom in the last of his earthly habitations, for the mission on which the *Isola* was now bound was the execution of the pitiless sentence passed upon him by the Lord of the Underworld, and every smooth pulsation of her engines was bearing him nearer to its mysterious portal. There was just one chance for him, and one only.

Wilfrid Ellerton had never been allowed to completely recover from the stupor into which he had been thrown by

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the drug which had been poured on the cloth over his head. He had had periods of half-awakening, during which he wondered vaguely where he was and what had happened. Now and then, too, visions of glorious bliss and exquisite loveliness, to which he could give neither definite form nor exact name, flitted through the mists which had somehow clouded all his mental horizon; but as to how or why the mists had come he had neither memory nor knowledge.

Don Ramiero and Doctor Billaud sat late over their coffee and cigars in the Council Chamber after dinner on the evening of the third day out from Leith. The subject of their conversation was just then coming slowly to his senses in a small, windowless cabin beneath the main deck, and almost immediately under the floor of the sanctum.

"And so, my dear Señor Valdez, you are still of opinion, even after all the arguments that I have adduced, that the course you propose to pursue is a wise one?" said the doctor, allowing the ash from his cigar to fall into a little silver tray.

"My dear doctor," replied Valdez, rather coldly, "it is not here a question of right or wrong, or wisdom or foolishness, it is a matter of obedience or disobedience to the commands of one who, as you know, has the power to punish—and who never forgives.

"You have performed the operation in accordance with the Señor's last orders when he left us. It was, as you know, his settled purpose to discover whether that piece of bone was pressing on the brain or not. You found that it was, and you have raised it. If you find that the operation has not restored to him the memory of certain occurrences which the Señor desires to be utterly forgotten, then it is our duty to arrange circumstances, if I may put it so, that they will fit in with his rescue as the sole survivor of the company of a fishing smack which had picked him up, and we had the misfortune to run down in the darkness. You are, of course, aware of the Señor's very pressing reasons for accomplishing this rescue if possible.

"Certainly," replied the other, "it is perhaps the one chance of escaping the commission of what some people would call a crime and possibly of restoring his daughter's complete reason and insuring her happiness. Laudable objects, I admit, but the risk is tremendous. It is always the unexpected that happens, and even an escape from the Underworld might, by some miracle, be made possible. No, no, with all due deference to the Señor, if that memory has come back to him, it is not safe for him to be alive *anywhere*. Much better to have left things as they were and put him below without any further trouble."

"You will pardon me, Doctor, if I remind you that that is not a question for us to decide. The Señor has already decided, and it only remains for us to carry out his orders," rejoined Valdez coldly. "Ah, there," he went on with sudden animation, as three gentle knocks sounded under the floor of the room, "your patient is ready for examination, I presume."

As he spoke he began to pull the loose carpet away from one of the corners. When a space of a couple of square yards had been bared he tapped three times on it with the toe of his boot. A section of the deck slid back in a groove. There was a slight sound as of the working of well-balanced machinery, and in a few moments Wilfrid Ellerton, seated in an armchair, appeared through the gap which was exactly filled by the rising platform on which the chair rested. His head was bandaged, and his face was that of a man who had narrowly escaped death after a long illness, but there was intelligence in the opening eyes with which he looked wonderingly round the room.

"Good evening, Mr. Ellerton," said Don Ramiero politely, and in sympathetic tones. "We, that is the Doctor and myself, are delighted to see you so far on the way to recovery after the serious injury occasioned by your fall. May I ask if you feel that your head is quite clear now?"

"Perfectly," replied Wilfrid in a weak but quite distinct voice; "the only thing I'm not quite clear about is that fall you speak about. Still, that doesn't matter now. So I've been *ill* some time, have I? Yet I seem to be still on board the yacht. The rest are still here, I suppose. If so I should very much like to see Mr. Staunton as soon as possible. I have something very important to say to him which I meant to say that evening when I had the accident."

"I am afraid," said Don Ramiero kindly, "that it will hardly be possible for you to see Mr. Staunton to-night. He is unwell. In fact he had to go to bed immediately after dinner. But in the morning, no doubt. And now as to your own health. Excuse a rather curious question, which I really ask on Mr. Staunton's behalf, for reasons which he will make plain to you later on, but do you find that your memory of past, somewhat long-past events, is any different from what it was before your accident?"

Wilfrid Ellerton answered the momentous question, on the reply to which, had he but known it, so much of life and happiness depended, with a low laugh, which made Doctor Billaud turn his head and give Valdez a quick, warning glance.

"Why, yes," he said. "That is rather a curious question, but the answer to it, I think, you'll find more curious yet. My memory is in that way most singularly better. Why, there are some things that I remember with perfect distinctness now which, for some reason or other, I had forgotten for years, and, what is more funny still, I remember now that I *had* forgotten them."

"That, my dear sir," said the Doctor in his soft, even voice, "is really most remarkable. You will, I am sure, pardon me if I seem to intrude upon your confidence, but my professional interest in the matter is so keen that I hope you will be able to accept it as an excuse."

"Certainly, Doctor," replied Ellerton good-naturedly. "I don't know of any reason why I shouldn't answer any question you like to ask about that sort of thing. What would you like to know?"

"Thank you very much, Mr. Ellerton," said Billaud in his suavest tone, "that is very kind of you. Well, in the first place, I should like to know in which period of your life occurred those forgotten events which you say you have just remembered; and at the same time, perhaps you would not object to giving me, just as a matter of professional interest, you know, some idea as to the nature of those events."

Ellerton looked down at the floor for a few moments and then his eyes wandered round the walls of the Council Chamber, dwelling here and there on the pictures hanging on the walls. One of them pictured a boy and a girl in a small boat on the sea.

It was the merest trifle, but it was enough to set the mechanism of his restored memory in motion. In a moment he was back amidst the long-forgotten horrors of the whale-boat, adrift on the wide Pacific. He began, and, like a man telling the story of a dream from which he has just awakened, so he told that story to his two eager and desperately interested listeners in such graphically lucid detail that it was little less than a reality to them while he was speaking.

He finished by saying in the most matter-of-fact tone:

"There, gentlemen, that is the thing that I had forgotten. Not the sort of thing a fellow would be likely to forget, is it?"

"And you feel quite certain, Mr. Ellerton," said Don Ramiero, after a little pause during which he and the Doctor had exchanged glances of sinister significance, "that this most interesting and thrilling experience was a real event in your earlier life, and that you actually do remember it as such?"

"Of course I do," he replied, with fatal candour, "why, the whole thing's as clear to me as though it had happened only yesterday; as, in fact, for some reason or other, it really seems to have done. I could tell you the names of the men in the boat with me, the ship we were wrecked in. Everything, in fact. I shall have quite a thrilling yarn to tell Mer—er—Miss Staunton and the other ladies after breakfast to-morrow."

"I have not the slightest doubt but that it will be as deeply interesting to them as it has been to Señor Valdez and myself. Really, Mr. Ellerton, I have to thank you for what I may call one of the most striking experiences of my pro-

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fessional career!" exclaimed Doctor Billaud with very real interest. "And now I must prescribe for you. A glass of wine with just a couple of drops of sedative in it, and then to bed again, please. A sound night's sleep and you will be quite ready to tell your marvellous story to the ladies in the morning."

"Thanks very much, Doctor," he said. "I do feel a bit fagged. By the way, I've forgotten to ask you what you have been doing to my head, and—and how the dickens I managed to get into this room?"

"All in good time, my dear sir," replied Billaud gently as he watched him drink the wine; "we must not trouble the head with too many details just yet; but I also shall have an interesting story to tell you later on."

While he was speaking Ellerton's head had drooped forward on to his chest, and the next minute he was fast asleep. Valdez tapped on the floor and the platform descended. Presently it came back empty.

"Well, Señor Valdez," said Billaud, "I think that is quite conclusive. Shall we descend?"

"We will," replied Don Ramiero; "he has pronounced his own doom."

Then, standing on the platform, they disappeared into the depths of the *Isola's* hold.

ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Physician and Nurse.

UNDER the floor of the Council Chamber there was another room of exactly the same size, but very different in its appointments. Its walls, ceiling and floor were of half-inch steel, painted a neutral grey. It was lighted by eight electric bulbs, two on each wall, and it was absolutely devoid of furniture with the present exception of the arm-chair in which the form of Wilfrid Ellerton was lying, huddled and limp, just as a lifeless body might have lain.

Its other occupants when Don Ramiero and Doctor Billaud descended on the platform were René Durtal and his First Officer, Herbert Darfield.

"And now, my dear Doctor," said Don Ramiero, as they stepped on to the floor of the room, "I must trouble you to make sure that your patient is quite unconscious, and then we will leave you free to visit your more important charge, who is, doubtless, by this time in need of your care."

The Frenchman turned quickly away to make his examination, and so they did not see the scowl on his brow, or the ugly twist of his ape-like lips which told of an anger amounting almost to fury, to which he dare not give expression. The suggestion was really an order, and he knew that he had to obey it without question. He would have given half, nay, all that he possessed to have remained in the room and seen what was about to be done with the unfortunate young fellow whom he had just drugged into insensibility; but that was forbidden, and he knew that if he made any difficulty about going, there would be no hesitation in removing him by force.

Valdez pulled aside the loose carpet and gave a signal. A section of the deck slid back in a groove. In a few moments Wilfrid Ellerton appeared through the gap, his head bandaged.

He was aware of the existence of that Underworld over which his master ruled with undisputed sway, but that was all. What it was in reality, or by what mysterious means it was reached from the world above the waters he no more knew than the firemen who fed the *Isola's* furnaces, and this was not the least of the causes of his secret, but ever-growing, hatred and jealousy of Don Ramiero.

Why should this Spaniard know secrets and possess powers with which he, the man of science who held the power of life and death in his hands, was not to be trusted? Well, he might learn for himself some day, and then—but for the present it was necessary to obey.

"Absolutely unconscious, my dear Señor Valdez," he said

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with gently smiling lips as he came back from the side of the chair; "he will remain as he is for fully two hours, which, I trust, will be long enough for your purpose. At the end of that time you will be good enough to give him hot brandy-and-water of moderate strength, first in teaspoonfuls, and then, when he can swallow it, as a draught. Within a quarter of an hour or so, he will be in full possession of his faculties, and in a week or so at the outside his physical health will be completely restored. And now I will act upon your suggestion and go."

"I am much obliged to you, Doctor," replied Don Ramiero smilingly. "I will come back with you, and let you out as you might have some difficulty with the doors."

The Frenchman had hard work to keep his lips smiling, for this was another very sore point with him. He had not even been trusted with the secret of the doors of the Council Chamber, and to such a fiercely jealous nature as his this silent lack of trust was infinitely worse than open insult would have been.

The rising platform carried them back, and as he was opening the doors, Don Ramiero said gently but with unmistakable meaning in his voice:

"That is the first time, I believe, my dear Doctor, that you have been in the lower chamber. Under the circumstances it was necessary that you should visit it. At the same time I think it well to inform you that the Señor does not wish it to be known that such a chamber exists. He has his own reasons for this, and I need hardly suggest to you that they are probably very weighty ones."

"My friend," replied the other, smiling and looking him frankly in the eyes, "whatever they are, it is not for me to question or even to inquire into them. Let me assure you that I remember nothing of what I have seen during the last half hour."

"That is exactly the reply that I should have expected from such discretion as yours, my dear Doctor Billaud," murmured Don Ramiero.

"Our friend is altogether too polite, and he is getting rather too much power into his hands," he said to himself as he closed the doors. "He must be watched. If he is not careful it may possibly be necessary to arrange for another of these regrettable accidents. No one is so necessary to the Señor as to be indespensible, my friend."

Meanwhile the Frenchman was saying in his soul as he went back to his own rooms:

"Why should that Spaniard be trusted with secrets which I may not know? If I am good enough for Staunton to trust with the reason, nay, the very life, of his daughter, am I not good enough also to know the secrets which Valdez knows? Does not this tyrant of ours know that the surest way to turn faithful servants into traitors is to distrust them while they are worthy of trust? Yet I will know some day, cost what it may, for knowledge is power, and power is the only thing worth having in this worst of all possible worlds."

No wonder Billaud's curiosity was deep and burning with regard to the happenings about to take place in the chamber below the Sanctum, for certainly nothing stranger had ever taken place either on the ocean or beneath it since men first went down to the sea in ships.

As soon as Don Ramiero had closed the double doors he went to the telephone and rang up the bridge where the Second Officer was in charge. The bell tinkled in answer, and he said:

"Have you picked up the buoy yet, Mr. Martin?"

"We have just got it with the searchlight, sir; we shall be fast within five minutes. Shall I ring you up again as soon as we are?"

"If you please, when you are quite ready. There is no immediate hurry," said Don Ramiero, hanging up the transmitter.

Almost at the same moment Doctor Billaud knocked softly at the door of the spacious state-room in which Mercedes was lying, already in the first stage of convalescence. It was opened by the head nurse, the woman who had recognised the First Officer of the *Isola* as the man who had given her his name, and then disgraced it.

"Good evening, Miss Yuill," he said softly as he entered. "Ah, I see that our dear patient is sleeping very nicely. It is the best of signs. Yes, yes, we shall have her well, I hope by the time that we have exchanged these northern latitudes for the blue waters of the Mediterranean."

"Northern latitudes?" she echoed. "What do you mean, Doctor? I thought we were going straight from Leith to Monaco?"

"At the last moment our sailing orders were altered," he replied in a whisper, for he was now by the bedside and was feeling his patient's pulse with an almost imperceptible touch of his finger. "Have you not noticed how the temperature has fallen during the last twenty-four hours or so?"

"No," she murmured, remembering what had happened during her last walk on deck. "You see, we have been very busy, Miss Leven and I, and I am not a very good sailor; so what time I have had to spare I have spent lying down or else in the saloon."

"Quite so," he replied, with a keen look at her fair face and honest eyes; "but, my dear Miss Yuill, this will not do at all. With the work that you have to do, and will have to do for some days and nights to come, it is absolutely necessary that you should have fresh air and exercise. Yes, as Miss Staunton's physician, I must really insist upon it. You will, I am sure, oblige me by asking Miss Leven to relieve you at once, and then by taking a good half-hour's promenade on deck. I need hardly remind a lady of your experience that the perfect health of the nurse is often essential to the recovery of the patient."

His tone and manner meant even more than his words, and she felt that there was only one reply to them, and so, with a few murmured words of thanks for his consideration, she left the room.

"That is a woman of character," he said to himself when she had gone; "and if I can still read the human soul through the windows out of which it looks upon the world, she has seen sorrow very close to her, misery, perhaps. Yes, she has suffered, and therefore she should be able to help me. I shall be better here for the present. If she notices anything out of the way during her stroll most possibly she will consult me, and then we may be able to come to something like an understanding. A handsome woman, too, almost beautiful, indeed, and highly skilled—a perfect wife for a physician. Well, well, what nonsense I am talking! And your dear Elsie still serving her life-sentence in the Isle of Pines. Tut, tut, let us attend to business!"

At this moment there was a tap on the door and Miss Annie Leven, the second nurse, entered. She was an absolute contrast to Janet Yuill—dark-haired, rosy-cheeked, hazel-eyed, *petite* in figure and overflowing with health—a typical Scotch lassie.

Meanwhile Janet had reached the promenade deck. The wind was northerly, and she at once thought of the Doctor's words as she felt the keen nip of it on her face. The moon was down, but the sky was clear and gemmed with star-clusters as it only is in high northern latitudes.

After the first wandering glance and a moment's thought there was no doubt left in her mind as to the real meaning of that triangular patch of white far up in the midnight sky with the long, wavering lines hanging down from it. It was the summit of Mount Hekla, clothed with its glittering mantle of ice and snow, hung in mid-air under the star-shine more than five thousand feet above the smooth sea on whose surface the *Isola* was now lazily floating.

Yes, the yacht had stopped, and that was the snow-clad peak of Hekla, the great volcano of Iceland. It could not be anything else. She knew that it was the only mountain of such a height that could be seen from the surface of the North Sea.

What was the *Isola* doing here off the coast of Iceland,

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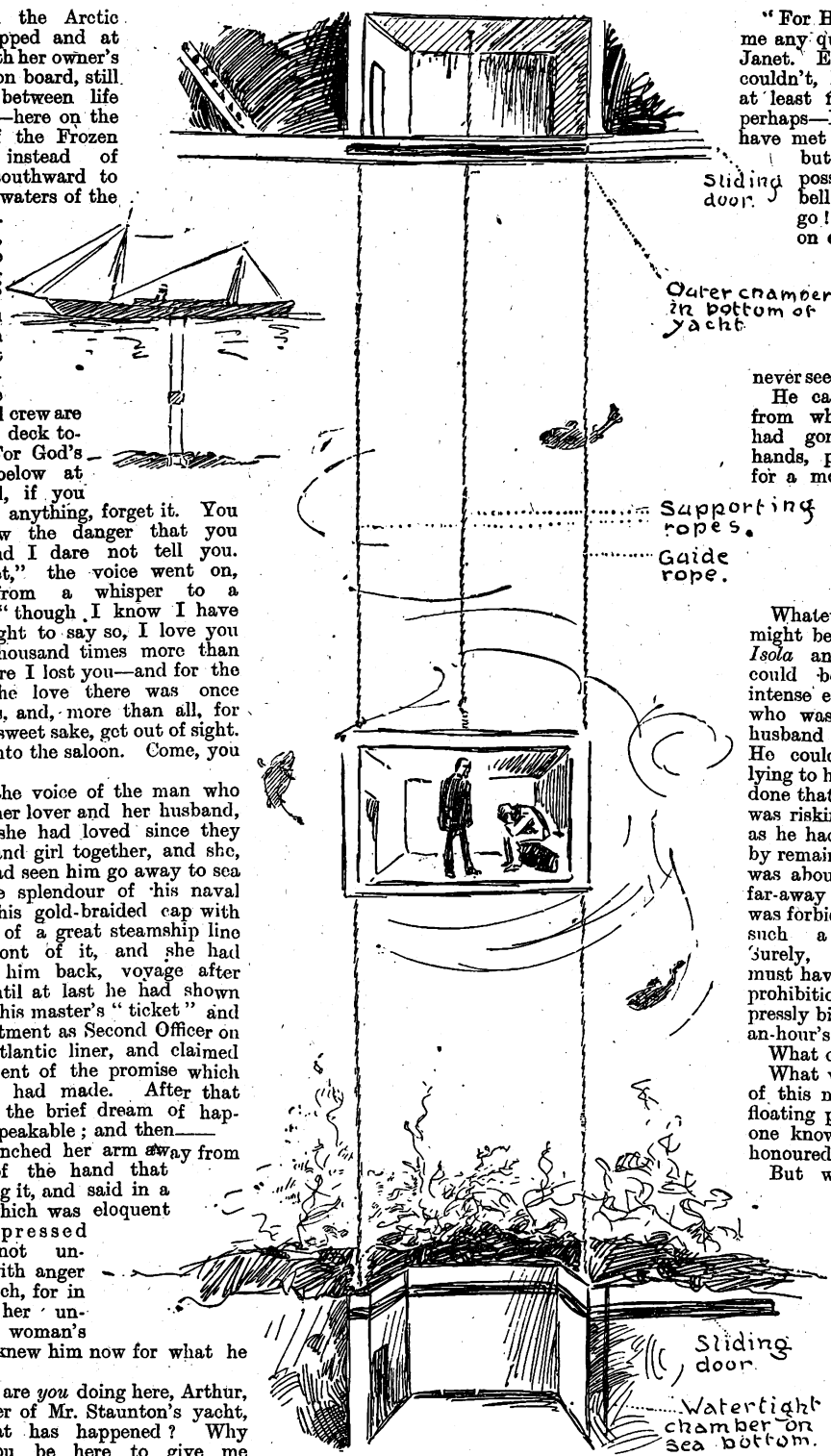
almost on the Arctic Circle, stopped and at anchor, with her owner's daughter on board, still wavering between life and death—here on the confines of the Frozen Ocean, instead of speeding southward to the sunny waters of the Inland Sea.

"Janet, what are you doing here? Have you not been told that no one except the officers and crew are allowed on deck to-night? For God's sake go below at once; and, if you have seen anything, forget it. You don't know the danger that you are in—and I dare not tell you. But, Janet," the voice went on, sinking from a whisper to a murmur, "though I know I have lost the right to say so, I love you more—a thousand times more than I did before I lost you—and for the sake of the love there was once between us, and, more than all, for your own sweet sake, get out of sight. Go back into the saloon. Come, you must!"

It was the voice of the man who had been her lover and her husband, the man she had loved since they were boy and girl together, and she, the girl, had seen him go away to sea in all the splendour of his naval suit and his gold-braided cap with the badge of a great steamship line on the front of it, and she had welcomed him back, voyage after voyage, until at last he had shown her father his master's "ticket" and his appointment as Second Officer on a crack Atlantic liner, and claimed the fulfilment of the promise which they both had made. After that had come the brief dream of happiness unspeakable; and then——

She wrenched her arm away from the grip of the hand that was holding it, and said in a whisper, which was eloquent with suppressed emotion not unmingled with anger and reproach, for in spite of her unquenched woman's love, she knew him now for what he was.

"What are *you* doing here, Arthur, First Officer of Mr. Staunton's yacht, after what has happened? Why should you be here to give me orders and warnings? Does Mr. Staunton know——"



This diagram shows how Ellerton was transported to the World beneath the Seas.

"For Heaven's sake, don't ask me any questions like that now, Janet. Even if I had time, I couldn't, I dare not, answer you, at least not here. Some day, perhaps—I hope so now that we have met against so strangely—but not now; it is impossible. Ah, there is the bell on the bridge. I must go! If there is anything on earth that is still dear to you, for its sake get out of sight before the watch comes on deck. If you were found here just now you might never see another sunrise."

He caught her left hand—from which the wedding ring had gone—between his two hands, pressed it passionately for a moment, and then, with a last look of eager appeal into her eyes, he released her and walked rapidly forward to the bridge ladder.

Whatever this terrible mystery might be which overhung the *Isola* and her doings, there could be no mistaking the intense earnestness of the man who was still, after all, her husband in the eye of the law. He could have no object in lying to her, and unless he had done that it was plain that she was risking her liberty, perhaps, as he had hinted, her very life, by remaining on deck. What was about to be done in this far-away part of the sea that she was forbidden to witness under such a terrible penalty? Surely, too, Doctor Billaud must have known of the strange prohibition, and yet he had expressly bidden her to take half-an-hour's walk on deck.

What could it all mean?

What was the real character of this millionaire's yacht, this floating palace which, as everyone knows, Royalty itself had honoured by its presence?

But while these questions were chasing each other through her brain, she saw silent, shadowy figures begin to creep quickly about the deck, and heard whispered orders pass from mouth to mouth.

She was no coward, but after what her husband had told her, it would have been mere folly to remain, and expose herself to insult and perhaps violence.

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She walked quickly to the saloon door on the other side of the deck to that on which the figures were moving, and slipped in just as a low whistle sounded from the bridge and the pad, pad of naked feet on the deck became louder.

TWELFTH CHAPTER.

To a City Beneath the Sea.

WHEN Darfield reached the bridge the rays of a small searchlight were shining on a little black buoy that was bobbing about on the water some fifty feet ahead of the *Isola*. There was nothing to distinguish it from the marks set by fishermen to indicate the position of their nets or lobster-pots—nothing to give the remotest hint that it was the clue to the greatest mystery of the twentieth century, a mystery which had been worrying the statesmen and financiers of Europe and America for nearly ten years past.

"You can lower away when you are ready, Mr. Martin," he said, after an anxious glance along the deck, as the Second saluted and left the bridge.

"Very well, sir. Everything is ready," was the reply.

A minute later a boat swung out on either side of the spar-deck and dropped almost noiselessly into the water. One of them pulled forward and took the end of a chain-cable which was being lowered out of one of the hawse-holes.

The yacht forged slowly up to the buoy, and when it was just under her sloping stem a man dressed in a diving-suit slipped over the side of the boat with the end of the chain in his hand and sank out of sight as the cranks of the air pump in the boat began to revolve.

Inside five minutes he came back up the rope-ladder which hung over the side and held out his hand. The end of an insulated wire, which communicated with the bridge, was passed to him, and he disappeared again.

He was a little longer below this time, and before he returned to the surface an electric bell tinkled in the chart-room in which Darfield was waiting with the telephone-receiver at his ear. The instrument began to buzz softly, and he said:

"Is that you, Herarra?"

"Yes, sir. We did not expect you so soon."

"No, this is a special trip. We have an important consignment for you. Is the chamber ready?"

"All ready, sir. Are we to expect the Señor?"

"No, he is in England. Señor Valdez and the Captain will bring the consignment to you as soon as we are ready. Stand by till I ring you up again."

"Very good, sir."

Then he went to another telephone and said to Don Ramiero, who was waiting in the Sanctum:

"Communication has been made, sir, and Herarra has the chamber ready."

"Very well. Tell him that the cable will be down in a minute or so. We are almost ready."

He hung up the receiver, went on to the platform, and descended into the lower chamber. Meanwhile the after-boat had picked up another mooring, and connected a cable with it.

"We are all fast, Captain," he said, with a glance at Ellerton's unconscious figure. "Mr. McAndrew can lower the cable as soon as he likes, and we had better get our patient below."

"Quite so, Señor," replied Darfield, going to the forward end wall and pressing a flat white button under one of the electric lights. One of the steel plates forming the wall fell back on a hinge. Beyond it was a sloping passage with a ribbed rubber floor leading down into the depths of the yacht amidships. At the lower end was an opening four feet high by three wide. Don Ramiero looked at the Captain and then at Ellerton. He understood, and between them they picked up the chair and carried Ellerton down the passage into the chamber at the end.

This was a little apartment, about the size of an ordinary passenger lift, but there were no seats in it, and so there was plenty of room for Ellerton's chair. When they had put it down Don Ramiero turned a switch, and a bulb in the roof began to glow. The Captain took a telephone transmitter from the wall, pressed a button, and said:

"Are you there, Mr. McAndrew? Yes. All ready? Very well. Run out the guiding-cable and the telephone wire, and when you hear that they have made fast below let me know. Thank you."

They waited for two or three minutes, during which they heard a sound as of a rope running swiftly over well-oiled bearings, over the fore part of the lift—for such this little chamber really was, though it was the strangest contrivance of its kind in the world. Then it stopped, and presently the bell rang.

"Yes," said the Captain, taking down the transmitter, "what's that? They've made fast? Good. Then I will close up and you may lower when I ring. Thank you. Good-bye for the present."

He turned a lever in the wall beside the opening by which they had entered, and a slab of steel slid noiselessly down, exactly fitting a rubber-padded slot which ran round three sides on the inside, and made the chamber both air and water-tight. At the same time Don Ramiero turned a little tap in the opposite wall and a cool stream of fresh air, stored under pressure in a reservoir in the roof, began to flow into the chamber.

The Captain touched the bell again, the lift sank about ten feet, and stopped; a heavy steel plate slid forward and covered the space it had left, then a portion of the yacht's double skin, a little to the starboard side of the keel, and just large enough for the diving-bell—for that is what the lift had now become—fell outward on a hinge and the water rushed in and surrounded the little chamber. The falling motion began again, and Ellerton had begun the first brief stage of his momentous journey to the Underworld.

The diving-chamber sank slowly, and in about five minutes it came quietly to rest on the bottom of the North Sea some sixty fathoms beneath the surface. The guiding-cable, down which it had slid from the yacht, led into another chamber which was structurally similar to the one which it had just left. It sank down, a heavy steel plate slid over it, a pair of rubber-lined jaws gripped the cable and stopped all inflow of water; another plate slid away from beneath, the water about the chamber fell away, and then it sank another twenty feet and came to rest.

"We have arrived," said the Captain, with a smiling look at Ellerton, "and before long this gentleman will, I suppose, awake in a new world. Ah, well, it is not to everybody that such wonderful experiences are given in these unromantic days. It is to be hoped that he will appreciate them at their proper value."

"It is at least somewhat doubtful," replied Don Ramiero drily, "the wonders will, of course, be there, Mr. Ellerton's appreciation of them under the peculiar circumstances is quite another matter."

At this moment the telephone bell rang three times. It was the signal that all was ready for the gates of the Underworld to be opened. Captain Durtal pulled the lever and the door-plate rose. A flood of soft light and a rush of cool, fresh air came in together, and an unmistakably Spanish tenor voice said:

"Welcome, Señors, to the Land beneath the Sea. Ah, and so this, I presume, is the consignment of which you told me over the telephone?"

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"Yes, Señor Herarra," replied Don Ramiero, in his most formal tones, "This gentleman," he continued, moving towards the chair, "is, as you see, seriously unwell. The Señor has come to the conclusion that a change of air will benefit him, and so he has instructed me to bring him into this retreat of ours and commend him to your most scrupulous care. Will you now be good enough to send a couple of your men to carry him to more comfortable quarters?"

"The Señor's wishes are the laws of the Underworld—which is his." replied Leon Herarra, a big, black-bearded, blue-eyed Andalusian, who, for a few years past, had been very badly wanted by the police of half the Governments of Europe, for the very sufficient reason that he possessed such an incomparable genius for coining and bank-note counterfeiting that the said Governments would have thought half a million sterling quite a reasonable price for his permanent retirement from business.

They had now begun to think that he had done so of his own free will and on a very handsome fortune. The fact was that he had accepted the very responsible position of Isolo Staunton's Viceroy in his Kingdom under the Seas.

"Excuse me a moment, Señors," he continued, stepping back into the passage. Then he called out in strongly-accented but perfectly plain English:

"Sigur, Elfreth, come here and bring two others. There is a precious burden to be borne. It is the Master's will."

There was a shuffling as of sandalled feet in the gallery, accompanied by a hoarse muttering of male voices, and the next moment four figures clad in grey woollen jumpers and short trousers appeared at the door.

If any of the late guests on board the *Isola* could, by any miracle of second sight, have been enabled to view the scene in the diving-chamber they would have been able to tell a story which the most credulous readers of newspaper sensations would have had some difficulty in believing. The four men who, in obedience to a few sharp orders from Herrara, took up the chair in which Ellerton sat, supported by a broad strap which the Captain had passed underneath his armpits and round the back, were in truth, not at all unlike those imaginary inhabitants of that other Underworld which the tellers of fairy-tales have pictured.

Although stunted in stature, and somewhat bent in shape, their shoulders were broad and their bare arms sinewy and muscular like their legs which were bare from the knee downwards. Their height was only an inch or so over five feet: but their heads were large enough for men of six feet. Their hair, cropped almost close to their skulls, was of a greyish white, and the skin of their faces, arms, and legs was almost of the same hue, and absolutely bloodless. Their eyes were covered with shades, as though to protect them from the glow of the electric lamps, which was, in fact, the case.

Such were the gnomes who, in the silence and semi-darkness of this world beneath the ocean, toiled like the slaves of some Eastern Genie, to increase the inexhaustible treasure whose possession made Isolo Staunton and his partner, Derrick Kesteven, the richest, and therefore, in the material sense at least, the most powerful men in the world.

Don Ramiero and the Captain followed Herarra and the bearers along the passage, which was some four hundred yards in length. The end was closed by a steel door similar to those in the water-tight compartments of warships. Herarra motioned to the bearers to stop, and putting his finger on a button at the side of the door, sent a signal in "longs and shorts," which, though inaudible in the tunnel, informed his second in command that the door was to be opened in the name of the Lord of the Underworld.

"I see that the precautions are as strict as ever, M. Herarra, said the captain in French, "and yet surely your domain should be safe enough even with open doors."

"Nothing is reasonably safe, Monsieur, until all possible precautions have been taken," replied the Spaniard in the same language. "We have these fellows pretty well in hand, but for all that, it would not do to let them know too much. Besides, you know, if by any means, through treason perhaps, the secret of our communication with the

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other world got known, this one gallery would be the extent of the invader's discovery. A knock on that door, or anything but the correct signal on the bell—and the door would remain fast and the gallery would be instantly flooded. No, no, we take no risks down here."

"And quite right, too!" laughed Captain Durtal, as the door slid slowly back in its grooves and they passed through into the ante-chamber of the Underworld.

The door closed again the moment they had entered, and as the bearers set their burden down at a sign from Herarra, he turned to Don Ramiero and asked:

"What are your wishes, Señor, as to the disposal of this gentleman, who, I presume, has had the misfortune to incur the displeasure of the Señor? Is it intended to terminate an existence which may have become superfluous or inconvenient?"

"No," replied Don Ramiero quickly, "it is not exactly that, although, with regard to the world which this gentleman has just left, it is so.

"His continued existence there has, unhappily, become an impossibility. For private reasons of his own, into which, as you are aware, it would be out of the question for us to inquire, the Señor has, as I may say, commuted sentence of death into one of perpetual banishment. I have your written instructions in my pocket, and if you will be good enough to let us have the use of one of your apartments for half-an-hour or so, I will give them to you and explain matters more fully."

"By all means and with the most cordial welcome, Señor," replied Herarra, with his most genial smile, for he was not a little pleased at being intrusted with what he rightly deemed to be a most important charge.

He gave a brief order to the bearers and as they resumed their burden, he went on:

"It is fortunate that I have just completed an extension of my dwelling-place. It was for that I asked for my last consignment of furniture. I have decorated it in Oriental style, and I venture to think you will find it comfortable. Will you be good enough to follow me."

They followed him and the bearers across the smoothly-levelled floor of a vast cavern from the invisible roof of which hung three great electric arc-lamps. Dim, almost ghost-like figures, clad as the bearers were, flitted hither and thither, all with bent heads and shaded eyes, most of them carrying burdens which, though small, appeared to be fairly heavy.

They passed through a roughly-hewn archway, one of several which led on all sides out of the vast ante-chamber, almost directly opposite the door by which they had entered, and came to a door which Herrara opened with a little key attached to his watch-chain.

When the bearers had gone through in obedience to a sign from him, he stood aside and said, with a motion of his left hand towards the door:

"Señors, do me the honour of entering."

Herarra closed the door behind them as they entered, and turned a couple of switches on a wooden panel just beside it. The dim glow of a single bulb overhead was instantly drowned in a flood of light which revealed to the visitors a scene in which the splendour of the East was admirably blended with the solid comfort of the West. The entrance-hall, as it might well be called, of the Viceroy's residence, was roofed with tent-like hangings of pale blue silk which, in the shimmer of the electric lights, looked strangely like the twilight sky of the Overworld, and its walls were hung with gorgeously-coloured carpets, the choicest products of Indian, Persian and Turkish looms. The floor of polished black stone was covered with skins of the white polar bear.

Their host turned to the right when they had gone about ten paces, and drew aside a curtain of heavy crimson silk, saying:

"This is the apartment, Señor Valdez, in which I propose to receive our guest. I trust that it may impress him favourably."

"Upon my word, Señor," exclaimed Don Ramiero, as his host switched on the lights and he looked about the magnificently-appointed chamber, "I must congratulate you on the excellence of your taste and the industry of your servants. Yildiz Kiosk itself has nothing to show like this. Our young friend should be fairly comfortable here."

"I hope so, Señor," replied Herarra, as he motioned to the bearers to put the chair in the middle of the room. "You may rest assured that no effort will be wanting on my part to reconcile him to his exchange of worlds—always supposing that I am instructed to do so."

"You are," said Don Ramiero, taking an envelope from the inside pocket of his coat. "Here are the orders of the Señor; you can consult them at your leisure. He will sleep for about an hour yet. During that time we can have a little necessary conversation, and you can send any cargo that you have available down to the lift. We must not keep the yacht waiting more than an hour, for we have an important appointment to keep a long way from here."

All the conversation with Herarra was conducted in Spanish, but his orders to the bearers were given in English, the only language, save their own ancient Norse, that the slaves of the Underworld were permitted to use.

Ellerton was lifted out of the chair and laid in a silken-hung recess in which a favourite of Haroun al Raschid himself might have been well content to repose.

Then Herarra, excusing himself for a moment, took the bearers to the door and sent them out, locking it behind them.

When he came back he was followed by three girls dressed in Oriental costume. They were exquisitely and yet strangely beautiful. Their features were small and almost perfectly regular. Their faces were bloodless, yet their skin was as clear as polished ivory, and their arms gleamed whitely through the gauze of their long, flowing sleeves. Their eyelids, golden-fringed, drooped over great sky-blue eyes, shielding them from the glow of the lights, and their pale yellow hair fell over their shoulders in shimmering ripples which almost touched the floor behind them as they walked.

Each of them carried a large silver salver. On one stood a couple of bottles of champagne, on the other some glasses and little bottles of liqueurs, and on the third silver trays filled with cigars and cigarettes.

"You see, Señors," said Herarra with a smile which showed two rows of brilliantly white teeth under his black moustache, "that we are well served in other ways than mere labour. I regret that my wife is not at present well enough to do the honours of her home, but she has sent three of her handmaids to wait upon us. A glass of wine and a cigar will make a pleasant conversation all the pleasanter. I presume that you do not wish our guest to be awakened——"

"No, no," replied Don Ramiero quickly. "It might be dangerous to disturb him before the time I mentioned, and you will see that it is the Señor's desire that he should awake amidst his new surroundings as from a dream, and with no links to connect him with the past."

"I fully understand you, Señor. His second existence shall be as distinct from his first as though he had been spirited away to another planet," answered Herarra as he proceeded to open one of the bottles of champagne.

———

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"Old John Sargent's daughter; he died when she was a child, you know, and left his entire fortune to her."

"Why isn't she married?"

"They say she has buried her heart in Charlie Cutter's grave. You remember poor Charlie was thrown from his horse some five years ago and broke his neck and her heart at one blow. She is a fine girl, though, isn't she? No use trying to get her, Billy. Settle down and calm yourself. My sister says she never had a spark of sentiment about her anyway, but now she seems to have lost all interest in anything. Oh, no, not a mean streak in her nature. She is very generous with her money, but gives as though she did not care a straw what she was giving to—unnatural, very."

"By Jove, I think the girl has a heart within her, and if I were going to be in town this winter, I would try and reach it! She walks like a queen. What is she doing here?"

"Going to the cemetery. She has a key to the side entrance and they say she comes here at all hours of the day or night, but there is never a flower on Charlie's grave. She makes no outward show."

"Does she live alone?"

"No; houseful of servants, and a cousin or something as a companion; she used to do 'slumming, but I heard she got mixed up in a row one night and was hustled off to the police-station before the policeman found out who she was, but the whole force apologised, and she was sent home, so they say, in the Black Maria. Anyway she gets someone else to slum nowadays, and she pays the bills."

"Is she a blue-stocking?"

"Oh, steady, Will, she is nothing but what a man would want his wife, mother, or sister to be—with a couple of millions thrown in.

"She goes on the Continent, so Sallie says, every time she hears of anyone who wants a start in art or science, and pretends it is a favour to her that the poor student accepts a couple of years' receipted bills.

"She runs a free children's school and dances beautifully.

"She takes a box by the season at the Gaiety, and turns it over to the young folks like the dear that she is; but, by Jove, she would give you the same kind of a nod, if she met you, as she would her cook, and there would be no more heart or soul in her greeting than in a dish of uncooked mushrooms.

"I hate to have a woman so independent and so polite that one can't catch hold of a straw for a good foundation for criticism. I wish you were going to be here, Billy. If one could move her, you could. But she is beautiful and no mistake. Here comes Ned in his trap—alone, too—good luck, we'll ride home! Hi! Ned! Room for two? Thanks."

That day Dorothy Sargent entered the silent City of the

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Dead with more than sadness in her sweet face, and as she reached the grave that held all that was mortal of the one man she had ever loved, she pressed her face against the marble cross, and in her anguish cried aloud, "Help me, dearest!"

Suddenly, as though the load were lifted from her heart, and her prayer answered, she sprang from the ground and hurried home.

Going at once to her room, she took from her desk three letters; bowing her head upon her hands, she whispered, "Whatever is is right, my love will guide me. I will be satisfied."

A messenger had brought her the first letter from the Metropolitan Club. She drew it from the envelope, and re-read the lines she knew she would have to answer.

"*Before you opened the envelope which holds this letter, Dorothy Sargent, you knew who was the writer, and you knew what he had to tell you.*

"*By breaking the seal you have proved you are willing once again to listen to me.*

"*I have returned to my native land after an exile of ten weary years. God knows I did my best to give my wife the love she craved, and he knows I did my best to make her happy, and was as true as steel to her, but in His wisdom, which I dare not question, He gave her pure mind the power of seeing beyond what I gave her, and the dear child returned to her Maker broken-hearted, leaving me and our four motherless children to you, my one love, my one thought, and my dearest wish.*

"*Would that you were poor, that I might give to you what you could not otherwise have!*

"*Nothing but pity for Marion's children, for my children, can tempt you to come to me now? Come! I will make you love me, I will, and you must know it.*

"*No man ever gave to a woman a purer love than is offered to you again.*

"*Give to me this one word I crave, in the name of the innocent woman who knew she held the heart that belonged to another. I cry to you—and not in vain?*" "JOHN H. NORTON."

Rigid and white as death she threw the letter on the burning coals, and watched the flames devour the paper till there was nothing left but a grey mass that trembled and fell to pieces as a whiff of wind blew across the grate.

Opening the second letter she read:

"DEAREST,—*For the years I have known and loved you, I have never till now dared to tell you of my love.*

"*You were rich, I was poor. Shame on me that I would so belittle you! As though you did not know an honest man's heart is worth more than Crœsus' wealth.*

"*You know what I have done in the scientific world, but you do not know that what I have accomplished has been through you, and that for you alone I have succeeded.*

"*I dare now to offer you the heart and life which will go on and on working for you, spurred by the glorious knowledge that you have said, 'I love you.'*

"*May I go to you and take you in my arms and hold you close to the heart that beats for you alone?*

"*That I have told you of my love makes me happy. That you will bid me come is the prayer of—Thine,*" "SYLVESTER NEWCOMB."

As the poor girl finished reading this letter, she threw it, as she had done the other, in the fire. As she watched it burn she said aloud, "I could be happy with him; his profession would be more to him than he imagines, and he might not see I cannot love as he does."

And she read the third letter:

"MY DEAR DOROTHY,—*You were a little girl when I saw you first. I loved you then because your beautiful eyes were so like those God had given to the woman I was soon to marry.*

"*You know of the short year of happiness which was granted me, and you know what a long, weary life I have had since my wife died.*

"*You, dear, have been, and are, the one woman in this world to whom I can offer myself and what is left of my life and heart.*

"*I do love you, not with the boyhood passion you may crave, but with the true and honest love of a man old enough to be your father. For years I have loved you thus, and would not tell you, dear. I wanted you to have the happiness which a younger man might give you, and I loved you so tenderly, I wanted you to have what would please you most.*

"*You know your own heart's story. I do not ask you to tell me anything, but, if you will be my wife, I will do all in my power to make you as happy as I know you can make me.*

"*Send me one word, dear, and I will promise to watch over the treasure God has trusted to my care, if you will bid me come.—Faithfully yours,*" "THOMAS OTIS SEWELL."

"He asks so little! I ought to be able to live with him and be happy. I will be making less sacrifice if I say 'Come' to him, and his dear old gentle life will be a benediction indeed."

With tears in her eyes she laughed aloud as she threw this last letter into the fire, and while watching it burn she said:

"I can't marry them all."

Taking a sheet of paper in her hand and smoothing it gently, as though giving it a little blessing, she dipped her pen in the ink, and with a shudder as though it were with her blood she were writing, she wrote the one word—"Come!"

Folding the paper she put it in an envelope and sealed it.

She then drew another sheet from the case before her and wrote upon it—

"MY DEAR, DEAR FRIEND,—*I love you too well to give myself to you, and myself is all I have to give.*

"*God grant you may find a woman worthy of your honest love, is the prayer of,*" "DOROTHY SARGENT."

Inclosing this letter in an envelope and sealing it, she gave a sigh of relief, and took another sheet of paper, on which she wrote a similar reply.

And she sealed this, as she had the others, and went to the library, leaving all three of her answers on her desk.

Touching the bell in the hall as she passed through, the butler answered her call.

"James, tell Poole to bring me the three letters on my desk. She may stamp them first."

Her maid brought her the letters. Stepping to the table, she bowed her head and whispered: "God help me to direct these aright."

She directed one to John Norton, the second to Professor Sylvester Newcomb, and the third to Thomas Otis Sewell.

To which would the fateful missive go?

Louise Clark.

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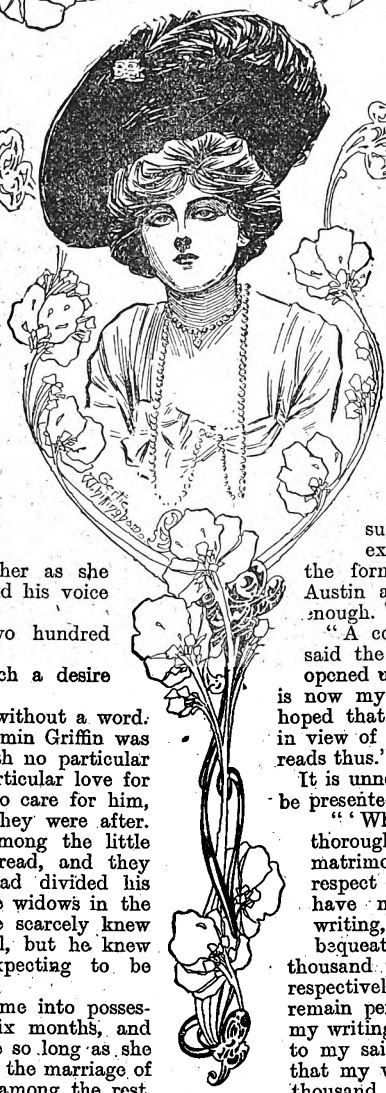

Telling How Seven Women—Wealth, and —Chose Between Love and the Result.

"WHAT does this mean?" he asked.

"Reuben——"

She hesitated.

"Well?"

"I fear—that an obstacle has arisen to our marriage."

"What obstacle could arise?"

"Two hundred thousand pounds have been bequeathed to me, on condition that I should not——"

Again she hesitated.

"Marry?"

"Yes."

He grew paler, and stood looking at her as she averted her eyes. Presently he spoke and his voice quivered:

"And you, choosing between the two hundred thousand and me, prefer the money."

"It is such a fortune, and I have such a desire for it!"

Reuben Austin, turning away, left her without a word. It was certainly a strange will, but Benjamin Griffin was a strange man. He died a bachelor, with no particular love for anybody and no one had any particular love for him. True, his few relatives pretended to care for him, but he knew that it was his money they were after. Consequently there was consternation among the little band of mourners when the will was read, and they learnt that the eccentric Benjamin had divided his fortune equally among seven marriageable widows in the town of Rathbone, where he resided. He scarcely knew them, for he avoided the sex in general, but he knew that they were all anxious—nay, expecting to be married again at no distant day.

The condition was that each should come into possession of her two hundred thousand in six months, and should continue in possession of the same so long as she remained unmarried; and in the event of the marriage of one, her share should be equally divided among the rest.

The seven widows walked out of the house. Before nine o'clock that evening there were seven miserable men in Rathbone. Six received peremptory orders to cease their attentions. The seventh, a good-looking young man with bright eyes and honest countenance, called on Mrs. Douglas, with what result we have seen. With her, as with the others, money overbalanced love.

The six other widows watched her house to see if he repeated his visits. They were wishing he would, for her share would then fall to them. The last week but one before the six months had passed, Reuben Austin was busy in his shop whistling at his work, trying to be merry, though he had lost twenty pounds since he lost his love.

"Reuben!"

"Good Heavens!"

That exclamation will help to convey an idea of the thrill that went through him at the sound of the familiar voice.

He turned and saw Mrs. Douglas standing in the doorway.

"Reuben, I shall not take the money!"

"Do you prefer me?"

"Yes."

"Dearest!"

It was in broad daylight or he would have caught her in his arms after the usual fashion.

Before the week was out they were married, and the other six rejoiced. In a day or two, according to notification, the heirs would hear from the executor.

Mrs. Austin, once Mrs. Douglas, was summoned with the rest. They found exactly the same company present as on the former reading. Everyone stared at Mrs. Austin as she came in, but she looked happy enough.

"A codicil to the will read six months ago," said the executor, "then sealed and not to be opened until now, was attached. That codicil it is now my business to read to you. It is to be hoped that no one will be unpleasantly disappointed in view of the terms laid down in said codicil which reads thus."

It is unnecessary to give it all here. Enough will be presented to make everything clear.

"'Whereas I, Benjamin Griffin, having a thorough disgust of money considerations in matrimonial projects, and entertaining a high respect for matrimonial affection and fidelity, have made my last will and testament in writing, bearing date, etc., and have hereby bequeathed the value of my fourteen hundred thousand pounds to seven widows of, etc., named respectively, etc., on condition that each shall remain perpetually unmarried; now I do by this, my writing—which I hereby declare to be a codicil to my said will—I do hereby order and declare that my will is that only the sum of one hundred thousand be under the provisions stated divided among said, etc., provided each shall, notwithstanding the temptation I have set in her way, remain true to her matrimonial engagement with the gentleman she now lovingly professes to be the choice of her heart.

"'In case one or any of the said, etc., should discard or fail to marry said man of her choice, I do hereby order and declare that the said sum or sums shall to her or them be forfeited; and if one or any of the said, etc., remain true to said, etc., share or shares falling to the lot of those who prove untrue, shall be given to her or them in equal shares.'"

"The hundred thousand pounds then falls to Mrs. Austin, who, I believe, is the only one among the within-named parties who has adopted the course which secures a title to the money bequeathed."

Six disappointed women filed out of the room. The rest of the fortune was divided among relatives.

"I am so glad that I was true to you, dear," said Mrs. Austin to her husband. "We will be so happy!"

Emily Howell.

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The Early Bird.

"You will come home early, won't you?" she said, as he was starting for the club. "Oh, yes; I'll come home early," he replied. "But, of course, dear," she persisted, "you understand that I mean early to-night, not early to-morrow morning?"

He Needed Prompting.

"You protest that you love me, Emily, but I am still waiting for the first kiss." "Well, why do you wait?"

A Wise Woman.

"They say her husband gratifies her smallest wish." "Very likely. She knows better than to have any big wishes."

Proof Positive.

Mabel: "I hope I didn't break Jack's heart when I refused him." Dora: "I don't think you did. He offered it to me the next day."

Circumstances Alter Cases.

She: "I shall have to refuse you again." He: "But this is positively the last time I shall propose." She: "Oh, well, that's different. Why didn't you say so?"

Cause For Grumbling.

"He tried to kiss me and I just told him to behave," said an irate young lady after a ball. "Well, did he kiss you?" asked her friend. "No. He behaved."

Happily Married.

Mrs. Nextdoor: "I suppose your daughter is happily married?" Mrs. Nagsby: "Indeed she is. Why, her husband is actually afraid to open his mouth in her presence."

Rough on Bertha.

Bertha: "I think Harry is soft enough for anything." Bessie: "So do I. Oh, by-the-way, dear, that reminds me. Last night I overheard him say he was going to propose to you."

A Great Attraction.

Fred: "So you are going to marry Miss Millyuns, eh? I don't see what you can find to admire in a girl of her stamp." Joe: "My dear boy, it isn't her stamp that attracts me; it's her cheque. See?"

An Apparent Deduction.

"This is a pretty time of night for that girl next door to be playing the piano!" remarked an indignant lady to her husband. "Oh, she's no respecter of time! You can tell that from the way she's playing!" rejoined he.

His Love Was Great But His Wealth Was Not.

Lover: "You are getting prettier every day." Sweet Girl: "Just now I am living on brown bread and water to improve my complexion." "How long can you keep that up?" "Oh, indefinitely." "Then let's get married."

Identification.

"Come here, my little Eddie," said a gentleman to a youngster of seven years of age, while sitting in the parlour where a large company was assembled, "do you know me?" "Yes, sir; I think I do." "Who am I, then? Let me hear." "You are the man who kissed sister Angeline last night in the parlour." Angeline fainted.

A Paying Profession.

"What's his business?" "Well, as near as I can make out he is matrimonial agent for his two daughters."

Rather Curious.

Watson: "Women are always curious." Johnson: "My wife isn't curious a bit." Watson: "Then she must be a curious woman."

He Was Bunkered.

Beatrice: "You know, Will said he'd like to be caught playing golf?" Patience: "Yes." "Well, I caught him on the links this afternoon. We're engaged."

A Most Unfortunate Scribe.

"He's an unfortunate man of letters." "Why, I never heard he was an author." "Well, he was the author of several letters that lost him a breach of promise case."

Not to Blame.

"Here, we have only been married two days, Clarence, and you're scolding me already." "I know, my dear, but just think how long I have been waiting for the chance."

Pa Mistook the Young Man's Mission.

"I am going to marry your daughter, sir," said the positive young man to the father. "Well, you needn't come to me for sympathy," replied the father. "I have troubles of my own."

Mutual Disapprobation.

Mrs. A. Cerbity: "You have accepted George? Why, you know very well that I don't approve of him." Her Daughter: "That's all right, mother. Neither does he approve of you!"

How Disappointed She Was.

Jack: "I have just received a telegram saying that a rich aunt, my only relative, has died and left me——" His Fiancée (eagerly): "Yes, and left you——" Jack: "All alone in the world."

Out of the Frying Pan.

Harris: "Walter has been looking pretty bad since his daughter got married, hasn't he?" Correll: "Yes; you see, he had no sooner got his daughter off his hands than he found he would have to put her husband on his feet."

She Anticipated Troubles.

Mabel: "Yes, dear, I will be a helpmate to you, and try to lighten the daily troubles and worries of your life as best I can." Arthur: "But I have none, darling." Mabel: "Oh, you old goose! I mean when we are married, of course!"

Hopeful Girl!

He (timidly): "Now that we are engaged, I—I presume I may—may kiss you as much as I please, mayn't I?" She (encouragingly): "Yes, indeed. Make the most of your time, dear. There's no telling how long an engagement will last nowadays, you know."

Fickle Woman!

"I am the unluckiest man alive!" "What's the matter?" "Why, I heard that she was engaged, so I went round and proposed to her, so that she wouldn't think I had been trifling with her." "And wasn't she engaged?" "Yes; but she broke it off. She said my love was more sincere than his."

He Came from Sussex.

She was pretty and sweet and poetic, and he was young and mischievous. "Oh, how I love to sit out here in the moonlight," she cooed; "to be fanned by the languorous perfumes of the roses and to be kissed by the soft airs from the south!" Then he kissed her and she grew indignant. "How dare you?" she almost sobbed. "Why, I'm a soft heir from the south," he replied. She didn't say anything when he kissed her again.

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The opinion of the Rev. F. F. Taylor, of Suddenham, near Manchester, who writes:—"I like Dr. Tibbles' Vi-Cocoa very much, and have used it every day. I believe it is all you represent it to be. It is far away to be preferred to tea, coffee, and other cocoas," is the opinion of thousands.

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By sending your name and address to the **Capillus Mfg. Company, 57 Century House, Regent Street, London, W.**, you will receive a full description of this simple and remarkable method, which will enable you to remove all superfluous hair at home at a very slight expense. The description is posted to you free in a perfectly plain and sealed envelope, and you should have no hesitancy in writing. You will be delighted to learn how easily and surely superfluous hair can be permanently and painlessly removed, and it **will pay you to write to-day. Don't neglect to do so.**

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

After the Dance.

"I MET a young man at a dance recently," writes "ADA," "but did not care for him at all. The other day, I saw him coming along the street, and avoided him. Was this a breach of etiquette, and should I see him again. Am I forced to recognise him?"

* * * * *

It is largely a matter of choice whether or not a girl resumes the acquaintance of a man whom she has met casually. If you have some definite reason for disliking him, and not wishing to know him, you can avoid noticing him without breaking a social rule. On the other hand, I do not advocate "cutting" people without very good reason. If the young man was merely harmless, and not really objectionable, a bow from you would do no harm, and you would avoid hurting his feelings. At the same time, men should bear in mind that it is the woman's prerogative to signify whether or not she wishes to resume a man's acquaintance. If she definitely shows that she does not wish to do so, he should avoid, when next meeting her, giving the impression that he wishes to press his acquaintance on her.

Family v. Lover.

"A READER." I am always pleased to hear opinions of my readers on any question I may discuss in this page, even if they do not agree with my own. I do not pretend to be infallible, especially on such vexed questions as some readers submit, and very often there is a good deal to be said on the other side. A week or so back, I advised lovers not to omit civility and kindness to their sweetheart's families, as a girl resented anything like a slight on her people. Now you say "you would not give a snap of the finger for a girl who loved her family more than you." You add that, "if a girl truly loves a man, she will decide with him against the whole world."

* * * * *

Now, this sounds very pretty, and is, I know, what we are always taught in stories to believe to be right. But you must remember that there are times in the stages of love when a girl, though she may feel deeply drawn towards a man, is not disposed to take his part against those whom she has loved all her life—her parents. Anything like a slight to them might arouse such feelings of resentment that her whole attitude might be changed towards the man she thought she loved. When a man and woman are bound together in love, and any dispute arises in which the woman has to choose between her family and himself, I believe it is right for love to win the victory. But experience proves that a good many things may happen to destroy what is supposed to be "love," and the instance I gave is among them.

Is Twenty Too Young to Marry?

"Is twenty too young for a man to marry?" asks "PERCY," who is that age, and engaged.

* * * * *

In my opinion, yes. Another two or three years, at least, should elapse before you take the step. At twenty, a man is far from having reached maturity in mind or body, and to be saddled with the cares of a household, and perhaps a family, so early in life must affect his working powers in business.

A Too Flippant Girl.

"THOMAS" is troubled by a young lady who is too flippant. He thinks he is very fond of her, but finds that whenever he talks seriously to her, she turns it into a joke. She is very fond, too, of chaffing him, and making him a laughing stock, which "THOMAS" cannot bear.

* * * * *

If, after knowing you better, "THOMAS," the girl continues to tease you, and you still find that it makes you unhappy, I think you had better let the affair drop. If one person has a sense of humour, or is frivolous, and the other very serious, I do not think they can be very well suited to each other. You will both find the other a source of irritation as time goes on, for humour must be shared and not one-sided.

A Case for an Apology.

"I USED to go out a great deal with a girl friend," writes WALLACE, "but one day, I was worried over business, and said something which offended her. She left me soon after, rather coldly, and did not see me again for some time. Then I heard that another man was paying her attentions. Now I find that I am really much fonder of the girl than I thought, and that she is necessary to my happiness. But what am I to do? I offended her, and another man took my place."

* * * * *

There can be no possible harm in your offering your apologies to her for your rudeness, and asking permission to see her again. If she consents, then you may take it that she has forgiven you, and that she is not committed to the attentions of your rival. If otherwise, and she will not consent to your meeting again, you must realise that you have lost her, and I fear, rather through your own fault.

Love and Business.

"I AM in love with a girl," writes "UNDECIDED" (Johannesburg), "and thinks he returns my affection. My prospects are not very bright at present. Would it be right for me to propose to the girl, and tell her all, for it may be years before I can marry. Would it not be better if I avoided her altogether?"

* * * * *

You do not yet know whether the girl returns your love. Would it not be better for you to avoid even broaching the subject of marriage until you know her better? As to your prospects, tell her candidly what they are. It will be a test of her love to see whether she, knowing the truth, is willing for you to continue paying her attentions. As to the wisdom of your proposing, or avoiding her altogether, certainly the wiser course would be the latter. You have to make way for yourself in the world, and in a colony, and a man in that position should certainly give as much of his attention as possible to business. To be committed to marriage might handicap you in the struggle, and would be placing a great tie on the girl.

Cynthia.

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Offered by THE BOYS' LEADER, "The Paper a Boy can take Home." Published by the Proprietors of "Pearson's Weekly," &c.

The Editor of THE BOYS' LEADER offers a Situation in the Offices of PEARSON'S WEEKLY, THE BOYS' LEADER, &c., and a salary of £100 a year to commence with, to a boy; and a like Situation and Salary of £100 a year to a girl.

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SIX QUESTIONS WILL APPEAR EVERY WEEK IN "THE BOYS' LEADER."

THIS IS THE FIRST SET.

1. *Who wrote Robinson Crusoe?*
2. *What famous British soldier is known as "Bobs"?*
3. *Who is your favourite hero (not fiction), and why?*
4. *Who made most runs in first-class cricket this summer?*
5. *Which is your favourite book, and why?*
6. *When was King Edward VII. born. Give year and day?*

The Second Set of Questions will appear in THE BOYS' LEADER (1d. every Tuesday), on Tuesday, November 10.

It will be noticed that some of the questions call for an expression of opinion only, and others you will have to search for in books.

Cut out and paste these questions on a sheet of foolscap paper numbering it No. 1. Write your reply to No. 1. immediately below, and then follow with No. 2, and so on, saying in what book you found the information and who helped you to find it.

Anybody may help you provided you say who. No competitor must be over 21 years of age. No reply must exceed fifty words. Keep all replies until the last set appears and until we tell you to send them in. Write plainly in ink on one side of the paper.

HINTS

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Parents and friends may be able to tell you many of the replies, and you can use this information provided you tell us how you obtained it.

This competition will be a valuable education for a boy or girl, even if they do not wish to enter for the prizes.

The two successful competitors will be given the choice, after we have arranged with their parents, of entering one of the following departments of our offices:—The Editorial Department, the Art Department, the Counting House.

Should the winners live outside London, we have no doubt we shall be able to arrange with their parents as to their residence.

At all events, here is an opportunity for some boy and some girl to put their feet on the first rung of Fortune's Ladder, and we hope every parent who has his child's interest at heart will make an effort on their behalf

---

THE BOYS' LEADER is the best paper a boy and girl can read. It is only a few weeks' old, but has already, by reason of its healthy tone, taken the first place in this class of literature; and articles and stories are contributed by **Jules Verne, George Manville Fenn, Theodore Roosevelt** (President of the United States), **Sir Henry Seton-Karr, M.P., Major Baden-Powell, T. P. O'Connor, M.P., Lord Ernest Hamilton,** the late **Max O'Rell, the Duke of Argyle, General Sir Evelyn Wood, G.C.B., &c., &c.**

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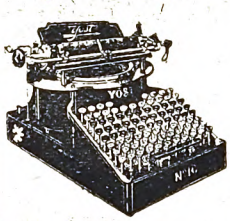

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SHORT STORIES

No. 777.] Week ending November 21, 1903. [Price One Penny.

WHAT AWFUL SIGHT IS THAT SHE SEES?

(A Very Thrilling Incident from "THE PURSUIT OF SARA." See inside.)

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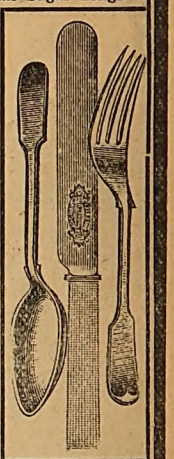

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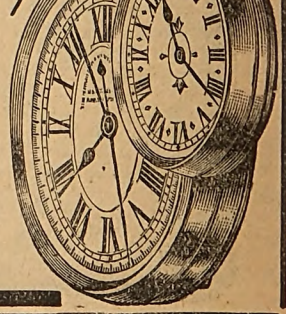

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 777.] Week Ending November 21st, 1903. [One Penny.

Fascinating New Series.

The names of persons mentioned in this series are not necessarily the correct ones.

THE PURSUIT OF SARA

For New Readers.

Miss Sara Gillespie, the relater of these experiences, was a typine in the firm of Templeton & Co.

The partners in the firm, Mr. Templeton, Mr. Harrington Shackell, and Mr. Rigby Starr, treated Sara most courteously, especially the senior partner, who, before very long, induced her to tell him all about her absent lover, Noel Masterman.

Noel was the nephew of Sir Francis Masterman, who in his will left him a thousand pounds. With this money he intended to buy a doctor's practice, and to give up the situation he was holding, that of medical attendant to a gentleman who was travelling on the Continent.

He came home to England on the death of the Baronet, but was soon recalled by telegram to Nice, as his patient had shown bad symptoms.

Noel was, however, loth to give up the idea of purchasing the practice he had in view, so, leaving the thousand pounds with them in notes, he signed a document authorising Templeton & Co. to act for him.

By a piece of trickery the firm converted this into a document authorising them to deal *with his whole estate.* He was heir to the Baronetcy, in the event of the present holder of the title, Sir Herbert, his cousin, having no son.

The next day Sara overheard the three partners gloating over the probable success of their schemes.

Then she was amazed and horrified to hear Shackell relate how, posing as Sir Herbert's valet, he had murdered the Baronet in cold blood, and had been most careful to leave no clues behind him.

Little by little she understood the full meaning of the vile plot the scoundrels had in hand.

Her betrothed was now Sir Noel Masterman, and Templeton & Co. had full power over his estate!

She resolved on a bold scheme—to get possession of the notes and the document. Bursting into the room, she eluded her astounded employers, seized the precious papers, and fled.

Besides the £1,000 in notes, she had about five pounds with her. Sara wired to Noel to return at once, and she then took train to Bedford.

While there a murderous attack was made on her by Rigby Starr, disguised as a nurse.

He endeavoured to push Sara into the river by Newnham Bridge, but in his eagerness he was nearly drowned himself.

Sara escaped, and, still retaining the all-important paper relating to her lover's inheritance, made her way to Northampton.

Templeton & Co., she knew, would leave no stone unturned to find her; no course would be too desperate for them to take in order to regain the document.

At Northampton Sara rescued a little boy from death, and thereby gained the devoted friendship of a young girl named Maggie Dunkley. To her she confided all her troubles.

In this town, Sara was led to believe that Noel was an inmate of a lunatic asylum.

In disguise, Harrington Shackell enticed Sara to the race-course, saying that he would rescue Noel for her.

Sara went, as invited, and another desperate attempt was then made by the firm to recover the papers.

They were, however, outwitted, and Miss Gillespie fled to Leicester. Here she met Sidney Ilford, an agent of the firm, who informed Sara that a reward of £100 was offered for her arrest.

She just managed to run away from him, but underwent another perilous adventure before the day was out.

Her only plan was to disguise herself so as to escape recognition, and this she managed successfully to do.

She received a telegram from Maggie Dunkley, telling her that Noel had arrived in Northampton, and would be with Sara the following day.

Miss Gillespie went to the appointed meeting-place—the canal; but Noel was very late, and Sara, fearing a trap, got on board a barge.

Imagine her horror when she found herself confronted by—Sidney Ilford! She was gagged and bound, in the power of Templeton and Co.!

Presently Noel appeared on the bank in search of Sara. He boarded the barge, but Ilford lied discreetly.

Sara's agony became too great to bear, for *Noel was about to leave!*

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THE PURSUIT OF SARA

A HOUSE OF MYSTERY IN BIRMINGHAM.

THE moments of suspense that followed! For a moment a faint hope flickered that even at the last Noel would turn back to save me, and then the echo of his footsteps died away, and my heart sickened within me at the thought that he had gone.

He, my lover, had left me to the tender mercies of his enemies. The knowledge stunned me like a blow; I fell back almost fainting; my heart beat heavily, painfully, there came a horrible dryness in my mouth, my tongue was parched. I lay helpless as a log, all feeling, all emotion, numbed.

Since the evening of my flight from London I had suffered danger, anxiety, pain; but through it all I had been buoyed up by the hope of re-union with Noel, my courage had not left me, nor my endurance flagged until this moment, when it seemed my lover had abandoned me. To be in sight, in hearing, in reach of the woman he loved, and not to know that she was there! In my despair I was ready to judge him harshly, unkindly, yet all the time my heart was crying out for him. Noel, Noel! How I craved for his voice and touch!

After a while I was roused from my state of stupor. Opening my eyes I beheld Sidney Ilford bending over me.

"You're faint," he said, and looped back the awning, so that the fresh air might fan my face. He placed a cushion under my head, and presently reappeared with a cup of tea.

"You're just about done for," he said quietly. And then, "You had better listen to me and act reasonably. It isn't to be supposed I entertain very kindly feelings towards you, considering you've done your best to kill me. All the same, I don't want a dead body on my hands, and as things are now you look uncommonly like pegging out. You're white as death, except where you're pale green. If you'll undertake to keep quiet, not to shout or scream, or play me any tricks, I'll untie those ropes and let you walk about a bit; also I'll let you take a cup of tea. Now, do you agree?" I signed consent, and stooping down, he deftly slipped the gag out of my mouth.

"Where are you taking me?" I asked in a wild, trembling sort of voice.

"Uncertain. You'll be handed over to Templeton some-time to-night, but for the next two or three hours you'll be here in my charge. If you'll give me your word not to try to escape, or to play up any of your dodges, as I said before, I'll untie you."

Aching in every limb, bruised in spirit, sick at heart, I was too weak to combat his offer. One stipulation I made, however:

"I'll be quiet for half an hour," I said. "That is to say, I won't call out or try to jump overboard myself, or to push you. At the expiration of that time my promise ends. I shall——"

"You'll be tied up again, my dear," he said facetiously. "I shouldn't let you go now if you did not look half dead."

I suppose I looked almost as bad as I felt, and Ilford, as I had already discovered, was essentially a coward. If I were to die upon the barge, it would be awkward for him!

Free from my bonds, I crept to the end of the barge, and watched the flat shores on either side with wide, despairing eyes. Through the grey light of the closing day the trees loomed ghastly and forlorn. The cries of the town in the distance came strange and hollow over the water. The horse plodding steadily along the towpath drew the barge slowly, monotonously on its course. We had reached a long stretch of the canal, there was not a lock in sight.

Ilford, seated at a convenient distance, near enough to watch my every movement, yet not so near as to endanger his safety should I break my word and attack him, smoked a pipe of peace. The boy lounged at the end, and lazily whistled an old tune. To all appearances we were a happy, peaceful trio, content with ourselves and our surroundings.

To my surprise, Sidney Ilford made no mention of the notes. I feared a cross-examination, or, worse still, an attempt to force them from my possession. He did not, however, refer to them, but smoked in silent satisfaction, casting quick glances in my direction every now and then.

I realised afterwards that my surmise as to the reason for his conduct was correct. The advent of Noel had startled him. For the first time, the possibility of the accomplished gang of scoundrels, of which he was a member, being brought to justice had occurred to him. He decided to minimise his chances of conviction, and to take no active part in my ill-treatment. He would deliver me into Templeton's hands, and then, his task concluded, could claim his portion of the spoil afforded by my capture with a light heart.

Across the water came the booming of church bells. It was half-past six—in another quarter of an hour my period of liberty would end. I must then decide on my course of action; I must either remain a prisoner on parole or make a bold attempt for freedom.

The rope that linked the barge to the patient beast of burden on the towpath creaked and groaned with the strain. If the rope should snap! The thought darted through my mind, bringing in its train a scheme, daring, and yet, it seemed to me, feasible.

If I could sever the rope, so that at any given moment the barge could be brought to a standstill, it would be a step towards my escape. Ilford and the boy would at once rush to see what had happened, leaving me free to—— I glanced down at the water with a shudder. Freedom to drown would be all that I should gain, it seemed to me.

And yet the water was not so very deep, nor the banks so very far away. The barge left to its own sweet way—the boy had ceased to manipulate the rudder—seemed steering for the right bank. I should be able, if its course were not altered, to jump to the shore. At any rate, it would be worth attempting. Even if I did not succeed in making my escape, I should at all events throw out the calculations of the firm. The barge might remain stranded for hours and hours, while Templeton fumed and fretted at the appointed place.

The rope was knotted round a short, thick post, heavy with tar, hard with exposure. It felt like iron to my slender strength; nevertheless I plucked at it, easing the knot with fingers that trembled with weakness and fear. As for my promise—well, I had given my word neither to call for help nor to jump into the water, further than that I had not gone.

Ilford, grown sentimental in the twilight, had fallen to singing a love song, the boy suiting his whistle to accompany him. Leaning on a pile of cushions the elegant Sidney flourished his cigarette, and smiled expansively. Neither he nor the urchin thought the forlorn-looking girl huddled by the rudder was even then contemplating her escape.

The rope yielded a little to my pressure, my fingers, aching with the task, knitted themselves about the heavy strands. With many a creak and groan the knot untwisted, the end at last lay loose between my fingers.

Shaking, I leant forward, my heart in my throat, waiting for some neighbouring church to sound the hour of my release. At last the welcome strokes fell on my ear. A sweet-toned chime announced the half hour over. It was a quarter to the hour.

Ilford, as well aware as I that the period for which I had pledged myself was over, glanced curiously in my direction. I rose quietly to my feet, letting the rope trail slowly through my fingers. Just as the end touched the water, a sudden shock thrilled the barge from end to end. There was grinding sound, and then——

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"We've stuck!" shouted Ilford, and rushing to where I stood, stooped, thinking to grasp the rope. The barge, deprived of its impetus, had grounded on a mud bank close to the shore. By the time Ilford had grasped the fact that he was out loose from his horse, I had put my project into execution. Running the length of the craft I poised myself a moment on the stern, then sheltered from view by the tarpaulin, took a flying leap into the dark.

My feet slipped on a sloping bank. I had almost fallen back into the water when, throwing myself forward, I felt the grip of a strong hand.

"Now, then, my good woman, hold tight or you'll be in the water. Hullo! What's this?" and my interlocutor held up my iron-grey wig, half dangling down my back.

"Why, bless my soul, it's a girl! What on earth are you doing, my dear? Here, hold up a second; you'll be over!"

Giddy and dazed, I clung to him, and was half dragged, half carried to a safe distance from the water side.

At this moment there rose shouts from the barge. Ilford's voice, hoarse with rage, screamed out my name.

"She's a thief," he shouted. "Hold her till I get ashore. I tell you she's a thief!"

He ran frantically to and fro seeking the point nearest the shore. He was too great a coward to leap as I had done. If I could induce this stranger to help I might get away before the craven found courage to face the jump.

"Are you a thief?" said the man bluntly.

"No, no," I answered. "It isn't true, indeed it isn't true. The men on board that barge—two men against a girl—want to keep me prisoner because I know certain things—bad things about them. You are so strong."

I glanced wistfully at his sturdy frame.

"Surely you'll help me. If not——" I turned towards the canal. "One can only die once," I murmured, and ran a step or two towards the water.

In a second his fingers tightened round my wrist.

"Nothing of the sort," he said sharply. "Whether you're lying or no, remains to be proved; for the present you'll come along with me."

Still keeping me prisoner, he led the way across a patch of market gardens, up a lane to the front of a large, well-built house.

The door stood open; I accompanied my host into a cheery sitting-room, where blazed a fire, in front of which there stood a table set for tea.

In answer to his summons a respectable-looking woman appeared, evidently his housekeeper.

"Give this girl some tea," he said brusquely, "and keep her here till I return."

"You are going——" I interrupted.

"To the canal, where I shall learn what those people on the barge have to say. I've heard your side of the story, I must listen to theirs."

"You won't tell them where I am?" I pleaded.

"Most certainly I shall, but"—he glanced at me narrowly—"I shall not give you up without due warning. I shall come back shortly."

New Street, Birmingham, where Sara arrived after escaping from her peril in Leicester.

Colmore Row, in which buildings the offices of Truscot Moran were situated.

He left the room, locking the door behind him; I stood bewildered, gazing at the fire. Something arousing my attention, I glanced to the other side of the apartment, where hung a mirror on the wall. My own reflection greeted me; I started with surprise; no wonder the good man felt suspicious—never was so wild a figure seen out of an asylum!

My hair, loosened from its coil, hung limp about my shoulders, the rouge upon my cheeks showed up the whiteness of my face. My eyes, swollen and dark, protruded from my head. Add to that the grey wig that my host had rescued, and it will be readily understood that my appearance was not calculated to inspire confidence. I contrasted my haggard condition with Sidney Ilford's good looks and smiling manner, and concluded that judgment must inevitably go against me. When the master of the house returned he would hand me over to my captors, and all chance of my escape would be at an end!

I turned towards the housekeeper, who sat regarding me in stolid wonderment.

"Will you let me tidy myself?" I asked, "my hair looks dreadful," and I pointed to my dishevelled locks.

"You mustn't go out of the room," she said, "but you can put yourself straight here if you like."

Hastening to the glass, I managed to smooth my hair into order, and by dint of hard scrubbing removed most of the rouge from my face. Then I turned to the respectable person by the fire.

"What is your master's name?" I asked.

"John Wilson," she answered slowly. "He's a rich man and a just man, and——"

I interrupted her. "Do you know why he brought me here?" I asked. She made a sign of indifference. "I never question what he does," she answered. "He said you were to bide here till he came back, and"—she looked at me significantly—"here you'll stay."

I tried threats and pleading, besought and upbraided—in vain. Mr. John Wilson, it seemed, was master in his house, and his will was never questioned. Possibly he had a fancy for bringing waifs and strays to his hospitable hearth, perhaps—my cogitations were suddenly cut short.

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"Master's a justice of the Peace," said the housekeeper proudly. "He's got to inquire into the rights of things. Maybe"—she glanced at me critically—"maybe he found you trespassing?"

I denied the accusation vehemently, and forthwith plunged into a recital of the persecutions I had suffered from the hands of Templeton and Co. My story was interrupted by the return of Mr. Wilson—followed by Sidney Ilford.

With a desperate notion of self-defence, I grasped the poker and awaited their approach. Mr. Wilson took in the situation at a glance, and striding towards me, dispossessed me of my weapon before I knew what was going to happen.

"None of that," he said sharply, "you make the case against you look even blacker than before. This gentleman"—he motioned to Sidney—"declares you are a professional thief. He says you came aboard his barge this afternoon, disguised as an elderly woman, and asked if you might hide from some men who were pursuing you. He thought your tale strange, but in compassion for your agitation, allowed you to remain. Your subsequent conduct convinced him that your tale was false, and on observation, he recognised you as a clerk in the employ of his firm, a clerk who had embezzled money and stolen papers. Now"—he turned towards me severely—"now what have you to say?"

For a moment I hesitated, Sidney's story, with its cunning mixture of truth and falsehood, seemed impossible to disprove.

"What is your name?" said Mr. Wilson, prompted by Ilford.

"Sara Gillespie," I said desperately. Then, taking courage from the danger of my situation. "What that man told you is partly true, but most of his story is a lie."

Ilford started to his feet and commenced to whisper hurriedly in Wilson's ear.

As a result of his communication, the J.P. looked at me more sternly than before.

"Have you certain papers and bank notes in your possession that you took from the office of Templeton and Co., your late employers?"

"The papers had been obtained by false means. They—" He interrupted me.

"I want a direct answer to my question. We will go further into the matter later on. Have you certain papers and bank notes, which you took—rightly or wrongly—from the offices of Templeton and Co.?"

"I will not answer," I said defiantly; "do your worst, I will not answer."

"If you refuse, I shall be obliged—on this gentleman's application—to issue a warrant for your arrest. Be advised, Miss Gillespie, tell me the truth. You are young, and I am anxious, if possible, to spare you disgrace. Have you the papers?"

I looked up at him, intreaty in my eyes. Had I seen ever so slight a softening in his face, had I read anything of pity—or of belief in my statement, my course would have been different. Grim and stern, he stood before me, justice he would have, the justice that judges from appearances, and appearances were dead against me!

"I have not the notes, I have not the papers," I cried, flinging the lie like a challenge in his face.

"It's false! false!" cried Ilford.

"If you doubt my word," I said, "let me be searched, that woman"—I pointed to the housekeeper—"shall prove that what I say is true. Let her go with me to another room, and search me."

Ilford protested noisily at the suggestion, but Wilson impressed by my earnestness, decided that the request was reasonable. Obeying her master's instructions, the woman lit a candle, and preceded me across the hall up a wide oak staircase, thickly carpeted, and so into a bedroom, lofty, cold, and hung with dark and heavy curtains.

I managed to close the door without slipping the latch; my guide, out of breath, sat down on a chair, and signed to me to take off my coat as a preliminary to investigation.

"In a minute," I said, "I'm tired; the stairs are steep." As I spoke I moved a thick rug aside, and folding it over my arm, sat down on the ottoman it covered.

"My brooch has caught in my collar," I said, "please bring the light a little nearer."

Grumbling, the woman obeyed, and advanced towards me with the candle. With a quick breath I rose as she approached and, flinging the rug over her face and head, sent her staggering back. The candle went flying to the floor, she groped wildly in the darkness, calling in a voice muffled by the thickness of the rug. Softly I stole through the door, across the landing, gaining, with swift and silent speed, the hall, before the worthy housekeeper had found her voice.

With bated breath I rushed past the parlour where Ilford was still holding forth, and so through the big door—open—thank Heaven, and into the sweet-scented darkness of the night.

How the housekeeper fared, what Wilson said, and Sidney Ilford felt, I could only form a guess. If their consternation were as great as my relief, they must have been miserable indeed.

For some little while I did not trouble as to the direction in which I was going, my only aim being to increase the distance between Ilford and myself.

After a half hour's rapid walking, I judged it safe to make a pause, and, resting on a convenient stile, thought out my next move. Two courses lay open to me. I could either return to Leicester—to Mrs. Goodman's house by the canal—there to wait Noel's return, or press forward to some safe hiding-place, from which I could communicate with him.

The latter seemed to me the wiser plan. My return to Leicester would be attended with an amount of risk I did not feel able to bear. Templeton and Co. would surely have spies posted in readiness and I should probably be seized and captured long before I reached my goal. I would go to the next big town, the larger the place the more easy it would be to hide.

I selected Birmingham, and decided to start for that city early the next morning. Meantime I must find some place in which to pass the night. A sharp walk brought me to a nest of cottages, where, after some tiresome explanations, I succeeded in securing a room. The night passed without peril. Early the next day I was abroad and taking the train from the nearest station, some miles beyond Leicester, arrived at New Street, Birmingham, about mid-day.

And at Birmingham commenced one of the strangest chapters of my life.

The platform at which the train drew up was thronged. The sound of many feet, ceaseless and hurrying, filled the great station. I was overpowered by a sense of insignificance and unimportance. The feeling was intensified, when at the top of a long flight of steps, leading from the platform, I found myself on the foot-bridge that traverses the station. Leaning against the railings, I stood dazed and bewildered by the crowd. A never-ending stream of humanity, to left and right, the currents hurry by, no loitering, no indetermination, but purposeful and strong, the throng sweeps by; artisans and operatives, clerks and bookmakers, work girls and pleasure-seekers, a dense mass hurrying over.

The spectacle took my breath away; I had not thought so wonderful a sight could be. London, with its teeming millions, vast resources, could not show anything so great. An ever hastening throng, purposeful and full of life, some on a wedding journey, others answering the call of sickness or distress, others again running a race with time—treacherous and implacable.

At that hour of the day traffic on the foot-bridge was at its densest. I leant closer to the railings, dizzy with the sound and scent of humanity. At that moment, forcing his way through the throng, came a man-servant, his arms full of parcels, and grasping a heavy package in his left hand. Immediately behind, flustered and concerned, followed a middle-aged woman, whose opulent silks and velvets intensified the plebeian appearance of her red, good-natured face and large, ungraceful body.

The man was overloaded, the weight he carried overtaxed his temper and his strength. Turning to answer an injunction from the lady in velvet, he got wedged in the crowd, trying to

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free himself he stumbled and fell, and, falling, dropped a heavy package on my foot.

Crying out with the pain, instinctively I tried to raise my foot and shift the weight. My efforts were quite useless, my struggles only served to give my ankle a great wrench.

I suppose it was not more than half a minute before, the centre of a sympathising crowd, I stood disencumbered from the package. Desirous, above all things, to avoid notice, I

Some of the houses in Russell Road, in which thoroughfare was the house where such strange occurrences happened to Sara.

disclaimed all offers of assistance, and essayed to walk away. The first step brought a cry to my lips, my ankle was throbbing violently, to walk was an impossibility.

Then it was that the owner of the packages, and the wearer of the velvet gown, rose to the occasion. Incircling me with a stout, protecting arm, she poured forth tearful regrets at what had happened—regrets that increased in volume when she discovered I had but just arrived in Birmingham.

"You must come back with me, my dear," she said. "Go to the hospital?"—as I urged the desirability of such a course. "I wouldn't hear of such a thing. Here, John!" to the burden bearer—"put these things down and help me take this poor thing down the stairs. The carriage is outside, my dear, a nice comfortable carriage, that will take us home in less than half-an-hour."

For a moment I hesitated to accept her offer. I had grown suspicious of my kind, and seemed to see the hand of Templeton and Co. in everything. I felt it would be wiser after all to go to the hospital, and yet the recollection that at a public institution, one is compelled to resign all right of judgment, all liberty of action, made me pause. The notes, the papers—into whose hands might they not fall? I glanced at the grieved face of the kindly woman who supported me. Whatever else was lacking in her countenance, candour and innocence abided there. It was preposterous to suppose the accident an outcome of the firm's villainy.

Clever as they were, they could not ordain that I should be injured by a type-writing machine—for such the package proved to be—at such and such an hour at New Street Station. The woman was evidently a person of means, if not of consequence; she would shelter, and possibly help me in my fight against my enemies and Noel's.

"I will come," I answered faintly, "and thank you very much."

With the assistance of Mrs. Moran, as I learnt my companion was called—and the faithful, if surly John, I reached the bottom of the steps in safety. True to her description, there waited just outside a smart-looking victoria, well built, well turned-out, drawn by a spanking pair of chestnuts.

The footman descended from his perch, moved the rugs, and assisted me to take my seat, with a countenance which displayed neither curiosity nor surprise. Mrs. Moran settled herself beside me, and John having disposed the parcels in safe corners of the vehicle, we set off.

Up Hill Street, with its atmosphere of grime and squalor, its hideous steam trams, the incessant clanging of whose bell send thrills of apprehension through one. Never have I seen such horrible conveyances as these same trams. Drawn by a locomotive engine, they belch forth huge clouds of black and noisome smoke, clattering about the lines with a jerky rattle that jars every nerve in the body of the unfortunate passenger.

My nerves were highly strung, and hence they appeared to me to be the acme of discomfort.

It seemed strange to emerge from Hill Street, dirty and narrow, into a splendid square. A magnificent site set round with tall, majestic piles, that keep a faithful watch and ward over the white statue of Queen Victoria that names the square. Dark and stately, the municipal buildings frown upon the street; the art gallery uprears its graceful tower against the sky. In the distance one catches a glimpse of the green trees and fountains against the University. A fair city, a brave city—one's heart goes out towards it, until passing the Town Hall, you find yourself once more in dirt and squalor, made doubly hideous by the dangers of the terrible steam trams. Just outside the Town Hall a shabby looking figure raised his hat, and gazed wistfully at Mrs. Moran. She flushed, looked uncomfortable, then suddenly returned his nod.

"That's Arthur Merridew," she said, "a late clerk of my husband's. He's very poor; I'm sorry for him."

Later I learnt to be sorry for him also.

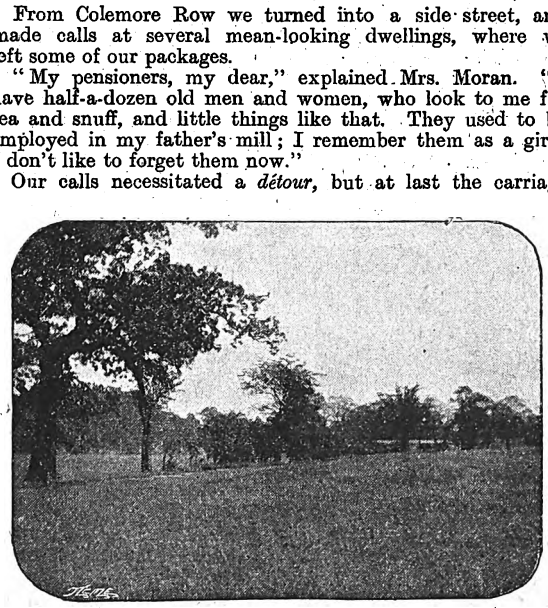
From Victoria Square we went up Colemore Row, where Mrs. Moran pointed out her husband's offices. He was an engineer, it seemed, and held in high esteem by his fellow citizens.

I was destined to become closely acquainted with that office.

From Colemore Row we turned into a side street, and made calls at several mean-looking dwellings, where we left some of our packages.

"My pensioners, my dear," explained Mrs. Moran. "I have half-a-dozen old men and women, who look to me for tea and snuff, and little things like that. They used to be employed in my father's mill; I remember them as a girl; I don't like to forget them now."

Our calls necessitated a *détour*, but at last the carriage



The mysterious house overlooked the "Reddings." The photograph shows a tract of this land.

swung into the Bristol Road, a fine wide thoroughfare planted with trees, that shaded well-built dwelling-houses.

Leaving the slums behind, we bowled along towards the pleasant suburb of Edgbaston. In this part of Birmingham, the steam tram has given place to the electric-car, models of comfort, speed, and elegance.

From the Bristol Road we turned off to the left, until we came to Russell Road—one of the pleasantest thoroughfares

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imaginable. Mrs. Moran—who had been solicitous as to my comfort throughout the drive—pointed out an imposing looking residence as our destination.

"Here we are, my dear," she said, and beamed a cheery welcome.

The stolid footman assisted me to mount the steps, and guided me across the hall into a pleasant sitting-room. Mrs. Moran settled me comfortably on a couch, and bustled off to send for the doctor.

The latter appeared in due course, and announced that with a few days rest my ankle would be all right.

"She'd better not be moved, doctor?" questioned my hostess. "There, now, my dear, you hear what he says, you're to stay with me for a week at least."

She seemed genuinely delighted at the prospect, and after a few minutes thought, I agreed to remain. I told her my name and my profession.

"I'm a typine, Mrs. Moran, and I was told there were more openings for employment in Birmingham than London. Things weren't so overcrowded. I have no parents, no people—only"—my voice faltered—"only my sweetheart, Noel."

She suggested I might like to send a telegram to my lover. I was deliberating on the advisability of such a course, when our conversation was disturbed by the arrival of Mr. Moran.

Tall and dignified, with a cold manner, and eyes that read you through and through, I feared him from the first. A man of about thirty-five, younger by ten years than his wife, he impressed me with a sense of his capacity, of great abilities and illimitable ambitions, Truscot Moran would have sacrificed his dearest friend for his own advancement.

He listened to his wife's account of our acquaintance, and put a few sharp interrogatories himself.

"You're a typine, you say. Do you write shorthand?"

"Yes," I answered. "Are you in want of a clerk?"

"That's as may be," he replied, "while you're here, however, it will do no harm to see of what you are capable. Your foot will be well again soon, you tell me. Well, then, you might do some work for me on Thursday."

With a cool nod, he sauntered from the room, calling his wife to accompany him.

I lay back on the couch and wondered at the strange turn my fortunes had taken. At last, it seemed, I had found a safe resting place. Surely my troubles were over, I could stay here until my lover came for me, and that would be only a matter of a day or two.

I reached the telegraph forms my hostess had just left me, and proceeded to write a long, explanatory message to Noel. As I wrote the last word I remembered I had not the full address of the house I was in. I knew it was in Russell Road, but of its name and number I was ignorant.

Just as I was deliberating whether I could manage to cross the room and ring the bell, Mr. Moran returned.

"My wife tells me you want a telegram dispatched, Miss Gillespie. I am sending to the post-office—or, rather, I am going there myself. I shall be happy to send a wire for you at the same time."

"Thanks very much," I answered. "First of all I should like to ask your exact address. What number or——?"

"No number, Miss Gillespie. Russell Road, that is all that's necessary. Is your wire ready?"

He moved to the foot of the couch, waiting expectantly.

I was just about to hand him the message when I caught sight of Mrs. Moran standing just behind her husband.

The woman's face had whitened, her rosy cheeks were flaccid, her eyes frightened and full of apprehension. Her big frame shook as if with strong emotions, her hands clasped in each other in awkward supplication.

She made a sign towards her husband, then pointing to the telegram, violently shook her head.

"No, no!" she motioned with her lips. "No!" and clasped her hands. Then, shaking and cowed, she edged off through the doorway. Moran and I were left alone.

"Are you ready, Miss Gillespie?" His face relaxed into a smile; at times Truscot could be fascinating.

"It's very good of you to trouble, Mr. Moran, but on second thoughts I don't think I shall wire after all. Telegrams are such inconclusive and unsatisfactory things. They always frighten people, and when, as is now the case, there has been a slight accident, the news stated baldly and briefly comes as a terrible shock. I shall write a letter instead. Thank you all the same," and with a pensive look I tore the message into fragments and lay back upon my pillow.

"Please yourself, of course; still it seems rather strange not to acquaint your friends with your whereabouts."

"A letter will tell them everything more fully," I replied And with that he had to remain content.

Later in the afternoon I was helped upstairs to a bedroom. The house was large and of considerable architectural pretensions. The rooms, lofty and imposing, were handsomely furnished and in good taste. The walls were hung with pictures, all of them striking, some of them famous. My room, at the back of the house, had a pleasant view. From the bay window one looked over a green expanse of grass, trees, and hedges. This space of ground, traversed by foot paths, is called the "Reddings," and is as pleasant a spot as you could find in the environs of a great city. My room was daintily furnished, and with a due regard to comfort. I could have been peaceful and at rest, but for the strange warning I had received.

Why had Mrs. Moran signed to me not to give my telegram to her husband? Why?

My thoughts were interrupted by Mrs. Moran herself.

"Have you everything you want, my dear?" she asked. She paused upon the threshold, anxious, it seemed to me, to avoid a lengthy conversation.

"I want one thing," I answered, "and that very badly. I want to know why you distrust your husband, and why you feared to let me give him my wire?"

She came closer to me, with noiseless, awkward movements. Her large face, white and staring, gazed down at me.

"I—I'm strange sometimes," she answered, "and do queer things. You mustn't take any notice of me whem I'm like that. It's my head, I think; it aches and throbs, until I feel I shall go mad."

She lifted her hand to her forehead, then meeting my eyes flushed a dull red.

"Then there was really no reason why Mr. Moran should not have taken my telegram? Perhaps it is not too late to give it to him now?"

"Don't give it to him. Don't——" Her voice trailed off into a sob. "I can't say anything more, my dear, you must not ask me anything more. Just get well as soon as you can, so you can go away. It's better you should go away. I thought I should be able to have you to myself. I took a fancy to you, and planned for you to stay here altogether. But it's no use. It is not to be. Besides," her voice fell into a whisper, "you must go," she said, "or it will be with you *as with the others.*"

Eagerly I demanded an explanation of her words, but she broke from me, hastening out of the room. Left to myself, I thought the situation over. There were certainly grounds for alarm, but—and of this I was convinced—what I had to fear was something different and apart from the persecution of Templeton and Company. All the same the prospect of staying in this house, if only for a few days, was sufficiently alarming. Who were the "others," and what ill-fate had overtaken them?

It seemed to me more than ever necessary that I should communicate with Noel that day. There were pen, ink, and paper on the table, and before long I had written to my sweetheart, inclosing the letter in one addressed to Maggie Dunkley, at Northampton. Then I rang the bell, and asked the maid to request Mrs. Moran to come up to me.

The poor lady had somewhat recovered her spirits. She had changed her velvet gown for one of amber satin, and under the soothing influence of its magnificence was less pessimistic.

"I won't question you, dear Mrs. Moran," I began. "I don't want to know anything it would distress you to tell me. All I ask is that you post this letter yourself. There is a

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pillar box a little distance down the road, I noticed it from the carriage. It would not take you long to slip out and run across. Will you do it for me? *Please*," I added, and, with a sudden inspiration, I clasped my arms about her neck and kissed her ample cheeks. The caress startled her. She strained me close and kissed me ardently.

"If I'd had a daughter," she cried. "If only I'd had a daughter!" and the emotional creature positively sobbed.

I endured her endearments for some few minutes. Then once more pressed my point. To my dismay she still proved obdurate.

"I dare not," she said, "and then it wouldn't do you any good. You must get well, and——"

Impatiently I interrupted her.

"If you won't help me, I must go myself." As I spoke I started from the couch and essayed to walk briskly across the room.

Alas! My fortitude could not endure such pain. I was forced to sit down, groaning with agony.

Mrs. Moran, genuinely distressed at my suffering, did her best to comfort me.

"Listen," she said. "I can't go out myself; my husband would be angry if I left the house so late, but I will send the parlourmaid, and watch her from the door."

"Do you mean the woman who waits on me?" I asked, with an instinctive dislike for her secretive eyes and furtive manner.

"Oh, no, not Rachael. She——" Mrs. Moran paused and bit her lip. "Janet shall take it; she's a nice bright girl. I can trust her."

I resigned the letter, and waited in anxiety till I received an intimation from Janet as to its safe postage; then, having managed to hobble to the door and lock it, made my way back to the armchair by the fire.

The evening passed quickly; the hours of ten, eleven, twelve resounded from the deep-toned bell of the hall clock. The house was hushed, long ago the servants had retired to rest, Mrs. Moran's wavering step had passed my door, her husband's heavy tread shortly following. The silence grew oppressive. I shivered, and glanced fearfully about the room. A stranger in a house of mystery; what evil might not come upon me before the morning?

I reproached myself for having yielded to Mrs. Moran's intreaty that I should go to her home. Yet what could I have done? Here at least my papers were left in my possession—my hand stole to my heart for re-assurance. In a hospital or infirmary that would have been taken from me.

And yet this place was very strange; through the darkness of the night, it might be even now, some evil thing was creeping near me.

I glanced towards the door. Did it move, did I see the handle turn?

With an effort of will I steadied my nerves sufficiently to take a long quiet look. I had been mistaken, imagination had played me tricks. The door was still fastened, securely locked.

If I could make up my mind to go to bed I might get rid of these strange fancies—this dark sense of foreboding that oppressed me. What could Moran do after all? I was in England, in one of the most enlightened cities of the Empire What harm could overtake me? It was not as if I had fallen into the hands of Templeton and Company. Then I might have cause for fear. And yet for all my reasoning, all my will, I could not shake off the terror that sat brooding over heart and brain.

My eyes, seeking to find something on which to rest, roved round the room. It was a large room, and at one time had opened into a smaller one. Now, however, the communicating door had been closed up, and papered over, only the fanlight gave sign that it had once been there. The long narrow pane of glass had an odd appearance without the door beneath. It fascinated me, again and yet again my eyes returned to the same spot.

Of a sudden the lamps that lit the room went out with the peculiar celerity characteristic of electric light. It was uncanny in the darkness, the fire had grown black and cold, not a spark of light came from its ashes.

As I sat, my heart beating heavily, a faint light streamed through the room. I raised my eyes, and with a thrill realised that it came from the fanlight. A moment, and then horror convulsed me. I tried to scream, but only a hoarse murmur came from my lips. There, staring at me through the glass, was, what seemed to me, *the face of a dead woman!*"

(The Birmingham episode concludes next week.)

His Little Joke.

AND THE HAPPY RESULT IT BROUGHT.

"THERE! I will wear Mr. Hoffman's red roses—they are so beautiful—with my dress, and are so becoming to my complexion. Charley will be furious, of course, but I can't be troubled about his jealous whims. Put that lovely cluster a little higher in the puffs of my hair, Lizette, and loop my overskirt with the other. There, Miss Meyer, don't you like that?"

Miss Meyer was the young woman who had brought the dress home from Madame Dumesnil's. She was considered to have wonderful taste, and she always stayed to see the dress tried on, and make any alterations that might be needed, and suggest the ornaments to be worn with it.

She stood off at a little distance, with her head on one side, and gazed critically at the beautiful Miss Creighton: a beautiful little creature herself, in spite of a mournful droop at the corner of her mouth, and some faint little lines of care. Her very ideal of Marguerite in *Faust*, Miss Creighton declared her to be, with her childish face, pure, sea-shell complexion, and the blonde hair, which she always wore hanging in a long, heavy braid.

"I think it is perfect!" she said, after she had walked slowly round Miss Creighton. "There is nothing wanting. Those beautiful roses have added the touch of bright colour that was needed."

"It was just like Mr. Hoffman to send them. He has such exquisite taste!" said Belle Creighton, gazing delightedly at her reflection in the mirror; a tall, graceful figure, with folds of creamy silk and frost-like lace falling about it, a perfect face, dark eyes, both soft and bright, like a Spanish woman's, and warm black hair, in which the deep red roses "blushed and burned."

"I don't think he has any better taste than Charley!" said Nan Creighton.

Nan was a schoolgirl, and was looking on with admiration at her sister's toilet, and wondering if her time would ever come.

Belle's lip curled slightly, and she tossed a bouquet into Nan's lap.

"You may have his bouquet, since you admire his taste so

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much—nothing but common flowers! I shouldn't think he took the slightest pains, or considered my complexion at all."

"But Mr. Hoffman——"

"Pardon me—I take a great liberty—but what did you say the gentleman's name was?"

The little dressmaker's sea-shell pink cheeks had taken a deeper tint, and there was a startled look in her eyes.

"Hoffman. Carl Hoffman, the distinguished musician. You have heard of him, of course?"

"I hear but little of music now, and it is a great grief to me," the girl said, shaking her head sadly. "But the name startled me. It is long since I have heard it. I once had a friend of that name, but he is dead."

"I am so sorry for you!" cried good-natured Nan.

"Here, you shall have this bouquet. I don't care for flowers, unless I can wear them."

"Thank you. I love flowers, and I seldom have any," said little Miss Meyer, wiping away a tear, and taking her leave with a grave courtesy.

"Miss Meyer, be sure you come with my green dinner dress. Tell Madame Dumesnil I always want you to see my dresses after they are done, if they are only wrappers. Your taste is charming."

"I will tell her," said Miss Meyer gravely.

"What a queer, grave little soul that is," said Belle. "So different from the rest of Madame Dumesnil's flaunting, stylish shop-girls. I wish I could have her for a maid; she has twice as much taste as you, Lizette, with all your French airs."

The ugly, high-nosed Frenchwoman, dropped a curtsey, and said with a laugh, but with a spiteful accent:

"Mademoiselle is very good!"

"No, I am not very good," said Belle candidly. "If I were, I should take more interest in that girl, and try to find out what troubles her, and try to help her."

"And if you were good you wouldn't treat Charley Forester so badly," said Nan, who was very fond of her future brother-in-law.

"What do I do to Charley?" said Miss Belle indifferently, while Lizette wrapped her in her opera-cloak.

"You flirt outrageously!—that's what you do, and when he doesn't like it—as I should like to know who would—you say he is jealous, and threaten to break off your engagement. If I had such a noble, true lover as Charley Forester, I would be true to him."

"Oh, the wisdom and virtue of fifteen!" said Belle.

Mrs. Creighton came in at that moment, stately in velvet and point-lace and diamonds.

"Now, Belle, I don't want to see any flirting to-night! Everybody is beginning to talk about you and Mr. Hoffman, and Charley is downstairs, looking perfectly wretched. I know he dreads going anywhere with you. If you don't stop these performances you will be sorry!"

"Another variation on the same air!" said Belle, with a yawn. "Gay youth and hoary age both lift up their voices against me. No, mamma, you're not old; you look like a beauty to-night. But don't talk to me any more about flirting. If it isn't stupid enough to be engaged to one's third cousin, whom one has known all one's life, and played with when he wore knickerbockers, without being absolutely forbidden to look at another man! And am I to blame because they will follow me about? I should think it was bad enough to have Charley such a jealous idiot, without your taking his part. No; I am not going to break my engagement if Charley will behave himself; but if he is going to stick close to my side everywhere I go, looking as if he contemplated immediate suicide, glowering at every man who speaks to me, I can't endure it, and I won't!"

And Miss Belle sailed downstairs, with her head very erect.

"Oh, Nan, I hope you will never be the trouble to me that that child is!" said her mother, with a sigh. "I hope you'll never be so handsome!"

"I hope I shall be!" said Nan anxiously; "but I won't flirt—at least after I'm engaged, though I will flirt awfully before." (This last clause *sotto voce*). "Anyway, if Charley had as much spirit as a man ought to have, he wouldn't have it!"

Charley, a fair, handsome young man, but with a rather woe-begone expression, was pacing up and down the drawing-room when his betrothed came sailing in, in all her splendour.

His face brightened suddenly at sight of her.

"Belle, who was the girl that I met coming downstairs as I entered?" he demanded, neglecting altogether his customary affectionate greeting.

"Now he is going to rave about his flowers!" thought Belle. "One of Madame Dumesnil's shop-girls, who brought my dress home," she responded indifferently.

"A shop-girl! She looks more like a princess! The loveliest face I ever saw! And so much grace and elegance about her, too!"

Belle stared at him in unaffected amazement.

Never, since he became her devoted slave, at the age of eight years, had she heard him express the slightest admiration for or interest in any young woman.

And not a word did he say about his flowers, though he must have seen them in Miss Meyer's hand.

"She is rather pretty," said Miss Belle coldly.

"Rather pretty! Why, where are your eyes, Belle? She is a perfect beauty!"

"How do you like my dress?" asked Belle, changing the subject.

"Very much. Did she make it? I should know she had exquisite taste by her own get-up."

"Get-up! What do you mean? She had on a black cashmere dress, made as plainly as it could possibly be."

"Well, perhaps she had, but there was an air and style about her dress. By the way, Belle, what is the matter with you? It seems to me you are not looking quite so well as usual. Feeling a little fagged, are you?"

This was too much for Miss Belle, who was sure she had on the most becoming toilet she had ever worn in her life, and was looking more brilliantly beautiful than she had ever looked before. She turned her back upon him and fortunately her mother appeared, and led the way to the carriage at that moment.

What had "come over the spirit of his dream" was more than Belle could guess.

Could it have been that little Miss Meyer, Madame Dumesnil's shop-girl? Belle had heard of love at first sight, and surely she was beautiful enough to turn any man's head.

But, then, Charley was in love with her—dreadfully so, he had seemed to be. About seven times as much so as she wanted him to be, she had been wont to say. Could such things be?

Revolving this problem in her mind, Belle was unusually silent and *distraite* all the way to Mrs. Maynard's, where the evening party was to be given. Charley, too, seemed lost in thought. As they got out of the carriage, Mrs. Creighton whispered in his ear:

"She shall behave better to-night, or I'll take her home!"

"Don't! Let her go to the end of her chain. I'm on a new tack!" he whispered in return.

Once in the thronged, brilliantly-lighted rooms, with the air heavy with perfume, and the band sending forth bewitching strains, Belle's spirits revived. If Charley wanted to fall in love with little dressmaking Miss Meyer, he might; she would show him that she didn't care.

Mr. Hoffman was there. He was a distinguished musician, who had recently come to the front, and he was "all the rage." He wasn't considered "eligible," of course, being only a musician; but he was so handsome and so elegant in his manner, that all the young ladies were bewitched with him. His hair was just touched with white, and he had a melancholy air, which made him all the more interesting. He was quite devoted to Miss Belle Creighton, and it could not be denied that she encouraged his attentions.

"It is perfectly shameful—the way Belle Creighton goes on with Mr. Hoffman!" remarked one young lady (who would have greatly preferred to monopolise Mr. Hoffman's attention herself). "And it's about the fortieth flirtation

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she has had since she has been engaged to Mr. Forester! And he goes mooning about, looking as doleful as an owl, and not speaking to anybody!"

But Charley was not as "doleful" to-night as usual. To be sure, he was not particularly devoted to the young ladies; but he did make himself agreeable to the dowagers, and he did not "stick to Belle's side," nor "look as if he contemplated immediate suicide."

Once, when they were dancing together, he said carelessly to Belle:

"How beautiful your roses are!"

And Belle replied enthusiastically:

"Aren't they exquisite? Mr. Hoffman sent them to me."

And, instead of looking angry or despairing, he answered indifferently:

"He has very good taste, then—a fine fellow every way, I think, and a real genius musically!"

Praise of Mr. Hoffman now! Belle looked at him in silent amazement, and he seemed suddenly to think that he was going too far.

"But I don't think it looks very well for you to dance every other dance with him, Belle!" he said.

Miss Meyer slipped and fell. Charley hastened to pick her up.

Belle saw that that speech was the result of an afterthought and drew her own conclusions. He did not care now how much she flirted with Mr. Hoffman, but he did not wish to change his manner so suddenly that she should guess his secret. And he only said that it didn't look very well; the looks used to be the last thing to trouble him!

Belle did not feel at all happy; her flirtation with Mr. Hoffman had begun to seem a flat, stale, and unprofitable thing. But yet she was not going to wear the willow for any man. Charley should not see that she even noticed his indifference.

The next day came little Miss Meyer, with the dinner-dress. Belle looked at her with a new interest. She certainly was beautiful enough to make a man forget his first love, she decided. The dress was very pretty, and Belle's vanity caused her spirits to rise to the highest pitch.

"I wonder if Charley would say I didn't look as well as usual if he could see me now," she thought. "Miss Meyer couldn't look like this!"

"Run down and let Charley see you," suggested Nan, who was always present at her sister's toilets when it was possible.

"How came Charley here at this time of day?" she asked.

"He is here, talking to mamma in the library," said Nan.

Belle threw her train over her arm and ran downstairs.

Charley and his future mother-in-law seemed to be having an earnest *tête-à-tête*, which was suspended as soon as Belle appeared.

"'It was a beauteous lady, richly drest?'" sang Charley. "That is uncommonly gorgeous, isn't it, Belle? But I am not quite sure that green is your colour! Did that same little girl bring it home?"—eagerly.

"Miss Meyer brought it home," said Belle stiffly.

"It is a beautiful overskirt," said Mrs. Creighton, who was inspecting the dress critically.

"Of course I don't pretend to be a judge," said Charley, "but it seems to me that if it were looped a little higher on the left side it would look a great deal better."

"I don't know but what it would," said Belle, with her mind wholly upon her dress.

"I'll let Miss Meyer try it."

"Let her come down here and do it! I want to see the effect," said Charley, coolly.

Belle drew herself up haughtily, and was about to sail out of the room; but a new idea struck her. Should she let this cool young man think she cared how much he admired a pretty shop girl—think that she was jealous of him? Perish the thought!

"Ring the bell, Charley, and I'll send for Miss Meyer."

Miss Meyer came, grave and quiet, as usual, and made the proposed change in the overskirt.

Charley expressed his approval enthusiastically, and Belle, being on the watch, caught him bestowing a very admiring glance upon the beautiful dressmaker. It was very doubtful whether little Miss Meyer had the benefit of it, however, for she scarcely looked up.

When she had gone Charley drew a long breath.

"That is the most exquisite creature I ever saw!" he exclaimed. "Do you suppose she could be induced to sit to an artist? Will Van Amsden would give his eyes for a chance to paint her!"

"I don't know. I never thought of trying to lead her out of her proper sphere in any way. She has very good taste, and suits me as a dressmaker, and that is all I know about her," said Belle icily.

"I think you and Will Van Amsden had better not meddle with a pretty dressmaker," said his future mother-in-law. "You would only turn her head with your flatteries!"

"But such beauty as that ought not to blush unseen—now, you know it ought not! Why, I don't believe there's a woman in the kingdom who could hold a candle to her! And she has such a lovely expression—such a sweet, appealing look in her eyes——"

Belle went out and banged the door at that moment.

Could it be possible that a faint, smothered laugh sounded in her ears as she ran upstairs? She thought not, for surely her mother would not stoop to laughter with that graceless fellow! She was vexed with herself for showing that she was angry, and resolved that it should be the last time she would give him that satisfaction.

She went upstairs and sent Nan out of her room, was cross to Lizette, and snubbed little Miss Meyer and dismissed her. She resolved to punish her lover by not making her appearance again that night, not suspecting that he meant to go away before dinner. But shortly after the door closed upon little Miss Meyer she heard it close again, and, looking out of the window, beheld Charley following closely in Miss Meyer's footsteps.

The dressmaker crossed the street, and Charley crossed also.

The pavement was icy, and little Miss Meyer slipped and fell.

Charley hastened to pick her up.

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"Just the chance he wanted! And the artful little minx probably did it on purpose!" thought Miss Belle in her anger. But on purpose or not, Miss Meyer had evidently sprained her ankle. She tried in vain to stand.

"A very interesting situation," thought the unsympathetic Belle.

She saw Charley point to the house, as if suggesting that she should be carried there. But Miss Meyer shook her head decidedly. Then Charley hailed a passing hansom, put her into it, and, oh! climax of horrors! got into it himself also.

"Ah! he is the true gentleman!" said Lizette, who was also looking out of the window. "As polite to the poor little modiste as if she were a lady! And truly she could not get out of the carriage alone, if her ankle is sprained or broken, as it seems."

"I'll break my engagement!" resolved Belle. "I've threatened it often enough when I didn't mean it; but now I will do it. This is a great deal more than his being jealous!"

In the meantime Charley was divided between sympathy for poor little Miss Meyer's sufferings and gratitude for the accident which had given an opportunity of making her acquaintance.

He accompanied her home, and made himself as agreeable as possible to the motherly old woman with whom she lodged. Little Miss Meyer's shy gratitude to him was very pretty to see, but he stayed only long enough to obtain permission to call again when she was better, and hurried in search of a doctor to send to her.

Then he hastily dispatched a messenger with a note to Mrs. Creighton, directing it carelessly, so that it looked as much like Miss as Mrs., and, oh, artful Charley! directing the messenger to say it was for Miss Creighton.

Charley's handwriting was well-known, and the note found its way at once into Belle's hands. She opened it and read:

"DEAR MRS. CREIGHTON—*Fate has favoured me, and I have made the acquaintance of the lovely little dressmaker, and I think I am right. I felt so strongly attracted to her the first moment that I saw her. I know you will be my friend in this, but how shall we break it to Belle, who, I am afraid, cares more than he deserves for a man who can, at most, give her only a divided heart. Think as kindly as you can of one who once hoped to be your son.* "CHARLES FORESTER."

Poor Belle sank down on the floor, not quite fainting, but feeling that her life, or all that made life worth living, had suddenly come to an end. Charley loved her no longer! Her mother was to help him break the news to her! This was so much more dreadful than her wildest fancy! And how cool he was about it!

But then her conscience whispered to her that in the three years that their engagement had lasted, she had sometimes been decidedly "cool" in declaring to him that she would flirt with whomsoever she liked; that she never would marry him, and that she did not "care a bit" for him. Poor Belle! She knew, now, whether that last statement was true or not. Oh, how much dearer to her was one hair of his head than Mr. Hoffman or the dozens of other men whose attentions and flatteries she had received and encouraged.

But she had fairly worn his love out, and the natural result had come. She had only herself to blame. But nobody should know she cared; her pride should sustain her even when they "broke the news" to her!

She re-sealed the letter carefully, and sent it to her mother, but no comment upon it passed between them.

A week passed and she did not see Charley. Another week, and he only wrote her a cold and careless note, saying that he was "very busy."

Then one day at the breakfast-table her mother began with the air of one who has a weighty matter on her mind:

"Belle, I have something to tell you."

Belle, who had grown visibly paler and thinner in these last two weeks, nerved herself for the coming blow.

"Charley has discovered that Miss Meyer is much above her station."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Belle, unable, with all her pain, to resist a touch of sarcasm.

"She has a sweet voice which has been very carefully cultivated. I went to see her yesterday, and heard her sing. She is anxious to find pupils, and I am confident that she can. She promised to sing. She has a very sad story, poor child. I am going to arrange a little musical evening on Thursday next. She came over from Germany to meet her lover and found that he was dead. She was detained after she had secured passage on a vessel by a long illness, and the vessel on which she was to have sailed was lost, with all the passengers, so that her lover, before he died, supposed her to be dead. She was homeless and friendless here, and had no resource but her needle."

"She has found friends now," said Belle coldly.

"Why, Belle, I am ashamed of you, not to show more interest in this poor girl! It is not at all like you!"

"With such devoted friends she doesn't need my poor assistance," said Belle, as she rushed out of the room, to hide a burst of tears.

Pride led her to don her bravest attire and her brightest smiles on the evening of her mother's little *musicale;* led her also to greet Charley with an assumption of gay indifference, which, unfortunately, did not accord well with her altered looks.

It was a small and select assemblage which Mrs. Creighton had gathered together for the purpose of displaying her *protégé's* talent.

Mr. Hoffman was there, handsome and melancholy as ever. Little Miss Meyer came in and took her place at once at the piano.

Mr. Hoffman volunteered to play her accompaniment. As he drew near she turned as white as a lily, and stretched her hands out towards him, crying:

"Franz! Oh, my Franz!" and fell fainting in his arms.

"Lena! My little Lena! Has the sea given up its dead?" he cried.

Miss Meyer did not sing that night. Charley drew Belle away into a quiet corner as soon as possible.

"I knew just how it was going to turn out, and I wanted to tell you before, but your mother thought it was better not. You don't look downhearted, Belle, but I was afraid—really a little afraid—that you cared for Hoffman!"

Belle drew herself up haughtily, but a little smile stole around the corners of her mouth.

"I should think you were the one to look downhearted!" said she.

"About Miss Meyer? That is my little joke! Were you really a wee bit jealous, Belle? Then I haven't plotted in vain! You see the way of it was this. Hoffman and I were better friends than you knew. He told me his story one day. I think partly because he knew I was jealous of him, and he wanted to assure me that I needn't be. When he first came to this country, and for a long time afterwards, he was very poor. At last he scraped together enough money to send for his sweetheart, but the vessel on which he supposed she sailed was lost, with all the passengers.

"Then he came here, and having good luck, he dropped his own Christian name, Franz, not wishing to be known as the poverty-stricken fiddler who had only played for balls and parties. He showed me his sweetheart's picture, and told me his heart was buried with her, and he should never care for any other woman. The moment I saw Miss Meyer on the stairs that day I knew she was the original of that picture! I saw that you did not like my being interested in her. Ah, Belle, I believe I should have lost heart entirely if it had not been for that sign that my darling did care for me, and I determined to try you a little in that way, while I was finding out whether she was Hoffman's sweetheart. Your mother planned the denouement. She thought we might be mistaken, and it was better not to raise false hopes in them. It seems that Hoffman had disappeared so suddenly from his few friends that they thought him dead, and told Miss Meyer so. Now, Belle, I want to know if it is true that without the existence of love there can be no jealousy?"

"Oh, Charley, I have been so wretched!" murmured Belle with her head on his shoulder. "I'll never flirt again!"

Henry Laroche.

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UNSOLVED LOVE PROBLEMS.

III.—THE DILEMMA OF BETTY CARTERET.

A Prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

A WOMAN, still fair, as the dying rays of the sun fell on her luxuriant brown hair, and touched with almost youthful bloom the thin cheeks of her earnest face, stood before her easel, painting with all her mind and soul as well as with all her strength.

It was a well-proportioned face, and a good face, with the look of calm contented waiting that comes to those who have learnt the lesson that happiness is not the lot of the many, but of the few—let those be thankful who can find peace.

But with a smile that softened her features, with a tenderness that was beauty in itself, she turned towards the radiant vision that burst impetuously into the studio, though she only said:

"Betty, child, when will you learn to come in gently."

Betty Carteret was indeed (as the old folks say) "a sight for sore eyes," "sweet and twenty," she radiated joy and life from the top of her curly head to the tip of her slender, arched foot.

"Oh, bother!" she cried, running across the room and throwing her arms round her sister's neck. "Now, Katie, you bad old thing, what *do* you mean by refusing Sir Edward Fairbairns? I have just met him looking as glum as an owl, and I know what that means."

"Oh," said Kate, disengaging herself and turning to her easel again, "I was very sorry. I had hoped I had made it plain to him long ago, and that he would spare me the pain of a direct refusal."

"Why could you not marry him? He is very nice! Now don't turn away like that; look me in the face and tell me."

Thus adjured, Kate turned round, but could not help a girlish-looking blush from stealing over her face as she replied:

"You know I am not free, my heart was given eight years ago."

"I knew it was that old tale," she cried contemptuously, "but, Katie, you really *are* absurd! Your engagement to Geoffrey Hilton came to an end five years ago, and, of course, you are free, and so is he."

A spasm of pain disturbed the serenity of the elder sister's countenance, and, putting down her brushes, she passed her arm round Betty's waist, and sat down by her in the broad window-seat.

"Betty, darling, you were only a child of fifteen when he went away, and you could not understand my reasons for acting as I did. Geoffrey was an engineer, but there was little hope of his getting on in the old firm, and we had been engaged for three years. Then came the chance for him to go out to the mines in South Africa, and I could see he was wild to go, but did not like to leave me to more weary years of waiting. I loved him too well not to wish for his happiness, so I bade him go, and go free. I would not have him hampered by me in any way. He was not to go out merely with the idea of getting a home together for me as soon as possible, he was to be absolutely free to choose the path most likely to lead to ultimate success."

Betty gave her sister a warm hug, and said:

"You are a dear, unselfish darling."

But Kate shook her head and continued:

"He knew I made enough to live on; he could not know mother would die a month later. He thought I was happy and comfortable with my painting to fill my mind, and mother and you to——" She hesitated and then went on: "To fill my heart." Then, with a sudden compunction for her hesitation, she added impulsively: "You have been the joy and comfort of my life."

"And I?" cried Betty, enthusiastically, "what should I have done without you? You have been mother and father and sister and all to me."

Kate could not repress a sigh as she added:

"What shall I do when you get married?"

"Oh," said Betty airily, "I shall not marry at all. We shall be the two old maids of Thorn Cottage."

"*You* do not look cut out for an old maid," said Kate, gazing fondly at the lovely face beside her.

"On the contrary, I 'feel a vocation' for it," said Betty gaily. "The truth is that Geoffrey will come back and marry you, and what will become of poor little me then?"

Kate blushed once more, but replied slowly:

"It may be he is married already."

But a few days later came the letter for which Kate Carteret had waited so many years. It was a short note from Geoffrey saying he was sailing immediately for England and hoped to find a welcome waiting for him from his "old friends at Thorn Cottage, Crowbury."

"Why, Katie, how handsome you are," cried Betty, looking with wonder at her sister's transfigured face.

"Nonsense!" said Kate, "remember I am past thirty, and faded and worn."

But Betty put a dimpled hand over each of her shell-like ears and stopped her sister's mouth with a kiss.

"I won't hear such rubbish. You *are* beautiful, and he will love you more than ever when he sees you," and then she ran away, laughing over her shoulder at her blushing sister.

It was true that hope had brought a renewed youth to the

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elder. Her eyes were brighter, her step lighter, and a faint pink shone in her cheeks, and the eye of love would be able to find all the beauty of twenty-two in thirty, with character and spirituality added thereto, but if the eye of friendship only looked upon her, it would see only a good woman, whose youthful beauty was faded with watching, waiting, and anxiety.

At last the anxious weeks of waiting were over, and Geoffrey Hilton arrived. The years that had turned Kate from a charming girl to a grave woman, and Betty from a lively child to a lovely girl, had made but little difference to the man of twenty-nine who presented himself before the sisters one glorious autumn evening at the cottage. His shoulders were broader, his face more bronzed, and his manner more assured.

The fate of three was settled in the first few minutes as Geoffrey held Katie's hand, and each eagerly scanned the face of the other.

Thought Kate with exultation:

"He is just the same, my noble love!"

Thought Betty with a strange, tense feeling at her heart:

"He is very handsome, and I think his love must be worth enduring much to gain."

Thought Geoffrey, as his eyes wandered from Kate to Betty:

"Poor Kate looks much older, but good Heavens, how lovely Betty has grown!"

The succeeding month only served to intensify these first impressions. Geoffrey spent nearly all his time at Thorn Cottage, and the inevitable crisis approached nearer every day.

Kate with quiet, serene happiness in her heart, went about her usual duties, managing the house, caring for Betty, visiting the sick, and painting with an added power from the joy that pervaded her being. Content to see Geoffrey every day and to wait till he should ask her for what had been his for so many years.

Betty was possessed with a feverish restlessness that lent a brilliancy to her eyes, and a brightness to her complexion that Geoffrey thought made her almost too beautiful for earth. She hardly knew what had happened to her. Sometimes she was unreasonably happy, and at others more miserable than she had ever been in all her happy life, and over these moods she seemed to have no control; they were something outside herself.

At last it came.

One evening the little maid ushered Geoffrey into the drawing-room where Betty sat alone gazing at the fire that leapt and crackled in the grate. Her eyes were full of tears, she knew not why, for she was not sad.

She jumped up at his approach, but forebore to ask for lights lest he should see the tears that were yet in her eyes.

"Sit down and wait for Katie," she said hurriedly, "she has just gone to see poor Mrs. Smith who has a tiny baby, and is ill with pneumonia, so Katie goes every evening to bath the baby and settle the mother for the night when the nurse comes and takes her place."

Geoffrey hardly seemed to hear what she said, he only knew they were alone, and he had never seen anything so lovely as her graceful figure with the fire-light glancing on her rounded cheeks and lighting up her curls.

His silence and the intentness of his gaze made her nervous, and for the sake of saying something, she said:

"I like this light, don't you? It is so full of mystery."

For answer he leant forward, taking her two hands in his, and saying in almost a whisper:

"Little Betty, oh, little Betty, the mystery is here, in us. Since the first moment I saw you in the setting September sunshine, I have known there is no happiness for me apart from you. Darling, tell me, do you love me?" And he strove to draw her to him.

A flood of joy that was almost pain, swept over Betty, and for a moment she yielded to his gently compelling arms, then it receded and horror overwhelmed her in a black tide.

She pushed him back with all her might, her face so white which a minute before had been rosy.

"But it is wrong—wicked——" she stammered. "How can you? Think of Katie."

"Katie!" he cried, "but that was all over years ago. We certainly were engaged, but she in her wisdom broke it off, and now—oh, Betty, listen to me. I love you, I love you. You are the only woman in the world for me. From all time it was ordained that we should love."

But Betty could only refuse steadfastly to listen, though it was music to her ears.

"I—I—thought you came here because you were going to ask her again."

"Betty, child, what are you running your dear little head against? It is certainly true, if you must know, that it was in my mind when I set out for England to see if she were still unmarried and willing to have me, but," he added with passion, "when I think of my feeling towards her and compare it with the love I have for you, I know that you are my real mate, my second self."

"But," murmured Betty faintly, "what if *she* thought—as—as—I did?"

"Nonsense!" he said firmly. "Katie is much too sensible a woman. She gave me up five years ago, and now any one can see she is wedded to her art. She has no place for me, or any other man, in her happy, well-ordered life. If I thought otherwise"—and his brow darkened—"if for a moment I thought she had continued to consider herself bound to me all these five years, and waited for me to return and claim her, if I thought that," he repeated, turning almost fiercely to her, "I would never have said a word to you of my love—I would have married her, and before God I would have made her happy. But now," he said, turning tenderly to Betty, who, cold and rigid, was gazing straight before her seeing nothing, "we know it is not so. Love me, my darling, and let us take the happiness that God has given us. She would be the first to wish us joy."

"The first to wish us joy?" Yes, Betty felt in her heart perhaps she would, but it would be from a broken heart.

"Give me time; I cannot answer you now," she cried brokenly, and left the room hurriedly.

Katie, coming in ten minutes afterwards, wondered to find the room empty and dark, and the fire nearly out.

For hours Betty sat huddled up in the window-seat in her bedroom, feeling not the cold of her body for the misery of her soul. Why was this sacrifice, not only of *her* happiness, but also of his, demanded of her? Why was the fate of three persons given to her, who had hardly ceased to be a child, to decide? Over and over again her numbed brain formed the words:

"He loves me, and I love him, but he would marry her if I told him the truth. Shall I tell him, or shall I say nothing?"

L. Hughes.

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A Tale About Bedford.

WHEN Colonel John Bolders retired to Bedford on half-pay, he naturally took with him his three most cherished possessions.

These were a son called Tom, a prize bull-dog called Chutney, and a temper called snappy.

The house he occupied in De Parys Avenue was semi-detached, his neighbour being a widow some fifteen years younger than himself. On the afternoon of the Colonel's arrival he went out accompanied by his little son and Chutney to inspect the garden at the back of the house. After a brisk march round, the old soldier's curiosity was satisfied, and he finished his cigar on a bench in the middle of the lawn.

The boy, however, continued to play about until he presently found himself opposite a break in the hedge, through which he could look into the next garden.

Scarcely five yards away from him he saw a little girl of about the same age as himself, sitting upon a basket chair. To his intense surprise she suddenly began to call out in a very persuasive voice: "Tom! Tom! Come here, I want you!"

The boy stood hesitating for a moment. She could scarcely have seen him, for her chair faced in the opposite direction, and, besides, he had only that moment appeared at the gap in the hedge. But he had heard his name called distinctly, so he passed into the other garden and walked towards the girl. She turned as he approached.

"You called for me?"

She shook her pretty little head silently, too shy to speak.

"Oh, but you did! I heard you distinctly!" cried the boy.

"I only called for Tom."

"Well, I'm him."

"That doesn't sound right," she answered gravely. "You shouldn't say 'I'm him,' you should say 'that's me.'"

"Well, they're both right," he protested. "I'm him and that's me."

"But you can't be him and me as well."

"Why not?"

"Well, it's this way. Now listen very closely, please, and don't wriggle. I called him and him's Tom, and me's I and I'm Eileen, and you're not either of us," she added triumphantly.

"Yes, I am, I'm Tom," he protested.

"Is that your name?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I see now. But I was calling our cat. See, there he is going down the path."

The boy turned round again and saw a magnificent Persian cat trending his way daintily down the garden. A presentiment of evil occurred to him.

"Don't let him go through into our garden," he cried. "Chutney would kill him straight off."

"I don't know Chutney."

"He's dad's bull-dog."

"Well, he mustn't." And the child's lips began to quiver, "and you're not a nice boy at all. Here's mother coming, I'll tell her I mustn't play with you."

Tom stood irresolute as the girl ran to meet her mother. And whilst matters were at this stage there was a sudden hoarse growl from Chutney, followed by a snarl from the Persian, and then the latter raced along the garden-path into the house, followed by the ungainly form of the bull-dog.

The lady who had just come out caught her daughter up in her arms, and followed the two animals into the house.

Meanwhile the Colonel had been aroused by the noise of the combat, and now found his way through the gap in the hedge into his neighbour's garden.

"Tom, what are you doing here? What's the matter? Who's hurting Chutney?"

The question was answered automatically, for the bull-dog presently appeared in the kitchen porch, whence he ambled sideways towards his master. He was followed at a respectful distance by a servant girl who carried a broom-stick, and looked "as though she would an she dared."

"The hugliest hanimal I hever set heyes upon," she cried, "folks as keeps bull-dogs needs keepin' theirselves." And she nodded to her own mysterious thoughts. "Straight weskits for man and beast and no queschuns harsked," she muttered, and then with a sudden glance at the indignant Colonel, "Was you pleased to hown this luvly dog, sir?"

"Pleased and proud," snapped the old soldier. "Have you a message to deliver to me? If so, deliver it, and go away."

What she would have said to this terrific insult cannot even be imagined, for at this moment Mrs. Howard herself reappeared and bade Jane return to the house. The Colonel was already hatless, so he bowed profoundly and then took the war right into the enemy's country according to his habit.

"I regret exceedingly, madam," he began, "that your people should have been allowed to plague and ill-treat my poor dog as they have done. A poor, timid, mild, inoffensive animal that wouldn't hurt anybody——"

"After it had eaten them," retorted the lady with some warmth. "Your dog should be kept under better control, sir. It is dangerous, especially where there are children."

"You are mistaken there, indeed. It wouldn't hurt a child for anything."

"You must allow me to believe my own eyes, sir. Eileen,

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come indoors at once, and please remember you are not to play with that little boy any more."

The lady turned and walked majestically into her own house, with her little daughter dragging at her hand and stealing a wistful look towards her new playmate. The Colonel stalked back to his own territory, where he ordered seven days C. B. for Chutney, and threatened Tom with a similar punishment if he spoke to the little girl next door. And so the great feud began.

* * *

It might have been expected that a quarrel arising out of a misunderstanding would soon have righted itself, especially as the parties concerned were next-door neighbours. But when you get an old soldier with a villainously quick temper opposed to the widow of an old soldier who had a still more "Indian temper," and when both parties are too honest to claim they are in the right and too proud to admit they are in the wrong, a trifling disagreement may drag on for a long time.

One evening the Colonel took a turn in the garden just after sunset. As he sauntered quietly down the path, he took out a cigar and proceeded to cut it. At the same moment he heard the sound of voices whispering. He stopped suddenly and silently, his first thought being that burglars were hiding, waiting till the early morning before they commenced operations.

The old soldier felt that he was in for a treat. It was not heroic work certainly, but it would serve, and anyhow the odds were against him. Before deciding on his plan of campaign he resolved to draw a little closer and try to learn something of the enemy, and with this idea he crept quietly down the path until only the hedge separated him from the burglars. For by this time he had discovered that they were in the next garden.

"Not that it makes any difference," he thought sturdily, "If I found a man robbing my bitterest enemy I'd capture him as a public duty."

Indeed, if the truth must be admitted, he was rather pleased than otherwise at his discovery, for the service he hoped to render to his neighbour might prove a means of reconciliation to that lady, without any loss of dignity on either side. Such a reconciliation was ardently desired by the Colonel who liked courage wherever he met it, and was delighted with the undaunted manner in which Mrs. Howard had repelled his onslaught. So he came closer, and this is what he heard:

"It's only a few years more," whispered Burglar No. 1, "and then we shall be old enough to marry and it doesn't matter what they think, because we shall be so happy together."

"I hope so," whispered Burglar No. 2, "but you can please yourself anyway because you're a man, Tom, and men always have their own way. I've heard nurse say so, and she said it killed pa, becos he'd have lived longer if they'd conterdicted him offener."

The Colonel crept away with a grim smile lurking about his grizzled moustache. And just as he got to a safe distance he heard the voice of Jane calling in the sweet accents of Cockaigne:

"Miss Heileen! Miss Heileen! Come here at once! Where have you been, you naughty child?"

"I've been talking to Tom ever so long," said the child happily, "and he's ever such a nice boy, and we're going to make mother and Tom's father be friends, and then we're going to be married. And they won't be lonely becos we' going to live in Tom's house and his father will come and take care of mother, and we'll go and see them quite often, you know."

The Colonel had not intended to punish his son for disobeying instructions, seeing that the information had been obtained by eaves-dropping. But the boy, hurrying back to the house, suddenly ran against his father in the dark, and explanations were inevitable.

"Where have you been?" said the latter, in a gruff voice, that was absolutely belied, if Tom could only have seen, by the pride that shone in the Colonel's eyes.

"I've been talking to Eileen, dad."

"Humph! Direct breach of instructions. Three days C. B.," growled the Colonel.

The little fellow saluted in military fashion as his father had taught him, but made no complaint. They returned to the house together in silence. When they reached the door, the Colonel stooped and kissed his son.

"I'm going out to smoke," he explained. "Good-night, my boy."

"Good night, dad."

Colonel Bolders, left alone in the garden, lighted his neglected cigar carefully and slowly. Then he blew out the match and dropped it very deliberately to the ground.

"If that lad doesn't rebel," he thought grimly, "I'll drive him out of the family. But I'm not afraid that he'll disgrace me. He won't tell a lie to save his life, but, all the same, he won't have his love affairs interfered with by a chuckle-headed old fool who's ashamed of himself and daren't say so."

"So they're going to be married and leave the grown-ups to take care of themselves. No, not quite that, to take care of each other. Humph!"

* * * * *

On the following evening, when the Colonel returned from his customary stroll, he inquired whether Tom had gone to bed. The servant to whom he spoke appeared rather surprised, but said that the boy had gone out about an hour previously, and had left a note for his father in the drawing-room.

The Colonel hurried along the hall and soon obtained the important document. It was written in a very straggling fashion with sundry blots and smudges, but the boy told his tale with commendable brevity.

"DERE DAD,"—he wrote—"*I'm runing away with Ileen becos we are both miserble and we are going to be married, and Please excus haste.—Your loving son,* "TOM."

When the Colonel had read this letter twice over he put it into an envelope addressed to Mrs. Howard, and desired that it might be delivered to her at once.

Then he set off to find the truants which was by no means an easy task, for there were several streets, along any of which they might have gone. The first, and perhaps the most likely way led him through the centre of the town, for he thought the two children would simply have wandered out of De Parys Avenue into High Street, without giving a thought to their pursuers.

But just as he crossed the Square, two persons passed him on the other side. They were Mrs. Howard and Jane, and they passed the Colonel at a quick pace, apparently without having noticed him. And as they went down the High Street, he changed his mind suddenly and turned to the left.

He soon reached the Embankment, and here a fresh terror gripped his heart. He glanced swiftly along the course of the river. There were two people standing a little distance away, gazing earnestly into the moonlit water. The Colonel gazed also, but could see nothing. He was beginning to

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run along the Embankment, eager to know what the other party had found, when they moved slowly away.

He sank upon a seat with a hoarse cry of relief. The doubts and terrors that had assailed him vanished in an instant, and he rose to his feet again to recommence the search. There was no time to be lost, for even as he moved there came on a heavy shower of rain.

With this new source of anxiety, he turned hesitatingly from right to left. Then he decided to cross the river and search the meadows at the other side. But this time he felt hopeless from the first, for the runaways were not likely to have come to such an open place.

The rain was still pouring down as he turned the corner of the band-stand, but what cared he? There before him lay the two children! Tom sat propped up against the side of the stand with the girl's head resting upon his knee. She had evidently fallen asleep in that position, and he had taken off his little Eton jacket and laid it over her shoulders to shelter her from the driving rain.

The Colonel cleared his throat gruffly as he approached.

"Tom," he growled, and then with a sudden change of manner, "stand up, my boy, and put on your coat. I'll carry Eileen."

The boy rose and trotted home by his father's side in silence. Even when they reached the High Street and were joined by Mrs. Howard and Jane, he seemed to take but little interest in the meeting. And as for Eileen she slept soundly until the following morning, when she wakened in her own cot.

Mrs. Howard and the Colonel were silent also, but there was no hostility between them now. Neither liked to make the first advance, however, although they both tried to coax their stubborn tongues to speak. And so the great opportunity passed away and they parted at the garden-gate with the merest formula of politeness.

Tom's unusual silence was explained the next morning. He awakened with a severe cold, which threatened to turn into pneumonia. The doctor shook his head very seriously, gave careful instructions to the housekeeper, and went his way, after promising to call again later in the morning.

Meanwhile the boy called unceasingly for his little playmate, until the Colonel at last resolved to sacrifice his pride, and to ask if she might come in. But just as he had made up his mind the doctor reappeared.

"Going to beg for the little girl?" he said. "Humph!" Would it relieve you in any way, Colonel, if I called on Mrs. Howard and asked her. I know her very well, and——"

"No, sir, said the other sturdily," "I appreciate your motive. I suppose you have heard of our little squabble."

"That is so, Colonel, and I thought——"

"No, thank you. I'm very grateful, doctor, but this is a case where it wouldn't be right to beg a favour by deputy. I'll go at once and get it over."

The two men left the room together. The Colonel saw his visitor off, and then made his way to the front door of his neighbour's house. He rang the bell with some misgiving, for the errand he came upon was not much to his liking.

"Is Mrs. Howard in?"

"No, sir, she went out only half a minute ago; said she'd be some time."

The Colonel groaned audibly.

"Which way did she go? Can you tell me?"

"I can't, sir, she left the house by the side door."

"Thank you, I'll call again." The poor father turned away with the boy's cries ringing piteously in his ears. He unlocked the door of his own house and entered slowly and almost unwillingly, wondering what he should say.

As he opened the bedroom door, he found to his surprise, that his son was fast asleep, and his breathing was almost normal. Someone rose from a chair by the window, someone whom the Colonel in his trouble had not noticed until then.

"I have taken a great liberty," she whispered, "but your boy caught his illness entirely through the care he took of my little girl, and, as I know something of nursing, I felt bound to offer my services at any rate."

The Colonel grasped her outstretched hand, and then, with a sudden gesture that sealed their reconciliation, he raised it to his lips.

"I have been to your house," he whispered, "to beg your forgiveness for my rudeness, and to ask if your child could pay a little visit to Tom. They're so fond of each other, they've quite mapped out their lives together."

He came to a stop, as a particular portion of the plan proposed by Eileen occurred to his memory. And Mrs. Howard, looking at him, blushed suddenly and turned towards the sleeping boy.

Wal Frank.

Your Editor Chats.

THE third Unsolved Love Problem appears on page 651, and I still keep open my offer of ONE GUINEA for the best solution of the difficulty.

I know my readers like to have an opportunity to show their powers of lucid reasoning, and they have in "The Dilemma of Betty Carteret" an excellent field for argument.

An answer is wanted to the question which concludes the story, "Shall I tell him, or shall I say nothing?" and the guinea goes to him or her who sends in what I consider to be the most all-round satisfactory reply. Write clearly, on one side of the paper only, and do not exceed one hundred words.

Replies should be addressed to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.," and must have "Love Problem" marked in the top, left-hand corner. The very latest date on which I can receive manuscripts is Friday, the 27th of November. None arriving after this day will be considered, but you may send them in as early as you please.

Those who have decided to send in replies in connection with the problem, "The Mistake of Millicent Howard" must remember that the closing day for that competition is Friday, November 20th.

I AM glad to be able to say that "A Criminal Millionaire" is very popular with my readers. When an author with the reputation that Mr. George Griffith enjoys contributes a serial great things are always expected, and I feel assured now that nobody will be disappointed, for the appreciatory letters that have come to these offices concerning "A Criminal Millionaire" have been as congratulatory as they are numerous.

Wilfrid Ellerton's adventures in the Underworld, the machinations of Isolo Staunton, and the development of the suspicions of Stanislaus Smith, *alias* de Ronski, will make very interesting reading for the forthcoming instalments.

ON page 665 there appears for the first time "Our Bachelor's Observations." These are contributed by a bachelor on our staff, who spends the best part of his day evolving epigrams and cynical sayings. But, as "there's many a true word spoken in jest," the feature will prove most instructive.

THIS is a little foreword to let you know that the Christmas number of *Short Stories* is in preparation.

I may truly state that this will be a colossal production, surpassing anything that has ever yet been brought out, and that, as you all know, is saying a good deal. It will be published on December 15th, and will consist of sixty-four pages, brimful of absorbing literature.

As an indication of what may be anticipated, you will be glad to hear that W. Pett Ridge, the well-known humorous author, is contributing an excellent story, one of his very best. This is just one of the tit-bits.

Your Editor.

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POWERFUL NEW ROMANCE. **START TO-DAY.**

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

INTRODUCTION.

CAPTAIN PERCY IDDISON and Lady Maud Hyam, his *fiancée*, are present at an "At Home" given by Lady Medcalf-Mears.

There they meet Isolo Staunton, the lion of the hour, a multi-millionaire, and styled "the modern Monte Christo." The curious feature about him is that, although he is admitted to the very cream of Society, nobody knows his past nor how he accumulated his vast wealth.

Wilfrid Ellerton, a fine young fellow, a worthy son of a worthy father, is also there, and is introduced to Iddison.

The latter notices a remarkable streak of white hair on Ellerton's head, running from the front of the left ear down to the base of the skull.

Isolo Staunton also sees this, but it causes him a great deal more anxiety than it does Iddison.

He knows the cause of that streak! He knows why that white hair is present on the head of one so young! He remembers how, when he was Isolo Zuarez, an escaped convict from the Chincha Islands, he was adrift on the ocean in a small boat, together with a man and a boy.

Isolo had picked up an axe to end the existence of the other man, when the boy, divining his purpose, intervened, and received the weapon on his own head.

They were rescued from their peril—but the blow the boy received had rendered him unconscious of all that had happened.

He had never since remembered.

The question that worries the criminal millionaire as he leaves Lady Medcalf-Mears' house is this—would his memory return?

If it should—what a grim irony of Fate it would be!

Staunton's blood is Spanish, and the ideal for the accomplishment of which he is amassing his many millions is to see Spain reinstated again as Queen of the Seas and Mistress of the East and West!

And now his ideal, his freedom, perhaps his very life hangs on the memory of a mere lad of twenty-three!

If Ellerton remembers the episode on the ocean it will mean, at least, a return to the Chinchas as a convict!

Staunton goes to his magnificent yacht, the *Isola*, lying alongside the Ocean Quay, Southampton, to talk the matter over with his right-hand friend and confidant, Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia, the only person living to whom Isolo Staunton has told the story of his life.

The millionaire tells Valdez of this awkward coincidence of his meeting Ellerton again, and asks his advice.

Valdez strongly urges Staunton to go to extremes to get Wilfrid out of the way, but Isolo is not willing to compass the boy's death.

Then Don Ramiero advises the millionaire to invite to the yacht a Society party, for a trip to Norway. Ellerton is to be one of the guests, and during the cruise steps are to be taken for his removal.

Staunton agrees to this and the invitations are sent out.

Mercedes, the beautiful, fascinating daughter of the millionaire, is to do the duties of hostess, and among the guests are Captain Percy Iddison and Lady Maud Hyam.

When Mercedes and Ellerton meet, the former recognises the latter as the boy who once rescued her from death, in Chili.

The two are drawn together by the bonds of love, and many are the glances that pass between them.

If Staunton had only seen one of these, the crime which had already been decided upon would never have been committed, and many things which came to pass in consequence of it would never have happened.

Wilfrid Ellerton, during the night, is, by a piece of ingenious trickery, secured and safely imprisoned beneath the decks of the *Isola*.

The rumour is the next morning circulated that he had fallen overboard and been drowned.

When Mercedes hears the news—the glibly spoken lie—she falls fainting to the deck and becomes seriously ill.

In consequence of the alleged accident the ship's company is landed at Leith. But Lady Maud Hyam and her *fiancé* have suspicions of foul play.

Staunton, leaving full arrangements for the disposal of Ellerton, goes personally to break the sad news to the latter's father.

Two nurses are taken on board to tend Mercedes, and one of these is Janet Yuill, who turns out to be the wife of Herbert Darfield, once Arthur Culworth, criminal, and now First Officer on the *Isola*.

The yacht sails away, presumably to the Mediterranean, but it really makes for the regions of the Arctic Ocean.

Suddenly the yacht comes to anchor, and marvellous are the things that now happen.

Ellerton, unconscious, is put into a small diving-chamber, and accompanied by Ramiero and Captain Durtal.

Then the chamber sinks many fathoms below the sea, and they alight in a most gorgeous underworld, where Ellerton is to be kept a prisoner.

M. Herarra, reigning for Staunton in this kingdom under the Seas, receives full instructions as to the manner in which the lad is to be treated.

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THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

In the Underworld.

WHILE Herarra's visitors were talking in his almost magically luxurious reception-room, his second in command, Andrée Ducos, a man who had once been a captain of Engineers on the general staff of the French Army, but who had betrayed his trust, had re-opened the door leading from the Central Chamber to the gallery.

He posted an armed sentry on each side of it, gave a few orders to a couple of subordinates, and presently a procession of about a dozen of the slave-workers—for these descendants of the old sea-warriors who had been so strangely entombed in the Underworld, were now nothing better than this—came out from one of the five tunnels which led into the chamber towards the door.

Each was carrying on his shoulders a small square box, which was evidently very heavy for its size. Ducos went before them into the gallery, and stood beside the entrance to the lift. Each box bore a letter and a number, and as it passed him he checked them off on a tally-sheet. When the lift was full he closed the water-tight door and told the captain of the *Isola* that his first consignment of cargo was ready.

As soon as the answer came back over the wire the covering plate slid back, and the lift returned to its place in the hull of the yacht. The operation was repeated six times before the conversation in the reception-room was finished, and by that time considerable material had been provided for the further mystification of the civilised world on a subject in which it had been for some years both deeply and angrily interested.

When the lift descended for the seventh time Ducos closed the doors and informed his chief by telephone that the transfer of the cargo was complete and that the lift was ready.

"Well, gentlemen," said Herarra, as he put back the receiver, "my lieutenant informs me that the work is done, and the lift awaits your pleasure"

"Then, my dear Herarra," said Don Ramiero, rising from the soft, silken-covered cushions on which he had been reclining, "I think we had better thank you for your generous hospitality in just one more glass of this very excellent wine of yours, and then get back to the other world. I don't think there is anything more of importance to say."

"No, Señor, I think not," replied Herarra as he opened another bottle of champagne and the golden-haired attendants presented the foaming glasses on their silver salvers. "I fully understand the instructions with which I have been honoured, and you may be confident that they will be carried out to the letter. As I said before, when my esteemed guest wakes he will begin a new life in a new world, which I shall do everything in my power to make a pleasant place of residence for him. Saving only release, and the sight of earth, and sea and sky, all that man can desire shall be his."

"Not by any means a bad exchange," laughed the captain of the *Isola*, with a comprehensive glance about the splendid apartment. "There's many a poor fellow wasting his life up yonder trying to keep a maimed soul in a starved body, who would be glad enough to say 'good-bye' to sun and stars on those terms, and your guest will be more than foolish if he gives way to any vain regrets for what he can never see again. Well, Señor, since we must go, here's *au revoir*, and success to you and your wonderful kingdom under the sea."

"And to that I will add many pleasant days and years for its new citizen," said Don Ramiero, also raising his glass. "By the way, Herarra," he went on, with a glance at the three girls, "you will have to find our young friend a wife. Certainly there should be no difficulty in pleasing him in that respect, and, of course, nothing could reconcile him more quickly to his change of worlds than the loving companionship of, for instance, one of these ladies of your submarine paradise."

"I have promised, Señor," replied the Spaniard, setting down his empty glass and taking a cigar from one of the girls, "that nothing shall be wanting to complete the happiness of his new life with us. Surely you do not think that I could forget the most important consideration of all. Certainly if I did it would not be long before my good wife reminded me of it. Women, you know, are the same all over the world—and under it too."

Don Ramiero took a last look at Ellerton, who was still breathing quietly, and lying motionless on the divan, and turned away thinking, not, perhaps, without a twinge of regret, how tremendous a difference he had been the means of making in the fate of this man, and in that of the girl who was even now, perhaps, dying a mental death for love of him.

When the lift had carried his visitors back to the yacht, and his domains were once more absolutely shut off, as every dweller in them save himself believed, from the world above, Herarra closed the gallery door and told his lieutenant to send the four bearers who had carried Ellerton from the lift to him. One of the sentries was sent to fetch them, and when they came they stood in a row before him with hands behind them, and heads downbent, like so many chidden schoolboys.

"Sigur, Elfreth, Jan, and Gurt," he said in sharp, stern tones, "you have done work to-day which you are now ordered to forget. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, lord, we understand," they replied together, speaking mechanically like a chorus, and bowing their heads still lower.

"Good," said Herarra, "and when you forget that, remember also that you have never seen the stranger, and that you do not know how he came here. If he learns anything it will be the boiling lake for all of you. You know the law?"

"Yes, lord, we know it," they murmured again, "we will obey."

"You had better," was the harsh reply, "and now, to reward your obedience, you are released from more work to-day, and you shall be made happy. Ducos," he went on, turning to his lieutenant, "send them away to their quarters and fill them with rum till they can't lie still without holding to the floor. They'll have forgotten all about it by the time they come to their senses again."

"Very well, sir," answered Ducos with an evil grin, "there's nothing like a good drunk now and then to keep these animals in their proper places. Jacques here will take care that they don't know the difference between up and down inside an hour."

"We thank you, lord," came the mechanical chorus again, and then the grinning sentry marched the serfs off to, in the most literal sense, drain the cup of their degradation to the last drop.

As soon as he had settled this little business, Herarra returned to the reception room to do something which was a good deal more important, for now the time had come to rouse Ellerton from his drug-slumber, and to introduce him to the strange world which, according to the decree of its absolute ruler, was to be his dwelling-place for the rest of his life.

The three girls were still in the room when he returned, for he had told them to watch the sleeper.

"Brenda," he said to the tallest and, perhaps, the most beautiful, "this is the stranger who has come from very far away, from a place like the shining world which your old traditions tell of, but he does not know where it is or how he came here, for he has been mad since then, and, moreover, he has sinned very deeply against the lord of this cave-world where we dwell, and whose word is law to all of us, and so he is banished for the rest of his days. Do you understand all that I am saying?"

"Yes, lord," the girl replied in a very sweet voice, and in English which had a strange, old-world sound. "I have remembered all your words, I shall not forget them."

"That is very good," he continued kindly, laying his hand gently on her silken-gold hair. "And do you also understand, Thyrza and Myra?"

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The other two bowed their heads, and said in their low, sweet voices, "Yes, lord, we have heard and understand."

"Now, I have told you this," he went on, "because you have seen him brought here, and because you are to wait on him, and bring him food and drink, and play on your harps and zithers, and sing to him when he desires it, for it is the will of him who commands, that this stranger shall be treated kindly and punished only with banishment. But he is to learn nothing of how he came here, or who came with him, or why he is here. If he learns that, then, beautiful as you are, and obedient as you have always been, you will not escape the death of those who disobey."

They instinctively shrank away from him and went nearer to each other as he spoke the last few words, for the death was a very terrible one—nothing less than being flung from a ledge of rock into a lake of boiling, sulphurous water twenty feet below it. Then Brenda crossed her hands over her breast and said:

"Lord, we will obey," and the others followed her example.

"Very good again," he said going towards the divan. "Now, Thyrza, go to the kitchen and bring a pitcher of hot water, and you, Myra, bring the tray with the spirits and a glass. Brenda, do you go and stand at the end of the divan there, so that when our guest's eyes open they may look upon the fairest face and form in Cave-Land."

The girl's eyelids rose for a moment, uncovering a pair of great, lustrous eyes, blue as the sky they had never looked upon nor ever would while Isolo Staunton remained lord of this hidden realm. An almost imperceptibly faint tinge of pink came into her cheeks as she looked at Ellerton's sleeping face, and then her eyelids fell again, and she did as he had bidden her without a word.

When Thyrza came back with a long-necked silver jug, of apparently old Norse workmanship, in her hand, Herarra mixed a glass of old liqueur brandy and water, and when he had taken a sip at it to try the strength, he slipped his arm under Ellerton's shoulders and raised him to a half-sitting position, telling Thyrza to pile up the cushions behind him. Then he took a spoon, and, while Myra held the glass, opened his mouth slightly with his left hand and poured a few drops into his lips.

After the third application of the hot spirit his jaw moved, and there was a convulsive motion of the throat. Then Herarra dropped the spoon and held the glass to his lips. A few drops went down and then a few more, mechanically swallowed, then came a little gasping cough, and his eyes opened.

For a full minute they wandered hither and thither over the gorgeous draperies of the walls and ceiling, the gleaming mirrors, and the splendid ornaments and furnishings of the great chamber. Then they seemed to get the focus of things. At length they rested on Brenda's lovely face, framed in its shimmering halo of golden mist.

"Mercedes! Darling, have you come back to me, or am I dreaming still? I have been ill, or sleeping, or both, a long time, eh? But I have dreamt of you—but, no—you—yes, you are beautiful, but you are not Mercedes. Who are you? And you, too. You are not Señor Valdez or Doctor Billaud. Where am I—what have you been doing with me? I am not dreaming still, am I?"

The words came feebly and jerkily at first, but they quickly gathered strength and coherence until the last were almost angrily spoken. As he looked at Herarra he sat up suddenly, and while he was staring into his eyes he put out his hand mechanically and took the glass from him. He drank nearly half the brandy and water in quick gulps, and with each gulp his strength seemed to return in waves of warmth. Then he fixed his eyes on Herarra's again and said suddenly in Spanish:

"You—you—where have I seen you before? No, no, I can't remember now. My head's too weak still. But I have seen you somewhere, and I shall remember soon. Who are you? Don't you recognise me? What place is this I've been brought to? I was on the yacht with Mercedes and the rest of them only—no, how long ago is it?"

Herarra did his best to repress a violent start and did not quite succeed, for he, too, had been wondering where he had seen his guest before. He remembered now, and in his recollection he found a very good personal reason for obeying his instructions to the letter.

"My dear and honoured Señor," he replied in his softest Andalusian, "permit me to offer my most thankful congratulations on your very long-delayed recovery. Do me the favour of taking a little more of the spirit. You are still a little weak. Ah, yes, that is well. Now will you lie back and take some rest?"

"I may as well do that," replied Ellerton, sinking back on the cushions which Thyrza had piled up behind him. "But you have not answered my questions. Who are you? What place is this, and how did I get here from the yacht? Come now, I must know that at once."

Herarra looked steadily at him for a few moments. Then, seeing no further sign of recognition, he shook his head, and said:

"My dear Señor, I am deeply sorry that I cannot answer all your questions because I do not understand them; but I will answer some since you seem to have forgotten. I am Leon Herarra, a dweller in Cave-Land like yourself, This is one of the apartments of your dwelling. Of any yacht—whatever that may be—or of her you have called Mercedes, I know nothing. Nor do I know how you came here, if not, like myself and the rest of us, by the usual process of being born here. You have been ill for many weeks, and it may be that in your fever you have dreamt of many strange and impossible things that your eyes have never seen. But you are well again now, and you will soon forget these and return to your old life."

"My old life, man! What the dickens do you mean?" exclaimed Ellerton, sitting up again and staring angrily about him. "I know nothing of this place. I never was here before, and though I seem to have seen you before, it certainly was not here. And yet you have the assurance to tell me that I was born here! It's a lie, and you must know it, whoever you are. I was on board Mr. Staunton's yacht—only a short time ago, and I can prove it——"

He stopped short. Could he? A numbing sense of some horrible mystery descended swiftly upon him. The stimulus of the brandy was dying away fast. The shock was too great for his drug-enfeebled brain. The lights and the mirrors grew dim. He uttered a gasping little sigh, and fell back on the cushions, almost into Thyrza's arms. When he woke Herarra had gone. A soft hand was gently bathing his forehead with a sweet-smelling essence, and a lovely girl was waving a fan of snowy feathers over his face.

FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Financial Mystery.

On the evening of the day on which the *Isola* dropped her anchor in the pretty little harbour of Monaco, and Doctor Billaud had kept both his promise and his prophecy by delivering his patient to her father perfectly cured in body and mind, save for that one little cloud which had descended upon her intellect and utterly blotted out all recollection of the happenings of that fatal morning on which he had formally announced the death of Wilfrid Ellerton, a somewhat important meeting of four

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persons took place in the private office of one of the Assistant Commissioners of Police at New Scotland Yard.

The Commissioner's guests for the time being were the Deputy Master of the Mint, a Treasury Solicitor, and a fair-haired, blue-eyed, pink-and-white complexioned, harmlessly insignificant-looking little man whose official position was Chief of the English Department of the International Secret Police.

His name was Stanislaus Smith. Of course he had a dozen or so official *aliases* only too well-known to cosmopolitan criminality, but that was his real one.

No man in Europe or America had run more distinguished criminals to earth, or exposed and wrecked more artistically-designed schemes for the swindling of the simple than Stanislaus Smith, but at last he had been compelled to confess that, for the time being and, until some quite unexpected revelation happened, he was quite as much at sea as the Assistant Commissioner himself, and that was saying a good deal.

There had been silence in the room for some few minutes, during which the Commissioner and the Deputy Master had been running through several wide-margined pages of figures and statements, the latter in French, German, and Italian, while Mr. Stanislaus Smith conversed in scarcely audible tones with the solicitor from the Treasury.

At length Ellerton's eyes rested on Brenda's lovely face, and he mistook her for Mercedes.

Then the Deputy Master, looking very grave and troubled, left the desk and took a vacant arm-chair, crossed his knees, and placed the points of his fingers and thumbs together in an attitude of anticipation.

"Well, gentlemen," the Commissioner began, leaning his elbows on the sloping front of the desk, "I am afraid that we must confess that, up to the present, no solution, by which I, of course, mean no logical, practical solution of this extraordinary problem seems to be any nearer to us than it was to the West Indian authorities some twelve years ago, when, as you know, a similar puzzle on a smaller scale confronted them. And yet, as far as I can see, there is no possibility of doubting the facts, is there, Sir Edward?"

"Not the slightest," exclaimed the Deputy Master, uncrossing his legs and sitting bolt upright. "There are the facts, and we cannot get away from them any more than we can explain them. That is the most exasperating part of the whole business.

"If there is an industry in the world that ought to be capable of exact checking as to its output it is the minting and distribution of money. Every civilised country in the world keeps the most exact returns. Fraud on the part of mint officials or workmen is simply impossible. Any attempt at trickery would be discovered within a week.

"No, I say again, and I think that Mr. Dennisen and Mr. Smith will agree with me, that, so far as the mints of the civilised world are concerned, it is hopeless to look to them for any clue to the mystery—for that, after all, it is. What do you say, Mr. Smith?"

"I quite agree with you, Sir Edward," replied the detective in a voice that was almost as soft as a woman's. "It's a little humiliating, I must confess, for people of experience in matters of this kind to have to admit that they are beaten, even for a time, but after working on the case with my European colleagues for over a year now, I'm afraid we've got to say that we are just about where we started."

"And yet surely," said the Treasury Solicitor, taking his monocle out of his left eye and looking critically at it, "if the age of miracles has really passed, there must be some human explanation of the thing. It can't be possible to swindle the whole civilised world in this way without someone giving the fraud away. Whoever the principals are, they must employ hundreds of agents all over the world, and surely if the Governments put their hands in their pockets and offered a really big reward, say a hundred or even two hundred thousand, with a guarantee of indemnity, someone would be tempted to give the show away."

"I'm afraid that you are hoping rather too much, Mr. Dennison," replied the Commissioner, taking up a few foolscap sheets from his desk. "We have now practically complete returns from every country in the world which mints its own coinage, and these returns show, as far, of course, as can be ascertained, the excess of coinage in circulation over the output of the mints.

"We ourselves have, roughly speaking, about two and a half millions' worth of silver coin, and half a million's worth of gold, which Sir Edward confesses himself quite unable to account for. Germany is nearly four millions to the bad in silver and nickel coins, and more than a million in inferior gold. France and Russia have lost over ten millions between them on gold and silver coin, and as much again on notes,

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which not even the official printers can tell from their own work. Our advices from the United States show that the Washington Mint and the Assay Office are some fifty m llion dollars wrong in their calculations as to coin, while the surplus of notes amounts to nearly twice that sum.

"Italy and Spain, too, have been flooded with silver coin with which gold has been bought, and then, as in the other cases, the gold has vanished. The same thing, only on a greater scale, of course, has happened in Austria, and even in Japan. The Banks of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and our Colonies, as well as those of Europe, are beginning to gravely doubt their own paper.

"And yet, as is the case with multitudes of coins which cannot have issued from any authorised mint, the counterfeits are so perfect that they cannot be told from the real things. Even the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street can no longer boast that her promise to pay cannot be successfully imitated; and when it comes to that, gentlemen, I think you will agree with me that matters are becoming rather serious."

"They are so serious," assented the Deputy-Master, "that if some means cannot be found of discovering and putting an end to these amazing frauds, the financial balance of the world's markets will be upset, and I need hardly say that that would mean something very like the control of the world—for it must be confessed that modern civilisation rests upon a cash basis—by those who command the sources of these mysterious supplies. They exist somewhere and they simply must be discovered if Society is not to be swamped by this unceasing flood of illicit money."

"Of course, everyone must agree with you there, Sir Edward, as far as the theory goes," said the Treasury Solicitor, screwing his glass into his left eye, "but the difficulty is in the practice. To my mind the most extraordinary part of the puzzle is the fact that, as Mr. Smith will tell you, the police of Europe know every professional coiner and counterfeiter in and out of prison, and they are also absolutely convinced that if all these gentry were allowed to join forces and work without let or hindrance for a couple of years on end they would not be able to account for a hundredth part of this mysterious output of coins and notes."

"Yes, that is perfectly true, Mr. Dennison," said the detective, suddenly waking out of what appeared to be a very brown study, "and I can tell you something else which, in its way, is even more curious than that. These coins and notes which come from no one knows where, are so perfect and they are produced in such quantities that, as an old expert at the game was telling me only last night, the regular professional cannot make his craft pay, so he is going out of business and taking refuge in burglary.

"The one fact that we may make sure of, gentlemen," he went on more seriously, "is this. The people who are working this world-wide swindle must not only have great capital—which, of course, they have now—but they must also have a perfect organisation and, what is more important than all else, they must have some place or places, which the rest of the world knows nothing about, in which they can carry on the practical, mechanical part of their work—work which, I think, Sir Edward will agree with me in saying, must at least be equal to that of the English Mint and the Bank of England put together."

"Undoubtedly," said the Deputy-Master, "if anything I should call that a low estimate. And yet it seems utterly incredible that such a vast industrial organisation, as we know it must have been for the last four years at least, can exist in any part of the known world without being discovered. To my mind it seems utterly absurd, and yet, unfortunately, it is only too true."

"That, after all, is the crux of the question," added the Solicitor. "Half the detectives of Europe and America have been trying for years to catch the people who pass these notes and coins, and they have not caught one. They have only caught the agents of the pettifogging practitioners who make half-crowns out of pewter pots and Britannia metal spoons, or idiots who think they can reproduce notes by photography. The trouble with these people, whoever they are, is that they turn out as good stuff as the mints and the banks do. No, we shall never catch them on bad quality. I daresay we ourselves have changed hundreds of their coins—and a good many of their notes, too, perhaps. Is not that possible, Sir Edward?"

"I am afraid it is only too possible," was the smiling reply. "You see, these people are really practical bimetallists. As mere silver at the present price, four five-shilling pieces, allowing for the expense of minting, would be worth about nine shillings; but, as fourth parts of a sovereign, they are worth twenty, and, of course, the same is true in degree of shillings, francs, marks, dollars—in fact, of any silver coinage on a gold basis. Given the plant and a safe place to work it in with plenty of raw material, and the profits would be at least a hundred per cent., and on the notes it would be about a thousand, or more. I fully agree with Mr. Dennison that the only way to put a stop to this ruinous work is to discover the place or places in which it is carried on."

"Quite so, Sir Edward," said the Commissioner, drily, "and since it is plain that such place or places must exist somewhere, and as they must of necessity be pretty large, we have got to find them, even if they are located at the poles. I am sorry that, after all this time, we have not been able to get any further than theory. We must hope that Mr. Smith's little trip to Monte Carlo may lead him to something like a clue."

"I most sincerely trust so, sir," said the detective, in a by no means sanguine tone, "but until I know what my colleague Trapané may have to tell me, I am as much in the dark as you are as to possible results. At the same time the very satisfactory powers which the British Government has been good enough to vest in me by your hands to-night cannot fail to be of the greatest service in following up such clues as we may have the good fortune to discover."

"There's one thing," added the Solicitor, who was also going to the Paradise of Knaves and Fools on a sort of semi-official holiday, "if M. Trapané has really got anything to work on, and he's hardly the man to be fooled by a canard, the field will be both narrowed and crowded—narrowed as to space and crowded as to possible criminals—if I may put it so, and surely if any definite traces of this cosmopolitan swindle ought to show themselves anywhere it ought to be there."

"I am not without hopes," said Mr. Smith, looking at his watch and rising. "We know, of course, that the flood of the silver tide has set in very strongly towards the 'Tables,' and that much larger quantities are in general circulation than usual. And now, gentlemen, if you will excuse me, I must go. I have a good many scattered threads to gather up and place in other hands before I start to-morrow."

He and the solicitor left the building together and strolled round by the Embankment in the direction of Northumberland Avenue. Though not exactly officially connected, their duties had brought them together on many occasions and, from being professional acquaintances, they had become fast and confidential friends. Arthur Dennison was recognised at the Treasury as quite the smartest of rising men in his department, and, although not quite thirty-five, that is to say, some seven years the great detective's junior, he was nearly always chosen for what appeared to be the hopeless cases—which was the principal reason why he had been asked to select Monte Carlo as a specially interesting place in which to spend his leave.

"If you have half an hour to spare, Dennison," said Mr. Smith, "I should be very glad if you would come with me to the Hotel Victoria. I am staying there at present with my wife and daughter, whom, strangely enough, you have never met though we have known each other so long. I should like to have a little chat with you, and you shall have some music if you like."

Although it seemed a little late to be asked to meet ladies whom he had never seen before, he knew his friend well enough to feel pretty certain that it was not altogether a social invitation, and so, as he had nothing particular to do before morning, he accepted. He knew nothing of Mrs. and Miss Smith beyond

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the fact that they lived almost constantly abroad, chiefly for the purpose of completing the vocal and musical education of Miss Smith.

"Ah, I am glad you can come," said Mr. Smith, "but, stop, I think that is one of my satellites across the road. Will you excuse me a moment? I will overtake you by the Avenue Theatre."

The next moment he had disappeared into the shadows under the railway arch. Dennison walked on and stopped at the theatre to light a cigarette. He had hardly got it well going when a young man of about his own age, fresh-faced and blue-eyed, with a soft hat poised rather rakishly on a very musical-looking mop of light brown hair, came up to him, and, throwing back the cape of his opera-cloak, asked him in very pleasant foreign English if he could favour him with a light.

Dennison handed him a match, almost without looking at him, but to his intense astonishment, when the stranger had lit up he passed his arm through his and said in familiar tones:

"Thanks, and now I am entirely at your service."

Dennison was too well practised at the game to make the slightest sign of astonishment. He took a few slow puffs and said quietly:

"Remarkably well done, my dear Smith, and in excellent time. Your man, I presume, had everything ready. But may I ask why such a respectable member of Society finds it necessary to visit his wife and daughter at a first-rate hotel in other than his proper person?"

"My dear Dennsion," he replied, once more affecting his excellent foreign accent, "I must first ask you to understand that there is no such person as Mr. Stanislaus Smith staying at the Hotel Victoria. You are going to be the guest of Herr Stanislas de Ronski, the not altogether unknown Polish violinist."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Dennison, this time fairly startled out of his self-control; "de Ronski—you——"

"Hush, my friend, or, as they say on the boards, we shall be observed. Come along, and the mystery shall be explained to you."

only was Mr. Smith saluted with more than usual deference by the heavily gold-laced porter and his satellites, but the major-domo himself, who happened to be passing across the hall just then, bowed to him with something more than condescension, and said politely:

A young man, of foreign appearance, asked Dennison for a light. It was Stanislaus Smith, the detective, admirably disguised.

"Good evening, Herr Ronski!"

A few people looked round as the well-known violinist bowed and murmured his reply to the greeting, and a page-boy came forward to perform the unnecessary task of escorting them to the lift which led to his suite of apartments on the second floor. They hung up their hats in a tiny ante-room, and then Mr. Smith opened an inner door and said, still in his accented English:

"Mr. Dennison, will you do me the honour of entering?"

FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Double Identity.

If Dennison had had any doubts as to the double identity of his companion while they were in the street, he would have lost them as they entered the hotel vestibule, for not

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A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

He went in past him as he held the door open. It was a snugly-furnished sitting or dining-room of the best hotel sort. His host closed the door and turned the key. Then he went to the sideboard, unlocked a spirit-case, got out a couple of glasses and a siphon of soda, and said:

"And now will you help yourself and excuse me once more, only for a couple of minutes? I will tell the ladies that you are here."

"Of course, my dear M. de Ronski," laughed Dennison, doing as he was bidden. "I hope, however, that you will apologise for my very untimely intrusion. I should be ashamed of myself if you had not made me so deeply interested."

"Which of itself is more than ample excuse, if any were needed," smiled Mr. Smith, as he disappeared through a curtained doorway at the other end of the room.

Dennison took a couple of sips at his whisky and soda and began to walk up and down the room, wondering not a little at the very strange revelation of the last ten minutes or so.

He knew that his friend and semi-colleague was, in his profession, a quick changer of character and appearance; but that he should combine two such utterly different and contradictory personalities as those of the cleverest detective and one of the best-known violinists and composers in Europe, was a trifle hard of belief, even for a man of his very considerable experience.

Presently the curtain was drawn back, and Mr. Smith returned. He still kept his admirable and, thanks to its simplicity, impenetrable disguise, but he had discarded his frock-coat and fancy waistcoat.

So perfectly did he play his part that Dennison had already begun to look upon him, in a certain measure, as a sort of new acquaintance.

"A thousand pardons, my dear friend, for keeping you so long," he said, "the truth is that we start the morning after to-morrow, and the ladies——"

"Yes, of course," interrupted Dennison, "that is just why I ought not to have come in. Naturally, your wife and daughter will be busy with their preparations."

"Pray say nothing more about that," replied Mr. Smith, "and now let us join them."

When Dennison went through the curtained door he found himself face to face with one of the most exquisitely graceful women he had ever seen. She was of medium height, but her perfectly-proportioned figure and the lofty pose of her head made her look almost tall.

Like a great many men who are really excellent judges of female beauty, Dennison never troubled about details. If anything was wrong in feature, carriage, or dress, it struck him instantly as a discord in music or a blemish in a painting would have done. Madame de Ronski, as her husband styled her during the introduction, and as Dennison ever after addressed her, commanded his complete admiration—and there were very few men who would have differed from him.

She might have been anything between thirty and forty, and she was younger-looking than young women of twenty-five. Her clear olive skin was without a wrinkle or a blemish. Her thick hair was blue-black, without a shimmer of silver, and her eyes and lips were still those of the seventeen-year-old Polish school-girl who had fallen in love with her cousin—and his violin—and had lived happily ever after.

During the introduction, another door had opened, and a tall slim figure in white, relieved by a broad belt of gold brocade and a ripple of blue-grey chiffon, flowing from neck to waist, came into the room. Dennison at once recognised her as the daughter of Madame de Ronski, despite the fact that her head was golden-crowned and her complexion as delicious a blending of milk and rose as he had had the good fortune to look upon.

"My daughter Paula, Mr. Dennison," said her mother, moving aside.

He concealed what might have been a visible start by a rather lower bow than usual.

Then he looked for one brief instant upon the most lovely face and into the most bewildering eyes that he had ever seen, and said almost involuntarily—for he was a man who never paid a compliment:

"Your daughter, Madame de Ronski! Surely——"

"Ah," exclaimed Mr. Smith, with undisguised pleasure, "so you are going to say what everyone else says, are you! Mother and daughter! Absurd, is it not? And yet Paula is already a year older than her mother was when she made me the happiest man on earth."

"Of course papa could not help saying that," laughed Paula—and Dennison thought that he had never heard such exquisite music in his life. "He always says it when someone gives him the opportunity, but whether he wants to make me out older or mamma younger than our birthdays, no one but himself has ever found out."

"Nor ever will," said Mr. Smith, looking from one to the other with the frankest and most pardonable admiration. "But come," he went on, a little more seriously, "let us sit down and talk quietly, for the subject is a somewhat grave one."

"Very well," said Paula, with a swift glance at the door to see that it was shut. "And now, I suppose, we are going to hear more State secrets. But then, of course, Mr. Dennison is quite accustomed to those things, and so perhaps even you will hardly surprise him."

"I am not so sure of that, Miss de Ronski," said Dennison. "As a matter of fact I daresay that your father could astonish people a good deal more experienced than I am if he chose to."

Mr. Smith sat down in a chair almost facing him, and, with a swift look across the room at his wife, he said, still speaking with his perfect foreign accent:

"I have asked you to pay me this little visit this evening, Mr. Dennison, not only for the pleasure of introducing you to my wife and daughter, but also, as between ourselves, to discuss a little matter of business.

"These ladies," he went on, "are not only my wife and daughter, they are also, if they will allow me to use the expression, my accomplices."

"I beg your pardon, M. de Ronski," said the Solicitor to the Treasury, sitting bolt upright in the chair, "accomplices? Surely that is hardly a term that you would use with reference to——"

"Ah, yes," exclaimed his wife, leaning forward in her chair and looking at Dennison with an expression in her eyes which could not be translated into words:

"You see that we are all conspirators here, but within the four corners of the law. And as my husband has told you, I suppose, we are here in—well not exactly the same character as that in which we are known on the Continent."

"My dear Madame, please allow the rest to be taken as said," he interrupted. "It is, of course, entirely my loss that your husband has not given me this pleasure before, but, like other deferred pleasures, it is all the greater for being deferred. He and I, as I suppose you know, are old friends, professionally and otherwise, and I need hardly say that——"

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Smith, "we will also take that as said. You will accept us, that is to say, myself, my wife and my daughter as conspirators, and now I think we may proceed to business."

During the few moments of the silence that came after these few words, Dennison leant back in his chair and looked round the room with raised eyelids, which meant a question.

"I am all attention, M. de Ronski," he said. "I am only here to learn. And now what is this conspiracy?"

"It is this," said Mr. Smith, getting up and putting his back against the door. "I have told you that we are conspirators to a certain extent. I have worked with you officially and unofficially, directly and indirectly, for some years now, and we have got to know each other fairly well."

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"Really, I must say that the balance of the knowledge appears to be on your side so far," said Dennison, "and therefore I am at a disadvantage, because, you see, to all intents and purposes, I made quite a new acquaintance to-night."

As a matter of fact he was rather more at a disadvantage than he thought of at the moment, for, as he spoke, Paula's eyes were looking straight into his, and they were not the sort of eyes that a man of his age and temperament ought to look at if he wanted all his wits about him, and so he just added, with a note of interrogation in his voice:

"Yes, and as to business?"

"It is this," said Mr. Smith, turning the key in the door and going back to his seat. "As Stanislaus Smith I have discovered certain facts which by themselves might not have been of any great value. As Stanislas de Ronski, the husband of my wife and the father of my daughter, I have been able, with their assistance, to discover other facts which may possibly, I might say, almost certainly, lead us to something like a definite conclusion."

He paused for a moment and shut his eyes.

"As to the silver problem?" asked Dennison, looking first across the room at him and then into Paula's eyes again.

"Is that not so, papa?" she said, with just a little faint flush of colour in her cheeks. "I think you told us this afternoon that the comedy was developing into tragedy?"

"Yes, it is," said Mr. Smith, getting up again and facing Dennison with his hands clasped behind his back. "There, you see, you have one of the conspirators. Will you tell the story, Paula, or shall I?"

"My dear papa," she replied, "it will be impossible for me to tell it as you could, and even if I could I wouldn't."

"Very well, then," said her father, with his almost womanly laugh, "then I will tell it."

His voice and manner changed instantly. In a moment de Ronski, the musician, disappeared, and Mr. Smith took his place, and he went on in a voice so changed that Dennison for a moment looked up as he might have done if another person had entered the room.

"I need not tell you, Mr. Dennison, that within the last six months or so four murders have been committed in the north, south, east, and west of London, and that the whole police force, including the Criminal Investigation Department, have been absolutely at fault, not only as regards the criminals, but also as to any motive for the crime or crimes."

"I know that," said Dennison, getting up from his chair with something like a jerk, "but surely if this has anything to do with the silver problem, you would have mentioned it this evening at the Yard."

"No, sir," replied Mr. Smith, "that is just what I should not have done, and that is also the reason why I and my wife and daughter are going to Monaco the day after to-morrow. Is not that so, Francesca?"

"Yes, that is so," replied his wife, nodding and smiling as though she was talking about some quite ordinary social event. "Here," she went on, taking a five-shilling piece out of a little silver chain-bag which hung on her chatelaine, "is one of the coins in question."

"Ah!" exclaimed Dennison, as she handed it to him, "then this will be the first authenticated one that I have seen."

He balanced it on the forefinger of his left hand, took a half crown out of his pocket, balanced that on his right forefinger, and rang the two coins. The ring was absolutely true.

"Yes," he continued, "now I see what Sir Edward meant about practical bimetallism. That is just as good a five-shilling piece as they could make at the Mint or anywhere else; possibly a trifle better. It's simply perfect as far as I can see. And now may I ask where that came from?"

"That, my friend," replied Mr. Smith, taking the coin from him and looking almost affectionately at it, "that is one of fifty-seven pieces of different denominations which were found inside the straw mattress on which the man Gunton died somewhat suddenly and mysteriously six nights ago in the three pair back attic in Luton Street off the Caledonian Road; and I could show you a couple of hundred more of equally

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"What!" exclaimed Dennison. "Why, those are the very places where all these murders have been committed. How is it that our people didn't know about that?"

"Some of them did," replied Mr. Smith, drily, "but not many. It was thought best to let the mystery remain mysterious. You see, we didn't want any newspaper Crime Investigators meddling with a serious matter like this, and so the murders were just treated *as* murders. There was absolutely no clue in any of the cases except these coins, and of course it would never have done for the imaginative reporter to get hold of *them*. It was only to-day that we of the International Police felt at all certain of our ground, and my principal object in asking you to come in this evening was to place the facts at your disposal. It is possible that they may be of some use to us when we renew our acquaintance in Monaco."

"I quite see what you mean," said Dennison, just a trifle touched in his professional pride. "You are perfectly right. It is the worst defect of our system that even official secrets do not remain secrets very long. But I suppose I am at liberty to let the Commissioner have what you have told me?"

"That," said Mr. Smith, looking him straight in the eyes, "is, of course, a matter for your own discretion; but I should be obliged if you would not say that the information comes from me. You see, my position is a rather delicate one. I am not in the employment of the British Government alone, and I could not make a statement like this officially I have given it to you because we are friends as well as fellow-workers, and because I know that you will make the best possible use of it. Personally, and with all due deference to the authorities, I should be inclined to say that, for the present at least, the fewer people who know a thing like this the better."

"In other words," laughed Dennison, "you don't want me to say anything about it. Very well. It's your information, not mine, after all, and I'll hold my tongue till you think it advisable to speak. Meanwhile, I suppose I may take it that you and your colleagues have sufficient reasons for believing that the finding of these coins is more of a consequence than a coincidence?"

"Undoubtedly. You know as well as I do that in the pursuit of the criminal we have to take the law of averages as practically true. This might have happened, possibly, in two of the cases; but in four, improbable. Which means that, for all practical purposes, these four men were agents of the Syndicate, or whatever it is, which is flooding the money markets of the world with illicit issues of coin and notes which have so far proved to be indistinguishable from the legitimate article."

"And, having got themselves suspected of treason, they were got rid of," interrupted Madame de Ronski, looking up from the five-shilling piece which she still held in the palm of her hand. "Yes, Mr. Dennison, I fully believe that in the end we shall find that this is the real explanation. It is, of course, a very terrible thing to have to believe that any man or association of men should have such a tremendous power in their hands; but it really seems to be so. These men were agents who were suspected of the intention to betray their trust, and you know, when great issues are at stake, it is usually enough to be suspected."

"Yes," replied Dennison slowly, "and that is another reason why the less we say about this particular aspect of the puzzle the better. Madame de Ronski, I have learnt more than I expected to do to-night; but, pardon me, is it quite safe for you to carry those coins in your purse?"

"Perfectly safe!" exclaimed Paula, rattling her own chatelaine. "I have some of them here too, and I daresay I shall spend a few to-morrow. And when we get to Monte Carlo, and you make the acquaintance, the real acquaintance, I mean, of your old friend Papa——"

"There is no reason unless Mr. Dennison has another engagement, why he should not do that this evening," said Madame de Ronski, looking across the room at her husband. "Is there, Stan?"

"Personally, I know of none," said Mr. Smith, with a note in his voice which told his guest that, for the present at least he had discussed the problem of the silver criminals and their victims as far as it was possible to do so with profit or entertainment. "Dennison, you thought, I daresay, down yonder by the Avenue Theatre that you had made a new acquaintance. So, in a sense, you did, and now, if you like, Paula shall introduce him to you."

"It would be difficult to tell me of anything that I should like much better," he replied, as Paula rose from her seat and went into the inner room in obedience to a glance from her father. "Mr. Stanislaus Smith, I believe, I know fairly well, but Herr Stanislas de Ronski is still to some extent a stranger to me, and I need hardly say that I shall be only too delighted to know him better."

"Very nicely put!" laughed Madame, as she got up and went to the piano. She sat down and within the next half minute Dennison heard a swift ripple of liquid melody come from somewhere and go to nowhere.

He was not a musical man, but he knew music when he heard it, and he had not often heard such sound-magic as he now heard rippling from the carelessly touched keys. He leant back in his chair, stretched out his legs, and thrust his hands into his trousers pockets.

Paula had brought a very shabby looking violin case into the room and opened it. She took out of it a violin, even shabbier than the case, and gave it to her father.

Then, as it seemed to Dennison, the piano and the violin became wedded, even as his host and hostess were, and Paula, with her eyes alight, crossed the room and said to him in a low, clear whisper which then and long afterwards was to him the sweetest music that he had ever heard:

"Now you shall hear the song of the ocean on the shore, and the murmur of the waves under the moonlight. Listen!"

Their eyes met, and while many unspoken words were passing from soul to soul, Madame de Ronski laid her fingers on the keys of the piano and Mr. Smith drew his bow across the strings of the violin. Dennison shut his eyes and listened, and to him the rest was a dream of blended melodies.

And so he began his knowledge of the new acquaintance whom he had known for so long.

Dennison had no very clear idea as to the numbers which he had heard, and that, as he expressed it afterwards, was the greatest tribute that he could have paid to the perfection of this music.

He listened entranced, for he had never heard such music as this before, and he was almost on the point of starting up from his seat when he looked across the room at Paula, caught a flash in her eyes, and saw her hand uplifted.

The next moment there fell a swift silence—and then something else came from somewhere. He knew that it was only the piano and the violin, but they were now as two kindred souls; they were speaking together in slow and solemn strains, which had a wordless wail of human misery in them.

Madame de Ronski looked round smilingly at him, and her fingers wandered back over the keys. Mr. Smith put up his bow, and Paula rose from the sofa, folded her hands behind her, and, as Mr. Smith drew his bow across the strings, and her mother struck the opening chord, she sang a sweet hymn. Then the wave of melody rose again, and she sang with such pleading emphasis as he had never heard put into words before.

"It is rather curious," said Mr. Smith, laying his violin on the top of the piano, "that such a splendid hymn as that should be the battle-song of the most merciless of the so-called civilised nations."

"Ah, yes, is it not?" exclaimed Madame de Ronski, as she rose. "Mr. Dennison, I am a Pole, and I know, as my ancestors have had only too good reason to know before me, what a ghastly mockery that is. Peace, peace! No, where the shadow of the Russian Eagle's wings falls there can be no peace save that which the sword makes—and that will come to pass when the sword has nothing left to slay."

"Or the Slayer himself is slain!" murmured Paula.

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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OUR BACHELOR'S OBSERVATIONS.

It's hard to flatter a sharp girl.

A DEAD love can never be revived.

BETTER be not at all than not be honest.

HAPPINESS is a ray of sunshine between two clouds.

BAD luck generally follows in the wake of bad habits.

CUPID is always shooting and continually making Mrs.

HOW can a woman keep her secrets when her eyes tell tales?

WHEN a man is hopelessly in love it greatly increases his sighs.

IF a young woman bids you take heart, you can probably take hers.

IF you are unable to find an opportunity go to work and make one.

A WOMAN has ideals till she gets married, a man after he gets married.

AN enraged man tears his hair, but an enraged woman tears her husband's.

ALL girls are always looking for an ideal man. Did any girl ever find one?

WHEN a man flatters himself that he knows a woman, he—flatters himself.

WHEN two women talk, the subject of their conversation is conspicuously absent.

SPEAKING of coincidence, it is worthy of remark that kiss, miss, and bliss rhyme.

HOW many people live on the reputation of the reputation they might have made?

IT is easier for some men to talk all day than to keep their mouths shut five minutes.

A LITTLE man should never marry a large widow. He would be the widow's mite.

HALF the men make love to a girl for the sake of talking about it to some other man.

ADVICE would be an awful thing if it were not for the fact that we can take it or leave it.

IF girls don't marry some men for their money, I'd like to know what they do marry them for.

WHEN the accepted lover says "Mine own," he feels a good deal richer than many mine owners.

THERE are occasional moments in every old bachelor's life when he is glad he never married.

ONE woman always pays more attention to what another woman has on than to what she says.

THE wise girl doesn't waste her time on the young man who wastes his time kissing her hand.

WHETHER the child is impudent or clever depends on whether he is your neighbour's or your own.

WHEN you hear a fellow referred to as a ladies' man, you may be sure that none of them want to marry him.

ALL waves are more or less dangerous, but the waves of a pretty girl's handkerchief are usually more so.

THE woman who wears her feathers in her bonnet won't let her little boy rob birds' nests because it is cruel.

WHEN a girl says emphatically that she won't, it is morally certain that she will; when she says she will, will she?

THE truest and best friend a man can have is a wife who does her best to keep him in the straight and narrow path.

LONG engagements are expensive affairs in Russia. The bridegroom is expected to send his *fiancée* a present every week.

WHEN a girl is in love her thoughts are about equally divided between the last time she saw him and the next time he is coming.

A GIRL may say she is surprised when she receives a proposal, but down in her heart she is wondering why the young man waited so long.

A START IN LIFE.

OPEN TO EVERY BOY AND GIRL.

A Situation Worth £100 a Year

For a BOY. (Parents may help their Son to win).

A Situation Worth £100 a Year

For a GIRL. (Parents may help their Daughter to win).

Offered by **THE BOYS' LEADER,** "the Paper a Boy can take Home." (Published by the proprietors of PEARSON'S WEEKLY, &c.)

The Editor of THE BOYS' LEADER offers a Situation in the Offices of PEARSON'S WEEKLY, THE BOYS' LEADER, &c., and a Salary of £100 a year to commence with, to a boy; and a like Situation and Salary of £100 a year, to a girl.

100 Consolation Gifts will also be Awarded.

These will be offered by competition, and the competition is this:—

SIX QUESTIONS WILL APPEAR EVERY WEEK IN THE BOYS' LEADER.

This is the First Set.

1. *Who wrote Robinson Crusoe?*
2. *What famous British Soldier is known as "Bobs"?*
3. *Who is your favourite hero (not fiction), and why?*
4. *Who made most runs in first-class cricket this summer?*
5. *Which is your favourite book, and why?*
6. *When was King Edward VII. born? Give year and day.*

BEGIN TO-DAY.

Other Sets of Questions will appear in THE BOYS' LEADER (1d. every Tuesday.)

It will be noticed that some of the questions call for an expression of opinion only, and the answers to others you will have to search for in books. Cut out and paste these questions on a sheet of foolscap paper, numbering it No. 1. Write your reply to No. 1 immediately below, and then follow with No. 2, and so on, saying in what book you found the information and who helped you to find it. Anybody may help you, provided you say who. No competitor must be over twenty-one years of age. No reply must exceed fifty words. Keep all replies until the last set appears, and until we tell you to send them in. Write plainly in ink on one side of the paper.

OUT TO-DAY.

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THE MARK ON THE WALL.

The Story of a Mysterious Omen.

PERSONALLY I think this is a most unsatisfactory story, and I have no doubt many people will agree with me. It is not a ghost story in the accepted sense of the word, for no ghost and no inexplicable noises were seen or heard, but notwithstanding all my efforts, I can find no explanation for what I am about to relate.

"I sometimes wonder if the place is damp and does not suit Edith," said my brother after his first greetings as I stepped out of the train on to the platform of Whitefield Station, "but she was all right the first month we were here, and it is only lately she has seemed so nervous and out of sorts. I am very glad you have come, Claudia; perhaps you will be able to cheer her up."

My only brother had married my dearest friend, and they had settled in a charming house at Whitefield, a tiny village in Kent. This was the first time I had been able to stay with them, for directly after their wedding I had been obliged to go abroad. Now, however, I had come for a long visit, and I was sorry to hear from Percy that Edith was not well. Certainly the place did not seem damp at first sight, and as we approached the house I exclaimed with delight, for I have seldom seen a prettier house than that low white one with its green verandah and gaily-filled flower-beds.

Edith was sitting on the verandah, and as she came to meet us I was startled to see the change in her. She looked thin and worried; every now and then she glanced behind her with a frightened air, and all the time her thoughts were evidently far away from our conversation. Her efforts to appear natural and at her ease were palpable but they were unavailing. My brother looked meaningly at me, and I understood his wish that I should not appear to notice her curious behaviour.

We had tea, and visited the nursery to see what its parents thought the most wonderful baby in the world, a soft little pink-and-white chubby person of about three months old, whom Percy proudly spoke of as "my son," and then I was shown all over the house and garden. Certainly, so far as I could see, there seemed nothing in either the one or the other to account for Edith's nervousness. The house was particularly cheerful, with large sunny rooms and everything planned for comfort and ease.

We spent a pleasant evening, and when I went up to bed Edith came with me and we gossiped together for a long time. At last she wished me "Good night," and was just going when I said on the spur of the moment:

"What a delightful place this is. You must be glad Percy bought it."

In a second the frightened look which had faded from her eyes while we were talking returned.

"It is the only thing he has ever done that I dislike," she said. "I hate this house! I—I—I wish I had never entered it!"

"But why, dear—what is the matter, Edith? You must have some reason. I can't help seeing how ill and unhappy you seem. Won't you tell me?"

"Yes, I have a reason," she said. "Perhaps I will tell you some day, but not to-night. Perhaps you will find it out for yourself. Yes," she continued in a lower tone, as if speaking to herself, "if she notices it, it will prove I haven't fancied it all!"

She departed and I thought of her strange words for a long time before I could sleep. The only solution of them that I could discover was that the house was haunted, but as I had never heard any rumour of the kind, and it seemed about the most unlikely house imaginable to be so, I scouted the idea and waited anxiously for the morning and some explanation.

Percy went up to his office in London every day, and on the morning after my arrival he went off as usual; and after Edith had attended to her household affairs we took our work and went out into the garden.

We talked about all kinds of things, the house, the baby, the place, the news of the day, but Edith carefully avoided all reference to her strange words of the night before. After about an hour she said she found it too hot in the garden, and we moved into the drawing-room. Edith settled me in an armchair facing the fireplace and a door leading into the conservatory. She sat by my side, and I noticed her eyes constantly stared at the wall opposite to us. I looked at the wall myself, and I noticed at once that on one side of the fireplace, just above a small water-colour painting, a piece of the paper had been torn so that the white wall showed. It struck me as curious that Edith, who was the soul of neatness, had not had this repaired, or at least had not hung the picture a little higher so as to hide it. As I looked more carefully at the mark it struck me also as strange that the paper should have been torn off so neatly; the mark was in fact a perfect square about the size of a copy-book. In spite of myself my eyes kept seeking it, and although I knew it must be imagination it seemed as if sometimes it changed colour, not altogether, but as if streaks of a pinkish shade moved up and down on it. It must be the shadow from the curtain, I thought, and I said to Edith:

"What a funny mark that is on the wall. It almost looks as if the paper had been cut away on purpose. I wonder you don't move the picture so as to hide it."

"Thank Heaven!" was her extraordinary reply. "*You* see it, too, then. It isn't all my imagination!"

"Of course I see a mark on the wall; any person not blind must see it!" I answered.

Edith got up from her chair and stood before me. "I am the only person in the house who can see it," she said impressively. "None of the servants can see it, none of the visitors, Percy declares I am dreaming when I speak to him about it. To the eyes of everybody who has been in this room except you and I that wall is entirely covered with paper and there is no mark on it.

"Listen; I will tell you all about it. About a month after we came here Percy and I were sitting in this room one evening, and when I looked up I saw what I thought was a

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shadow on the wall. It was that mark. I asked Percy to look at it and said how odd it was that a piece should have been torn off the new paper like that. He said he could see nothing and that my eyes were deceiving me. At first I thought they might be, but the next day the mark was still there, and there it has been ever since. Percy thought it was because I was not very well just then; and still I see it, and as you see it, too, it proves it must be there."

"What did the doctor say about it?" I asked.

"Oh, he was like Percy and thought I imagined it. He can't see anything either. And as for moving that picture to cover it, it can't be done. I have moved the picture again and again but the mark moves, too, I imagine. At any rate, it is always just above the picture, and I feel sometimes that it will end by driving me mad!"

I did not speak for a moment or two. I am absolutely healthy, I have no nerves, and not a scrap of imagination, and what Edith had just told me seemed impossible. Still, there was the mark without a doubt, and it seemed extraorninary that no eyes but hers and mine could see it.

Edith continued:

"I hate this room! And I never sit in here if I can help it, and I haven't told you quite all now. The mark *moves*. I mean something moves on it, like a shadow going up and down. I am sure it means something horrible, and I am frightened. Oh, Claudia, how glad I am that you have come, and that you can see it, too!"

"I certainly thought I saw something moving on it," I said; "anyhow, there is no use in terrifying yourself over it. It can't hurt us, and all we can do is to watch it carefully and wait for something else to happen."

That evening I asked Percy if he had ever heard anything about the house being haunted.

"Certainly not," he replied. "I suppose Edith has been telling you about the mark on the drawing-room wall. It is only her imagination. Doctor Bourne thinks she wants a change, and I want to take her and baby to the seaside as soon as I can manage it. I believe the shadow from the curtain falls on the wall, and that Edith has thought so much about the mark she fancied she saw that now she honestly believes she sees it. Hallucinations, I am sure, and I hope, Claudia, you will try and get the idea out of her head. No one else can see any mark at all. It is only a fancy of Edith's."

"It is no fancy," I answered, "for before Edith had said a word to me about the mark I saw it and asked her what it was."

Percy stared.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "What has happened to you both? I always thought that *you*, at least, were a sensible woman, and now you go and imagine this rubbish!"

"I am bound to believe what I see," I said, "but I am not in the least frightened about the mark, and I intend to try and find some explanation of it."

Percy only laughed.

"You want a tonic as well as Edith," was all he said, as he walked away.

Neither Edith nor I mentioned the mark to him again. It still remained on the wall, and often when we were watching it I thought I saw strange signs moving across it. One day it occurred to me what they were. They were letters, blurred, misshapen, and many of them only half-formed. I suggested to Edith that we should write down all the letters we could make out, and when we did this we found that they formed a sentence:

"Beware of journey twenty-first July."

"It must mean that something dreadful will happen on that day!" said Edith, and I agreed with her that the words were a warning, but for whom or against what I could not imagine. We decided not to tell Percy what we had discovered for he regarded the whole affair as a phantasy of our brains. However, one good result ensued from our making out the sentence; the mark disappeared, and we were no longer worried by seeing it each time we entered the

What Clever Folks Eat.

PROVERBS, even when untrue (which is rare), are invariably at least based upon truth. "What is one man's meat is another man's poison" was said so long ago that no one knows the origin of it; but its accuracy is proved by the different fare preferred by various celebrities.

Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace finds fish diet best for brain work.

Mr. G. B. Shaw is a vegetarian.

Mrs. Langtry prefers plain fare, and little of it.

Mr. George Gissing would like to be a vegetarian, but confesses himself unable to live without meat.

Mr. R. G. Knowles eats rich food, pastries, &c., and drinks ice-water, yet declares himself well and happy; while Mr. Hall Caine owns to being "a constant martyr to all the troubles that attend diet," but neglects to tell us what he eats.

Well, well, we are not all cast in one mould, that's clear. How all the world must envy Mr. Knowles, while forced to adopt for itself Mr. Hall Caine's description!

And yet ability to digest rich foods is nothing but what should be the attribute of everybody; as it invariably is of people who fortify their digestive organs with an occasional dose of Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. In that way one can ensure the healthy action of the liver, a plentiful supply of pure blood, and freedom from constipation and all the other pains and penalties which are summed up in the one word—indigestion.

Though Mr. Robert Duffield is devoted to agriculture, and has lived all his life in one of the healthiest counties of England, he has not escaped the universal complaint. "My trouble was indigestion," says Mr. Duffield. "I had no appetite, and became listless and unfit for work. Food caused me pain and wind in the stomach. A constant feeling of bilious sickness at last turned to violent fits of vomiting, of which I would sometimes have three or four in a day, which reduced me to a state of trembling, like one with the ague. A private doctor giving me no hope, I went into hospital for five weeks, where my condition improved a little; but I had no sooner come out than I was as bad as ever again. After I had suffered for five years, a friend advised me to try Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. Then my relief began. Soon afterwards all my ailments left me, and I returned to work. My health has ever since remained good, though I am now seventy-four."—(Signed, Robert Duffield, Letheringsett, Holt, Norfolk, August 28th, 1903.)

The diet of clever folks differs as greatly as their abilities. But that which makes any wholesome diet possible to everybody is always the same, and its properties are unrivalled.

A Thirsty Soldier.

EIGHT shillings for half a pint of water! This enormous price was paid by a soldier while marching to Khartoum to relieve Gordon. Could it possibly be worth the money? The soldier says that it was, for it revived him when his tongue was parched and his lips swollen from thirst. Though eight shillings so greatly exceeds the price, it is not more than the value of a bottle of Mother Seigel's Syrup, which restores the tortured dyspeptic to health and ease.

Mr. A. E. Sharpe, of 17 Spencer Road, Seven Kings, Ilford, says: "Indigestion and the troubles it gave rise to—heart-palpitation, headache, nervousness, loss of appetite, &c.—made my life wretched, and reduced my weight from 12 stone to 8 stone 6lb. I could not sleep at night and would get up in the morning feeling as weary as when I went to bed. I had no heart to work and would sometimes have to leave off and sit down on my stool, a prey to melancholy. My nerves were so shattered that I dreaded the railway journey to and from the City. Nothing benefited me until I took Seigel's Syrup. That is the medicine which cured me and restored me to my former self."

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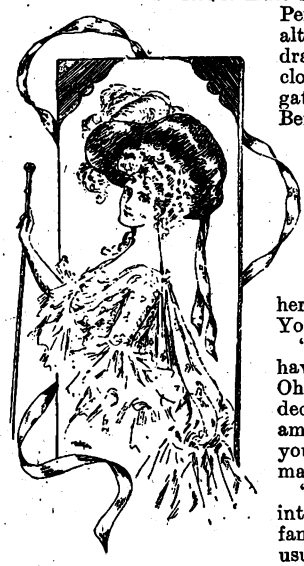
drawing-room. Sometimes we spoke about it to each other but we were so relieved at its disappearance, and the date mentioned was so far away (this being only the middle of August), that by degrees we forgot about it, and by the time I left Whitefield Edith was her old bright, cheerful self, and had almost forgotten all the terror she had suffered.

Well, the winter passed away and summer came round again, and Edith invited me to go and stay with her again. Even returning to Whitefield did not recall the events of my previous visit to my mind. We had so much to talk about, and the baby was so charming now that he was beginning to walk and talk, that nothing else seemed worth consideration.

Percy was going away for the week-end to stay with some friends at Richmond. He would return by his usual train on Monday afternoon. I think I shall never forget that Monday. It was a glorious summer day and we stayed in the garden all the morning with the baby. After lunch Edith suggested that we should rest in the drawing-room as it was really far cooler than the garden. We provided ourselves with books and settled ourselves in the two most comfortable chairs. I suppose the heat made me drowsy, for I fell into a doze from which I was roused by a touch on my arm. Edith was standing by my side, staring, livid-faced, wild-eyed, speechless at something on the wall behind me. I turned, and saw—the mark again. In an instant everything came back to me, but before I could speak Edith's voice sounded, hoarse, strangled, from her pale lips.



"Claudia, this is the day—Percy—he returns to-day. 'Beware of journey twenty-first July,' it said. I shall never see Percy again, I am sure!"

She broke down utterly and sobbed, while that horrible mark looked down at us with the words now standing out clearly on it. This was the twenty-first of July, and Percy was the only person we knew likely to be journeying on it.

The necessity for action roused me. My first idea was to go off to London myself, but there was no train till five, and by the time I reached Charing Cross Percy would be in the train on his homeward journey. Besides, though I hated to think of it, the warning words might apply to me.

I consulted the "A. B. C." The train he always came by was an express, leaving Charing Cross at six and arriving at Whitefield at twenty minutes past seven. Then there was a slower train leaving at half-past six and arriving at half-past eight. This was the last train of the day.

"We must wire to Percy not to come home to-night," I said.

Edith only cried on.

"He would take no notice," she said. "If we wired that without any reason he would naturally take no notice, and if we gave the reason he would still come because he would think we were mad. You know, when you were here last summer, he always declared we imagined the mark. No, he will be killed, I know; there will be some accident to the train. I shall be a widow to-night and that precious baby fatherless!"

She wept hysterically.

"Don't be silly, Edith!" I said sternly. "It is no good to behave like that. We must *do* something, and to wire to Percy is the only thing we can do. I will go to the village now and send a telegram."

I went and dispatched a message to Percy, begging him, "for a good reason," to spend that night in town, although I had but little hope he would take any notice of it. Nor was I wrong, for a reply came from him, saying: "Expect me by usual train; do not understand your message."

Then, indeed, we despaired. Edith gave way utterly and kept urging me to save Percy, to do something. I did not see that there was anything I could do. Occasionallv I went into the drawing-room to see if the mark were still there, but there was nothing to be seen, and I tried to think that the whole thing was a horrible dream. Finally I went to the station to meet the six from London.

It arrived safely, but Percy was not in it.

"He missed it, I suppose," said Edith hopelessly; "but it makes no difference. He will come by the next and be killed just the same."

But I felt more hopeful. Warnings are not always infallible. One train had arrived safely, why should not the next? The time for the next train to arrive came and passed, the time it would take Percy to walk the two miles from the station came and passed, but he did not come. We could not hear from him for the telegraph office closed at six. I suggested going to the station again, but Edith would not let me leave her, and the two servants objected to walk down that lonely road at night either singly or together.

That was indeed a night of horror. We feared we knew not what; at one moment we professed to think the whole episode of the mark on the wall nonsense, at another moment we felt it must be a true warning. We invented excuses for Percy being kept all night in town; we alternated between hope and fear. The hours dragged on, the morning broke, and as the clock struck six I heard the click of the garden-gate; up the path came Percy, safe and well. Before he could open the front door we were with him, and in the first joy of seeing him whole and unhurt we forgot to wonder how he had arrived at that hour, for the first London train did not reach Whitefield till half-past eight.

"I came by a special," he said. "I couldn't get here sooner because the line was blocked. I couldn't wire as the office here is shut and I knew you would be anxious. You have heard, of course?"

"Heard?" Edith echoed. "Heard? We have heard nothing. What has happened? Oh, Percy, how thankful I am that you decided to obey my telegram in the end. I am sure something would have happened to you if you had come last night. The mark——"

"But I didn't obey your telegram," he interrupted her. "I thought you were two silly, fanciful women, and I intended to come by my usual train as I wired to you. But at the last moment, just as I was leaving the office an old friend of my father's turned up unexpectedly, and I had to see him. Then I made for the six-thirty. I got in a block and was delayed some minutes and the office clock must have been slow, for I reached Charing Cross in time to see the last Whitefield train steaming out of the station. Was it Providence, I wonder, or what? I stayed at the Morgans for the night, and it was only very early this morning I heard what had happened. The six-thirty met with an accident and ran off the line and——" He paused.

"Was anyone hurt?" I asked quickly.

"If I had been in that train you would never have seen me alive again, I think!" he answered. "There was only one first-class carriage, and every passenger in it was killed!"

* * * * *

Now, can anyone explain this story?

Claudia Ashton.

STONEBROKE: "Do you think your father would object to my marrying you?" Heiress: "I don't know. If he's anything like me he would."

EDITH: "Is it true that you are engaged to Jack?" Mabel: "Yes, but you are not to mention it. I'm not quite sure that Jack knows it as yet."

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Catarrh Claims New Victims Daily.

It is estimated by the medical profession that more than one half of all diseases are produced by taking cold, that is by an acute catarrhal condition. Unfortunately, this truth is not generally recognised. The victim of a cold looks upon its symptoms as merely a temporary affair, and in the majority of cases the cold is allowed to linger on until it assumes a chronic state. The chronic cold becomes chronic catarrh, silently and insidiously producing general weakness and often attacking the lungs, stomach, liver, or kidneys in the course of the disease. A very thorough treatise on this subject, together with much good advice, is contained in the last *Review of Ear, Nose, and Throat Diseases.* With the *Review* is also included a "Supplement" describing the success of a new treatment in such a large number of different forms of catarrh that everyone can find something of interest. A free copy of this medical work can be obtained post free by addressing the Editor, Drouet Institute, 10, Marble Arch, London, W. With the *Review* there is also a Report Form, by means of which anyone can obtain free advice by post. The Editor advises patients, however, when possible, to visit the Drouet Institute for a personal consultation with the medical staff. Consulting hours are—in the morning, 10 to 12, and in the afternoon, 2 to 4, week days only. A fee of five shillings is charged for personal consultations.

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THE SAFE REMEDY FOR

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CURES IN TEN MINUTES

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Packets of 18 doses 1/1½;

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Badly Expressed.

"Ah," he protested, "my love for you is the greatest thing in the world. It is larger than the world. It is wider than the sea. Let me pour it into your ears?" "Sir!" ejaculated the fair maid. "Do you mean to insinuate anything about the size or shape of my ears?"

She'd Make Sure of That.

Miss De Pride: "I wouldn't marry him if he were the last man on earth!" Rival Belle: "Indeed you wouldn't! I'd take him myself then!"

In High Society.

May: "Do you think one should marry for love or for money?" Chaperon: "My dear, love is an excuse for marriage, but money is a justification."

How Beautiful 'Twould Be!

"I'm going to hug you!" he cried. "Forewarned is fore-armed, you know." "Four-armed?" she murmured, blushing vividly. "Would that you had been forewarned!"

Obstacles in the Way.

Harry: "Blanche says she has insuperable reasons for remaining single." Horace: "Yes, I know what they are." Harry: "Then she has told you?" Horace: "No; but I have seen her."

She Was a Girton Girl.

He: "Darling, name the day!" Blushing Maid: "I regret I cannot, as it is already called 'Wed-nesday,' derived from the Saxon 'Woden'; I shall, however, be happy to designate a date."

To Arms!

"You have had some experience with the fair sex," said the inexperienced youth who had been jilted; "what is the best way to get round a girl?" "With your arms!" tersely replied the old-timer.

Nothing Very Extraordinary.

Bertha: "Sometimes you appear really manly, and sometimes you are absolutely effeminate. How do you account for it?" Harold: "I suppose it is hereditary. Half my ancestors were males and the other half females."

Edgar Eagerly Entices Edith.

Edgar: "Miss Edith. I—er—have something most important to ask you. May I—that is——" Edith (softly): "What is it, Edgar?" Edgar: "May I—Edith, would you be willing to have our names printed in the papers with a hyphen between them?"

Easily Removed.

"Do the girls here really affect men's clothes to any great extent?" inquired the tourist. "Oh, no!" replied the gallant native. "No? I thought they did." "No. Of course, a little complexion powder or rouge may stick to a fellow's sleeve occasionally, but that could hardly be said to affect the clothes."

Would Not Be Quite Proper.

"Can we squeeze in here?" said the young man with the red necktie, as he and his young lady got into the well-filled omnibus. "Well, I 'specs you kin if you want to, master," replied the man from the country, "but I'm thinking it would look a trifle better if you reserved that mark of affection till you reached the girl's home."

Far Worse.

Wife (bitterly): "You deceived me when you married me." Husband: "I did more than that—I deceived myself."

He Was Thunderstruck.

He: "You are the first girl that I have ever loved." She: "Darling, I believe you!" He: "Heavens! You are also the first girl that ever told me that."

Her Candid Opinion.

He: "Do you think a fellow ought to be locked up for stealing kisses?" She: "No-o, hardly. But I think he ought to be tied up." So now they're engaged

More Jealousy.

Miss Passay: "Yes, and when he proposed, I tried hard not to let him read any encouragement in my face, but he did." Miss Peppery: "Ah! I suppose he could read between the lines."

Then There Was Trouble.

Mother: "So you enjoyed your walk, Kate? Did you go all that distance alone?" Daughter: "Oh, yes, mamma, quite alone!" Young Brother: "Then, how is it, Kit, you took an umbrella out and brought back a walking-stick?"

Naturally!

Miss Uglymug (an heiress): "Mr. Cashunter, you are the first man who ever kissed me in my life. Do you believe me when I tell you this?" Her Affianced: "Believe you? Well, I should say so." And now the engagement is declared off.

An Objection Overruled.

Miss Hockheimer: "No, Mr. Pinkenbergh, I am sorry, but I cannot marry you. I could never love a man with red hair." Mr. Pinkenbergh: "Dot vas notting. My barber tells me dot at der rate my hair is falling oudt I vill be completely bald in one year."

Distance Makes the Heart Grow Fonder.

"While my daughter was playing the piano last night a strange man stopped at the door and asked to be allowed to give her half a crown." "Was he such an ardent music-lover?" "No; he said it was merely a thank-offering because he didn't live next door to us."

George Didn't Keep His Promise.

"George said he'd die if I didn't marry him." "And still you refused?" "Yes. I wished to find out before promising whether he really loved me as much as that or not. Oh, Harriet, I'm p-p-perfectly miserable. He seems to be wretchedly healthy, and I d-do love him so much."

It Really Meant "Evelyn Cavendish."

Angelina: "That was a lovely engagement-ring you gave me last night, dear; but what do those initials, 'E. C.' mean on the inside?" Edwin (who has bestowed the ring before, and had it back): "Why—er—that is—don't you know that is the new way of stamping eighteen carats?"

They Were Only Minor Indications.

"Has my daughter, sir," demanded the stern father, "ever given you reason to think she would listen to a proposal of marriage from you?" "Well," said the young man, twirling his hat in his hand, in an embarrassed manner, "except that she calls me 'darling,' and always kisses me when I bid her good-night, I can't say that she has."

He Was Used to Being Dunned.

Ethel: "Oh, Tom, what a pity it is you are not rich! They say that some of these millionaires don't dare to leave the house for days at a time, because they receive threatening letters, saying that something dreadful will happen to them if they don't pay the writer sums of money." Tom Hardup: "Pooh! Why, I get plenty of such letters."

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Send us an envelope (stamped and addressed), and you will learn how to remove permanently all superfluous hair FREE OF CHARGE. (Send no money).—Address, in confidence, CABILLUS MFG. Co., 57 Century House, Regent Street, London, W.

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This famous remedy has guided many a young man to sobriety and into the high road of fortune, and has saved the father, the brother, and the son.

If you send name and address to the Ward Chemical Company, 51 Century House, Regent St., London, W., they will post enough of the remedy free to show how it is used in tea, coffee, or food.

Mrs. George Fuller says:—"*I am only too thankful my husband never now wishes for intoxicating liquor. I gave him Antidipso in his tea and coffee, and it has quite cured him.*" With the

FREE TRIAL

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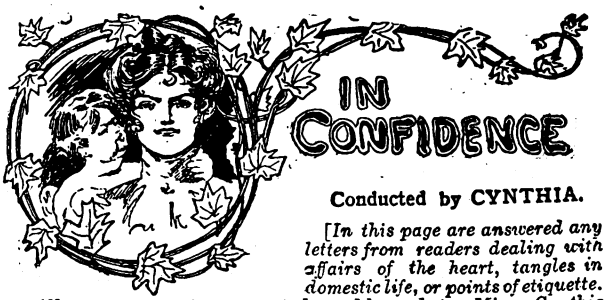

Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Cool Love Letters.

"My lover," writes "BEATRICE," "writes very cool love letters. He seldom tells me anything but just news, and yet, when we are together, he is very affectionate. Do you think this coolness in writing letters means that he is only a little bit in love with me?"

* * * * * * *

Not necessarily. Many men are not clever enough to express their feelings in writing, while others—those of the plain, practical, common-sense kind—dislike writing their thoughts, but prefer to express them. Trust your lover, and judge by his personal actions, not by the tone of his letters.

Breaking an Engagement.

I AM very sorry, "E. R.," that you have had to break off your engagement. But as you say your late *fiancé* indulged in bad habits, such as drink or gambling, you were, no doubt, quite right to let the affair drop. If the influence of a woman is not sufficient to take a man from such habits during courtship, it is scarcely likely to avail after marriage.

* * * * * * *

As to presents and letters, yes, it is usual to return them. The ring should, of course, be returned. As to the letters, it is a matter of choice whether you return them or destroy them. Ask the man if he would like to have them back. As to your other question, I should certainly advise you not to see him if you can possibly avoid it. As you have definitely made up your mind to cease your relations with him, it would be better not to resume it on the basis of an impossible acquaintanceship.

The Fair Stranger Again.

"ON my way to business," writes an anonymous correspondent, "I invariably meet in the train a young lady. I am anxious to speak to her, but am at a loss to know how to do so. I see her five times a week."

* * * * * * *

I should avoid wishing to speak to strange, unprotected young ladies in a London railway carriage. Certainly I cannot advise you in such a matter. If a man is fortunate enough to strike up an acquaintanceship with a girl through meeting her in a train, it must be due to some mutually expressed desire to know each other. If the girl to whom you refer wishes to know you, and could do so without embarrassing herself, probably she will give you an opportunity to speak to her. But I cannot advise you to make overtures to her. If that kind of thing were regarded as correct, there is no knowing to what attentions young ladies might not be subjected when out by themselves.

In Doubt.

"I HAVE been meeting often a young man who treats me with every respect, and says he could never love another girl as he loves me. I like him very much myself, but know very little of him. We met at a party. He is twenty-seven, I am eighteen. Would it be right to listen to him?"

* * * * *

As you were introduced to him at a party, I suppose you have some means of finding out something about his position and character. If you are satisfied, then I should just act as my own feelings dictated. As you like him, then give yourself every opportunity of improving your acquaintance with him. Do not be afraid because he is several years older. Twenty-seven and eighteen are very good ages for a match

An Unreturned Sentiment.

"DAISY" writes: "Some weeks ago I met a young man at a party, and we walked home together. I fell in love with him. Since that he has not written to me, or given me any reason to suppose that he wished to resume our acquaintance. On the evening in question, however, he was most attentive. Well, acting on the advice of a friend, I wrote him a letter on the pretext of wanting to know somebody's address. I thought he would reply by saying he hoped to see me again. Instead of that, however, he merely gave me the information, and wrote an ordinary polite letter. How would you advise me to again hint to him that I wish to know him better?"

* * * * *

You had better let the matter drop, "DAISY." You did quite as much as a girl should to give him an opportunity of writing to you in the needfully tender strain, and as he did not take the chance offered him, you must conclude that he is not so eager for the friendship as you are. No girl should let it appear that she is angling for a man, as that lessens his respect for her, and, in some cases, men have been known to take advantage of a girl's admiration without serious intentions. These things lead to heart troubles, and should be avoided.

Love versus Song.

"ROMANY" has a lover. She also has a voice. The two have lately run rivalry for "ROMANY'S" attention. She is a member of a chapel choir and a choral society, and sings a great deal at concerts and "socials." This takes up four of her nights a week. Her young man does not object to her singing in the chapel choir—as why should he?—but draws the line at the other functions which take so much of "ROMANY'S" time. "ROMANY" is willing to give in, but does not want to offend the people who ask her to sing.

* * * * *

Well, I think your young man has a good deal of right on his side. Four nights a week is a great deal of time for any girl to give to singing, unless she does it for a livelihood. He has a right to claim that you should give more time to him, as you are to be married in a year. Besides, you will have to give up some of your engagements then, and if you must offend your friends in any case by withdrawing from their concerts, it might be as well now as then. At the same time, I do not see why you should not occasionally give them your services. It is a very nice accomplishment for a girl, and should not be dropped. But I think your lover is right when he objects to a steady four nights a week given to it. Try to reduce the number.

Cynthia

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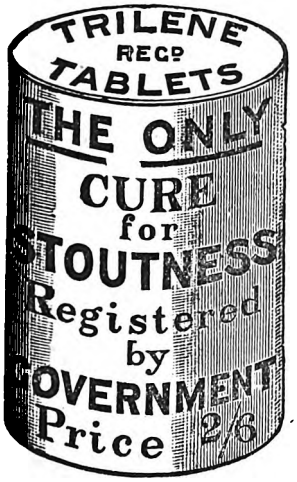

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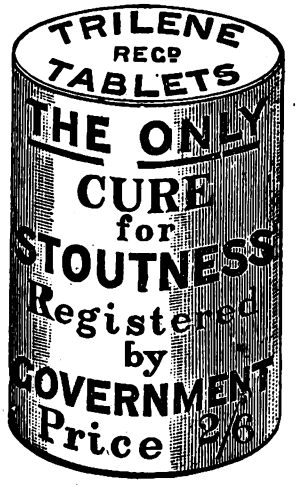

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66 Finsbury Pavement, London, E.C.

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.
Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.
"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Risholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.
Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Liatorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st 8lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagilt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st. and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Miss JANE CARTER of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

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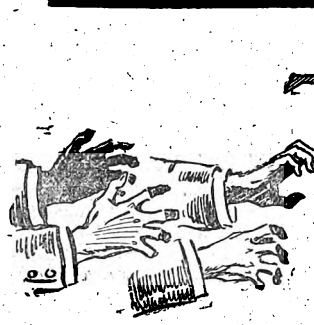

THE PURSUIT OF SARA

The names of persons mentioned in this series are not necessarily the correct ones.

For New Readers.

Miss Sara Gillespie, the relater of these experiences, was a typine in the firm of Templeton & Co.

The partners in the firm were Mr. Templeton, Mr. Harrington Shackell, and Mr. Rigby Starr. The first-named before very long induced her to tell him all about her absent lover, Noel Masterman.

Noel was the nephew of Sir Francis Masterman, who in his will left him a thousand pounds. With this money he intended to buy a doctor's practice, and to give up the situation he was holding, that of medical attendant to a gentleman who was travelling on the Continent.

He came home to England on the death of the Baronet, but was soon recalled by telegram to Nice, as his patient had shown bad symptoms.

Noel was, however, loth to give up the idea of purchasing the practice he had in view, so, leaving the thousand pounds with them in notes, he signed a document authorising Templeton & Co. to act for him.

By a piece of trickery the firm converted this into a document authorising them to deal *with his whole estate.* He was heir to the Baronetcy, in the event of the present holder of the title, Sir Herbert, his cousin, having no son.

The next day Sara overheard the three partners gloating over the probable success of their schemes, and she was amazed and horrified to hear Shackell relate how, posing as Sir Herbert's valet, he had murdered the Baronet in cold blood.

Her betrothed was now Sir Noel Masterman, and Templeton & Co. had full power over his estate!

She resolved on a bold scheme—to get possession of the notes and the document. Bursting into the room, she eluded her astounded employers, seized the precious papers, and fled.

Besides the £1,000 in notes, she had about five pounds with her. Sara wired to Noel to return at once, and she then took train to Bedford.

While there a murderous attack was made on her by Rigby Starr, disguised as a nurse. He endeavoured to push Sara into the river by Newnham Bridge, but Sara escaped, and, still retaining the all-important paper relating to her lover's inheritance, made her way to Northampton.

Templeton & Co., she knew, would leave no stone unturned to find her; no course would be too desperate for them to take in order to regain the document.

At Northampton Sara rescued a little boy from death, and thereby gained the devoted friendship of a young girl named Maggie Dunkley. To her she confided all her troubles.

In this town, Sara was led to believe that Noel was an inmate of a lunatic asylum.

In disguise, Harrington Shackell enticed Sara to the racecourse, saying that he would rescue Noel for her.

Sara went, as invited, and another desperate attempt was then made by the firm to recover the papers.

They were, however, outwitted, and Miss Gillespie fled to Leicester. Here she met Sidney Ilford, an agent of the firm, who informed Sara that a reward of £100 was offered for her arrest.

She just managed to run away from him.

Her only plan was to disguise herself so as to escape recognition, and this she managed successfully to do.

She received a telegram from Maggie Dunkley, telling her that Noel would be with her the following day.

Overcome with joy, Miss Gillespie went to the appointed meeting-place—the canal.

She was secured on board a barge by Sidney Ilford, and when Noel presently came to seek her, Ilford was enabled to conceal Sara, and much to her chagrin Noel left.

Sara made a dash for liberty and reached Birmingham. At New Street Station a heavy parcel fell on her foot, hurting her ankle.

The owner of the parcel, Mrs. Moran, offered to take her home and tend to her injury, and Sara accepted her hospitality.

While in this house Sara received vague warnings which she was at a loss to understand, till one evening she saw, through a fanlight, what she took to be *the face of a dead woman.*

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THE TERROR AT BIRMINGHAM.

THE emotion of horror dominated me. Fear came to me and trembling; my flesh shivered, my heart seemed turned to ice. The face, livid in colour, was not emaciated; as I looked I saw the lips, blue-stained lips, twitch over the teeth. The eyes, glassy and staring, were of a sudden galvanised to life. The fanlight, that, working on a hinge, opened into the room in which I sat, was gently pushed an inch or two. The catch that held it shut, had been left unfastened, so that it swung softly back.

Through the aperture a hand and arm appeared, and something white was dropped on the floor; and then the face vanished, the fanlight closed, the light went out, and I, alone in the darkness, was left to solve the meaning of the mystery.

Through the night I sat, cowering in the chair, my eyes turned, now towards the fanlight, now towards the floor. It was too dark to distinguish what it was that my ghastly visitant had dropped. The electric light was still refractory and the dawn was distant by some hours. I could not summon to my aid sufficient resolution to leave my chair, my ankle throbbed, my body ached, and yet I had not courage enough to go to bed.

Perhaps in my sleep that ghastly face would look at me, those thin, claw-like fingers point at me!

Who and what was this thing? The face was a dead face, and yet—could it be that some person, woman it might be, had put on a mask to frighten me?

No, no mask could alter in expression as the face had done. Could it be—sinister recollections stole across my mind; strange tales of men who had kept their victims under lock and key, administering to them some slow and subtle poison. The memory of a picture that I had once seen came back to me. A girl with wizened form, and death-like countenance. I had been told it was the study of a girl poisoned by lead.

"*It will be the same with you as with the others!*" Mrs. Moran's words came back to me at this moment. Perhaps "one of the others" was in the room next to mine, suffering agony, or—the thought chilled me again to horror—*dead*.

If only the day would come; so slow, so dark were the hours. Never had the torch of morning tarried so long to light the East. I tried to force my thoughts to other things, for fear of the dread that weighed on me. I strove to recall fragments of verse, to evoke some kindly image of security.

At length the blackness of night gave place to the grey of a quiet dawning. I watched till the light stealing between the curtains at the window touched the edge of the carpet; then waited breathless while it crept by slow and sure degrees across the room. Now it was even with the couch, another minute it would reach the table, now, with a cry, I stretched out my hand. The light had fallen on a letter lying on the floor.

The distance from my chair to where the letter lay was but the matter of a yard or so. I dragged myself towards the spot and clutched it eagerly. Scrawled in pencil, on a half sheet of paper, was the following:

"I am kept here against my will by my uncle, who desires my death. Will you help me to escape? Say nothing to anyone, but if you will help me knock three times on the wall—under the fanlight.

It was a woman's writing, and showed signs of great agitation

I managed to reach the wall, and gave three distinct raps on the panels; a minute or two elapsed, and then three fainter raps assured me that the message had been understood.

It remained for the occupant of the other room to reopen communication. It did not seem as if her life were in immediate danger, otherwise her appeal would have been even more strongly worded. I decided I could do nothing until the morning. By that time, if I could snatch a few hours' rest, I should be better able to judge the situation. The terrors of the night had left me utterly worn out, and I fell into a sleep sound as a child's.

I did not get up till late the following afternoon. My ankle was less swollen. I was able to walk a few steps without much pain.

Mrs. Moran waited on me herself. I saw neither Rachel the grim, nor Janet the frivolous.

"I hope you had a good night, my dear," she asked kindly. "My husband's niece sleeps in the next room. She's ill, poor thing, and inclined to be restless. Did she disturb you at all?"

"Not in the least," I answered, ready and unashamed. "What is the matter with her, Mrs. Moran?"

"The doctor says it is blood poisoning, my dear; but I think she's in a decline. All her family are consumptive; a pretty girl she used to be, and full of fun. It's sad to see how terribly she's altered."

"Has she lived with you long?"

"She came to us two years ago, when her father died. Truscot was left her guardian. He was very fond of her, and is so now, for that matter, though she's taken a turn against him. She and Arthur Merridew, the young fellow I pointed out to you, took up with one another. I like Arthur myself, but he was nothing of a match for Lesbia. My husband opposed their engagement, and discharged Arthur from his employment. That was in January—nine months back. Lesbia took it to heart terribly, and has pined away ever since."

"How old is she?" I asked.

"Twenty-one next month—if she lives till then she'll be her own mistress, and can marry whom she likes. But——" Mrs. Moran sighed, and dropped her hands helplessly beside her.

My pity and my curiosity were roused to the highest pitch by this statement. I longed for the evening, when the unfortunate Lesbia would perhaps give me her account of the story. Meanwhile, anxiety on my own account had not lessened. I had hoped Maggie would wire to me on receipt of my letter; as the hours went on without bringing the expected telegram, I began to speculate upon the chance of Noel answering my appeal in person.

Every knock at the door set my heart in a flutter; it might be that my lover himself had come.

By half-past nine I had worked myself up to a terrible pitch of excitement. I felt I could not bear another hour of suspense. Just as I had made up my mind to quit my room and gain the hall—preparatory to going out—Mrs. Moran hastily appeared.

"Here!" She struggled for breath, and thrust a letter in my hand. I slipped it in my bodice—none too quickly, as things happened. A step sounded outside my door. Truscot Moran's voice asked in mellow tones if I were better.

"Much better, thank you; almost well," I answered. "Mrs. Moran has been so good to me."

"I—I just brought up some grapes," she faltered. "Miss Gillespie said she had a fancy for them," and the poor thing pushed a plate of fruit towards me.

"Quite so. Did I hear the postman just now, Mary?"

"Yes, it was a letter for me," she answered, "a bill, I should say," and she handed him the missive deferentially.

He accepted the statement, though I do not think that for a moment he believed it. Together they went downstairs, wishing me "Good night." Barely had the echo of their steps died away before I locked the door and opened eagerly my letter.

It was from Maggie, and contained bad news. She wrote

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coldly, almost angrily. Briefly she stated that, owing to my rashness, everything had gone wrong. Had I waited at Mrs. Goodman's I should have met my lover, and my troubles would have ended. As it was, not only had I been tricked by Templeton and Co., but, as she feared, Noel also. He had received a message purporting to come from me, addressed from a house on the outskirts of Leicester.

Without waiting to consult Jim and Maggie, who were still searching for me by the canal, he started off, leaving the note with Mrs. Goodman. On their return, finding him absent, my friends, suspecting mischief, set off for the address mentioned. No such street or house existed! It was evident that Noel had fallen into a trap; at the present moment he was perhaps in the hands of the firm.

Not wishing to act on her own responsibility, Maggie wrote to me for instructions. Should she go to the police and tell them of Noel's disappearance, or, should nothing be done in the matter?

The news maddened me, my own position—alone in a strange house, surrounded by mystery and peril—faded into insignificance beside the thought that harm had come to Noel.

I would wire to the Dunkleys that night, and tell them at all cost to go to the police; alas! even as I hurried impetuously to the door, the insuperable obstacle of my lameness came home to me. I could not go out myself, nor, in face of Mrs. Moran's warning, could I send anybody else.

I must wait, hardest of all tasks, for the morning. Then come what might I would leave the house.

Shortly after midnight I heard three faint raps on the wall. I answered the signal in the recognised fashion, and a few minutes later the fanlight was softly pushed back, and the face, that awful livid face, looked down at me once more. Mounting a chair, I reached towards her.

"You are ill," I said softly; "what is it?"

"I am being poisoned," she answered, in a thin, quavering voice. "In the food I eat, the air I breathe, in my clothes, in the very paper on the walls of my room, there is poison. It chokes me, kills me, turning me slowly but surely from a living woman to a dead one. My uncle wants my money. Next month I am of age, and I can make a will and leave my fortune as I wish. If I die before that time, my fortune comes to him, my father's brother, the man who swore to love me as his own child. At first he was not unkind to me, later, when I learnt to love Arthur Merridew, his clerk, he changed. It did not suit him that I should marry, he wanted my money for other very different purposes. And so he sent Arthur away, and for me he planned a cruel and lingering death."

"But the doctor," I urged, "what does he say?"

"He is an old man and very stupid; he will not listen to a word against my uncle, and ascribes my complaints to a disordered brain. I cannot escape by myself; I am too weak, and the house is too well guarded. I know I must die, there is no hope of saving my life. But"—she stretched out a claw-like hand in piteous pleading—"but I don't want to die here; I must see him—see Arthur, before I go. If I could be with him a little while; just a few short days, it would not be so hard. Will you help me?" Her eyes, alight with fever, burnt into mine; the face, discoloured beyond recognition, worked convulsively.

"I will do my best," I answered; "at any rate, I can inform your lover as to what is happening. First of all, however, tell me why your aunt doesn't interfere?"

"She believes as the doctor says, that I am suffering from blood-poisoning—she does not suspect her husband of foul play. Besides, there is a reason, a great reason why she cannot, dare not, interfere with anything he does. She was married before she met uncle, and by her first husband she had a son named Dick. My uncle has discovered something about him and threatens to have him prosecuted whenever my aunt remonstrates; she's not a bad woman, but a very weak one."

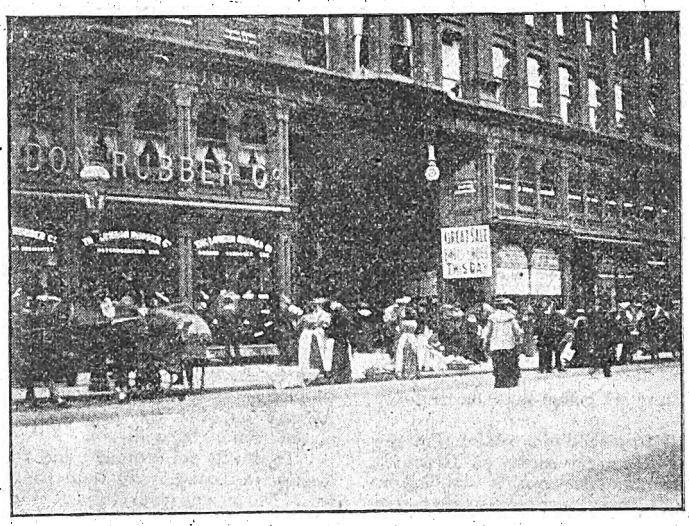
"Tell me," I said, "have there been any girls here before I came? Mrs. Moran said something about certain lady companions she had had?"

"Two girls were engaged at different times to stay with Aunt Mary. They were both orphans, without friends or families. They both died within a twelvemonth of their coming here, and"—her voice sank to a low murmur—"the lives of both were insured in favour of my uncle."

I shrank back aghast and trembling at her words.

"You need not be afraid," she went on with a horrible laugh, "you'll be quite safe—until you are insured. Be careful," she added, "not to let him know where your people live, he will get their consent to the insurance, upon some plausible pretext, and then you will have difficulty to refuse."

"I shall not stay here after to-morrow," I said, gasping. "I'll get out of the house as soon as it is light."



The Great Western Arcade, the place appointed for the meeting between Sara and Mrs. Merridew.

"You won't leave me? You promised you'd help me. For the love of Heaven don't break your word."

"I can help you more easily outside the house than in it."

"Indeed you are wrong; at any moment my uncle may make up his mind to bring things to a quick conclusion. If you are in the house, you may be able to stop it, you may—oh!"—the poor thing began to sob in a fashion terrible to witness—"don't leave me, help me, for God's sake, help me to go to Arthur."

Against that plea I could not steel my heart. She, like me, was persecuted for the sake of the man she loved. I would do my best to help her, so long—I had to insist on the proviso—so long as her interests did not clash with Noel's.

She seemed comforted by my assurance, and with many thanks, crept softly from the fanlight back to her own room.

The next morning I was early astir; my ankle, though weak, pained me much less; with care, I felt sure I could get about as much as I wished. I came downstairs at the summons of the gong to breakfast. Mrs. Moran raised hands and eyes, in protest at my foolhardiness, but Truscot praised my courage and welcomed me enthusiastically.

"I suppose you are not able to come down to my office to-day, Miss Gillespie, otherwise I could install you as my assistant immediately; I have a lot of work on hand, and both my clerks are laid up with influenza."

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"Indeed, I am quite recovered," I said, with a smile, misleading as his own. "I'll be at Colemore Row by twelve o'clock, Mr. Moran, and shall expect a hard day's work."

I left the house a little after ten; with the aid of a stick I found I could walk without great inconvenience. Still my progress was necessarily slow, and I was glad to hail a cab which I encountered at the end of the Russell Road.

I directed the man to drive straight to the chief post office, an imposing building facing Victoria Square.

Leaning back, I surveyed the panorama of the streets; noting once more the sharpness of the contrast between the fashionable thoroughfares—Corporation Street, with its costly shops, New Street with its bristling activity—and the squalor of the side streets, through which one caught a glimpse of slums, black and festering cancers that eat into the very heart of the great City.

During the drive I decided on my plan of action. I would wire instructions to Maggie to appeal at once to the authorities. Meanwhile, I should remain at Truscot's house. There, whatever peril I might run, I was safe from Templeton and Co., in another place I might fall into the hands of the enemy. Besides—and this weighed with me—I had promised to help the unfortunate Lesbia, I could not turn my back on the unfortunate girl.

My telegram dispatched, I sought Mr. Arthur Merridew. He was engaged in a small office in Cherry Street, at the princely salary of a pound a week! A shabby, careworn youth. I was not impressed by his manners or his looks, until I mentioned Lesbia.

Then a smile flashed into his eyes that utterly transformed him. He became young, ardent, almost good-looking.

"She sent me a message?" he said; "how good, how dear of her."

He did not seem to have heard of her illness, and was horror-stricken when I told him of her condition.

"We cannot talk here," he said, "we may be overheard. These people know Mr. Moran well. I shall be free about five o'clock, if you will meet me in the Art Gallery, we could discuss matters undisturbed.

I agreed to the proposal, and, it being close on mid-day, took a cab to Colmore Row.

Mr. Moran's offices were well furnished in a solid and respectable fashion that reminded me unpleasantly of Great St. Helens. One large room opening into another smaller one comprised the suite. I found Moran surrounded by correspondence. He greeted me with a nod, and signed to me to take a seat at the table, and commenced to dictate the answers to his letters.

"You'll do," he said shortly. "You're as smart as I thought you were, and that's saying a great deal. I'll give you two pounds a week, if you care to come to me as typine. You can stay at Truscot's house into the bargain; you'll be a nice companion for my niece. Didn't know I had one?"—he laughed unpleasantly—"I'll introduce you to-night," he said abruptly, and recommenced his dictation.

He kept me hard at it till close on three, when we were interrupted by a caller.

Mr. Moran motioned to me to retire into the inner room, where I found a typewriter located. The latch of the door was defective, so that it did not quite close, any secrets that Mr. Moran and his visitor may have discussed, however, were rendered inaudible by the click of the machine—besides, their voices were quite low.

I heard the man depart, Mr. Moran accompanying him to the landing. In a minute or two the former returned; some one was with him, a man with a heavy step, and—I guessed, a portly figure.

"How's business?" said the new-comer.

He had a smooth, insinuating voice, a voice that of a sudden set the room whirling round me, and made my fingers shake and quiver on the keys.

"Templeton!" I gasped, and, panic-stricken, thumped the typewriter, fearing lest silence should arouse suspicion.

I did not catch Moran's reply—I was listening so eagerly to my enemy's next words.

"I'm glad to hear you're prospering. How's the niece? What, not pegged out yet? Good gracious, what constitutions these young people have! Now, there's a girl of ours—the firm's, I mean, who has been through enough trouble and anxiety to kill a man twice over, and yet she's still alive and apparently unhurt."

"Who is it?" said Moran. "The girl who stole your notes? Some of your people sent me a bill describing her. Red hair, green eyes—isn't that it? Doesn't sound very attractive."

"That's the girl. I've reason," Templeton seemed to draw nearer the other, "I've reason to believe she's here—in Birmingham. I've set our best men to trace her out, but so far it's no go. She's covered her tracks so safely, there's no unearthing them. Now you, as a local man, may know better how to set about the business, we *must* find her, it's more important now than ever."

"Why, has the value of the document she stole gone up?"

"That's so. It's worth more now than it ever was. The reason"—Templeton hesitated, in my anxiety to catch what followed, I raised my fingers from the keyboard, not daring to press a single letter.

"We've secured Noel Masterman, and put him in a safe, sure place. Nobody—except a factory girl, at Northampton, and she can't prove it—knows he is in England. In his absence we are authorised to deal with his estate. We can and will deal with it, most expeditiously—only——"

"I understand," said Moran, "everything is to your hand except the deed, and that——"

"Is in the hands of Sara Gillespie. The question is, will you help us to find her?"

"What are your terms?" said Moran brusquely

"How much do you want?"

"A fourth of the estate."

"Preposterous! Do you take me for a fool?"

"I take you for a hard-headed man of business, Templeton, and, as such, I give you three minutes to consider my offer. If the girl is to be found I shall have to devote money and time to the business. I shall have to run considerable risks. The longer she remains hidden the less your chance of success. At any moment the bubble may burst. Masterman may escape, Sara Gillespie——"

"That will do, Moran," said the other, "I don't want to discuss any more. We want the girl, in fact, we must have her. I'll accept your terms. Find Sara Gillespie, and you stand in with the three of us. A fourth of the estate to each."

"I will produce the lady," answered Moran, "there's no fear as to that."

He rose from his chair as he spoke, and walked across the office, towards the room in which I sat. I counted his steps, one, two, three—Good Heavens, in another second he would reach the door—and I—I, who had fought so long and so painfully for Noel, would find defeat.

I covered my face with my hands, leaning my head upon the table, and waited—as I think a victim must wait for the executioner's knife—for Moran to denounce me.

A heavy hand was laid upon my shoulder, sick unto death I turned. Through the half open door I caught a glimpse of Templeton. His back was towards me, he stood waiting, impatient for Moran to return. Could I make a dash for freedom—rush through the door, past Templeton, and out into the corridor? I might have done so, but for my ankle. As it was I made a step across the room.

Truscot caught hold of me, smiling at my torture of suspense.

Then, with a little laugh, he released me.

"Get on with your letters, my dear," he said, "you're not wanted in the other room this afternoon."

I dropped back limp as a rag into my chair, unable to realise that the danger was past. I understood it thoroughly, however, when, some ten minutes later, Templeton having departed, Moran reappeared.

"Well," he said, "are you going to thank me for what I've done? Poor little girl, you're quite white. You're shaking," and he stroked my face in a caressing fashion, that sent the

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blood flushing to my cheeks. He noticed my discomfiture, and seemed annoyed at it.

"You're wonderfully sensitive, Miss Gillespie, considering the adventures you have passed through. Come, don't you think you owe me some gratitude for what I've done for you?"

He leant towards me as he spoke; Truscot Moran was going to kiss me! As his face, handsome, despite its evil mouth and eyes, came nearer, a flame of anger, indignation, and contempt, rose within me. He was the only person who could help me, the one man who stood between Templeton and me; but all considerations of the kind went down before my indignation. I struck at him with my clenched fist, leaving a mark upon his evil, smiling face.

He fell back with an oath.

"That will do," he said slowly, as, frightened at my own temerity, I gasped forth some sort of an apology. "I'll conduct all further negotiations with you on strictly business principles, Miss Gillespie, be sure of that," he sneered as he spoke, and my heart contracted miserably.

"I've undertaken to hand you over to Templeton on conditions which you overheard this afternoon. I shall keep my undertaking, the only thing left for me to decide is when I shall complete the contract, whether, in short, I shall inform Templeton of your whereabouts to-night, or in a week, or in a month, as the case may be."

"Not to-night," I pleaded desperately. "Give me till to-morrow, just till to-morrow."

"I'll give you three days," was the reply, "on certain conditions. It never pays to give something for nothing, Miss Gillespie—as I have just learnt. If you want three days' liberty, you must pay the price. It's not a hard, not an excessive price—you've just got to pretend you're my niece, Lesbia Moran, for half an hour, that's all. To put it plainly, you've to accompany me to an insurance office where I shall take out a policy for you as Lesbia. The doctor will examine you, and, finding you healthy—you look very strong, Miss Gillespie—will pass you, as a suitable client. Lesbia, as you are aware, is dying, she will be dead before the month is out; at her death I shall claim £5,000, the amount of the policy taken out this afternoon."

"It's—it's fraudulent!" I gasped.

"Quite so, and you will be a party to the fraud."

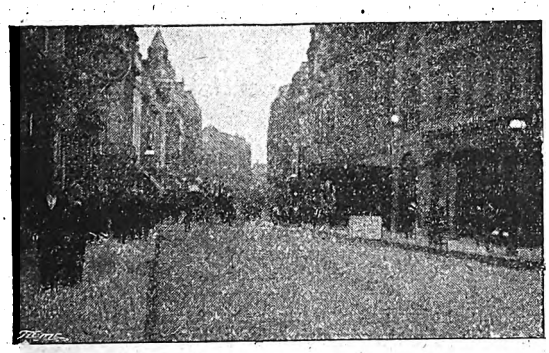
"I can't do it," I said desperately, "whatever happens."

"Very good. I'll ring up Templeton on the telephone and have a chat with him."

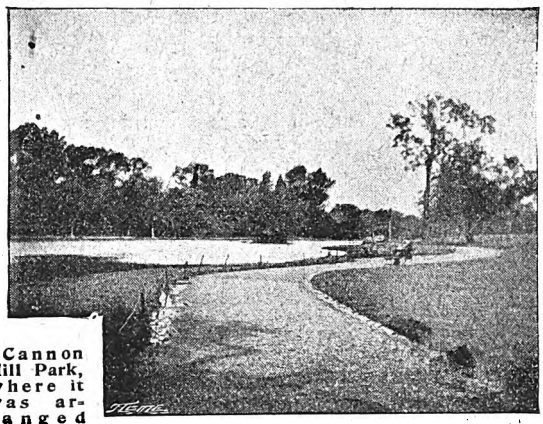
He strolled towards the instrument as he spoke, and leisurely proceeded to ring up. For a minute I did battle for conscience' sake. It was a fraud, and by consenting I became involved. And yet, could I refuse? For Noel's sake, my sweetheart, who was in danger, who, if I lost my liberty would be left friendless, and alone, without a soul to fight his battle.

Love before all things was my motto, for love's sake I would do even this.

"You need not ring up Mr. Templeton," I said slowly, "I will come with you to the office and pass as your niece."



The Insurance Offices, to which Sara was taken, were situated near New Street.



Cannon Hill Park, where it was arranged that Lesbia and her lover, Arthur Merridew, should be brought together.

"That's a sensible young woman," he said calmly; "I thought you'd come round in time. There's just one thing more to settle, and then we'll get off. You'd better understand that it's quite hopeless for you to attempt to escape. There's no spot in which you can hide in Birmingham unknown to me, nothing you can do I shall not find out. You must have realised that for yourself from what Templeton said. To-day, for instance," he smiled serenely, "you called and interviewed Mr. Arthur Merridew at his office in Cherry Street. Don't trouble to protest, Miss Gillespie, it's useless; I'll keep my part of the bargain, if you'll keep yours. To-day is Wednesday, on Saturday—three days from now—I hand you to Templeton, meantime, take my advice, and don't endeavour to escape, if you do, you will merely precipitate the event."

Against my will, his words convinced me; I realised there was no chance of escape for the next three days. Silently I got ready to accompany Mr. Moran, and listened to certain instructions as to the coming interview. I did not speak until we drew up at the Insurance Offices near New Street. Mr. Moran introduced me as his niece; he had evidently arranged the interview, for all preliminaries had already been settled. I was ushered into a room, where the Doctor, a kindly-looking man, proceeded to test my lungs and heart.

The examination was entirely satisfactory. He told me I was in good health, and likely to live to an advanced age. At the last moment my courage failed me; I felt I must confess I was not Lesbia. I turned towards him appealingly.

"I—I—am not——"

Mr. Moran's voice immediately outside the door checked the words. I must go through with the business—for Noel's sake.

"You did that very well, my dear," said my "uncle," as we left the office. "You've the makings of a first-class adventuress."

I looked at him quite steadily, and said:

"I've done what I undertook, Mr. Moran. You named the terms, I accepted them; now the positions are reversed. It is for me to dictate; for you to obey. You promised me three days of safety—to wait till Saturday before you gave me up. Listen to me, on the day you betray me to Templeton, the Insurance Company will be acquainted with the fraud that's just been practised. I have provided against every contingency; I wrote a note while I was with the Doctor, and posted it a moment ago in that box. The note was addressed to friends whom I can trust; I have instructed them that any morning they fail to get a telegram, assuring them of my safety, they are to post on the inclosure sent with the letter. That inclosure is addressed to the Secretary of the Insurance Company."

I smiled as I concluded, and gazed at him serenely.

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"I rather think I have the best of this bargain, Mr. Moran; and now, I'm going to look at the pictures in the Art Gallery. Don't be afraid, I'm not going to run away, I shall be back at Russell Road a little later."

"And pray what are you going to do, if you meet with Templeton?" he sneered.

"That's your look-out, not mine; any morning my friends don't hear from me, you know what will ensue."

He ground his teeth with rage, and yet unwilling admiration shone in his eyes.

"Little vixen!" he murmured, "you have done me this time. The next——" He smiled significantly, and turned aside.

It was considerably past five when I reached the Art Gallery; I feared Arthur Merridew had gone, but after a little search I found him. He was in the first room, seated in front of one of the greatest pictures of modern times, "The Last of England." He was gazing at the exquisite face of the woman, as with her blue eyes, glistening with tears, she looks her last on her native land. His own eyes were misty, and his lips moved, seeming to shape the name of "Lesbia."

He started when I spoke to him, and, pointing to the picture, asked if I did not see the likeness.

"Lesbia's hair is just that beautiful shade of chestnut; those are her very eyes, and the mouth is the same."

I gasped at the words, and thought of the poor distorted face that had looked out at me from the window.

"Lesbia is not like that now," I said "you must understand she is terribly altered, she declares she is being poisoned, and I am inclined to agree with her."

"We will go to the police," he declared excitedly, "and ask for Moran's arrest."

"Nothing of the sort," I answered impatiently; "no one would take any notice of you. The only thing to be done is to plan an escape. Lesbia must be got out of the house. I will manage to see her to-night and take her some food, which she can eat in safety, so that by Friday she will be a little stronger. This is my plan—Mr. and Mrs. Moran must be got out of the house on Friday evening about seven. At that hour, you must be waiting with a carriage a few doors from Truscot's house. I will bring Lesbia to you—the rest is in your hands."

"It's impossible for me to meet you near the house; Moran always has someone on the watch when he's away, and that would spoil it all; you see, he's always suspected me of trying to communicate with Lesbia. He tried to compel me to leave Birmingham—I had great trouble to get any work after he discharged me; now I am only kept on sufferance at a miserable salary of a pound a week."

"What do you propose then?" I asked impatiently; I was sorry for him, but it was not fitting to sympathise.

"I'll wait for you in Cannon Hill Park; I'll be there at seven, and stay till you come."

"Very good; meanwhile you must do your share. Find out the favourite haunts of Mrs. Moran's son Dick. Then send a wire in his name urging her to meet him. Also you must wire to Moran. I will write you the message you must send to him, and post it on to you. Can you do this?"

"Of course; I am very grateful to you for suggesting it."

"I must warn you, Lesbia's very ill. She will not be able to stand much of a journey. Where are you going to take her on Friday?"

"I'll take her to my mother, she'll look after her and nurse her back to health. Also," he flushed and hesitated, "I shall persuade her to marry me almost at once. A man can protect his wife against everything."

He looked too absurdly young and insignificant to protect anybody; but he seemed truly fond of Lesbia, and was not without intelligence.

"How shall I know if you've carried out these arrangements?" I asked.

"Go down Corporation Street on Friday at five o'clock, past the Great Western Arcade; my mother will be standing at the entrance. She's an old lady and wears a black beaded cloak, and a bonnet with violets. Look at her carefully, but don't speak. If she nods to you, you will understand everything is satisfactory. If she makes no sign, Lesbia's escape must be delayed."

I agreed to the proposal and once more repeated my instructions, wished him "Good luck!" and departed, leaving him to feast again upon "The Last of England."

By this time my ankle was aching pretty badly; I managed, however, to get to the post office and inquire for telegrams.

No wire had as yet been received; I was not over anxious as to the delay—I had already matured a scheme, by means of which I hoped to extort Noel's whereabouts from Templeton, through the agency of Moran. Thinking it wiser to save my strength than my money, I took a cab and drove to a large grocer's in Corporation Street, where I purchased a bottle of brandy, some strong soup, and some eggs.

Brilliantly lit and busy with a pleasant, bustling throng, crowding to look into the shops, Corporation Street was at its best. I envied the women with their husbands, the girls with their sweethearts. When—ah! when should I be once more with Noel?

I stared dreamily at the stream of sight-seers, oblivious of the cab, forgetful of Lesbia—even of myself. I was recalled to things present by a touch on the arm.

"If you want to meet the senior partner, Miss Gillespie, he's just round the corner. He'll be here directly."

Truscot Moran's eyes flashed into mine.

There was no need for a second warning; forgetful of my ankle, I flew across the pavement, and bundled into the hansom.

The next minute we were dashing along, in the direction of Russell Road. The trams with their hideous clang and clatter, passed us at intervals, and as usual sent a thrill of apprehension through me. A sort of panic seized me at the approach of these monsters. They filled me with an unreasoning terror.

Nothing of note occurred that evening. Mrs. Moran, sat placid in a gown of ruby velvet, and lamented Truscot's late returning. I endured both the gown and the lamentations till ten o'clock, then I said "Good night," and went upstairs.

I passed Rachel on the way; she glanced at me suspiciously, and hardly returned my greeting. In my calculations as to Friday, I had left out the grim and silent woman.

When the house was silent and the hour late, I cautiously rapped on the fanlight. Lesbia looked a little less ghastly than on the previous occasion; she told me she had abstained from food during the day, and the result seemed beneficial. I passed her the eggs and brandy, with directions to beat them

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up together and swallow at intervals during the next twenty-four hours. I instructed her to get some outdoor clothing in readiness by Friday, when I hoped she would see her lover. I repeated Arthur's messages, and encouraged her to the best of my capacity.

The next day passed uneventfully. I worked at the office until six, then returned to Truscot's house, calling at the Post Office on my way. Maggie wired to say she had been to the police, but they seemed to regard her story with suspicion. If my plan succeeded, I was not likely to want their assistance, however. To-morrow—by to-morrow—success or failure would be assured. If I could get Lesbia away from Truscot's house to the safe keeping of Merridew, I should practically have the whip hand of Moran.

I determined to drive a bargain with him, hard and fast. I should threaten that unless he obtained for me Noel's whereabouts I would expose him out and out to the insurance office, I would produce the real Lesbia, and in face of such a piece of evidence, Moran would be lost.

Thursday evening I handed Lesbia a fresh supply of food, I repeated my instructions as to her conduct the next day. At six o'clock, when Rachel usually brought up her tea, she would complain of headache, and express a desire to go to bed. Having seen her safely tucked up, the woman would go downstairs, leaving the patient free to dress herself. By that time, if things went well, Mr. and Mrs. Moran would have gone out, and the coast would be clear. I had not yet thought out a way of removing Rachel, I left that over, hoping for an inspiration at the last.

The hours dragged terribly the next day. The suspense was almost intolerable. I had instructed Merridew as to the nature of the wire he was to send—it was a message of urgency, purporting to come from Templeton—and all day long I hoped and feared for its arrival. Not until Moran was leaving the office for the day, did the telegram arrive. He tore the wire open, read its purport, then, with a cunning glance at me, lounged out of the office.

Did he believe it, or had he scented forgery? I had no means of discovering whether or no he was already in communication with Templeton. If that were so, the game was already lost. There was still one chance, however, in my favour. Fortune is kind to the rash, and my plan was rash indeed.

From the office I made my way to Corporation Street. Anxiety kept a keen look-out for Merridew's old mother. I saw her waiting a short distance from the entrance to the Arcade, a pretty old lady, slight and fragile, with silver hair banded over her ears, neat black gown and beaded mantle, and a small bunch of violets in her bonnet.

She tightened her lips as she caught sight of me, and nodded her head with much insistence. I smiled, passed on, and, hailing the nearest cab, drove as quickly as possible to Russell Road.

I arrived at Truscot's house about a quarter to six; from that time events came quickly. Mrs. Moran had received a telegram from her son, Janet informed me, and would not be back till late.

"It's a fine night," I said encouragingly, "a run would do you good. If you like to go out I'll answer any rings at the bell, Rachel needn't know, and I don't suppose the cook will mind."

Janet dimpled with pleasure, and a few minutes later I had the satisfaction of seeing her trim figure running down the garden path. My next difficulty was Rachel.

On going upstairs I found Lesbia looking through the fanlight. The poor thing had fastened a sailor-hat on her thin hair, excitement had brought a less livid colour to her cheeks. She was quite self-possessed, and ready to do all I told her.

"You've taken some soup, and eggs, and brandy?" I questioned.

She nodded.

"That's good! Do you feel very weak?"

"Horribly, but I shall be strong enough to get away from this house. I shall keep up till then——" her mouth worked, and large tears fell on her hand

"You mustn't cry now," I said peremptorily. "Pull yourself together like a good girl. Is your door locked?"

"Yes, and Rachel has the key."

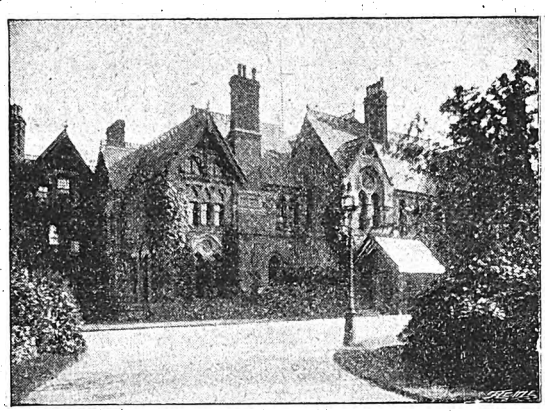
Now this was an eventuality I had not foreseen. For a moment I wondered if it would be possible for Lesbia to climb through the fan-light, and escape through my door. A moment's consideration convinced me of the impossibility of such a project.

"Lesbia," said I, "you must ring the bell violently, furiously, as if you were alarmed, or taken very ill. Rachel will hurry to answer it, when she's outside the door and you hear her turn the key, call out that she must come at once. In her hurry she will perhaps leave the key in the door; I shall be outside waiting to seize it.

Lesbia fell in with the project, and rang the bell imperiously and repeatedly, till Rachel, grumbling but alarmed, appeared.

"Quick, quick!" cried Lesbia, "Make haste, you'll be too late."

Muttering and angry, Rachel pushed the door open, she withdrew the key, but in her haste it slipped from her fingers. She stooped to pick it up, but I was too quick for her. Thrusting my hand over her shoulder, I grabbed it



Highbury, the residence of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, where Sara went to appeal for help.

from the floor. She clutched me round the waist, and tried to drag me down beside her, but, too lissom for her to hold, I wriggled myself free. Lesbia took advantage of this interlude with more courage and initiative than I thought she possessed. I don't quite know how it happened—things came so quickly—but in an incredibly short time I stood beside her on the landing, the key of the door in my pocket, and Rachel locked in the room.

She was not likely to stay there long, however, already her knocks and bangings, to say nothing of her shouts, seemed to fill the house.

But for Janet's timely absence, and the fact that the cook was both lazy and deaf, our manœuvre would have been futile. As it was, I had half carried, half dragged my charge down the stairs and out into the street, just as the cook arrived in the hall to investigate the disturbance. I whistled to the hired brougham waiting in readiness, and, lifting Lesbia in my arms—the poor thing was incredibly thin—carried her towards it.

The door banged, the carriage drove off up Russell Road to Cannon Hill Park; so far my plan had answered perfectly.

I had grave doubts, however, at one period, whether my charge would last until the journey's end. Her sudden spurt of courage had exhausted the last remnant of vitality. She lay back motionless, it seemed to me dead. I poured brandy down her throat, and abjured her in Arthur's name, to rally. She revived a little, but I felt very anxious, and it was with

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grave misgivings I left her, on arriving at the Park, to seek out Arthur.

He was not within sight at the gate, and as in desperation I hurried on, I yet could catch no glimpse of him. Mad with fear I ran at top speed calling his name.

I found him gazing at the water, murmuring Lesbia's name. I'm afraid I roused him from his reverie rather abruptly.

"Come at once," I said, giving him a little shake. "You'll find her gone if you're not careful."

He needed no further spur, and together we returned to Lesbia. I watched their meeting, and forgave the young man all his sentiment and affectation by reason of his tenderness towards her. Neither by word nor look did he betray the awful shock her alteration must have given him.

She had been a comely-looking girl when last he saw her—now—I sighed, and tears sprang to my eyes.

Gathering her in his arms, he murmured all his love and affection. My last glimpse showed me her head upon his shoulder, gazing into his eyes.

And to me they did not give a thought!

Now that Lesbia was safely off my mind, I turned my thoughts to my own affairs—and Noel's. Moran I calculated would return about eight. At that hour I decided to call at the house, inform him of my share in what had taken place, and threaten to expose him unless he obtained from Templeton particulars as to my lover's whereabouts. Busy with my thoughts I turned into "Reddings," watching the lights of the distant town shine through the trees.

I walked a short distance along the footpath, until I reached a hedgerow, thick and high.

The next minute I had stopped short, my senses on the alert. At the other side of the hedge Templeton and Moran were conversing.

"I won't come any farther, thank you," said the former. "I must get back to the hotel. You understand how matters lie?"

"Exactly," Moran answered, "I hand the girl over to you to-morrow, in return you give me the address of her friends at Northampton, so that I can stop their communicating with the insurance people!'

"That's so, I think we're in sight of home at last, Moran. It's been a tough fight, but at last she's in our power."

They shook hands and parted, leaving me overwhelmed with the discovery. The ground was cut from under my feet; I dare not denounce Moran, the denunciation would entail my own discovery.

What could I do, to whom could I appeal in my distress?

Like a flash the answer came. I would go to the idol of Birmingham, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain himself. Surely he would listen to my story, surely he would give me help. Buoyed up with hope I tramped the road that led from the "Reddings" to Highbury, but when, the large gates passed, I stood in full view of the great house, my courage failed me.

As I stood hesitating, the door opened, Chamberlain himself, accompanied by his son, walked down the steps. Before I had time to frame an appeal, they had stepped into the waiting carriage and had driven off. My last chance was gone!

Utterly exhausted, I made my way to a seat by the roadside, there I waited till a belated cab, journeying back to the city, offered to take me as a cheap fare. I decided to go to Mrs. Merridew's, where I could pass the night, and therefore agreed to his proposal. The cab deposited me in the middle of Corporation Street; Arthur's mother lived in a street off the Moseley Road. I turned in that direction; my way led me through Old Square, the terminus of those terrible steam trams. For a long time I stood at the corner of the Square, hesitating to cross, for fear I might stumble and fall a victim to one of the trams. As I stood waiting on the kerb, debating with myself when I should take the plunge, I became conscious that someone was staring at me from the other side of Corporation Street!

I looked up and recognised the senior partner. Panic-stricken I rushed across the Square, hoping to evade him in the traffic. Fearful of losing me he launched himself into the road at the same moment. A shout rose from the by-standers—my heart was in my throat, I glanced back. The shouts grew louder.

"Take care, take care!" the people cried. And then I realised what the warning meant. Within a few feet of me, steering straight for me, was a huge tram, belching forth clouds of smoke—another second it would be upon me—another second—I stood transfixed with horror, I could not move

(Another long instalment of "The Pursuit of Sara" next week.)

THE LOVE of MIRIAM NORTH.

How a Careless Youth Hurt a Woman's Feelings.

People said that Miriam North never had a love affair in her life; but her world did not know what Miriam North knew as she stood one night before her mirror and curled a few loose locks of her reddish-brown hair that had fallen over her forehead.

When she had finished she stepped back a little and looked at herself with a sense of satisfaction. She looked very well, nobody could deny that. One would not think she was thirty years old, she said to herself with a slightly heightened colour that became her.

Miriam was a rather pretty woman. She had a pale, creamy complexion and a wealth of burnished reddish hair that Will admired so. Her face was a long oval; she had good brows and rather fine eyes of the same warm hue as her hair. Her nose and mouth were large. To-night her hat suited her, and the dull fawn of her jacket threw into relief her ruddy hair and eyes. She caught herself hoping that Will would notice it, and then threw back her head and called herself a fool.

"If anybody guessed, how they would laugh at me," she said, biting her lips sharply.

When she went down, Will and Kate and Bob were waiting impatiently for her at the front door. Kate was sure they would be late for the concert on account of Miriam's fussiness.

She was Miriam's sister, and Bob was her brother, but Will Harper was merely a distant cousin. A handsome, round-faced, boyish fellow of nineteen or twenty, he was listening to Kate's lively chatter with a rather bored expression. His eyes lightened up as Miriam came downstairs, and he stepped forward eagerly.

Kate and Bob snickered significantly as they started down the paths between the rows of red and yellow dahlias. Kate was eighteen, and, in common with the rest of Lynborough, looked on Miriam as a confirmed old maid. It seemed to her too funny for anything that Will should prefer Miriam's company to hers. At the gate Bob paused to call out:

"If you two stand mooning there all night, you'll be late for the concert."

Miriam winced a little. She was pinning a cluster of asters to Will's coat.

"You look stunning to-night, Mirry," he whispered admiringly.

She coloured again with a pleasure she was ashamed of.

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How foolish of her to be so pleased with a boy's admiration. They walked slowly down the long, elm-shaded street in the purple gloom of the dusk. When the concert was over they walked back again in the moonlight. Bob and Kate had gone in before them, but, as they turned in at the gate, Will drew Miriam aside into the shadow of the trees.

"Don't let's go in for a while, Mirry. It's just the thing out here. And I want to have a talk with you before I go, you know I'm off to college to-morrow, and won't be back till next Spring. I don't believe you are a bit sorry."

"Oh, Will!"

"Well, I don't. You know how much I think of you, Mirry. I've told you so often, and you've just put me off and off, and never would give me a decided answer. But you will now, Mirry, won't you, before I go. Promise you'll marry me as soon as I get through college, and I'll be the happiest fellow in the world."

He put his arm round her coaxingly, and bent forward to look up into her face.

Miriam laughed a little.

"You foolish boy! Why won't you stop talking such nonsense? I've told you often enough I'm too old for you to marry. It would never do. Why, you're just a boy, Will, and I—I am an old maid."

"You're nothing of the sort, Mirry," he said stoutly. "You're far prettier than Kate. I don't care if you are older than I—that will never make any difference. I've known you all my life—and we've been such chums—and you must marry me, Mirry. Promise me now, do, dear."

"You will change your mind in a year or two," she warned him.

"I won't. If you won't take me, I'll never look at any other girl. Oh, Mirry, why can't you say now at once that you'll marry me, and make a fellow happy, and not keep putting him off this way every time?"

Miriam sighed. Will had said the same thing a dozen times that summer. Nobody knew or guessed it but herself. Will Harper had always made a sort of second home at the North's. Miriam had been a grown-up young lady when he was a boy in knickerbockers, and he had always been a pet with her. It was only this summer that he had taken it into his head to be so—ridiculous.

Her own family looked upon her as very ancient, and thought Will's boyishly displayed devotion partook of a filial character. Hadn't Mirry always patronised him? Only Miriam knew the difference.

"Will," she said finally, "it seems a very silly thing for us to think of—very silly. You'll say so yourself some day. I can't give you any answer now. But if, when you come home next Spring, you feel just the same and—and—ask me again, I'll give you your answer then."

This did not suit Will at all, of course. He assured and protested that he would always feel the same, and that it was all nonsense, and positive cruelty besides, to drag him through a year of miserable suspense, when she might just as well settle the whole thing at once. But Miriam was firm, and Will had to accede grumblingly. Well, he would write her anyhow—every week, and she must write him—and he would work like a slave at college for her sake—and she wasn't to forget that she was as good as engaged to him.

They went in then for Will to say good-bye to them all. Kate noticed Miriam's crimson cheeks at once, and asked her if Will had been painting or kissing her out in the garden. Kate was the terror of poor Miriam's life.

Will said good-bye all round, and parted from Miriam with a whispered—

"Remember now, Mirry."

After he had gone, and while Mrs. North and Kate and Bob were saying how much they would miss him, and praising him up for a smart boy and likely to do well, Miriam went softly upstairs and sat down in the moonlight.

She was very happy—and a year would soon pass—and if Will was as fond of her as ever when he came back—she did not complete the last sentence, but buried her face softly in her hands, and blushed at her foolish dreams.

Will wrote regularly, as he had promised, and Miriam wrote back. In the Spring he came home. On the night she expected him Miriam was dressing painstakingly in her room, having first locked the door to keep Kate out. She tried on a dozen different dresses, and finally settled on a new white one. When she had finished dressing she surveyed herself contentedly. She looked well and hoped Will would like her appearance. Pure white suited her. She pinned a cluster of roses at her belt, and picked out a perfect bud for Will. She hoped that Kate would not notice anything unusual, or comment on it if she did.

She peered with some disquiet at the visible lines about her mouth and the crowsfeet at the corners of her eyes, and put up a finger to smooth them away. After all, she reflected, they were no plainer than they were a year ago, and Will had loved her then.

She pulled up the blind and sat down by the open window to watch the sunset through the trees. She was very, very happy. Will—her Will—would come in a few minutes—the dear boy. She had been cruel to make him wait so long for his answer. But the winter had gone, and he should have

Miriam sat down on the rustic seat, and Will stood beside her.

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it at last. How happy they would be, they two! It should make no difference, after all, that she was the older; at least she felt as young as he. He did not care. So she hugged herself in a little paroxysm of joy. To hurry the lagging moments she got out Will's letters to read over. Most of them were rather interesting, though not at all sentimental; but then she had forbidden him to write sentimentally. The last ones were rather short and dry—but of course it was all the fault of those "beastly examinations," Will himself said so. The last one of all was a mere scrawl—written a week before college closed. Miriam kissed the signature before she put the letter back in the bundle. Short or long, after all, what did letters matter? In a few minutes she would have Will himself.

When she heard his ring, she stood up, her heart fluttering nervously, her colour coming and going like a schoolgirl's. But she would not go down straight away—not until the first meetings were over and he had asked for her. Then she would slip down and in, and Will would spring to meet her and shake her hand with a little shy squeeze, as of old, and give her a significant look from his blue eyes. Then, after a while, when it grew dusk, she would slip out in the garden, and Will would follow her, and put his arm round her, and tell her he had come for his answer. She planned it all out, as she walked up and down the floor, listening to the sounds below. The minutes passed very slowly, but still nobody came. Half an hour went by before Kate came flying upstairs and into the room.

"Mirry, why on earth don't you come down? Don't you know Will is here? He's asking for you. You'll take Will's breath away completely, Mirry, if you swoop down upon him in all that splendour at once. Hadn't I better go down and prepare him?"

"Don't be idiotic, Kate," said Miriam, not so sharply as she might have. Kate stood aside in meek awe to let her pass. She went downstairs a little dizzily, and paused for an instant at the door with a sense of going through some carefully rehearsed performance.

Will was sitting on an ottoman, with his right foot hooked over his left knee, and his hat and cane on the chair beside him, vigorously discoursing to open-mouthed Bob on the events of his freshman year.

Becoming aware of Miriam's presence, he sprang up eagerly and gave her a hearty handshake, without any attempt at the old-time squeeze.

"Why, Mirry, is it you? I thought you weren't going to come down to see a fellow at all. You're looking well, though, isn't she, Bob? How are you, Mirry?"

"I'm—I'm very well," stammered Miriam faintly. It was the one solitary thing she could think of saying as she backed awkwardly to a seat in the corner. Will dropped back on his ottoman and resumed the interrupted thread of his speech to Bob. Miriam listened vaguely without understanding a word of it.

When Kate and Mrs. North came in again Will turned himself round to take in the circle. He had not changed much in appearance; there was a faint dark line on his upper lip, which he caressed with infinite care.

When it grew dusk Miriam rose and went noiselessly out. She had been pacing up and down the path for a long while before Will came. He was smoking a cigar, which he removed for an instant as he came up to her.

"Hope you don't object to a cigar, Mirry?"

"Oh, no, not at all," gasped Miriam.

"Glad of that," said Will carelessly. "It's a beastly bore when a fellow can't enjoy his cigar in peace. You were always a sensible sort, though, Mirry. Fine evening, isn't it? How have you been getting on?"

"Oh, very well," flatly.

"Any prospects of a lively time in Lynnborough this summer, or is it going to be as dull as it usually is?"

"I don't know," faltered poor Miriam confusedly; "there is some rumour of a few garden-parties or so."

"Beastly bores," said Will, with whom the expression seemed a pet one. "Well, of course, one doesn't expect much go in a place like this. Just as well, I suppose, one way you look at it. I've got some studying to do this summer."

"How did you get on in your examinations, Will?" said Miriam, plucking up a little courage at the prospect of a subject she could talk about.

"Well," said Will confidentially, "I don't mind telling you, Mirry, because I know you'll keep it close. You always were a brick like that. I didn't do much, and that's the fact. Didn't fail in any except those two, but it was just as much as ever I scraped up a bare pass in the rest. Don't tell the folks. I'm ashamed of it, I'll own. I really meant to work hard and distinguish myself and all that, but somehow—well, I don't know how it was exactly. There was always so much going on—parties and football and larks with the boys. And a fellow is never expected to do much his first year, except the plugs. But I mean to pull up next year, straight."

They had got round now to the rustic seat. Miriam sat down meekly and Will stood beside her.

"Look here, Mirry," he said awkwardly, getting very red in the face even in the dusk, "I know you're afraid I'm going to make a duffer of myself again this year, but you needn't be. That's what I came out to tell you. I knew you'd be glad."

"Oh!" said Miriam faintly.

"Yes, I was an awful fool last year; I see it now, just as you said I would. You were a regular brick, Mirry, to be so patient with me, and put up with my nonsense so long as you did. It would have served me right if you'd snubbed me as I deserved. What a verdant kid you must have thought me, though you never let on. But I've got a little more sense now, I hope. You needn't be scared of my relapsing into idiocy again. We can be good friends, as we always were, but I'll promise to behave myself."

"Of course," said Miriam, without any clear idea of what she was saying.

"I say, Mirry," went on Will confidentially. "I've got a picture here I want to show you, to see what you think of it. You're a pretty good judge of faces, I know. I'll strike a match so you can see. There!"

Miriam took the picture in her cold hand, and looked at it.

"She is very pretty. Who—who is it, Will?"

"Florrie Moore; pretty name, isn't it? She's the daughter of our professor of Greek. Not much wonder I got plucked in it, is it? She's just eighteen, and as sweet as a peach. All the fellows in our class were crazy over her. Not to boast a little bit, though, Mirry, there wasn't one of them in it when I was about."

Miriam handed the photograph back silently. Will went on undauntedly:

"I met her at an at-home just the week after I went there. I was clean gone from the start, and so were all the other boys. I tell you, it was lively going for awhile. But I won her. Might as well tell you the whole business, Mirry—I know you won't tell anyone—we're engaged, Florrie and I. Don't give it away to Kate or Bob, though, Mirry."

"Of course not," said Miriam, wearily. "I suppose—I ought to congratulate you, Will. You have my best wishes."

"Thanks awfully. When you see Florrie—I'm going to have mother ask her up next summer, of course—you'll agree with me that I am a lucky fellow. It will be such a comfort to have someone to talk to about her, Mirry."

Miriam got up. There were limits to any one's endurance, even that of an old maid on the wrong side of thirty.

"I must go in, I think," she said, in a lifeless voice. "It's very damp out here."

Will sprang up repentantly and tossed his cigar away.

"Of course it is. What a beast I am to be keeping you out here! You haven't anything on your head, either. Just like me! I'm so selfish when I get talking about my own affairs."

Miriam went in and upstairs. On the landing she gave a little bitter laugh. She locked herself in her room and fell on her knees beside the window, sobbing hysterically.

That was the end of Miriam North's love affair. The world will tell you that she never had one.

Lilian Montgomery.

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Unsolved Love Problems.

A Prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

IV.—THE DOUBT OF MILDRED DALRYMPLE.

In the early summer of 1899, a girl sat at her writing-table in the old Manor House of Sunningdale.

It was a bright, pleasant room looking out on to the smooth green lawns and spreading cedars that were the feature of Sunningdale Manor, and the brilliant morning sunshine that streamed through the open window seemed to linger fondly on the dark head of the youthful mistress of that fair domain.

Mildred Dalrymple was not exactly a beauty, her features were too irregular, and her complexion too sallow, but she possessed a shapely figure, a graceful carriage, and a well-shaped head that was exquisitely poised on a charming neck.

Moreover her manner was most sweet and winning, and she had an instinctive talent for dressing herself to the best advantage, and the money wherewith to do it, so that many a man had before now taken her for a beauty, even with eyes all undazzled by her possessions.

With a tender smile on her sensitive mouth, and a glitter of unshed tears in her brown eyes, she was writing a few words on a thin slip of paper:

"*She comes to ask your pardon. Will you forgive her the hasty words?*"

This she carefully wrapped round a charming miniature of herself, exquisitely set with diamonds, and that bore the inscription on the back: "From Mildred Dalrymple to Rodney Brookes.—May, 1899." And then, putting it back into its leather case, addressed the little packet to "Rodney Brookes, Esq., Reithock, S. Africa."

"There!" she murmured to herself. "That is the *amende honorable*, and he can't do less than humble himself before me. After all, he was more angry than I, and said much worse things, and I suppose that is why it is so easy for me to ask his pardon first. And what is the good of all my money if he won't take a penny of it, but will go out to that horrid South Africa to make some for himself," and she ran out of the room to take the precious packet to the post herself, singing gaily as she did so.

A few months previously, Rodney and Mildred, affianced lovers, had parted with angry words because Rodney refused point blank to marry her "without a penny to his name," and insisted he should go abroad and get a respectable number of the said coins before settling in ease on his wife's estate.

She, hurt that any consideration should weigh with him against his possession of her, accused him of pride, and even of discontent and a desire to see the world. In short there was a pretty little quarrel, rather more serious than lovers' quarrels generally are, perhaps, yet not serious enough for any word to be spoken of terminating the engagement.

He had gone off with a sore feeling that she did not see how deep and true his love really was, and she was left with a fleeting impression that there are times when a woman must be content to stand aside and let a man's pride have free play.

After a few cool, friendly letters had passed between them, Mildred grew impatient of standing on her dignity, and chose this means of setting all right between them, reading between the lines of her lover's letters, that he, too, only needed the slightest excuse to return, with dignity, to their former footing.

So she sent forth her little packet freighted with love and longing, and waited for his speedy reply.

Months passed, and no word came from him. Mildred counted and recounted the days till there was no longer any doubt, that allowing for every possible and impossible accident he must have received her miniature three months ago, and yet there was no sign from him.

Paler and sadder grew Mildred as the silent days dragged by. Had the wound been deeper than she thought? Had her hasty words slain the love she prized so dearly and someone else become to him what she had once been? She tried to tell herself that she cared naught for love of so slight a nature, but she knew she must always love him, whatever happened.

Then, in October, war was declared, and a new anxiety beset her.

Eustace Elborough, the owner of Crowhurst Park, the adjoining estate, felt his faithful heart racked with pain when he saw how Mildred suffered. For many years he had loved her in a hopeless way, and, having so long put himself out of the question, he honestly wished only to see her happy.

One morning he rode over to see her and say "good-bye," for he was off with the I.Y. to fight the Boers.

"And so," she said sadly, "the last of my friends leaves me. Good-bye, Eustace, good luck and happiness attend you."

"Good-bye, Mildred," he said, holding her hand, and gazing earnestly into her sad face, "if my heart's blood could give you happiness, how gladly would I give it."

"Oh," cried she, her face lighting up with a momentary hope, "perhaps you will hear what has become of him out there. I fear something dreadful must have happened to him. Do, *do* find out for me and let me know."

"Of course I will!" he cried with fervour, quite forgetting for the moment that Africa was a large place, and that he was not going out as a private inquiry agent, but as a soldier.

From time to time he sent her short friendly notes with accounts of the fighting and many of his adventures, and she almost forgot her personal sorrow in sympathy for the general mourning of the country, and the perils of her brave countrymen.

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Then he wrote from Reithock, and the very name stirred her heart with pain.

"We have reached here at last, and the more sanguine say the war is over, but those who know the Boers say differently. I have made all possible inquiries, and have at last found out all there is to learn about poor Rodney. His servants deserted him when war was declared, and his place was one of the first to be destroyed.

"He was rescued and taken in by a family of Boers with whom he had been very friendly, but the household was soon broken up, the horses and men commandeered, and the women-folk scattered. After this I can find no further trace of him, nor of any of the women who might be able to give us some information. You may rest assured I shall continue to make every possible inquiry, but I fear there is no more to learn."

For a time Mildred was overcome by her grief. Surely her beloved Rodney had been killed. But hope which "springs eternal" whispered there were no proofs, and she began to entertain the idea that he was still alive. But why, then, had he not written? He must have received her miniature and pathetic cry for pardon some months before the trouble broke out with the Boers.

Could it be possible he had ceased to love her? Perhaps given his heart to some brave Boer maiden who had succoured him in his need, possibly saved his life? No, no, a thousand times no! Rather would she hear he had died, fighting against the enemy, true to his country and to her.

The war dragged on its weary length, but ended at last, and once more Eustace Elborough stood in the library of the old Manor, war-worn and bronzed, his rugged features, never handsome, had gained the dignity of the man who had looked death in the face, and was not afraid.

Mildred looked older and sadder than when the story began, but the depth sorrow had given to her eyes and the pensive droop to her mouth, in no way detracted from her nameless charm, for the man who was gazing at her with all his soul in his honest blue eyes.

"Indeed, Mildred," he was saying, "there can be no hope, it is nearly three years now since you heard from him, it cannot be that he is still in the land of the living."

"No," said Mildred slowly. "I am sure you are right, and yet—and yet——"

"Make up your mind to it bravely," he said with tender compassion. "Poor Mildred, it will be easier to bear than hugging this forlorn hope to your heart."

"Yes!" she said, "a life-long widowhood, yet never a wife." And she turned away with a sob.

"Oh, Mildred," he cried, seizing her hand, "be my wife. I have loved you for so many years—you are dearer to me than anything in the whole world. Indeed, indeed I would try to make you happy."

"I know you would," she said impulsively, holding out her hand to him, "but, Eustace I am not worth it; my heart is buried out yonder in South Africa."

"Not buried," said Eustace eagerly, holding her thin hand in his warm clasp, "it is only stunned, it will come to life again in the warmth of my love. Mildred"—with a pathetic break in his voice—"I have loved you so long, you do not know what the hope of possessing you means to me."

Mildred was deeply touched. For three years her heart had starved for "the gentle ministering of love," it was no wonder she wished to take this devotion so unreservedly poured out at her feet, and surely she owed something to this good man who had loved her so long and so well. If it would really give him happiness to take her broken life into his keeping, why should she deny it him?

After some minutes' silence, in which she weighed her life and shrank from the barrenness it offered, Mildred at last replied:

"If indeed you really want me, you shall have your wish, but I want you to understand I cannot pretend what I do not feel. You are my old friend and comrade, and I have a warm affection for you, but more—I cannot give—at present."

Poor Eustace paled at her words, but catching at the hope in her last phrase, cried eagerly:

"So you will have me, and let me love you. I ask for nothing more."

And so the engagement was made.

The day before her wedding Mildred received a small, stained packet.

"Another present, I suppose," she thought, as she took it into her hands.

But the sight of the foreign stamp and the postmark "Bloemfontein" caused her to tear it open with trembling fingers.

Behold, some dozen letters on thin paper, and her miniature, the frame wrenched and despoiled of its diamonds, but the poor face still smiling bravely as when she sent it forth to make her peace with her lover.

An official-looking letter headed "Bloemfontein Hospital" caught her eye, and she read as follows:

"To Miss Mildred Dalrymple.

"Madam,—*There has recently died in this hospital one Piet Maas, and before dying he handed me the inclosed packet.*

"*I gathered from what he said that he had been in the service of Mr. Rodney Brookes, an Englishman, and that he had intercepted the inclosed miniature for the sake of its diamonds.*

"*Then, for fear of discovery, he had kept back all the letters on both sides. Not knowing Mr. Brookes' address, I forward the packet to you.—I am, Madam, your obedient servant,*

"H. C. Burton, M.R.C.S."

The letters fell fluttering to the ground as Mildred sank into a chair, half-stunned by the overwhelming rush of thoughts that came over her at this simple explanation of Rodney's silence.

Her first coherent thought was one of joy that her love was exonerated from all blame. He had been true to her, and no doubt also he was still living.

Then eagerly she turned to examine the letters.

There were all her poor pitiful words, begging him to write and relieve her anxiety, and there were all his to her, the least of which would have filled her with joy and thankfulness.

For he also wrote wondering at her silence, and with all his wonted warmth of love that flooded her being with joy.

Then his last letter:

"*How is it there is never a word from you yet, it is three months since I heard. Is it that you cannot forgive me for the foolish words I spoke? Surely, my darling, you know me better than to doubt the real depth and warmth of my love. Still, I am beginning to fear the worst, if I do not get some word from you during the next month I shall go away to fight, and shall care nothing henceforth what becomes of me.*

"*If you no longer love me, I am worth nothing.—Your always loving and devoted,*

"Rodney."

Bitter tears fell and blistered the paper, till a hopeless rage dried them ere they fell.

"That infamous man!" she cried to herself. "How can God permit, that for the sake of a few paltry diamonds, two lives should be ruined? Oh, my love, my love, did you think I could ever cease to love you?

"Perhaps he still lives. His name has never been amongst the killed. I will seek him out, if I spend my last penny in the act—I will find him, and I will say——" And then her glance fell on her wedding-dress, spread out on her bed, in readiness for the morrow, and at the thought of the gallant gentleman whose heart was even now filled with a joyful awe at the thought that to-morrow she would be his, froze the words that had involuntarily burst from her lips.

"But, Eustace! I have pledged him my word, and he has waited with so much love and patience. Rodney may be dead after all. Have I the right to put him to the open shame of a marriage broken off at the eleventh hour, while I spend my youth and my strength in searching for one I may never find? And yet, oh, my love, Rodney, my love, my love!" And she sank sobbing on her bed.

What should she decide to do?

L. Hughes.

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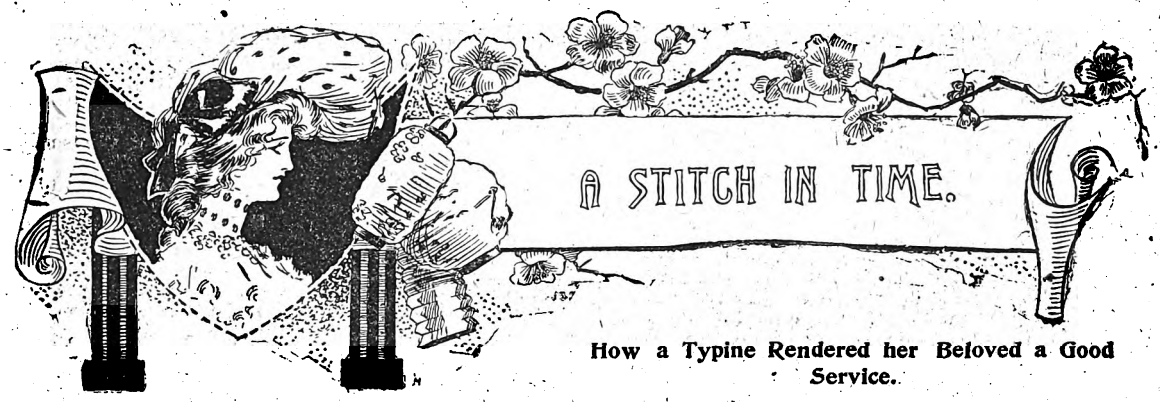

How a Typine Rendered her Beloved a Good Service.

JIMMY CARLESS, ad.-man to a great advertising firm in London, was looking decidedly grumpy. He sat in his room savagely gnawing a stub of pencil, and frowning at an open page of a magazine which lay on the desk before him.

"Read it!" he snapped, jerking the book over to his typine, who sat, notebook in hand, waiting his pleasure.

The girl, with the smile for once absent from her pretty face, took the open magazine, and held it before her. Could Jimmy have seen behind it he would have wondered at the strange expression in her eyes.

"'Puerile!' he called it. 'Tautological twaddle!' The idea of an old curmudgeon who couldn't write an ad. to save his life presuming to criticise my work! By crumbs, Ethel, I tell you, I was riled.

"'What's doubled the sale in the last twelve months?' I asked him.

"'I allow you your due, sir,' he snorted, 'you have done excellent work, but this sort of stuff isn't up to your usual, and what's more, it won't do for me. Take my advice, Carless, and pull yourself together for both our sakes.'

"Now, look here, Ethel," he went on resentfully. "There's my record-book. I ask you, isn't that page as good as anything I've ever turned out?"

The girl walked over to the side-table, and, opening the book, examined the specimen ads. pasted in its pages. An unusual flush was on her cheeks, and she was glad he could not see her face.

Every working day for the past year she had taken down at this man's dictation. As she bent over the book her memory went back to that first day, when, buoyant with optimism and enthusiasm, he had told her what he would do for his firm.

She remembered the verve and ease with which he had produced those early ads.—ingenious and telling every one of them, and crowned with a success that had more than justified all his optimism.

She endeavoured to place that first day when the success of it began to make her proud of working with him, and the close of the working-day only anxious for the next to commence so that she could be with him.

Mechanically she turned the pages. There was a memory attached to every one of those ads. she had pasted in this book so carefully. That one marked the day when he had first addressed her as Ethel, naturally and without any intention of familiarity. This one, the morning when with white face and dark-circled eyes, he had made a laughing reference to his seediness being due to the little card party of the night before with his "pals." She thought, with a pang at her heart, as she still lingered at the page, that this particular ad. marked the day of his degeneration.

For the past three months, as the nightly dissipation sapped his mental power, she had seen him gradually getting more and more incompetent. The fluency of his diction was gone. The snap and virility of his sentences were lacking. A growing indifference resultant on brain-weariness, and the increasing difficulty of proper concentration necessary to evolve novel arguments, had for some time made her fear this day. And now it was here, and he had asked her for her opinion.

"George! How my head spins!" he cried, lying back in his chair. "Would you mind giving me a glass of water? Everything's green!"

The girl gently closed the book and tendered him a glass freshly filled from the filter. He gulped the draught down, and pressed his hand to his aching brow.

"Thanks, Ethel," he said weakly. "You're a good little girl. Had rather a time with the boys last night, you know. Decidedly seedy—and the guv'nor upset me. Tell me, honestly, don't you think the talk's just as convincing, the whole ad. just as telling as anything in the book?"

She looked him straight in the face as he sat gripping the arms of the chair, and a great longing to save him from himself, borne of a deeper feeling than the inherent sympathy of her womanhood, forced the tears to her eyes.

He evaded her gaze, wondering why she did not answer.

"Tell me!" he cried querulously, and, lifting his eyes, he saw the strange look on her white face.

"The criticism was just," she said, firmly.

He started forward at the charge and glared at her incredulously. Had he heard aright? Was it Ethel—his typine—who had uttered the indictment?

"It is true," she said quietly, seating herself at the desk. "Your earlier work was good; there was nothing better. This is but a string of stereotyped platitudes—bald and unconvincing. If you like I will tell you why, but—is it necessary?"

His fingers went to his mouth, and he gazed at her stupidly. His head was swimming. He felt sick and dizzy. It appeared to him as he looked that this girl's accusing face grew and grew until it dominated his vision. Her eyes seemed to sear his brain.

Surely this could not be the same machine-like creature who had sat at his beck for months? It was absurd—an hallucination born of his disordered imagination.

"No; it is not necessary," she continued deliberately, and her voice seemed to come to him from a distance. "But it is very pitiful."

For a space there was no word spoken, and then, suddenly, his two hands went up to his head as the justness of the incrimination forced a groan from his twitching lips.

White-faced and trembling he staggered up and held open the door.

"Thank you, Ethel," he stammered. "Will you please leave me? I will ring for you when I want you."

The girl rose and faced him.

"That page for next month's insertion should go to the electrotyper's to-day," she said.

"Yes, I know," he said shakily. "Thank you."

He closed the door after her, and, stumbling to his chair, sat for quite a long spell gazing blankly before him.

The earnestness of her manner, the half-contemptuous,

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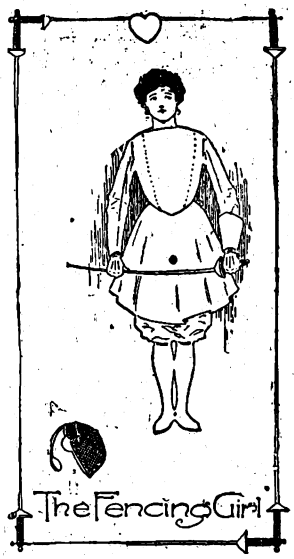

half-pitying look on her face was still with him. "Is it necessary?" A review of the past months passed through his mind; the gambling and drinking until the early hours, the lassitude and physical weariness of the mornings, the growing disinclination for application during the day; and he knew that the accusation was true, the reproach deserved.

He rose, and striding over to the glass, gazed at the reflection of his face. Leaden-eyed, hollow-cheeked and sallow—a pitiful counterfeit of what he had been before that infernal set had trammelled him—he stared dazedly incredulous, and then, as the consciousness of the change in his appearance smote him, he turned away and reviled himself for a fool.

He strode over to the book and feverishly turned the first pages. It was true! Barclay was just in his criticism; the girl was right! He was losing his grip! He was becoming worked out!

The door opened and Thomas Barclay himself intruded his head into the room.

"Carless," he said, shortly, "have you written that copy for next month?"

"Yes—no—I'm on it now," he stammered confusedly.

"Very well," said the chief, "I want to see it before it goes out. Don't forget!"

The significance of his enjoinder was plain, and the face of the ad.-man flushed.

Dropping into his chair he took up again the pencil and stabbed viciously at the paper. His brain was a chaos, absolutely incapable of coherent thought. The knowledge that he was on his trial was wormwood to him. The expression on the girl's white face kept recurring before his mental vision. For an hour he sat, and at the end of it the paper showed but a score of outlined faces—a woman's face that was something very like that of Ethel's.

"Confound everything and everyone!" he cried in his impotence, and he tore the paper into bits and strewed them on the floor. Striding about the office he racked his brain for the original thought that would not come. His incapability maddened him, and drove him to raging at his arbitrary treatment.

"The old idiot should know that the creative faculty can't be forced!" he stormed. "He thinks I'm a machine charged to turn out so much original matter per hour!"

The entrance of the secretary interrupted his railing.

"Hello, Jim; coming out to lunch?" came the cheery invitation.

He muttered a curt negative and flung himself into his seat. The intruder settled his hat on his head and gave a prolonged whistle.

"Go easy, Jimmy, my boy," he said smilingly. "You'll kill yourself. Your brain will never stand the strain. Give it a rest, my boy, and——"

"Get out!" snapped the ad.-man. "Hang you, can't you see you're bothering me?" The man went out whistling.

Another hour went by and the end of it found him still incapable.

He took up an American advertising journal, thinking perchance to catch an idea from the displayed ads. therein. He went through a whole volume, and, at last, stumbled on to a word or two that prompted a headline. Concentrating his mind on the idea it suggested he endeavoured to build up the fabric of an ad., to find, when it was roughed out, that it was but a plagiarism of the one in the book he had gleaned it from. Disgusted, he tore it into shreds. It was useless. His brain seemed paralysed. He would try no more!

Seizing his coat and hat he made for the street. The girl met him in the corridor and her gaze lingered on his white, strained face.

"Ethel," he said hoarsely, "I'm going out. If Barclay asks for that copy you tell him I said he was to write it himself. I've finished!"

Before she could remonstrate he had passed her and was hurrying down the steps. She stumbled to the landing, and involuntarily the faltering whisper slipped from her lips: "Jim—come back!"

He looked up. Over the banister her arms were outstretched to him. Startled at the knowledge that she—the girl who had accused him—wished him to return, for a second he stayed, and then, like a man demented, hurried quickly down into the street. Reckless of consequences he made straightway for the hotel where he knew some of his clique would be playing billiards. They greeted him effusively; a glass of spirits was thurst into his hand, and, presently, duty was forgotten.

After he had gone the girl roused herself and slowly passed into his room. Torn with emotion at the involuntary revelation of her feelings towards him and distraction at his mad action, she sat, her hand pressed to her breast, a prey to mental anguish. What would he think of her? Could she ever face him again?

The step of the chief in the passage roused her to a sense of her surroundings, and she hurriedly thrust a sheet of paper in the machine and commenced to tap out a letter from her notebook. He passed into his sanctum, and her fingers stayed fixed to the keys at the thought that presently he would come to pass the "copy" for that page. If she told him that it was not written, it would be ruin for the man she loved!

She crossed to the desk. The paper on it was blank. She noted the littered floor, and, hardly knowing what she did, she picked up a fragment and gazed at it unseeingly. It was true then. He had not been able to write it! She turned the torn fragment of paper in her fingers, and the scribbled words on it riveted her attention.

It was the headline of the ad. he had attempted to write, and immediately its peculiar aptness struck her. A rush of pertinent phrases suggested by it came into her mind, and she started at the sudden thought that perhaps she could weave a fabric on it that might pass censorship.

The nature of her occupation, the technical knowledge she had acquired of the art, had tempted her in her leisure hours to attempt the production of ads. for many of the specialities she saw advertised, and one or two of her efforts had been bought by the firms to whom she had submitted them. Perhaps she might be able to avert the threatened blow!

Taking a sheet of paper she jotted down the thoughts that crowded into her mind. The phrases came with pleasurable ease. The argument grew and shaped itself; a particularly happy sentence forced a passing smile. She went over it again, deleting, revising, and polishing until, satisfied that further improvement was impossible, she desisted. Only for a moment, however. A feeling of feverish eagerness was upon her to get it finished before the chief should ask for it. Crossing to the machine she quickly typed it.

It was scarcely completed ere the call came. Fighting to control herself, she took up the sheet and carried it to the chief.

"I want Carless and that copy!" he rapped out as she entered the room.

"This is the copy, sir," she said quietly.

He took it from her hand and, adjusting his glasses, went rapidly through it. A succession of expressive grunts came from his lips as he noted the concise and forceful phrasing. A prolonged "A-ah!" came as he appreciated the peculiarly happy touch. At the end of it his face was wrinkled with a queer smile.

"That's good!" he said, and taking his pencil he scribbled his initial in the corner and handed it back to her. "My compliments to Mr. Carless, young lady, and tell him it's approved."

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Somehow—she scarcely knew how—she managed to escape from the room.

"Straight talk's done the youngster good!" said the old man, banging down his rolltop desk. "That's a seller; the best thing he's done for us!"

* * * * *

When Jimmy Carless, miserable and mad at his folly—went down to toy with breakfast next morning, he found a letter by the side of his plate. Wonderingly he opened it, and a sheet of typed "copy" lay in his hand. Wide-eyed he stared at the headline—*his headline*. Eagerly he read it through, and, as he saw the initial in the corner and realised what it meant, the paper dropped from his nerveless fingers.

Pulling himself together with an effort he went out and hurried to the office. The girl was in her place, busy with her machine.

"Ethel," he faltered, striding to her and seizing her two unresisting hands, "you did this for me?"

She looked up at him half-ashamedly, and in her eyes showed a mist of tears. Her hands slipped from his grasp, and shame-facedly he walked over to his desk and dropped his head on his arms.

The folly of the wasted months flooded his being with remorse. In an agony of self-abasement he sat, tortured by the knowledge that this woman knew him for what he was. What a weak fool he must appear in her sight!

And yet, knowing this, she had saved him!

Very slowly he raised his haggard face. She was looking at him with a yearning expression in her eyes that revealed all the love in her heart. In that second he realised why she had done this for him, and his arms went out, involuntarily, towards her.

"Ethel!" he whispered—and could say no more.

"Jim!" she murmured, twining her arms about his neck and crying for very gladness. "You're not angry? I wanted so much to help you——"

"God bless you—Ethel," he faltered. "I am a despicable coward—but you have given me the will to become a man again—will you help me always?"

"Always," she murmured, the love-light shining in her eyes.

"Always, Jim, because I love you."

John J. Armstrong.

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Your Editor Chats.

THE fourth Unsolved Love Problem appears on page 683, and I offer ONE GUINEA for what I consider to be the best solution of the difficulty.

"The Doubt of Mildred Dalrymple" will be an excellent test problem. Surely a more difficult position for a girl to be in could scarcely be imagined, and yet how absolutely possible her position is. It is but another example showing how very careful lovers should be before deciding that their heart's desire has been false to them. Appearances are deceptive, and a girl should have conclusive proofs that her betrothed is not worthy of her love ere she says or does anything likely to hurt his feelings.

The question to be answered is, "What is the Best Course for Mildred Dalrymple to Take?" Replies must be written on one side of the paper only, and should not exceed one hundred words.

The guinea will go to the reader who sends in what I consider to be the best solution. My decision will be final.

Replies should be addressed to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.," and must have "Fourth Love Problem" marked in the top, left-hand corner. The very latest date on which I can receive manuscripts is Friday, the 4th of December. None arriving after this day will be considered, but you may send them in as early as you please.

Those who have decided to send in replies in connection with the problem, "The Dilemma of Betty Carteret," must remember that the closing day for that competition is Friday, November 27th.

Next week I hope to announce the winner of the guinea offered for the best solution of "The Awkward Predicament of Edward Clements."

COMING! Coming! It won't be long now! What is coming? Why, our splendid Christmas Number. In three weeks' time it will be published, and there is sure to be a big demand for it.

It will be in every way the best Christmas number of its kind ever produced, and regular readers will be well advised to order their copies early, so as to avoid the possibility of disappointment.

The main feature of the number will be its wealth of fine seasonable fiction, including a splendid story from Mr. W. Pett-Ridge, the author of "Mord Em'ly" and other well-known books.

I SHOULD like to draw my readers' attention to the notice on the third page of this week's cover announcing that the Editor of *The Boys' Leader* is offering a situation worth £100 a year to a boy and a situation worth £100 a year to a girl in the offices of *Pearson's Weekly*, *Short Stories*, *The Boys' Leader*, and other papers. Here is an excellent opportunity for a boy or girl to make a start in life, and if my readers have any juvenile friends it would be doing them a great kindness to call their attention to this magnificent offer.

Your Editor.

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POWERFUL NEW ROMANCE. **START TO-DAY.**

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

INTRODUCTION.

CAPTAIN PERCY IDDISON and Lady Maud Hyam, his *fiancée*, are present at an "At Home" given by Lady Medcalf-Mears.

There they meet Isolo Staunton, the lion of the hour, a multi-millionaire, and styled "the modern Monte Christo." The curious feature about him is that, although he is admitted to the very cream of Society, nobody knows his past nor how he accumulated his vast wealth.

Wilfrid Ellerton, a fine young fellow, a worthy son of a worthy father, is also there, and is introduced to Iddison.

The latter notices a remarkable streak of white hair on Ellerton's head, running from the front of the left ear down to the base of the skull.

Isolo Staunton also sees this, but it causes him a great deal more anxiety than it does Iddison.

He knows the cause of that streak! He knows why that white hair is present on the head of one so young! He remembers how, when he was Isolo Zuarez, an escaped convict from the Chincha Islands, he was adrift on the ocean in a small boat, together with a man and a boy.

Isolo had picked up an axe to end the existence of the other man, when the boy, divining his purpose, intervened, and received the weapon on his own head.

They were rescued from their peril—but the blow the boy received had rendered him unconscious of all that had happened.

He had never since remembered.

The question that worries the criminal millionaire as he leaves Lady Medcalf-Mears' house is this—would his memory return?

If it should—what a grim irony of Fate it would be!

Staunton's blood is Spanish, and the ideal for the accomplishment of which he is amassing his many millions is to see Spain reinstated again as Queen of the Seas and Mistress of the East and West!

And now his ideal, his freedom, perhaps his very life hangs on the memory of a mere lad of twenty-three!

If Ellerton remembers the episode on the ocean it will mean, at least, a return to the Chinchas as a convict!

Staunton informs Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia, his right-hand friend and confidant, of this awkward coincidence of his meeting Ellerton again, and asks his advice.

Valdez urges Staunton to go to extremes to get Wilfrid out of the way, but Isolo is not willing to compass the boy's death.

Then Don Ramiero advises the millionaire to invite to the millionaire's yacht, the *Isola*, a Society party, for a trip to Norway. Ellerton is to be one of the guests, and during the cruise steps are to be taken for his removal.

Staunton agrees to this and the invitations are sent out. Mercedes, the beautiful, fascinating daughter of the millionaire, is to do the duties of hostess, and among the guests are Captain Iddison and Lady Maud Hyam.

When Mercedes and Ellerton meet, the former recognises the latter as the boy who once rescued her from death in Chili.

The two are drawn together by the bonds of love, and many are the glances that pass between them.

Wilfrid Ellerton, one night, is, by a piece of ingenious trickery, secured and safely imprisoned beneath the decks of the *Isola*.

The rumour is the next morning circulated that he had fallen overboard and been drowned.

When Mercedes hears the news—the glibly spoken lie—she falls fainting to the deck and becomes seriously ill.

In consequence of the alleged accident the ship's company is landed at Leith. But Lady Maud Hyam and her *fiancé* have suspicions of foul play.

Staunton, leaving full arrangements for the disposal of Ellerton, goes personally to break the sad news to the latter's father.

Two nurses are taken on board to tend Mercedes, and one of these is Janet Yuill, who turns out to be the wife of Herbert Darfield, once Arthur Culworth, criminal, and now First Officer on the *Isola*.

The yacht sails away, presumably to the Mediterranean, but it really makes for the regions of the Arctic Ocean.

Suddenly the yacht comes to anchor. Ellerton, unconscious, is put into a small diving-chamber, and accompanied by Ramiero and Captain Durtal.

Then the chamber sinks many fathoms below the sea, and they alight in a most gorgeous underworld, of which Staunton is Lord and Master, where Ellerton is to be kept a prisoner.

M. Herarra, reigning for Staunton in this kingdom under the Seas, receives full instructions as to the manner in which the lad is to be treated.

Ellerton is treated in a most sumptuous manner, and is told that he has had a long illness, and that all his fancies about another world are only dreams.

He, however, realises that he has been the victim of some plot, with what object, of course, he does not know.

Meanwhile, every nation in the world above is staggered by a great financial mystery. Millions of base coins, excellently executed, are flooding the markets.

Stanislaus Smith, the great detective, who is also Herr de Ronski, the famous musician (though none know of his double identity except Arthur Dennison, a Treasury Solicitor) is endeavouring to solve the problem, and he has clues which make him set out for the Riviera, a day or two after the *Isola* drops anchor in the harbour of Monaco.

Stanislaus Smith, *alias* de Ronski, is accompanied by his wife, his daughter Paula, and Dennison.

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SIXTEENTH CHAPTER

A Change of Scene.

"Look here, Staunton, doesn't it strike you that we have been playing this game just a trifle close? It seems to me that we are trying to go straight and crooked at the same time, and if you can show me that that can be done with safety, I guess I shall learn something."

"I quite see what you mean, Kesteven," replied Staunton, leaning back in the easy chair in which he had faced Dr. Billaud and Valdez the night after Wilfrid Ellerton's premature disappearance. "Yes, that's all right as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. Of course I admit that if it had not been for that most unhappy occurrence, or, perhaps, I should rather say, friend Ramiero's undue haste in arranging the accident, a good deal of the trouble could have been saved.

"But then you see I put the thing to the test. Billaud performed the operation and the fellow's memory came back.

"You must see that when the experiment had succeeded—although I would have given a hundred thousand for it to have failed—still, when he *did* remember, what was there to be done except what I did—what I had to do? You don't suppose that I was going to give myself, and the work of a dozen years, and all that I have been hoping for into the hands of a mere boy, who could either put me back where I was on the Chinchas or have me hanged or garrotted? No, no, it is done now, and it has got to remain as it is. I am sorry, bitterly sorry, I confess, but there is no help for it as far as I can see."

"Yes, yes," said Kesteven, the millionaire's partner in his great schemes. "From the personal point of view perhaps you are right, but you see there are other things."

"Political and diplomatic? Yes, that's a sort of risk that we have been taking all along, and, as far as I can see, we have got to go on taking. Of course, if you have any workable alternative to propose, I shall be very glad to hear of it."

"I am afraid you have got me there, chiefly for the reason that you don't seem to have left any alternative possible. You see it looks as though this Ellerton affair is to have awkward consequences. His father took your version of the tragedy in good faith, but, to my idea, it was rather a difficult sort of thing to swallow, and I certainly think that Valdez might have arranged it a little more scientifically. That 'man overboard' idea was a bit thin, you know, in a smooth sea like that—and it doesn't seem to be quite believed."

"What!" exclaimed Staunton. "Who doesn't believe it?"

"Well," said Kesteven, "I had a chat with our mutual friend Morton up in the grounds of the Casino this morning, and he seemed to think that some of your guests on this boat were not quite convinced as to the accuracy of the tragedy."

"What! How can that possibly be?" said Staunton testily. "I still think that if ever a disappearance was properly arranged that was, although, of course, I admit that Valdez did complicate matters terribly by hurrying things as he did. You know I have only too good reason to say that."

"Now look here, Staunton," Kesteven said, "you are just trying to talk round the facts instead of getting at them. We won't say anything about what happened on this yacht a few days ago. That is a matter personal to yourself, but I must remind you that there are other things and pretty big ones too hanging to this business."

"Yes, yes," interrupted Staunton impatiently, "that, of course, is understood. What I want to know now is what you mean by the suspicions you are connecting with Morton and which seem to be troubling you so much. What are they? For my own part, I cannot see how there could have been any suspicions, I mean, in the way of what, between ourselves, we might perhaps call foul play."

"Well, for one thing, young Morton seems to have got pretty confidential with my daughter Cora. He has been doing very well lately, thanks to us, and I have an idea that he would not have much objection about marrying into the family. So naturally Cora, who's about smart enough to buy him at one end of this yacht and take him to the other and sell him and make dollars on him, wasn't long in finding out that he had been hearing something."

"And that?"

"Well, you know that two of your guests on this boat at that unfortunate time were Lady Maud Hyam and Captain Percy Iddison. Now Iddison happens to have a younger brother who is second-in-command of a British Destroyer called the *Scorcher*. I need hardly tell you that of all the intelligence agencies in the world the British Navy is about the most complete.

"These men don't talk much, but they put in a lot of time thinking. When you landed your guests at Leith one of the first things Captain Iddison did was to communicate with his brother and the result was that within forty-eight hours of the accident, there was not a man on the British North Sea Squadron, which his boat was attached to, who believed it could have happened without the body being found. Every set of the tides and currents all round the compass were known to them. They kept the wires from Calais to Trondjhem hot. Steamers were sent out to the fishing fleet on the Dogger Bank, and revenue cutters and all sorts of craft got wandering about trying to pick up information about this lost son of a millionaire.

"You see you cannot get away with the son of one of the best known men in England without having a considerable amount of trouble made out of it, and the result seems to be that——"

"That this story is not quite believed? Is that what you mean?" exclaimed Staunton angrily. "But even if it is not believed, how is anything else going to be proved? If Morton gives that sort of gossip away to your daughter, as I suppose he did in a way that those young idiots will do when they think they have fallen in love with a girl——"

"You seem to forget that we have both got daughters, and that——" said Kesteven sharply.

"Yes, yes, I beg your pardon—and your daughter's too," replied Staunton, leaning his elbow on the arm of the chair and putting his hand to his forehead. "You must forgive me, Kesteven. This extraordinary development has quite upset me."

"Well," said Kesteven, rising and looking at his watch, as though he too had had enough of the subject for the present, "I don't know that you're to be blamed for that. It has been a most unfortunate business—one of those miserable little businesses which the Fates sometimes seem to start out with to smash up the biggest enterprises. Still we must just keep our eyes skinned, and take our luck in this as we have done in other things. And now what's the matter with dressing for dinner? It will do us good to forget all about the old Underworld for a bit, and just remember that we're in a lot wickeder and pleasanter place. Besides, we're going to hear de Ronski to-night, and I reckon that ought to help a bit."

"Yes, you're right there," said Staunton, whose one passion, outside his ambitions and love of power, was music—"we haven't too much time and if there's any magic that can charm evil thought away it is de Ronski's. And that daughter of his is going to make a sort of *début* to-night at the Salle des Concerts. I am told that she is very beautiful and sings like an angel."

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"Cora's just wild about her," replied Kesteven, "she heard her at a private sing-song, in Dresden, I think it was, about six months ago, and she avows there'll be nothing like her in Europe in a year or two."

* * * * *

It was the famous musician's first recital of the season.

Staunton, with his party, which considered of Mercedes, Cora and her father, Don Ramiero, and Doctor Billaud, with the Honourable Reginald in almost constant attendance, occupied a box to the right in the grand tier. In the box immediately opposite to them they were rather surprised to see Lord and Lady Medcalf-Mears, and Lady Maud Hyam, who had accepted her ladyship's chaperonage as a very easily earned social license for a trip to the Riviera with her Captain of Engineers, who was sitting beside her. There was another man in the box, obviously an Englishman.

It was not, after all, a very strange coincidence under the circumstances. The abrupt conclusion of the trip in the *Isola* had left the little party without any plans, and, as Lady Maud's father and mother had meanwhile gone to Homburg for the cure, and Lady Maud happened to cordially detest the place and the cure alike, it was only natural that they should seek a relieving contrast from the melancholy circumstances of their last pleasure-trip in another to the autumn Holiday Land of Europe.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mercedes, when she had settled herself in her seat and taken a preliminary look through her lorgnette over the audience, "look, there is Lady Maud, and, of course, Captain Iddison. Yes, and Lord and Lady Medcalf-Mears, too, but who is the other gentleman? Do you know him, papa?"

Her father put his glasses up and looked across the house.

"No, I can't say that I do," he replied, "at least, I don't locate him, though his face does seem familiar to me. Still, one does meet such a lot of people. Morton, do you know him?"

It was, of course, the Honourable Reginald's duty, part of the work he was paid for, in fact, to know more or less intimately, everybody who was worth knowing, so he replied immediately:

"Oh, yes, that's Arthur Dennison, nephew of *the* Sir William Dennison, you know, or, as he is a good deal better known, Lord Justice Dennison, the great criminal judge. Dennison's father was, as it happened, one of the first criminal lawyers, perhaps *the* first until he died about four years ago, I think, Arthur, the man over there, has followed in his father's footsteps, and is now recognised as about one of the smartest men they have in the Solicitor's Department at the Treasury.

"Thanks," said Staunton. "I think I must have met him somewhere. Do you know him personally? Is he a decent sort of fellow?"

"Oh, yes," was the reply. "I've known him for some years. We're fellow bachelors, and he's as good a fellow as one would wish to know. By the way, he is one of a good many people in Europe who are deeply interested in the great Silver Problem. Of course, I don't mean bi-metallism, but the other much more interesting question which, I suppose, some of the monarchs of finance would also be very glad to solve."

"The great Silver Problem?" said Cora Kesteven, looking round at him with a glance which had already become for him almost irresistible. "The great Silver Problem—why, what's that? Do tell me. We come from out West, you know."

"I reckon that'll have to keep, Cora," interrupted her father, "there's the overture beginning."

"And, after all," murmured Morton, bending slightly over Cora's chair, "it is really only a question that troubles financiers and other people in the City."

"Quite so," said Staunton, with a meaning which only one person in the box understood, "and now let us listen to the music, which, I expect, will be much more interesting."

As regards the concert, it will be enough to say here that there was not one of the numbers that did not completely fulfil the party's expectations, and more than satisfied the demands of what happened to be, just at that time, one of the most critical audiences in Europe. During the fifteen minutes' interval, visits were exchanged between the two boxes, and when the concert was over the two parties met in the vestibule, Staunton took the opportunity of saying to Lady Medcalf-Mears, with an expression which sounded to her perfectly genuine:

"I trust that the very painful circumstances under which we were compelled to part at Leith will not make it impossible for you and your party to give Mercedes and myself the pleasure of receiving you on board the *Isola* during our stay here? I am going to be daring enough to attempt to persuade M. de Ronski and his wife and daughter to be our guests on one of these moonlight nights that are coming, and, if so, we will run out to sea a little way, and have a moonlit marine-concert all to ourselves."

"Of course," replied Lady Medcalf-Mears, who had not the slightest intention of ruffling her latest lion, or taking undue sorrow to herself because a deplorable accident had happened to a mutual acquaintance. "We shall be delighted to come. What happened was very terrible indeed, but, after all, it was the purest mischance, and, well, naturally, there is the end of it. Your idea as to the concert is quite delicious if you can only carry it out, master of millions and all as you are. You know, de Ronski is a most peculiar man even for a genius. But stop, what am I thinking about? My friend, in fact, my connection, Mr. Dennison, has the honour of knowing him personally, and he is going to introduce us all. Of course, that would be the easiest way to manage it!"

"Once again you have made me your debtor, Lady Medcalf-Mears," said Staunton. "Then if you will all come to lunch to-morrow on board, where I think we can treat you a little better than these wretched hotels and restaurants do, and bring Mr. Dennison as one of the party, perhaps we might be able to arrange matters. I am a thousand times obliged to you."

It was a lovely night, and when the two parties had taken leave of each other to walk back to their quarters,

"Well, Maud, and what do you think of the fair Mercedes?" asked Iddison, when they had got clear away from the crowd. "She seems to have got over the shock wonderfully, considering how severe it must have been."

"As regards her general health, she undoubtedly has," replied Lady Maud in a somewhat subdued voice, "but in one way it has certainly affected her very seriously."

"Oh, I am very sorry to hear that! What is it?"

"Why," continued Lady Maud, "would you believe that, when I was talking to her about her illness, I was amazed to find that she is utterly ignorant of what had caused it, and Miss Kesteven said to me afterwards that everything connected with poor Mr. Ellerton's disappearance is, for the present at least, utterly wiped out of her memory."

"Just as well, perhaps," replied Iddison, with a gentle pressure on her arm, the meaning of which she fully understood.

SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Tangling Threads.

EARLY the next morning, in fact, as they were going for their dip in the sea, Dennison said to Iddison:

"I think I ought to tell you that, quite involuntarily, I overheard what Lady Maud said to you about Miss Staunton's illness as we were coming away from the concert. I mean about that curious obliteration of memory with regard to poor Wilfrid Ellerton's disappearance. You were on board at the time, and if you can tell me anything more of the circumstances, and feel at liberty to do so, I shall be glad."

"I don't know that I can tell you very much," replied

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Iddison, not very cordially, "because, as you see, after all it was a private party, and I don't——"

"No, I know you don't, my dear fellow," interrupted he of the quicker intellect, "and that just tells me that you do, I mean that you do know something that I should like you to tell me. But you know there is honour even in the Solicitors Department of the Treasury. As a matter of fact, we are the most honourable set of officials in the world. Even our lawful prey sometimes admit that. Therefore I will be quite candid with you. I and one or two others of a similar mental turn, don't quite see how that accident could, well, what shall I say——"

"You have said quite enough, Dennison," interrupted the other, looking round at him, "Now you must tell me whether you asked me that question officially or just as a friend?"

"As both," replied Dennison, looking him straight in the eyes.

"I see what you mean," said the soldier, "and I don't see why you shouldn't know anything that I know; wherefore, I don't mind admitting that I thought that in some respects it was a very extraordinary sort of occurrence. It was this way, you see—"

And then he gave him an account of what had happened on the *Isola*, so far as he knew the facts, and he ended with confidence—

"And now I am going to answer your first question; but this, of course, is quite between ourselves, because it was really Maud who found it out."

"Then I will promise not to use it without your consent and Lady Maud's. Will that do?"

"Of course," replied Iddison, well knowing that only one of those consents would be necessary. "The reason for Miss Staunton's unhappy lapse of memory which you heard Maud speak of last night is really this. She and Ellerton had met under rather tragic circumstances when they were boy and girl in Peru. Mr. Staunton was out there a good bit, I believe. It was at a seaside place called Chirillos, during the war between Chili and Peru, and the Chilians were bombarding the place. He saved her from a shell by jumping into the sea with her before it burst, and taking her ashore when the damage had finished.

"It was a rather early introduction, but it, or love at first sight, or both, seemed to have done all that was wanted. As soon as Maud found out the real state of affairs, she, being an engaged girl, naturally entered into a conspiracy with me to get another girl engaged, I suppose, just as married women seem to want to get other women married, and the result was that they came to a complete understanding.

"There can't be any doubt whatever about poor Miss Staunton's love, for the moment she heard next morning of Ellerton's falling overboard, she fell on to the deck at her father's feet, sobbing out something in Spanish which no one could catch. Perhaps her father understood the words, and perhaps they told her story. That, of course, no one knows, but it is a fact that she has forgotten everything that happened between her and Ellerton up to that moment. She remembers him as a guest on the yacht, and she has been told since that he was lost overboard. That, at least, was what Mr. Staunton told Lady Medcalf-Mears, who, as you know, was on board the yacht with us at the time."

"Quite so. Thanks very much, Iddison. Poor girl! What a pity! Beauty—millions—found the man she loved and wanted—and lost him inside forty-eight hours! A tragedy in more senses than one. Well, here we are. Let us enjoy ourselves while we may."

"Well," said Kesteven, the partner of Staunton in his great schemes, "It has been a most unfortunate business."

Arthur Dennison put in a good deal of thinking while he was somewhat lazily enjoying himself in the warm, clear water of the Bay. True, the conversation would not have appeared very important to a third party not personally interested in the subject, but to him it meant a good deal, so much so that he there and then determined on a step which he would not have thought of taking twenty-four hours before.

He declined an invitation to breakfast with Lady Medcalf-Mears' party on the ground of a prior engagement, dressed quickly, but with all his usual care, and drove out to Cimiez. Arrived at the Grand Hotel, he sent his card up to M. de Ronski's rooms, and was presently invited to give himself the trouble of ascending.

"Welcome, if unexpected—indeed, the more so on that account," de Ronski said as they shook hands. "Of course, you will stay to breakfast—an early one, nine o'clock—for, between ourselves, a mutual friend of ours, a Mr. Smith, has a good deal of business to do before I shall be ready to obey the command of His Highness the Prince to play to-night at the Palace at Monaco. But I am delighted that you have come. If not I think I must have sent for you. Sit down and light a cigarette. The ladies will put in an appearance very soon. Meanwhile excuse me for a moment."

He was back in a few moments with a little portfolio in his hand. He sat down and opened it with a key attached to his watch chain, and took out a photograph, which he handed to Dennison, saying, in Mr. Smith's usual voice:

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"Do you recognise that face—I mean, do you think that you have seen it lately?"

Dennison, as is necessary for anyone who succeeds in his profession, had an involuntary and practically infallible memory for faces. They instantly associated themselves in his mind with places and circumstances, though not always with names. He looked at the somewhat faded and old-fashioned photograph for about half a minute, and then he gave it back, and said:

"It has all the features and expression of a man I was introduced to last night in Mr. Staunton's box. Younger, I should say, by about ten years. Beard and moustache fuller and darker; hair ditto and thicker, but probably the same man. But what is the matter? If I am right, what is he doing in this photographic gallery of yours—for I suppose that comes out of the unique collection of our mutual friend?"

"If you are right, as I think and most sincerely hope you are," replied Mr. Smith's voice, "there will shortly be something very serious the matter.

"That is a photograph, taken unawares, of one Pedro Ramierez, who was so strongly suspected of complicity in that mysterious silver swindle in the West Indies which worried us so much about ten years ago that he was arrested and even committed for trial. Nothing, however, could be positively proved, though the moral assumptions were very strong, and in the end the jury stopped the case somewhat abruptly, and of course he was discharged. I may add that some members of that jury seemed to make money with singular rapidity during the next few months.

"Bribery and corruption, I believe, are no more impossible there than they are any nearer home, if scientifically administered. Of course I remember that swindle, though I was only just beginning then. It was practically identical with the present one, only on a microscopic scale. The natural deduction would be that there is some connection between them.

"And I have some hopes that this may prove to be a link in the chain. This, I believe, to be also the photograph of Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia, whom you met in Mr. Staunton's box last night. He is very closely associated with him in business affairs, and, socially, they are almost inseparable.

"Curiously enough also," Mr. Smith continued, taking a bank-note out of the portfolio, "this thousand-franc note, which has been passed under the microscope during the night and found *not* to contain the new mark, though it is only dated two months back, was changed by the said Don Ramiero to pay for Mr. Staunton's box. In fact, all the money taken at the office has been submitted to a most rigid examination. That, I may say in confidence, is one of the reasons why our friend de Ronski began his season here."

"Well, I'm—all admiration!" exclaimed Dennison, who might perhaps have said something more forcible had not the door opened just at that moment.

"Good morning, Madame de Ronski; good morning, Miss Paula," he continued, getting up and shaking hands. "Allow me to offer my unspeakable thanks for what you gave us last night. That is a little illogical, but you see what I mean."

"Of course," said Paula with a laugh, which even now he could not help thinking more musical than her singing. "That is very kind of you, and I am glad you were pleased. But, ah, here is something more interesting than compliments, she went on, going to the table and taking up the photograph, "and so you and papa have been having a professional talk?"

"Yes," replied Dennison. "I came up to see M. de Ronski."

"Otherwise Smith," murmured the owner of both names, "and I have been rude enough to ignore the possible purpose of his visit. That, I must confess, is both socially and professionally, very bad etiquette. Dennison, I owe you an apology. You didn't come here for nothing at this time in the morning. What was it? Speak as plainly as you like. We are quite by ourselves—and, to some extent, as we said before, conspirators together."

"Please, Mr. Dennison!" said Madame de Ronski, as she and Paula sat down and looked expectant.

"It isn't much," he replied, "but I thought that it may mean something later on if not now—and from what I have just heard, it will be rather now than later. Unhappily, I cannot give the particulars even to you just now, but I know that you will trust me for those.

"I came to ask M. de Ronski," he went on, laying a stress on the name, "whether he would allow me to introduce Captain Percy Iddison, of the Engineers, an old friend and schoolfellow of mine, to his confidential acquaintance; and, secondly, whether Monsieur, Madame, and Mademoiselle de Ronski would be willing to accept an invitation to dine and spend an hour or two in a moonlight cruise on board Mr. Isolo Staunton's yacht?"

"And you say that that isn't much!" exclaimed Mr. Smith, with his own voice and manner, and an unwonted amount of emotion in his tone. "Why, my dear Dennison, it may be very much; it may, indeed, be a considerable part of everything. Yes, I think we will—well—make it our business in both senses to accept the invitation. As regards your friend, there can be no question whatever about that, except this; which of my two selves do you wish him to know?"

"Both, if you have no objection," replied Dennison seriously. "I have reasons for asking this. He is a soldier and a gentleman, which means, of course, that he would die any kind of death rather than betray a confidence."

"I fully understand you. Let us make his acquaintance, and, if possible, let us become friends as soon as you wish."

"Why not lunch, say, two o'clock?" interrupted Madame de Ronski, by way of adroit acquiescence. "That will give Mr. Dennison time to have a little breakfast with us—it must be quite ready now, and to go back and bring his friend here comfortably."

"Very sorry, Madame, but we're both engaged for lunch on the yacht to-day. To-morrow, of course, we shall be delighted."

And so it was arranged, entirely to Dennison's satisfaction. During breakfast all reserve was thrown aside, and they talked quite freely as "conspirators" on the subjects which interested them most for the moment, and when he went away he left behind him an intelligently sincere desire to know more of Captain Percy Iddison.

It so happened that when he got back into town the first Englishman he met was Iddison himself. But he was walking along the sea-front with a tall, and, as it seemed to him at the first glance—which is mostly correct—handsome, almost beautiful, woman in the costume of a nurse. He raised his Panama, and was going on his way, when Iddison exclaimed:

"Ah, there you are, Dennison. The very man we were talking about. Let me introduce you to Miss Janet Yuill. We have just found each other again. She was at the front with Ours in the war. Right through it almost. We used to call her "Sister Janet" then, for she was a sister to the whole lot of us, and some of her brothers were rather hard bargains I can tell you. And now, as the Fates will have it, she turns out to be one of the nurses that Mr. Staunton engaged at Leith to nurse his daughter. That's why she's here, of course. She has been telling me a story—which I already have her permission to tell you—that I would hardly have believed from anyone else."

"And that?" asked Dennison, as he shook hands somewhat informally with "Sister Janet." "Please let me have it. You can hardly have too much of a good thing, and it seems to me as though I were going to have quite an interesting day—as I will explain later on. I am just in the humour to listen to wonders."

"I hardly know whether you will consider this a wonder or not, Mr. Dennison," said the nurse, with a quiet yet meaning smile; "but I have just been telling Captain Iddison in all good faith that fifteen nights ago I saw the snow-cap of Mount Hekla in Iceland from the deck of Mr. Staunton's yacht."

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There was no doubting the truth of the eyes which looked into his as she said this, but for all this he could not help exclaiming:

"Mount Hekla, fifteen nights ago! And here you are in the Mediterranean! Well, since it is true, it must be a miracle of some sort, and therefore——"

"Exactly," added Iddison, "there is a very considerable 'therefore' connected with the story as far as I can see."

EIGHTEENTH . . CHAPTER.

Beginning a New Life.

WHEN Ellerton woke for the second time in the new abode into which he had been so mysteriously taken, he felt, even while he was wondering at the strangeness of his surroundings, that something had happened to him in the mental as well as in the physical sense.

How this amazing change had come about was for the present quite beyond his comprehension. So far as he could see, he had been suddenly translated from one world into another.

But, apart from this mystery, there was something else which he recognised as a change within himself. Somehow his brain seemed a little different in its working. His intellect was clearer and stronger than he seemed to remember it before this strange transition had taken place. His memory, too, seemed to have been curiously lengthened, for he not only distinctly remembered certain episodes in his life, notably the tragedy of the whale-boat, but his recollection of everything seemed very much clearer than it had been before.

So much, at least, he owed, albeit unconsciously, to the last scruples of the man who had banished him from the upper world, and to the surgical skill of Dr. Billaud.

He looked from one to the other of the three girls, wondering how on earth he could have got into such strange company. They were totally unlike the women of the world which he had left. They were beautiful, but with a beauty which seemed so unreal that he regarded them rather as the phantoms of a dream than as creatures of human flesh and blood.

And where was Mercedes? How far had this evil miracle which had befallen him, removed him from her, just as he had begun to taste the sweetest delight that the Fates can give to man?

His crowding thoughts were agonising enough to have driven a weaker man towards the verge of insanity, but Wilfrid Ellerton had too many generations of hard-headed ancestors behind him for that.

Herarra had purposely placed him in the most magnificent surroundings that his submarine domain could afford. It was his design to intoxicate his senses so completely that he would, as weaker men might have done, accept the conditions of his new existence, if not without question at least with easy-going content.

Instead of that, his strong common-sense, reinforced as it was by the all-absorbing love which had for the first time come into his life, caused him to take an entirely different view of his new surroundings, and as he lay there on the couch gazing half-dreamily about him, he came quickly to the conclusion that, for the present at least, it would be best for him to consider himself as having been translated by some unknown means into a totally strange state of existence.

He would be an explorer in a hitherto unknown country, which might perhaps contain many marvels for him, and as such ready to make the best of it. He was not of the sort that gives up hope easily, and, wherever he might be, the last thing that he intended to despair of was solving the mystery which surrounded his present condition, and, by some means or other, returning to the world in which Mercedes was waiting for him.

As his intellect cleared and became active again his physical strength returned. He stretched his limbs out on the divan and then he sat up and, as it were, looked at himself.

He was dressed exactly as he had been on that memorable night on board the yacht. It struck him as almost comically odd that he should be sitting there in this strangely splendid apartment in exactly the same dinner-suit in which he had sat down to dine, and in which he had taken that moonlight walk on deck afterwards with Mercedes.

And then these girls, who were they? Why should they be standing by the side of the couch fanning him and bathing his forehead with scent, as though he were some Oriental potentate?

"May I ask who you young ladies are, and why you should be taking all this trouble about me?" he said rather abruptly, as he rose to his feet.

He looked at Brenda as he said this, and added:

"But I beg your pardon, but perhaps you don't speak English in this place, wherever it is."

Considerably to his surprise, and also not a little to his embarrassment, they all three crossed their hands before them, and bowed as slaves might have done before their master, then Brenda replied, in her quaint English, like a child repeating a newly-learnt lesson:

"Lord, it was the will of the Master that we should attend upon you. We are his servants and therefore we do his bidding, and we are commanded to do yours."

There was a touch of abject submission in her tone and bearing which irritated him, and he replied almost roughly:

"Well, then, if that is so, will you be good enough to go and find this master, whoever he is, and tell him that I should like to have a talk with him. Is he the man who was sitting here before I went to sleep again?"

"Yes, Lord," replied Brenda, looking up at him with vague astonishment in her big blue eyes. "Your bidding shall be done." She moved away to walk towards the curtained entrance, and he turned to the other two, and said:

"I needn't keep you young ladies any longer either. I am quite well now, and I want to be alone until this Master, as you call him, comes."

They bowed again, and followed Brenda in silence, and he put his hands in his pockets, and began to walk up and down the room, saying to himself:

"Well this is a confoundledly curious business; however it has all come about. Certainly there is some infernal mystery about it. Whatever happened to me on board the yacht, and it must have been something pretty serious, I should fancy, it made me insensible for some time, goodness knows how long. Then I wake up and find myself here—which isn't saying very much, seeing that I haven't the remotest notion where I am. Now it's quite obvious that this cannot possibly have happened, first without some object in getting me out of the way; and, secondly, without the knowledge and consent of Mr. Isolo Staunton.

"Isolo, Isolo, surely I have heard that name before, and now I come to think of it, his face, that reddish-brown, Scottish hair, and those big, deep Spanish eyes of his.

"Good Lord, of course, he was one of the men in that boat which I had forgotten all about and remembered again so curiously after I had been ill on board the yacht!

"Well, that clears up a good deal of the mystery, I suppose, if it really is so. If that's so he must have wanted to get rid of me, and Valdez and the doctor helped him to do it—and they did it the very night that Mercedes had given me the greatest happiness that I could have wished for! What a ghastly complication! Well, there must be some way out of it, and as that way also leads to Mercedes, I am going to find it."

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At this moment his speculations were interrupted by the entrance of Herarra and a tall, well-dressed, handsome, but somewhat masculine woman.

"Ah, my dear Señor," said Herarra, with a gesture of pleasure, "I am delighted to see that you have so far recovered. Permit me to present, or perhaps I should re-present, you to my wife—that is, of course, unless you have also recovered from the strange lapse of memory which so unhappily caused you to forget us."

"I am afraid, Señor, that I cannot yet lay claim to the pleasure of remembering you nor yet the Señora," replied Ellerton, returning the lady's bow somewhat stiffly, but speaking in a tone of perfect good humour. "However, since that is so, we shall have to make the best of it. Therefore, perhaps it will be as well if I consider myself a stranger in this somewhat strange land, and you and the Señora, as my host and hostess, at any rate, for the time being."

"Under the circumstances, my dear Señor Ellerton, that will undoubtedly be the course most pleasant to all of us," replied Herarra, even more cordially than before. His involuntary guest was not a little astonished to find that he knew his name, but he had made up his mind to take everything, no matter how extraordinary, just as it came, and so he replied:

"Very well, then, as I am a complete stranger and your guest, I suppose I shall not be trespassing too far on your kindness and hospitality, tell me where I am, and afterwards enable me to explore this new abode, which now seems quite unknown to me."

"Since you seem to have so completely forgotten it, Señor," said the lady, who was not only Herarra's wife, but, at one time, his most daring and successful accomplice, "I think we can promise you some very interesting discoveries—in short, nothing less than the discovery of a new world."

"Yes," added Herarra, going towards the table on which the wine and the glasses stood, "and as we are agreed to look upon your return to health in that way, let us welcome our guest in a glass of wine."

He opened the bottle and poured out three glasses, and handed one to his wife and one to Ellerton. Ellerton recognised clearly that, since he was obviously in the power of these people he could only do himself harm by any appearance of unfriendliness, and so he drank to his own welcome and thanked his host and hostess—or gaolers, as the case might be—and probably was—with a cordiality which was excellently well assumed.

Herarra had been given clearly to understand that his guest was to be looked upon as a prisoner for life and, as no escape from the Underworld was considered possible, both he and his wife were prepared to take a certain amount of pleasure in revealing some of its secrets to him with perfect candour. Thus, when Ellerton turned to the Señora and complimented her on the strange beauty of her handmaids, thanking her for giving him such charming attendants in his illness, she replied, with a look at her husband:

"Ah, Señor, that thing alone shows how completely you have forgotten, for surely such beauty as Brenda's would be the last thing that a man of your age would forget. Besides, it is not long since you were such very good friends that we all thought you were going to become something more."

"Whoever this lady is," was Ellerton's indignant mental comment, "she is certainly a most excellent liar."

But he said aloud:

"As you say, I really must have forgotten completely if I have forgotten that. She is very beautiful. You mean, I presume, the eldest of the three. The other two are scarcely less so. But at present I must confess that their beauty hardly interests me. But now, who are they?"

"That," she replied, dropping into a broad low armchair, "is a question to answer which we should have to tell a whole history—one which you used to know——"

"Another lie," thought Ellerton, "a more elaborate one this time, I suppose. Still, I may as well hear it."

Then he went on aloud as he accepted a cigar from Herarra:

"Perhaps at the same time it will be none the less interesting to me now, and so if there is time I can promise you an attentive listener."

"There will be plenty of time before dinner, Mirella," said her husband. "It is nearly an hour yet, and so if you wish to tell the story I know you can do it better than I could."

"Very well," she said, "then I will tell it."

And she began to tell him the strange and well-nigh incredible story of the coming of the remnants of the Viking expedition from the Far West into the Underworld.

She told how they were driven, starving, on to the coast of Iceland many generations ago, and how the inhabitants, not having too much food for themselves and wanting no new settlers with hungry mouths to feed, tried to drive them away.

This the sea-rovers resisted and took what they wanted by force of arms until the Icelanders came upon them in such numbers that they were defeated in a battle and those that were left of the men, women, and children were forced to take refuge in a great cavern or crevice leading down into the heart of a mountain. The Icelanders were afraid to attack them here and so built fires across the entrance and kept a strict guard over it.

The invaders were almost driven to the point of surrender when there came a convulsion of the earth and the inner end of the great cavern was burst open and they were able to retreat still further. They lit the torches and lamps which they had brought with them and they made their way into a succession of still vaster caverns, and while they were doing this there came another shudder of the earthquake and closed the rocks again behind them, thus inclosing them for ever within the bowels of the earth.

"By what miracle some of them survived under such terrible circumstances," said the Señora when she had reached this stage of the story, "can never be known, for their descendants have almost forgotten even the first traditions, but some must have done so and accustomed themselves to these almost impossible conditions.

"They no doubt found subterranean rivers with fish in them for they and the fish are here now, and vegetables of some sort, for there were also animals which fed upon them. They must also have discovered or invented a source of light, for it would seem that the more completely they, as it were, conquered their new realm, the more their sight, which had been almost lost during a few generations of darkness, came back, and so their children's children are able to see again. Thus they continually improved their condition, in what they truly called in their old speech, the Underworld.

"That, Señor, is the legend or the history of the ancestors of the original people of the region which once you knew so well and have now apparently forgotten. The rest, I think, I had better leave to my husband to tell you. I must go now."

NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

. . A Recognition. . .

THE departure of the Señora was a distinct relief to Ellerton, who was one of those perhaps excessively chivalrous men who find it impossible to be anything like rude, or even to speak quite plainly in the presence of any woman, friend or enemy, which latter he now felt pretty certain his hostess must be.

He took a sip at his glass and a pull at his cigar with a deliberation which was not quite pleasing to his host, and then he turned on him quickly and said in a tone which he liked still less:

"I have been deeply interested in all that I have heard so far, Señor—pardon me, you know my name—may I ask for 'the favour of yours' and at the same time some indication

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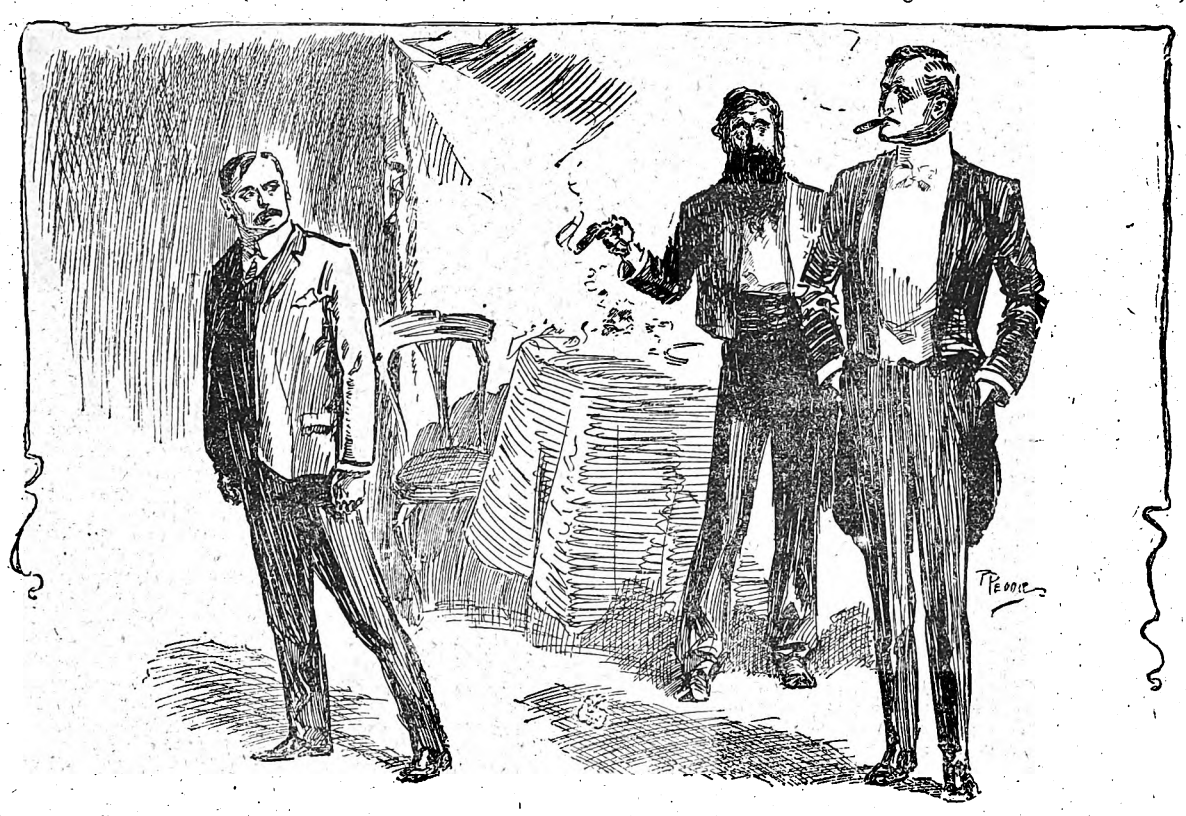
of the position which fortune has given to you in this world to which I have returned from my forgetfulness? Miss Brenda referred to you, in what I can only honestly call a somewhat servile manner, as the Master."

"I can, under the circumstances, be nothing else than quite frank with you," replied the other, between the puffs of his cigar, what time Ellerton waited, as he thought, for the next lie. "My name is Leon Herarra" ("May I be kicked hard, if I didn't think it was. The man Dad just missed catching over the forging of those Bilbao Iron share certificates," was Ellerton's mental comment) "and I have the honour to be the ruler of these regions to which, as you have justly put it, you now return."

There was a distinct menace in the tone, rather than in the words, which it was impossible for Ellerton to mistake, but he



As Battley left the room Ellerton gave him a glance which meant a great deal.

took no visible notice of it and said without a trace of emotion in his voice:

"Thank you. And now may I ask by what means the Señora and yourself and myself, who are evidently not of the same race as the descendants of those old Vikings of whose advent the Señora spoke so eloquently, got into this Underworld, as I believe they called it. We can hardly have come by the same way that they did?"

Herarra had been in a good many tight places during his criminal career, but this question would have put him into one of the tightest, had it not been that, save in the matter of life and death, the man who asked it was absolutely at his mercy. There was, therefore, not the slightest necessity to tell anything like the truth, and so he lied with a logical fluency which excited Ellerton's involuntary, but none the less sincere, admiration.

"Ah, now," he said, "you have finally convinced me that you have forgotten everything save perhaps your own identity. Of course, you are perfectly right in what you say and equally, of course, it is true that we came where we are by another road. But it would be idle to repeat all that old story now about the party of mining explorers who got themselves lost.

"That is merely commonplace, and I should be only wasting time by trying to describe what you have completely forgotten. Some day when you have got a little more at home again we will take an opportunity of re-discovering it together." ("That's not a bad sort of lie under the circumstances," thought Ellerton while Herarra was speaking, "but it won't go down, my friend. I don't know how you and I came down; but I'm perfectly certain we didn't come that way.")

"Quite so," he replied aloud, looking at the end of his cigar, "that will be a most interesting excursion when we make it, but I suppose there is no particular hurry. I had better renew my acquaintance with your Underworld first. And now, to change the subject for a moment," he went on, looking round the walls and up towards the ceiling at the lamps, or rather discs of light, which illuminated the chamber, "what light is that and where do you get it from. It doesn't look like either gas or electricity and it can hardly be oil."

"It is none of them," replied Herarra, thinking that he was answering a perfectly harmless question, "it is, as I will show you when you renew your acquaintance with our Underworld, one of the reasons which apparently enabled the descendants of the first discoverer of this region—a discovery which must, of course, have been purely accidental—to illuminate it and so by degrees recover their power of vision. We have very greatly improved the appliances of it but even we do not know exactly what it is. We have learnt to use it, as men first learned the use of electricity, without knowing what it was.

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But that must wait now, I am afraid, for here is Brenda to tell us that dinner is ready."

As he spoke the curtains over the entrance parted and Brenda came between them. She looked at them for a moment with her big, shyly-shrinking eyes and said; as she crossed her hands and bowed her head:

"Master, our lady bids me tell you that the table is spread and waits your pleasure."

"Very good, we will come!" said Herarra in English and in a rough tone which inspired Ellerton with a desire to kick him. Then he continued in the same language, and with a perceptible Spanish accent: "Come, sir, dinner is ready. I hope that you will not find the hospitality of our Underworld, to which you have become such a stranger, deficient."

Ellerton got up and followed him through the curtains, one of which Brenda held aside for them to pass, and as he went by her, she raised her head and their eyes met for an instant.

There was a dim, half-expressed appeal in hers, which could not possibly have been translated into words, but which inspired him with a desire to strangle Herarra, which was a good deal stronger than his previous desire to kick him.

Still, there was no use in worrying about that sort of thing just then, and so he came to the wise conclusion that he had better think out these strange happenings a little longer.

Herarra led him to the left along the spacious corridors illuminated by the lamps, whose source of light was still puzzling to him, and turned to the right into another chamber something like the reception-room, smaller, but even more splendidly furnished and decorated.

It was an oval chamber hung with tapestries, which concealed the rough-hewn rock walls. The ceiling was draped with sky-blue silken hangings, which depended from the centre of the ceiling, and met the tapestries at what seemed to be the top of the walls in such fashion that the room presented the appearance of a great tent. From the centre of the roof depended a large ground glass globe, which lighted the whole with the same soft, diffused, mysterious radiance.

The table in the centre of the dining-room was oval, and, in common parlance, there were four covers laid. A fourth place was vacant, and Ellerton, remembering the manners of the Overworld, stood by the chair, which his hostess had asked him to take by a motion of her hand, looking at the vacant place and waiting for the fourth guest to make his appearance.

"We shall not keep you very long, I hope, Señor," said his hostess with a note of apology in her tone. "Mr. Battley is a little late, but perhaps that is because his duties have kept him beyond the time. Ah, yes, very little," she went on, still in Spanish, "here he is."

As Mr. Battley, a short, sturdy, dark-haired, blue-eyed, square-jawed Yorkshireman, came in through the curtains apologising in English for being a few moments late, Ellerton had thoughts running through his mind, which so forcibly summed up the situation, that they could hardly be reproduced in cold print.

The man looked at him for a moment, then his eyelids dropped, and with another bow to the Señora, he went to his seat. It took all Ellerton's self-control, and he had a good deal of it, not to show that he recognised in this man one of his father's best engineers who had stolen the specifications of an apparatus upon which he himself had been working hard for some months before this crisis, which had begun on board the *Isola*, and was being continued in this new existence of his.

He bowed as Herarra made the introduction, and said to him in Spanish:

"The Señor's name is English. May I ask whether he understands the language which we have spoken so far? I only ask the question, because it may be that the Señora does not understand our English speech—I mean mine and his. Of course I need not remind you that it is usual to use a language at the dinner-table that everyone understands."

"It is unfortunate," replied Herarra, "but our friend understands only English. I speak it with some little difficulty, and the Señora not at all, except just a few words, and so I suppose we shall have to make the best of it."

The Señora bowed her acquiescence, and Ellerton, looking straight at Battley, as though he were a perfect stranger, said:

"Very well, as I happen to speak both languages, perhaps we shall be able to get on."

"No doubt of that, I think," said the Señora. "May I ask, Señor, where you learnt your Spanish before you joined us so many years ago in this Underworld of ours?"

He saw an absolutely savage expression come over Herarra's face as she said this, but it vanished in a moment when he replied:

"You see, Señora, that I have been suffering from a serious lapse of memory, and therefore I am not quite able to answer that question exactly, but somehow it seems to me that a long time ago now I did learn to speak Spanish."

And while he was saying this he looked at Battley, saying in his soul:

"I am not sorry I met you, and if you don't help me out of this place, that I've tumbled into somehow, I'll wring your neck, whatever else happens."

The meal was such as might have been served in the Carlton or the Waldorf-Astoria, and the wine was certainly not made from grapes grown beyond the reach of the sun. These were facts which Ellerton laid by for possible future use. The conversation was somewhat restrained and difficult in consequence, not only of Mr. Battley's lack of Spanish, but also to a considerable extent on another account which he would have found it difficult to explain to the man at the head of the table, who already held his liberty in his hands, and, as he very well knew, could and would, if necessary, arrange for his disappearance from the ledge into the boiling lake, by just giving his orders.

When the dinner was over—and Ellerton was very glad when it was finished, chiefly because of his disgust at the slavish manner in which Brenda and Thyrza and Myra waited upon them, as though they were not even servants but slaves, Herarra said to him in Spanish, as the Señora rose:

"And now, Señor, shall we go back to your own apartment and smoke our cigars, or would you prefer to renew your old and forgotten memories of the world to which you have returned?"

"If we can smoke our cigars while I am renewing my memories I think I should prefer that," replied Ellerton, as he bowed his adieu to the Señora, "and our friend here, I presume he will accompany us? From our conversation I take it that he is your second-in-command," he continued, looking uncomfortably hard at the Yorkshireman.

"The Señor is the head of our engineering department," was the reply. "As he does not enjoy tobacco, and as he has some matters to attend to before the sleeping hour comes—you see we make our own night and day here—we will, if you please, take a sip of coffee and cognac, and join him later in his department."

Mr. Battley took his dismissal for the time thankfully. As he left the room Ellerton gave him a look which meant a great deal.

While they sipped their coffee almost in silence save for a few casual remarks, for, truth to tell, both were somewhat busy thinking, Ellerton took every opportunity that offered to look keenly at every feature and gesture of his host, what time the two words "Leon Herarra"—"Leon Herarra"—kept chasing each other through his mind. He knew the name well enough as that of the man who had forged the bonds; but the man himself, the man he had half-recognised when he woke for the first time—where had he *seen* him before?

Presently, as Herarra set down his empty cup, rose and said politely:

"Well, Señor, if you have finished, shall we go?" the flash of recollection came.

"Good God, I thought so! He was the other man in the boat, and I saved his life by getting this chop over the head from our mutual friend Staunton. What the dickens will happen if he recognises me?"

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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He Couldn't Afford it.

ESTELLE: "And are you going to leave me so soon, Augustus?" Augustus: "My love, I would willingly give ten years of my life if I could stay longer. But if I don't go, I shall be fined sixpence for being late at our debating society."

Then He Revoked.

"MY wife," he said proudly, "has been known as the queen of hearts." "No doubt," they answered; "it was because she took the knave."

An Ambiguous Farewell.

HE (about to start on a journey): "Can I still trust you to love me so when I am far away?" She (trustfully): "Yes dearest, yes. The farther you are away the better I shall love you!"

She Still Wonders.

"How long does the train stop here?" the old lady asked the guard. "Stop here?" answered the functionary. "Four minutes. From two to two to two-two." "I wonder," mused the old lady, "if that man thinks he is the whistle?"

That was No Encouragement.

HE: "If you did not love me, why did you encourage me?" She: "I haven't encouraged you." He: "For two seasons you have accepted every one of my invitations to the theatre." She: "That was not because I loved you; it was because I loved the theatre."

The Natural Reason.

"ETHEL," said a clergyman to one of his daughters, whom he saw with her hair in curling-pins, "if Nature had assigned your hair to curl, it would have curled it for you." "It did, dad, when I was a child," was the reply; "but I suppose it thinks now that I am old enough to do it myself."

It Came as a Shock.

SOPHY (who has accepted Mr. Charles Fleetwood the night before): "Does Mr. Fleetwood strike you as being a sensitive man, Pauline?" Pauline (who doesn't know of the engagement): "Gracious, no! A man who has been rejected by fourteen girls within six months, and gets fat on it, cannot be sensitive. Why, Sophy! what's the matter?" She had fainted.

Feminine Figures.

"No," said the beauteous maiden, "I cannot marry you; the disparity in our ages is an insurmountable barrier." "But," answered the man who would a hubby be, "you admit to having celebrated twenty-two birthday anniversaries, and I am only ten years your senior." "True," said the fair one, "but think of the difference twenty years hence; you will be fifty-two and I will be twenty-seven." And, being a wise man, he said never a word, but let it go at that.

She Asked for it and She Got it.

HE: "A funny thing happened up at the Blimbers the other night. May Blimber, you know, is quite a whistler, and she walked up to the piano, and sat down, and was just going to whistle her best piece——" She: "Yes; go on." He: "Charlie Linseed was there, and he didn't know about her whistling talent. And so when she looked up at him with her mouth all puckered he thought it was an invitation and kissed her." She: "Did he? Was—was it puckered like this?"

A Profound Secret.

SOPHIE: "Julie and Joe are engaged, but they have decided to keep their engagement a secret; Julie told me so." Tom: "Yes; I know it; Joe told me."

What He Did and where She was.

LAWYER: "Where did he kiss you?" Pretty Plaintiff: "On the mouth, sir." Lawyer: "No, no! you don't understand. I mean where were you?" Plaintiff (blushing): "In his arms, sir."

Two Points of View.

HE: "Your eyes remind me of a bottle of champagne." She: "And why, pray?" He: "Because they sparkle so." She: "Well, you remind me of the empty bottle." He: "How so?" She: "You don't pop."

All the Difference.

MAUDE: "Oh, mamma, I wish you'd introduce me to that tall gentleman yonder. He has such a noble carriage!" Mamma: "Don't be foolish, dear; he's a nobody. But the little gentleman with him has a noble carriage and pair!"

A Romance Ended.

WATTS: "There are two broken-hearted chappies in two office buildings down my way." Potts: "And why?" Watts: "They have been flirting with each other across the street for a week from their window. Each thought the other was a girl."

Bridegrooms as Bargains.

"WAS she willing to pay so much for such an insignificant husband?" asked the thoughtless girl. "Oh, dear no," replied the well-posted girl, "she was buying a position in Society when she took the duke, and not a husband. He was simply done up in the package."

The Mistake They Made.

"WHEN I was courting my wife," said the sad-faced man, "we were two souls with but a single thought." "How about you at present?" asked the inquisitive youth. "We still have a single thought," replied the proprietor of the sad visage. "We both think we made idiots of ourselves."

He who Hesitates is Lost.

"Is it true, Miss Gertie," he said, "that there are just two things a woman will jump at—a conclusion and a mouse?" "No," she answered, "there is a third, Mr. Philip." After thinking the matter over for a few minutes he tremblingly made her an offer, but she didn't jump at it. He was not the right man.

It Had the Desired Effect.

HE was one of those bashful young men, and sat six yards away from the girl of his choice. "Don't you think you'd better see a surgeon, Freddy?" she inquired with feigned alarm. "See a surgeon, D—Dolly!" he echoed, in astonishment. "Why, what for?" "Really, didn't you know your arm was out of place?" Then those six yawning yards were diminished.

A Very Remote Ancestor.

MRS. NEWRICHE (patronisingly): "Were any of your ancestors men of note, Mr. Cynic?" Mr. Cynic: "Yes, madam, I should say so. One of them was the most famous admiral of his day, and commanded the allied forces of the world." Mrs. Newriche (with altered tone of deep respect): "Is it possible, Mr. Cynic? And what was his name?" Mr. Cynic: "Noah, madam."

She was a Clever Girl.

THE critical minute had come. He knelt on the carpet. "Darling," he whispered, "will you be my wife?" Just then a deep voice from a corner answered, "Yes!" "Yes!" "Yes!" a dozen times. "What does that mean?" gasped the astonished suitor. "It means," replied the fair girl, "that papa forbade me answering in the affirmative when you proposed. However, this did not deter me from employing a phonograph to take my place."

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Mrs. McLaren's Boarder.

Relating the Mistake a Girl Made.

Not that she had only one; no, she had many. I was one, my Uncle Dick was another; but the lodger whom I have in my mind's eye in connection with the title of my tale was a gentleman, young and handsome, whose advent created a stir in my serenity.

One afternoon, while I was gazing out of my window, I beheld a large van pulling up before the door, laden with seven large trunks, a capacious clothes-basket with a cover, a bundle of swords and canes, and several hat-boxes.

These articles were all safely deposited within the house. Surely, I thought, not all the property of the one masculine whom I knew our worthy landlady was expecting to occupy the room next my own (third storey front); but I was much mistaken; the entire collection of miscellaneous luggage was before long imported to the neighbouring apartment, much—very much—to my astonishment; but I, of course, forbore either to make remarks or ask questions.

At dinner I beheld the proprietor of all this array, good-looking, as I remarked above, tall, his finely-developed figure displayed to admirable advantage in a grey tweed suit; dark-brown eyes, and beautiful white teeth, showing, now and then, under his thick moustache.

Immediately my interest and curiosity were aroused in the newcomer. I had no chance to view him other than in the brief dinner hour, for, immediately thereafter, donning a shining top hat, and toying with an ivory-handled cane, Mr. Duane lit a cigar and sauntered forth.

Late at night I heard him return and enter his room. His customs were strange, I thought, at first; he appeared very late in the mornings for breakfast, walked forth at about half-past ten or eleven, usually armed not only with cane and cigar, but also a light roll, either manuscript or pamphlets, I could not determine which. He always came home about three, but regularly passed his evenings out. Now and then a mysterious boy appeared, and bore off the clothes-basket, apparently bursting and running over with parti-coloured wearing apparel, and occasionally the point of a rapier gave zest to the arrangement. The basket was, however, always returned by the same boy, sometimes full, sometimes empty.

The occupations of Mr. Duane, while at home, I could vouch for as being studious. He seemed to devote his entire muscle and lung to elocutionary exercise; and the nature of his selections roamed anywhere from Shakespeare down to nameless authors of the nineteenth century.

I finally concluded, after an argument with Uncle Dick, that he was a young lawyer, or rather that he hoped and aspired to fame in the practice of the law.

After expressing this belief to Mrs. McLaren, she coincided with me entirely, adding that he "was of a very fine old family in Lancashire—very fine; and, oh, yes, of course, a-studying for the Bar!"

The mystery was solved — at least the mystery of elocutionary exercise at any and every hour of the day and night; but the boy, the seven trunks, the parti-coloured garments, and the collection of fire and side-arms!"

Wait and hope! I should yet find out. Certainly, he was marvellously fine-looking, and I could readily comprehend his being a scion of an aristocratic house, for he had a very thoroughbred air.

Once Mr. Duane was lured into the drawing-room. It was on a Sunday evening, which was, in point of fact, the only night that he ever spent in the house, no matter what the elements or the attractions within doors.

He was invited to sing by a maiden of certain years, and replied somewhat strangely, I thought, that "he'd never learnt; that sort of thing never came in his line at all, and——" At which point Mrs. McLaren hastily called the young aspirant for legal honours to her side to look at photographs of departed McLarens.

What it all denoted I was at a loss to conjecture, but upon one subject I was positive, and that was an unconquerable curiosity in my neighbour.

Daily, as I watched him go forth with his little porfolio, a bundle of yellowish-brown pamphlets, I yearned to know more of him; it was irresistible; fight as I would against it, I took a frightful interest in this new boarder, who, beyond a steady habit he had of looking at me fixedly, now and then, and blushing like a girl whenever I caught the turn of his eyes, evidently took no interest in me; we never talked to each other, scarcely spoke, only a polite profound bow, whenever I chanced to meet him, as I occasionally did in the street, swinging along in his lazy fashion.

But, notwithstanding his lack of interest in me, mine grew wilfully and wonderfully strong in him, and refused to be crushed, either by other society or those rules of propriety for the guidance of a young maiden's heart and thoughts which my dear old uncle, aided and abetted by my worthy and spinster aunt, Matilda, had instilled into my breast since earliest childhood.

I *would* think of young lawyers, and brown eyes, and seven trunks, and an adherence to one grey tweed suit, whether it was proper, or whether it was not.

One day, in about the middle of the eighth week of this object of interest's residence in the boarding-house, I was lying prone upon my sofa, afflicted with the most frightful headache.

The door was standing partially open, in such a way that I could see out, but no person passing see in, for the heat from the hot water pipes with which the room was heated almost suffocated me, and I feared an incursion of neuralgia from without should I open the window.

There came a ring at the bell—no unusual sound, but I noticed it, because every small sound almost drove me distracted.

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The ring was repeated with violence several times, and presently I discerned a clear, correct feminine voice inquire, "Is Mr. Duane at home?"

Upon receiving an affirmative reply, and the attendant question, "What name?" this woman's clear voice replied: "Miss Delaplaine; but, never mind; what room?—third floor front, I believe, isn't it?" she asked briskly. "I'll go straight up; you needn't trouble," with which comforting assurance to Bridget's weary limbs, Miss Delaplaine, with a sprightly step, bounded up the stairs and presently brushed past my door on her way.

She was a tall, dark, pretty girl, with a great many curls floating down her back, a little pink hat sat jauntily on her head, a perfectly irreproachable grey silk dress, an ungloved dress, with a variety of rings and a roll of something in it.

Upon reaching my neighbour's door, she tapped lightly, and receiving an invitation from the other side to "come in," turned the knob, and sang out:

"Hello, Mr. Duane! how are you? I got so fidgety over this hateful thing, I thought I must go over it once again with you before to-night, so——"

Here Miss Delaplaine's speech was cut short by her host's voice, which I could hear distinctly enough through the thin partition dividing the apartments.

"Don't bawl so, Lillie, for Heaven's sake! Shut the door, can't you?"

The portal banged, whether urged thereto by host or guest I could not say, but it might as well have been open so far as I was concerned. Firstly, I heard Mr. Duane's voice in a very slow, drawling sort of tone:

"I haven't looked at the thing yet. I've been so busy about other matters."

"Not looked at it!" responded Miss Delaplaine, in accents of surprise. "Why, you'll be sure to break down, and if you do I'll never forgive you, or get over it, either. You know the whole business is new to me, anyway, and I don't see how you can act so meanly, Harold!"

Miss Delaplaine spoke in a key that was piteous to hear. Her host replied languidly:

"Oh, I'm an awfully quick study. Don't worry, please. Just sit down there and amuse yourself for a few minutes while I get ready; that's a darling," added Mr. Duane, in a soft manner.

This brief dialogue was succeeded by a silence of a quarter of an hour or so.

"What could it mean?" I asked myself again and again. "Engaged? But even so, how strange to come and visit her betrothed in so social and peculiar a style? Cousins? I never visited my cousins of the opposite gender in their boarding-houses, nor did any of my acquaintances. Simpy a friend? Well, no; further off than ever. "'That's a darling!'" rang in my ears like a sort of knell. "Engaged," I repeated to myself, "of course; but how very odd! I should not think Mr. Harold Duane the sort of man who would fancy such a fiery, free-and-easy young lady to convert into his wife; but there's no telling," I argued. "She certainly is a trifle fast, but then she is very pretty, and probably very worthy and lovely."

My explanatory soliloquy with reference to Miss Lillie Delaplaine was here interrupted by that young lady's soprano voice carolling melodiously a couplet of some song relating to "my love" and "stars," and "wars."

This display of her quantity of lung power was hastily put a stop to by him whom I now forced myself to consider the vocalist's intended husband, in these terms:

(*Continued overleaf.*)

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"Oh, stop that squalling! You'll rouse the house. There!" and I heard a bang upon the table. "That's fine, my dear."

"Get up," replied Miss Lillie irrelevantly.

"What, 'biz' and all?" inquired her host, in somewhat of a languid tone. "I am very tired."

"Of course; that was principally what I got in the fidgets over. Come. Oh, Colonel, is that you?"

Mr. Duane's affianced spoke in tones of accentuated and silvery surprise, and I waited eagerly for the response of some individual who, I thought, must have entered the next room through the medium of the window, or else rendered himself invisible while passing my door. But no third voice made itself heard. Mr. Duane's own organ answered in tones of delicious gallantry:

"'Tis I, Mademoiselle Estelle; and how beautiful, how charming, you look! Why do you wander in this wild and unfrequented region, where you are exposed to——"

A scream from Miss Lillie Estelle (I presume the latter to be a middle name), smothered by some means by Mr. Duane interrupted this speech. A terrific bang against the wall, either one of the two falling upon the floor with a resounding crash—Miss Lillie Estelle, I surmise, from what succeeds—Mr., or rather, Colonel, Duane's voice betokening a terrible anguish of spirit as he spoke.

"My beloved! Look up and speak to me, Estelle; he is dead! You now have not an enemy upon the earth, nor I a rival or an opponent. Look upon me, beloved, with those beautiful eyes, and say that you will live for me!"

Decidedly this was growing peculiar. Ought I to have heard! Ought I not get up and make a racket, or leave my room altogether? No, I could not; my head throbbed wildly, and I could not help hearing; if Mr. Duane chose to go through such scenes with his *fiancée*, he might; I should not move.

This train of thought was interrupted by a low moan from the young lady; and, fed by reflection and a vigorous fancy, I rapidly concluded that the "colonel," although a mute, was probably Miss Delaplaine's guardian, and had eluded my observation in gaining the next room, and in attempting to coerce his ward into a final separation from her lover, had met with an untimely end at the hands of her disapproved suitor.

But how account for the strange language they had used in conversing—the peculiar allusions to "wild and unfrequented regions?"

Alas! I was fearfully bewildered, and almost feared I had suddenly gone insane. However, whether insane or not, the sense of hearing, or its perverted semblance, was still mine. The low moan over, Mr. Duane exclaimed, in tones of horror:

"Behold him dead, and by this hand—for thee!"

Again a moan and a brief silence, which I occupied in picturing the body, which I was now sure was lying stiff and stark in the next room, and of the accuracy of my instinctive abhorrence for the collection of arms I had noted in the strange boarder's luggage.

Murder! I thought my brain fairly reeling. Murder! It must have been with a poinard, or a dirk. I had heard no report, and the "colonel" had never spoken a word. Of course I ought—I must get up and alarm the house; but my limbs refused to support me. A dim and terrible fear possessed my soul, and I lay still upon the lounge, petrified with horror.

Presently I again distinguished sounds issuing from the fatal apartment, indistinct at first, but finally clearer. Quite clearly Miss Lillie Estelle Delaplaine's voice sounded out lively and cheerful.

"I say, Harold, think I'll look well in a wedding-dress?"

"Suppose so," said the other laconically. "Don't daub your face up with too much paint, though; and, look here, Lil, don't lean too heavily on me, because I haven't got over that brilliant tumble of mine from the flies yet. It hurts like the dickens every day."

"All right," sang out the lively Lillie. "Come on; now for the next. That's light; you might as well sit down, if you like. You do look tired, Harold. I do declare, you look as though you were in love with somebody. Who is it? Quite romantic. You aren't nearly as lively as when you first came down from Lancashire."

My heavens! I saw it all. They were going to be married that night. In the very presence of the body of the murdered colonel, this girl had the coolness to ask him how he thought "she'd look in her wedding-dress?"

And he! What must he be? A man certainly could not *love* the girl whom, about to marry, he advised in a careless voice not to "paint her face too much," and not to "lean upon his arm too heavily."

What should I do?

There were more low murmurings, probably, I judged, relative to the disposition of the body of the murdered man, and then Miss Lillie Estelle's voice, quivering with a passionate tenderness, ejaculated:

"Swear to me that I am your first and only love!"

"Oh, no," rang out Mr. Duane's clear, sweet voice, adding, with a low, rippling laugh, "not by many!"

I could stand this no longer. I rose by a tremendous effort, slammed my door, locked it with trembling fingers, and flew to open the window for a breath of air, and sank down upon my knees, gaining a little strength and relief from the fresh November breeze.

In less than ten minutes I beheld Miss Delaplaine emerge from the house. She glanced up at the window of her intended husband's room, kissed her hand playfully, sang out in a melodious little voice:

"Ta-ta; be round at seven, sharp;" and shaking her silken skirts airily, the future Mrs. Duane was soon lost

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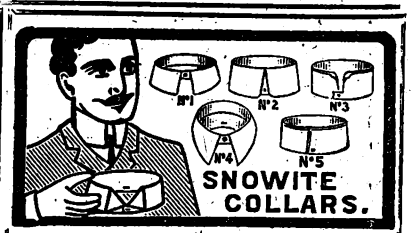

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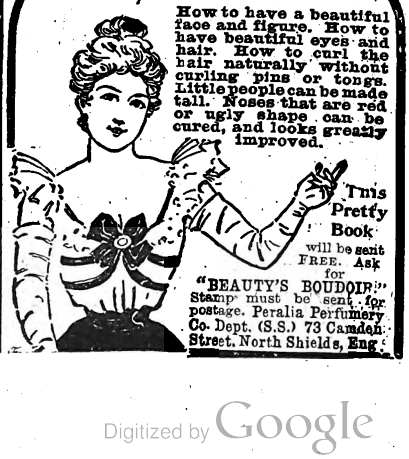

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to view round the corner of Clarence Street, presently succeeded by Mr. Duane, who, however, meandered in the opposite direction.

Revived by the cool air, I rose and hastily unbolted the door, preparatory to going below to announce the tragedy to Mrs. McLaren, and to declare to her at one and the same time that no human power would induce me to sleep another night in the third storey of her house. My uncle, of course, had not as yet returned from his business, so I could not rush to him first.

Opening the door, I peeped cautiously out. Horrors! Mr. Duane's door stood wide open, and almost unconsciously I gazed in, expecting to behold, with frozen eyes, the "colonel's" body laid out upon a blood-stained carpet.

Nothing of the sort. No "colonel," no body, no blood; nothing at all different from the usual aspect my neighbour's apartment presented to my daily vision as I passed in and out.

What had they done with it? Had they put it up the chimney? There was none. In the cupboard? No; the door of that receptacle stood open, and within it, as sole occupants, were a light overcoat, a Panama hat, and three or four pairs of boots.

I stood there speechless, glaring, in a white wrapper and long, dishevelled hair, when I heard a footstep, and in another instant the murderer stood before me.

In rather a gasping voice I ejaculated, somewhat unnecessarily:

"I thought—you were out, Mr. Duane!" and then bitterly regretted having spoken at all.

What business had I thinking anything about him, in or out, the wretched criminal?

"I did step out to get a cigar," he replied, smiling. "Is there anything I can do for you?" he replied civilly. "You look alarmed."

"I am, for I—I thought you'd been killing somebody!"

It was a wild thing to say to a man with whom one had never exchanged a hundred words, and who, in all murderous probability, would thank you harshly for your information; but he received it obligingly enough, as he laughed, and answered:

"Oh, I'm sorry we disturbed you. Miss Delaplaine, our leading lady, is rather lively, even over her rehearsals. I did my best to keep her quiet, for I was afraid all the while that we were annoying you. Please forgive me?" he asked, bending two repentant brown eyes upon me. "I—she sha'n't come here again for any new piece."

"Oh, certainly," I responded, in a maze of bewilderment, and with the best grace I could command. "Please forgive me my rudeness and my frightful suspicions. I really thought you had been murdering a colonel or somebody!"

He laughed heartily, and with a hundred assurances of future good behaviour, and the brightest, sweetest smile in the world under his golden moustache, disappeared within the recesses of the apartment for which he paid the worthy Mrs. McLaren thirty shillings per week.

I flew to my landlady, not with a tale of crime, but for information.

"An actor," she said.

Ah, now I saw it all! but why had she never divulged the nature of her new boarder's calling, but rather induced the belief in another calling. He, as I remembered now, had never evinced any disposition to make a secret of his belonging to the "profession."

Well, Mrs. McLaren explained, now that she had to, that when the supposed law-student engaged the room, she knew not his occupation. A few days later she became acquainted with it, and yet feared to let her other boarders into the secret, knowing full well that their virtuous and well-regulated souls would recoil from the idea of a play-actor beneath the same roof with themselves. All of them were people who would as soon think of entering a theatre as undertaking a trip to America in a paper boat. Mr. Duane's thirty shillings a week were dear to the heart of the widow McLaren, and, besides, he was "such a gentleman! such a fine family! such exceptional references, that she hadn't the heart to tell him she required the room."

An actor! This, then, explained days at home and nights abroad; collections of fire and side-arms, wigs, and last—by no means least—Miss Lillie (without the Estelle this time) Delaplaine's call.

The seven trunks, of course, contained his wardrobe—theatrical, not civilian. The visits of the mysterious boy were simply occasions for carrying forth those costumes required by Mr. Duane in the play then running, and to return those not in use. The morning promenades, armed with pamphlets (alas! containing "parts," not "briefs"), simply eleven o'clock calls to rehearsal. Strange that no one ever saw his name in the papers, or his face behind the footlights. But, dear me, he was, of course, no star, and then the name.

Well, the new boarder, Mr. Harold Duane, was a law-student, and any other Mr. Harold Duane announced as fulfilling the *role* of hero in drama, comedy, or farce, could certainly not be connected with him.

Again, none of the virtuous dwellers beneath the roof of Mrs. McLaren ever darkened the door of a temple of the drama with their presence.

Of course, now that the secret was out, all attempts at legal dissimulation on the part of the worthy widow were at an end.

That evening, when the subject of their discussion was probably repeating his love-making of the morning to "Mademoiselle Estelle," the anti-histrionic corps of his fellow-boarders were holding solemn conclave over the horrors of the situation in the parlour.

Though present, I was not of their inclination. I had always adored in secret that profession of which the sometime law-student was a member; but the result of this court of investigation was that, either Mr. Duane must leave, or they, the judges, would; one of the two—whichever seemed better to the mind of Mrs. McLaren.

As may readily be imagined, the arithmetical problem of a weekly deficit in the receipts of thirty shillings, or ten or twelve times that sum, was quickly solved in the brain of the widow.

The next morning the dramatic and hitherto mysterious boarder was duly informed of the perils and necessities of the situation.

Poor fellow! he had fully believed all along that everyone was perfectly aware of his business, and seemed to be rather confounded at the whole proceeding.

However, he appeared quite regardless of the tribulations of moving, and watched (I did, too, from the vantage-ground of my casement) the loading of the seven trunks with a becoming calm.

But, if the virtuous dozen were in danger while Mr. Duane, whilom lawyer, present actor, slept beneath the same roof with them, they were not very much better off when he dreamt his dreams out, six streets away.

Mr. Duane got a trick of coming round frightfully often, and, after a while, nearly every day; and finally—we've laughed a great many times together over his "engagement," engendered in my fertile imagination, with Miss Lillie Delaplaine, who, it seems, is married.

"No intention in the world of running away with Lillie," said Harold to me, the other day; "but I hope I shall tell you very soon, Muriel, my little darling, how you look in a wedding-dress."

Katie Birrell.

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a great deal which it will be useful for you to know. What sort of a disposition you have, whether you are likely to succeed in life, if you are of an affectionate and lovable nature, besides much other information without which you would probably be hopelessly at sea in the affairs of every-day life. You can obtain a reliable delineation of your character by sending a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped, addressed envelope, to RANEE, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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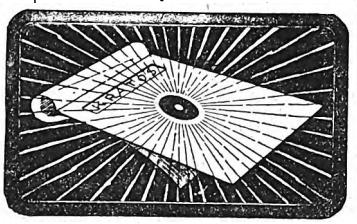

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

Suspicion.

"I AM anxious about my lover," writes "AMY." "He has recently changed his lodgings, and his landlady's daughter is a very pretty girl, who will see a lot of him. I am living some distance away, and fear he may be stolen from me."

* * * * * * *

I should trust him, "AMY." Surely he is not so fickle as to be led away so easily? And if you let the young lady know that he is your sweetheart, I feel sure she will not be so mean as to attempt to steal him from you. After all, a pretty girl is not so hard up for suitors that she must poach on other people's preserves to find one.

Should He Propose?

"ADOLPHUS" writes, "I wish to become engaged to a certain girl, but not until my means allow. I expect shortly to inherit a sum of money, which would enable me to offer her marriage, but there is just a doubt. Would you advise me to postpone proposal until I know definitely, or until I come into the money, or what should I do?"

* * * * * * *

It would be better to be candid with the girl, and tell her your prospects. I do not suppose she herself will wish to become engaged unless you have good means or assured prospects, and would probably take as sensible a view of your not proposing as you could wish. It is certainly wise not to pledge yourself and the girl until you know you are in a position to make her happy.

Unconscious Offence.

"I AM afraid," writes "B. T.," "that I have offended a young lady to whom I wished to pay attentions, but only know of it through private sources. The other night I made some trivial remark, which I meant as a joke, but I thought she took it seriously. She did not appear offended at the time, but later on I met a great friend of hers, who said, 'Miss B—— is offended with you for saying what you did, but don't let her know I told you so, as I only heard it in strict confidence.' What am I to do? I cannot apologise, as I am not supposed to know she is offended."

* * * * * * *

If you really said something you should not, it would be better in any case to apologise, and explain your meaning. You need not reveal that you heard it from the friend. Write saying you regretted afterwards what you had said, and hoped it would be overlooked. It may take some time to right it, as you must know that slight offences are less soon forgiven than heavy ones.

A Too Long Engagement.

"ENGAGED" writes: "When I proposed to my young lady she was twenty-five years old, and quite attractive in looks and manner. Three years have now elapsed, and though I'm still fond of her, she has gone off a great deal, and is a trifle peevish at times. I doubt whether, after all, we should really be happy now, as she seems so different. What would you advise?"

* * * * * * *

I advise you to marry her at the earliest possible moment. A man who lets an engagement hang on indefinitely—if, of course, he is able to marry—can scarcely be surprised if his sweetheart shows some signs of advancing years. I doubt not that the girl is chafing at the length of the engagement, and wishes to get married. At twenty-eight, though still young, a girl feels she should not still be single, and no doubt her dear friends remind her of the fact. These things combine to sour her manner, and wear her looks, and it is her *fiancé's* duty to hasten on the wedding.

Fear of a Mother-in-Law.

"I AM not happy," writes "EDWARD." "I am very fond of the girl to whom I am engaged, but cannot endure her mother. I fear we should not at all agree after married life. Do you think it would be wise to go further with the affair, seeing how unhappy the mother-in-law may make us."

* * * * * * *

One would think, "EDWARD," that you were going to marry the mother-in-law yourself from your anxiety. I have never heard of an engagement being broken off for such a reason, and do not think you can be very fond of the girl if you ever contemplate a breach on those grounds. Besides, there is no need for you to entertain your mother-in-law after marriage. It is quite a delusion and very old-fashioned to make out that this lady is sure to interfere in her son-in-law's household. Most of the mothers-in-law of my acquaintance, though ever so fond of their sons and daughters, leave them severely alone in their private affairs. It is only a very foolish and vulgar type of person who interferes in this way, and I think she lives chiefly in the imagination.

Advice for a Mother.

HERE is another mother question, and a rather more serious one. "MATER'S" daughter is a very sensitive, innocent girl, who is receiving attentions from a man much older than herself, who has not a very good character. Still, he has much influence over the girl. "MATER" wants to stop the affair altogether, but fears it would make her daughter unhappy. What is the best thing to do?

* * * * * * *

If the man has no serious intentions, and is not a fit person for your daughter to marry, you ought to stop any communication. It may go against the grain, perhaps, to be too strict, but it is your duty as a mother to do it. Be careful not to do it in a tyrannical way, which might lead to an elopement or secret marriage between the couple. It would be better if you could take the girl away for a long stay, or send her somewhere where she would not be in touch with the man. You should also privately talk to him, to see what he intends, and if you still think the affair is unsatisfactory, ask him to cease meeting your daughter. She might be unhappy for a while, but I feel sure she will soon get over it when she sees that you have acted for the best.

Cynthia

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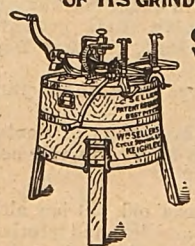

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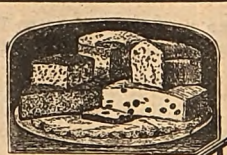

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(A Thrilling Episode from this week's "THE PURSUIT OF SARA." See inside.)

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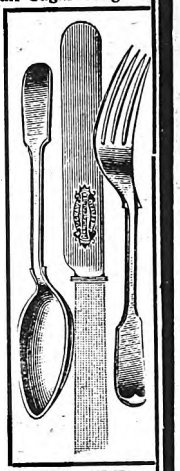

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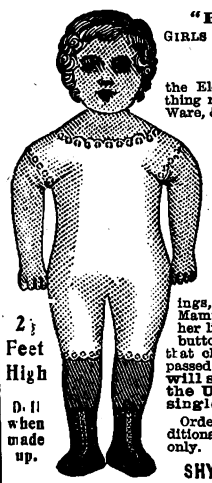

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Short Stories

No. 779.] [One Penny.

For the Week Ending December 5th, 1903.

"TIDDLES."

A Very Pretty Story telling how a Little Girl Managed to Make Four Persons Happy.

"But I have no time for that sort of thing."

The speaker, a man with a strong, resolute, somewhat weary face moved restlessly in his chair as if to escape from the clear, direct gaze the girl he addressed turned upon him. She had a way of looking at him, this girl, which was rather disconcerting—a way which demanded the exact truth, and, as he confessed to himself—perhaps reluctantly—got it. It was almost impossible, looking into her face with its many changeable expressions—at one moment brimming over with fun and mischief, the next, sad with the ready sympathy accorded by all true womanly natures—to prevaricate. She took life rather seriously this little girl, in spite of the fun and mischief, which would bubble over at times, and there was a certain look in her deep violet eyes which told of a nature which might prove worth sounding. That thought passed through the man's mind as she gazed at him, as if trying to reckon up the exact meaning of his last words. They had been speaking of love, those two, and with a certain impatience with which a man of the world who has passed his first youth will treat the subject he repeated:

"No—I have no time for that sort of thing."

"Why?" she asked in the simple, direct way he had grown accustomed to during the last few days.

"Because my work must come first with me," he answered.

"Then you are ambitious," said the girl.

"Yes"—with a hardening of the lines on his face which told of a fight hardly won, which also showed the indomitable spirit of the man—a look which might spell "bend" if necessary, but not "break." Then, with a sudden change in his voice which appealed to the girl at once, he said:

"My mother died worn out soon after she was thirty because my father possessed no ambition."

"Yes," she said softly, "I understand."

Looking at the small earnest face turned almost pityingly towards him, the man felt that she did understand, and a sense of comradeship not often experienced crept over him, making him wonder if she might not be right when she said:

"But do you not think it is a pity to miss all the best things of life, to be always alone, to have no one to care whether your work goes well or ill?"

As she spoke another face rose in the man's mind, a face beautiful enough, indeed far surpassing that of the girl by his side, but without its indefinable charm—cold, proud, self-possessed—fitted in every way, so people said, to be the wife of the rising barrister, Ralph Carrington. No! he should not always be "alone," but apart from the position he could give her, would Beatrice Cangham care "whether his work went well or ill?"

He checked the impatient sigh which rose to his lips and also the half-formed thought that he would tell his "little friend," as he called Nina Beaumont—of his bride who was to be—of the marriage which was to take place in the summer—a marriage which was "so suitable," so his friends said, "which would be such a help to him in his profession," in which, as he told himself half in pride, half in contempt, *love* had no part. No! he was leaving Parkfield Manor in a few days; why spoil those days by speaking or thinking of a future which had never been too attractive and which now, somehow, seemed less so than ever. He turned to the girl who was still gazing at him with grave, earnest eyes:

"So you think I am missing the best things in life, little one, do you?"

"I think so," she said simply; then, with that quick change of mood which was one of her chief charms, she said merrily:

"But come, 'My lord,' listen to that waltz; do you know you asked me for it a quarter of an hour ago? It is not worth much, if it is not worth the taking, eh?"

Rising with alacrity as he thought of several waltzes with this same small person which had a way of recurring to him, as delightful experiences, they left the conservatory and were soon floating down the room to the strains of the "Valse Bleue."

* * * * *

Ralph Carrington sat in the smoke room at Parkfield Manor, and as he puffed the smoke-rings above his head, with a persistence worthy of a better cause, his thoughts travelled

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back over the last fortnight, to the day when, turning out of his London chambers, he had bumped into his old college chum, Arthur Maitland, a man whom he had not met for the last four years, but of whose friendship he felt as sure as if they had seen each other daily. As Arthur would have said—they had been great "pals" at college—"what the dickens have you been doing to yourself?" had been that gentleman's greeting after a grip of his friend's hand, the intensity of which would have brought tears to the eyes of any ordinary person. "You look as if you had taken a ticket for Kingdom Come!"

"Shouldn't mind much if I had," he remembered saying—for he had reached that stage when nothing seems to matter and a doctor would have said he was suffering from a severe attack of "nerves" consequent on overwork and want of change.

"Look here, old chap," said Maitland, "you're overdoing it; throw musty law books and 'cases' to the winds, or otherwise get someone to look after them for you, and come down to Parkfield. The wife would be glad to see you, I'm sure, and we have all sorts of gaieties on the go for Christmas; you've never been introduced to 'Tiddles,' have you? That would do you good in itself—wake you up, you know."

Wondering who or what "Tiddles" might be, Ralph Carrington had promised to "look them up" and "stay until he felt better." He had been looking forward to a lonely Christmas, for Beatrice Cangham was abroad with her aunt, who objected to spending the winter in London with all its smuts and fogs. They were in Egypt, and only intended coming home in time for preparations for the wedding which was to take place the latter part of June.

From time to time Carrington received long descriptive letters filled with accounts of their gaieties—their stay at Cairo, of the dance at "Shephead's," which had been such a huge success, the ride to the Pyramids with Sir Roland North in attendance. The good time they had on board the *Rameses* going up the Nile, the moonlight expedition to Thebes—how wonderful the ruins were—everything, it seemed to him, but interest in himself and his doings. He had never seemed to notice how wrapped up in herself the girl was, until, worn-out and overdone, on the brink of illness, he had felt the want of a woman's sympathy. "Nina will do him good," thought little "Mrs. Arthur," as she preferred being called—when he turned up at Parkfield as he had promised on Christmas Eve, and Nina *had* "done him good." Little by little he found himself confiding in the girl, telling her all his plans and prospects, and very much to his own amusement at times, wondering whether she would approve of this or that.

How well he remembered turning round in response to Mrs. Arthur's "let me introduce you to my sister, Mr. Carrington," to see a small fair girl with wonderful violet eyes heavily fringed with lashes several shades darker than her hair—eyes which would have redeemed many a plainer face without the aid of the sunny locks, which rippled back from that face, in such luxurious profusion. A dainty little maiden, simply gowned in white, with a knot of her favourite violets at her waistband. She was a refreshing change to the usual run of girls Ralph Carrington met on those rare occasions when he could be induced to accept one of the many invitations which poured upon him. Girls, whose one aim seemed to be that of drawing a wealthy prize in the matrimonial market, and whose efforts in that direction were so palpable as to very often defeat their own object. He thought of the merry skating parties when he and Nina had skimmed through the frosty air together, for after a day or two of what Mrs. Arthur called her "petting," he began to feel himself again and, with the ncentive which Nina's society provided, a keener enjoyment of life than he had felt for years took possession of him.

He felt to have gone back ten years, to have lost that feeling of "oldness" which had oppressed him so much, making him feel like a man of fifty-nine, instead of thirty-nine. Then there were the carpet dances, when two or three of the younger members of the neighbouring families had dropped in, sure of a welcome at Parkfield. One or two quiet evenings—and Carrington thought he had enjoyed those best of all—when he and Arthur had sat listening to the "girls" singing, for in spite of "Tiddles," who turned out to be "Miss Maitland"—a lovely, precocious little piece of humanity aged ten—Arthur Maitland always spoke and thought of his wife as a girl. They had all driven over to the Hunt Ball the night before, and Ralph wondered that he had enjoyed it so much—no! after all, did he wonder? Was it not all summed up in a few words? Three or four waltzes with a slender figure, which seemed to float through the air, in his arms. Desultory chats in the conservatory—what was it she had said, that he was "missing the best things of life," so he was—and with a deep sigh, which was almost a groan, Ralph Carrington realised that to him the best thing in life meant Nina Beaumont.

Downstairs in the drawing-room below Mr. and Mrs. Arthur were holding what at first was a very one-sided discussion on the Hunt Ball. "What a lovely gown Lady Gower had on," began Mrs. Arthur, addressing the furniture presumably—for to all intents and purposes Arthur appeared to be asleep in the armchair, "trying to get up to himself," he called it, after last night's dissipation. Something which sounded like a grunt came from the depths of the chair.

"It must have cost a little fortune," went on Mrs. Arthur, nothing abashed by the unresponsiveness of her lord and master—another grunt. "I wonder if Mr. Wardroper and Phyllis Carstairs intend making a match of it?" went on the little lady, trying another tack. "He seemed to pay her very marked attention" (no answer to this). "She is a lovely girl, but I thought there were some very pretty girls there taking them all round, didn't you, Arthur?"

"Nina looked as decent as anybody," came in a sleepy sort of growl, which said as plainly as possible, "do be quiet."

"Oh, yes, of course," briskly. "Nina always does look lovely."

There was silence after this for a few minutes, for Mrs. Arthur's thoughts were busy with an idea which had come into her head the night before, as she caught sight of Ralph and Nina dancing together. There was a look on the man's face which to the wise little woman could only mean one thing. He had lost his heart to that pretty little sister of hers, she felt sure, and she was simply "aching" to tell Arthur all about it. Like all happily married women, she was a real match-maker at heart; but, as she knew by experience, Arthur always pooh-poohed anything of the sort, and was apt to meet her little confidences with advice as to "minding her own business" and so on. Like a wise general, then, she skirted round the subject warily.

"I think Mr. Carrington enjoyed the dance last night, don't you, Arthur?"

"Should think so," still more than half asleep.

"He looks heaps better for coming," persisted she.

"Yes! he is better; talks about going back to London soon"—with a yawn, but signs of gradually returning to a fit state for rational conversation.

"I don't think he will though," said Mrs. Arthur in a tone which invited the question which followed.

"Why, dearie?"

"Well"—with a knowing look—"I think he is beginning to think he has been a bachelor long enough, and quite right too—he is far too nice not to have a dear little wife of his own!"

"What makes you say that, Nettie?"

"Because"—launching her bombshell now that she saw he was interested—"I think he is in love with Nina!"

"Ye gods!" give me a woman for making a romance out of nothing," laughed Arthur; "in love, with Nina indeed; he's engaged to a Miss Cangley, or Cangham, or something of that sort. I remember him writing to tell me about it, oh, twelve months ago—no, little woman" (kissing his wife's disappointed face), "you're wrong this time. Of course he likes her——"

"Yes, he does, papa," broke in a childish voice from the deep-seated window where, unnoticed by her parents, and half concealed by the curtains, "Tiddles" had been busily dressing her doll.

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"I know he likes Auntie Nina, because I saw him kissing her photograph in the breakfast room just now." After which calm delivery of *her* bombshell, "Tiddles" went quietly on with her business.

"Oh, 'Tiddles,'" said her mother after an uncontrollable glance of triumph at Arthur. "You should not say such naughty things; Mr. Carrington would be looking at Aunt Nina's photograph, not kissing it."

"Yes, he did look at it, mamma, for ever so long and then he said 'my darling,' quite low down, and then he kissed it three times, because I counted," persisted "Tiddles" who was nothing if not accurate.

Mrs. Arthur bit her lips in an almost hopeless endeavour not to laugh as the child looked up into her face with great solemn blue eyes, and said:

"I *know* he likes Auntie Nina," cried Tiddles, "because I saw him kissing her photograph."

"'Tiddles,'" if ever you say anything like that again about Mr. Carrington I shall be obliged to make you stay in the nursery; little girls should not talk in that way—it is very rude; go to nurse at once."

"Tiddles" gathered up her precious doll in her arms and with an expression of injured dignity on her face walked towards the door, turning round, however, before she reached it to say, "He did, mamma, really he did!"

* * * * *

Mrs. Arthur did not belong to that disagreeable order of women who take a delight in saying, "I told you so," which is invariably so annoying to the person "told," and in addition is like adding insult to injury, but on this occasion that was the remark which fell from her lips, adding to it:

"You'll perhaps think I'm right now."

Arthur simply did not know what to think and plainly showed the state of his feelings by giving vent to a long expressive whistle under his breath. "Great Scott!" came next, and whatever may be the meaning of that ejaculation, it seemed to relieve his mind and also put his tongue into working order, for he said:

"I say, Nettie, it's about time he went back to London, for if he is in love with Nina, and I begin to think there may be something in your idea after all, he'll be in a beastly hole. Poor old Ralph, he was never much of a hand at love making, and if he gets properly into Cupid's clutches he'll take it very seriously like everything else he does."

"Yes, not like a dear old boy I know, who imagined every girl he met was his fate," put in Mrs. Arthur with a peck which was meant to be a kiss, somewhere near the top of her husband's head.

"Well, he was right once, wasn't he, old girl"—pulling her on to his knee where she nestled very contentedly, for Arthur Maitland and his wife were lovers still in spite of several years of married life, or, perhaps, because of it.

After a moment's silence Mrs. Arthur reopened the subject by saying:

"But what about that engagement? I can't make it out."

"Nor can I," said her husband. "He has never mentioned it; I answered his letter, telling me of it, of course, and he has not thought it necessary to speak of the fact since he came here. You see, we men have no back hair to brush out in each other's rooms, and don't get so confidential on those subjects"—stroking his wife's curly head as he spoke.

"I wonder what Nina thinks about him?" went on Mrs. Arthur.

"Oh, that he's a decent sort," said Arthur carelessly—then with a sudden thought: "Look here, little woman, don't you be putting ideas into the child's head. She's all right now and it's as well to let sleeping dogs lie. Ralph will go back in a day or two, and as far as he is concerned, he is old enough to look after himself, but I don't want Nina made unhappy." In common with most people Arthur had a very warm corner in his heart for his little sister-in-law, and truth to tell, would have thought Ralph Carrington a very lucky man to have won her. He was about to say as much to his wife when the welcome clatter of cups and saucers was heard, and the footman appeared with the tea-tray followed in a few moments by Nina and Carrington themselves.

The girl looked very lovely in her dark furs with a closely fitting toque of velvet—the colour of which exactly matched her eyes and was rivalled again by the violets she had tucked into her muff. The keen frosty air had brought a faint colour into her cheeks, and loosened the sunny curls which clustered in bewitching tendrils round her face and ears. Ralph had seen her coming up the drive from the breakfast room window, and, knowing that she would go to the drawing-room for her usual cup of tea, had hastened to meet her there. He had come to the conclusion that, as a man of honour, it was impossible to stay much longer at Parkfield, for to see more of Nina and not betray his feelings, he knew would tax him to the uttermost. He must make some excuse and leave—he would say Saturday. To-day was Tuesday, just four more days for a glimpse of happiness "that might have been," she would be none the worse, and he—well, he was not the only man who has found that the gate leading to earth's fairest garden must be passed if he would keep pure that Heavenly flower which is given to all, but is so often blighted before it blossoms to fullest perfection—honour.

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"Wherever have you been, Nina?" said Mrs. Arthur with a glance of fond admiration at the girl, as she cast aside her hat and coat, and sank into a low chair. "You make me absolutely tired by displaying such energy after dancing until the small hours of the morning; we have all been so lazy, haven't we, Arthur?"

"Well, I have, I admit," he answered, "and if you call talking nineteen to the dozen laziness, you'll come out a very fair second—as for Ralph, ask him to give an account of himself."

Ralph smiled as he handed the girl a cup of tea and said: "No, Miss Beaumont must give an account of herself first."

"Come," said Mrs. Arthur; "obey orders, Nina."

"Oh, I have only been to the top of the hill just to get the cobwebs blown away, Nettie," said the girl, with a happy smile playing about her lips. Life seemed all sunshine just now, and she did not realise how much Ralph Carrington had to do with the fact, or how quickly the clouds may gather and burst.

"Cobwebs indeed," said Mrs. Arthur, "then if you have got rid of yours, you shall sing ours away, when I have given you another cup of tea."

Nina smiled and sat quietly listening to the two men who were discussing a celebrated law case at that time filling the papers. They had different opinions on it, and as Nina noticed how rapidly and quietly Ralph demolished all his friend's arguments, she thought, no wonder people spoke of him as "clever."

"I should not care to be your opposing counsel, Mr. Carrington," she said. "You have not much mercy for the other side."

"Possibly if you were I might be more lenient," said he with a look in his eyes which made her heart beat more quickly, she scarcely knew why—"but did I not hear something about your singing just now?"

Nina rose, and, going to the piano, picked up the first song she came to, which was Guy D'Hardelot's setting of Victor Hugo's beautiful lines "Sans Toi."

"Oh, do sing that, Nina, it's just lovely," said Mrs. Arthur.

As the girl's full rich contralto voice rang through the room, the song appealed to Ralph as music had never done before, passionately fond of it though he was, and with the last lines "What are tears without thine eyes, or my lips without thy kiss?" the determination to leave Parkfield at once took possession of him. Would it not be better to face the truth, admit that he was, after all events—in this thing weak-minded, not sure of himself, that bound in honour to one woman, he, Ralph Carrington, who had always prided himself on his self-control, was afraid of betraying himself to the woman whom too late he found was the one real love of his life.

That night, as the two men sat in the smoking room, Ralph in an odd, abrupt sort of way told Arthur of his intention to leave before breakfast the next morning.

"Make my apologies, and say 'Good-bye' to the ladies, old man—I will write to Mrs. Arthur and thank her personally for all her kindness."

"Look here, Carrington," broke in Arthur, "what's all this rubbish about? There's nothing happened that you need rush off like this, I'm sure!"

Half in despair that he should be unable to get away if he did not explain to his blundering, kindhearted friend—and half in relief, Ralph told Arthur everything, in a few simple well-chosen words, which made that gentleman wring his friend's hand with a curious "lumpy" feeling in his throat which he relieved by muttering something to the effect that "some people did make awful fools of themselves!" However, he drove Ralph to the station himself the next morning, entering the breakfast room just as Nina appeared with "Tiddles" in attendance for their usual half-past nine breakfast.

"Where is Mr. Carrington?" said Mrs. Arthur. "You and he have been early birds this morning, Arthur."

"Yes," said her husband, instinctively averting his eyes from Nina's face. "He has had to get back to London, and I've been to the station with him to catch the eight-thirty train."

"Gone back to London," echoed Mrs. Arthur, "why he——he——"

"Yes," broke in Arthur, "he left all sorts of nice messages for you girls, and he's going to write to you, Nettie, and say pretty things about how much he enjoyed himself, and so on."

"I do think he might have told me last night," began Mrs. Arthur, and then something in Arthur's expression stopped her and she glanced at Nina—the girl's face was white and strained and she sat perfectly still with a look almost of bewilderment on her face. For some minutes she said nothing and then in a tremulous voice, which she tried in vain to keep calm and steady, she simply remarked:

"I am glad Mr. Carrington enjoyed his visit."

As soon as Arthur could escape from the room he did so, and Nettie, crossing over to her sister, said:

"What is it, darling? Oh, *don't* look like that!"

The girl's lips quivered piteously for a moment and then, utterly unnerved by the sympathy expressed in every line of Nettie's face, she cried:

"Oh, Nettie, Nettie, I know I ought not to say it, for Ralph has never spoken to me, but I love him—I love him, and I thought—Oh, how ashamed I am"—breaking off and hiding her burning face in her hands.

"Nina," said Nettie, laying a caressing hand on her sister's shoulder. "Don't say that, dear, there is no need to be ashamed, for I, too, thought—nay, I am sure that Ralph does love you, and I think that is why he left so hurriedly this morning."

"But why should he?" began Nina, lifting a tear-stained face.

"My darling," said Nettie, "Arthur told me only yesterday, he is engaged to a Miss Cangham, and they are to be married in the summer."

Nina buried her face in her hands and for some time there was no sound in the room but her sobs. Mrs. Arthur let her cry on, thinking perhaps it was the best relief she could have, and after a while the girl pushed her hair from her face and with a brave attempt at a smile, which brought tears to Nettie's eyes said, "Forgive me this once, Nettie, I shall be all right now." But Nettie thought as she left the room that it would be many a day before she saw the old light-hearted Nina again. Unconsciously she spoke out the thought:

"Oh, if he had only been free; how happy they might have been."

"Tiddles" had all this time been an unthought of spectator of the little scene, and with wide open eyes and ears, was trying to put two and two together in her own little mind. She electrified her mother by saying:

"I think Auntie Nina is very silly to cry because Mr. Carrington has gone away, mamma, and because she loves him."

"Well, you see, darling, he has somebody else to love him, and he must go and talk to her"—lightly, in a vain endeavour to stop the child's chatter.

"Yes, but why doesn't he tell his Miss Cangham he wants to talk to Auntie Nina, mamma, and then he could come back again, couldn't he?"

"Hush, hush, my pet, you know nothing about it." But "Tiddles" thought she did and perhaps she was wiser in her own generation than we think.

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When Ralph Carrington arrived at his chambers in town he found waiting for him a letter from Beatrice Cangham, saying that her aunt, Lady Leslie, in her accustomed erratic way, had suddenly made up her mind that she was tired of roaming about, and with that want of consideration for other people's plans which usually characterised her actions, announced her intentions of returning by the next boat. "We shall spend a short time in Paris to do some necessary shopping," wrote Beatrice, "but in any case shall be in London in February. We intend to take rooms at the Hyde Park Hotel for a while, for auntie is going to have the house in Upper Belgrave Street done up before we go into it. I think she might have stayed another fortnight; there is so much going on here and everything will be so abominably flat in London."

Not a word to say she would be pleased to see him, or any suggestion of their making arrangements together for their future home. He wondered if she ever gave it a thought of any sort, and as was so often the case with him now, had resolutely to put aside the picture of Nina in that home. Oh, the irony of it all. Could it be right to put pure happiness on one side in this way? For though no coxcomb, Ralph had a feeling deep down in his heart that, had he been free to do so, he could have won Nina's love.

It was in a far from enviable frame of mind then, that he found his way to the Hyde Park Hotel one bright frosty morning towards the end of February. He had received a telegram telling him of the travellers' arrival there, and made up his mind that he would see Beatrice at once and ask her to hurry on the preparations for their wedding, for he thought once married he might be able to get rid of this miserable feeling of unrest.

He found Beatrice and her aunt in a whirl of excitement booked knee-deep for "this" and "that," for, as Beatrice explained, Sir Roland North had travelled home with them and was "so kind." "His mother had sent them an invitation to Wetherby Grange and she thought they might go—anything would be better than London in February, didn't Ralph think so?" and so on.

Ralph wearily assented and was wondering how he could best broach the subject uppermost in his mind, when a childish voice full of excitement fell on his ear, reminding him irresistibly of Parkfield. "Oh, mamma, are we really going to see the *Babes in the Wood?* —how lovely!" the voice said, and when it was answered by one he recognised as Mrs. Maitland's, he astonished Beatrice by exclaiming, "Why, that's 'Tiddles' —excuse me"—and, springing to the door he re-entered a few moments later with that small maiden and her mother in attendance.

When the mutual introductions were exchanged, Mrs. Arthur explained that Arthur had important business with his solicitors, and they were staying for a couple of days. As his time would be taken up so much during the day, she had brought "Tiddles" as a companion, for Nina was anything but well, and could not come up as she had intended, to search for new "chiffons."

"What is the matter with Miss Beaumont? Nothing serious, I hope?" said Ralph in a low tone.

"No, I thinks she wants a change—has got run down," said Mrs. Arthur; "we are going to the Riviera next week; I think it will do her good." All this time Lady Leslie was talking to "Tiddles," highly amused and attracted by the child's chatter and sweet winsome face.

"Mrs. Maitland," said she, "'Tiddles' says she will come and have tea with me if you will allow her to do so, and tell me all about the *Babes in the Wood*. You will join us, I hope?"

But Mrs. Maitland could not do so, "she had promised to meet Arthur in Regent Street before returning for dinner, "but I will bring 'Tiddles' in if you like, Lady Leslie, and she may stay with you until we get back, then it will be bed time for all little girls who have been busy, eh, 'Tiddles'?" So it was arranged and "Tiddles" went on her way rejoicing.

"Is that Mr. Carrington's Miss Cangham?" she asked her mother as soon as they got outside, for 'Tiddles' had never forgotten the day when Auntie Nina had cried so much, and had firmly made up her mind that Miss Cangham ought to know all about it. When her mother said "Yes, 'Tiddles,' that lady and Mr. Carrington are going to be married some day," a thoughtful look settled down on her little face, and she had not so much to say about the doings of the "Babes" as was her wont on such occasions.

The three left behind parted company soon afterwards, for Ralph felt utterly out of cue with the gay chatter going on, and finding it impossible to speak to Beatrice alone, left them, promising to look them up early the next day and spend a long day with them. Soon after he had gone, and Lady Leslie was taking her usual afternoon siesta, letters were handed in, amongst them one for Beatrice from Sir Roland North. A straightforward, manly letter, telling her of his love for her, "hoping that she was not quite indifferent to him, and that she would one day become his wife, would she send him word at once that he might come to London and receive his answer personally."

The girl sat with his letter in her hand, a troubled look on her usually impassive face. In addition to his title, which she did not attempt to disguise was attractive to her, she felt more at ease with him than with Ralph, realised that he did not see through her little weaknesses and ambitions so easily, in fact, that what little heart she possessed was given to him;

She turned, and saw Ralph there with outstretched arms.

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the letter was not altogether unexpected; indeed, during the pleasant journey home, it had troubled her more than once as to what her answer would have to be when the inevitable question was asked, for needless to say, Sir Roland knew nothing of her engagement to Ralph.

It was this mixture of feelings which caused her to be so much more talkative than usual during Ralph's visit, which had made her so resolutely avoid a *tête-à-tête* with him, and now—what should she do? Could she make up her mind to tell him the whole truth? If it had been love, and love alone, which prompted her inclinations, she felt she might have done so, but Beatrice Cangham owned the truth even to herself, and she knew that the prospect of being mistress of Weatherby Grange—able to take her position as Lady North—meant more to her than that she should win a noble-hearted English gentleman to be her companion through life.

She dreaded Ralph's keen insight—the scorn which would come into his face, for although they had never professed any great affection for each other, she thought he cared for her, as much as he ever would for any woman, as indeed he had, until he met Nina. She took the letter to her room, altogether undecided how to act, forgetting all about the fact that her aunt had asked "Tiddles" to come back to tea. Mrs. Maitland had rushed in from the matinée, as usual at the very last minute, and being afraid she would miss her appointment with Arthur, instructed her maid to make "Tiddles" tidy, and take her to room No. 14, where she was to take tea with Lady Leslie.

When "Tiddles" arrived, therefore, in all the glory of freshly-tied hair, and pretty frock, it was to find an empty room and no hostess; the child, in quaint imitation of her mother, said:

"You may go, Jenkins, I will wait here for Lady Leslie."

The maid, a simple country girl, scarcely knew what to do, but thinking her charge could not come to much harm, left her, after many warnings "to be good and not touch anything till the lady came."

For fully one minute the little one sat perfectly still, and then, as was only natural, became restless, and started a tour round the room which might have been disastrous in many ways if her attention had not been arrested by a tiny table in the window, upon which were pen, paper, and ink, which plainly told "Tiddles" to write something."

"I'll write and tell Miss Cangham all about it," she thought.

To think with "Tiddles" was to act. Drawing up a chair she wrote:

DERE MISS CANGHAM—*Auntie Nina says she loves Mister Carinton and he likes her, becaws I saw him kiss her fotograph in the brekfast room, so I think you had better let him come back and live with us.*

Yours obedintly,

TIDDLES MAITLAND.

Folding this, she put it into an envelope, and in a larger round hand than ever addressed it to "Miss Cangham." She was wondering what to do next, when Jenkins, who had been uneasy, knocked at the door to ask if Miss "Tiddles" was all right, and finding she was still alone, bore her off, much to her disgust, to their own apartments.

Thus it was that when Beatrice came down for a cup of tea, she found this note, which was to alter the course of four lives. She picked it up idly, and, noticing the superscription, wondered how it got there and what it could mean. With her thoughts full of her own affairs, it was not until she had read it several times, that it bore any meaning for her. "Auntie Nina, Mr. Carrington, Tiddles Maitland," she repeated to herself, trying in vain to read the puzzle. All at once the truth flashed upon her and she remembered that Ralph had been staying with the Maitlands while she was abroad. Who Auntie Nina was, she neither knew or cared, but evidently the child "Tiddles," whom she now remembered was to have taken tea with them, had been in the room during her absence, and for some reason or other had written this note. Ah, if it could but be true: no, it *must* be true; here was a way out of her difficulties. Once again she read the quaint epistle, laughing out loud at the phrase "I saw him kiss her fotograph." Fancy dear, staid old Ralph (she felt quite fond of him again now), kissing anyone's photograph. But to business. Taking a sheet of notepaper she simply wrote "Come and see me.—Yours, Beatrice." and addressed the envelope "Sir Roland North, Wetherby Grange, Wetherby." Then after thinking awhile she also wrote:

DEAR RALPH—*If the inclosed note means anything you will be able to wish me joy in my engagement to Sir Roland North, with all sincerity; if not, will you still do so for the sake of "Auld Lang Syne," knowing that I think it will be best for us to live our lives apart and that I am only waiting to hear from you to say that I will become his wife. I have no hesitation in writing this for something tells me that "Auntie Nina" has found a way to your heart which I could never have done. Hoping this is so for your sake, believe me, your erring and repentant friend,*

BEATRICE CANGHAM.

Inclosing the note "Tiddles" had written with such laborious care, she sent a messenger with it to Ralph's club, telling him to wait for an answer. Ralph, however, was not there, and she had to "possess her soul in patience" as best she might. On Lady Leslie's appearance, which was only just before dinner was served, she was shocked to find she had forgotten all about her "little friend," and sent round to Mrs. Maitland's rooms to ask if it was too late for her to pay her promised visit. But "Tiddles" was preparing for the land of dreams, and her mother thought she had better leave it until to-morrow. They had dined and were just preparing to go to "His Majesty's" where Tree was playing in *Resurrection*, when Ralph rushed in. The girl looked miserably confused when she saw him, but one glance at his radiant face reassured her, and she said: "Oh, Ralph, I am so glad. Why did you not tell me about 'Auntie' before?"

After a few hurried words of explanation from both, and a hand-shake on Ralph's part which told Beatrice what a heavy load had been taken from his mind, Ralph took up his hat and coat—if he caught the next train he could be at Parkfield by half-past nine and he felt he could not rest until he had seen Nina. When he arrived there he brushed past the astonished footman in the hall, saying:

"You need not announce me, Barnes, I will go to Miss Beaumont in the drawing-room, she is alone you say?"

Ah! she was singing—what was that? "What are tears without thine eyes or my lips without thy kiss?"

The voice died away in a vain tremulous attempt to keep it steady, and it was almost more than Ralph could bear, when, putting her head on her arms, she leant forward on the piano with a sob and a low "Ah, Ralph, Ralph——"

"My darling, my darling, come to me," he said, moving slightly out of the shadowy corner, where, overcome with the passion of feeling which surged through him, he had waited for the conclusion of the song. She turned, and seeing him there with arms outstretched, and a face full of passionate love and tenderness, took one step forward, to be folded once and for always, to that true strong heart, which, finding her, had found its own true mate.

Billy Lamb.

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The Missing Brides.

The Story of a Strange Adventure.

At last Belding Hall was to be occupied. Once more it was to become the abode of men and women, instead of a home for owls and bats.

For thirty years its gloomy chambers had been closed, and the light of the sun excluded from its halls. Grass had grown over the walks, and weeds and bushes hedged the building in on every side; while the trees spread their sheltering arms about its upper stories, shielding the chimneys, cornices, and roof from the blasts of winter, and the scorching heat of summer.

Some of the window-shutters had fallen from their hinges, and the doors had shrunk from the door frames, as if fearing contact with them. Ruin had set its mark on everything, increasing its hold from year to year, until it now reigned supreme.

But all this was to be changed. Robert Belding, the heir to the estate, contemplated marriage, and was going to bring his blushing bride to the home which had been bequeathed to him by his uncle, Maxwell Belding.

The house had been in the possession of the family for over a hundred years, having been built by Robert's great-grandfather. Maxwell Belding had intended to make it his residence, and thirty years before our story opens, the friends of the family had assembled at the hall to celebrate his marriage to Grace Atherton, the belle of the county.

But Fate had decreed that he should not partake of the cup of wedded bliss; for, at the last moment, when all were breathlessly awaiting the entrance of the bride and bridegroom, a commotion was heard among the bridesmaids, and soon it was whispered from lip to lip that Grace had disappeared.

She had left the chamber above, a few minutes before, for the purpose of going to the library, or study, where hung Grandma Belding's portrait, taken when she was first married, seventy years before. Grandma had been noted for her many virtues and accomplishments, as well as for her devotion to her husband. It had been a custom of the family for many years, when a wedding occurred, for the bride to kiss Grandma's portrait; the old servants stoutly affirming that she who did so would be blessed with a constant and adoring husband, and her married life would be one of peace and happiness.

In deference to the family tradition, Maxwell had laughingly escorted Grace to the door of the library, and then left her; as, to insure the blessing of the departed dame, it was said that the aspiring bride must be alone when she sought the coveted favour.

Several moments passed, and then Maxwell went to the door, and entered the room. It was empty. He gazed about in bewilderment. Grace was nowhere visible.

The light shone dimly from the chandelier. He lighted more candles, and hurriedly examined every part of the room. The window stood open, and he stepped out on the balcony. Grace was not there. Not a sound was to be heard, save the distant voices of the guests in the hall below. Where had she gone? What could it mean? He spoke her name gently, then louder. There was no reply.

Five minutes passed, then ten, but not until fifteen minutes had elapsed did Maxwell collect his thoughts sufficiently to give the alarm. In a moment everything was in confusion. Frightened bridesmaids ran from room to room, calling Grace's name; but the only answers they received were the echoes of their own voices.

The grounds were carefully searched, but not a trace of the missing Grace was found. Quickly it was whispered among the guests that she had fled with a lover, whose existence Maxwell had never suspected. Whether this was the true solution of the mystery, no one knew; for Maxwell never saw her face again after kissing her good-bye at the library door.

Silently the bridal party dispersed. The luxurious dwelling prepared for the reception of Maxwell Belding's bride was closed, the doors and windows nailed up, and he went abroad—no one knew whither.

For ten years he travelled, trying in vain to forget his lost bride. Then he returned to England and took up his abode in London, where the remaining twenty years of his life were devoted to the practice of his profession—the law. He died, apparently a man of eighty, although scarcely sixty years of age, bequeathing his property to his nephew, Robert Belding, with the provision that he was to marry before he attained the age of thirty, and that the ceremony should be celebrated at the old mansion, where the happy couple were to reside permanently.

This brings us back to the beginning of our story.

Robert Belding had just passed with high honours at Oxford, and inheriting, as he did, the immense wealth of Maxwell Belding, he was an object of considerable interest to the people in the village. Nothing was talked of but the coming wedding and the opening of the old Hall, which had so long been an eyesore to the community.

One day Robert Belding arrived, accompanied by an army of carpenters, bricklayers, plasterers and paper-hangers, and at once began a vigorous assault on the infirmities of Belding Hall. In a few months a wonderful change took place in the building and surrounding grounds. Every sign of neglect and decay was effaced, and the house stood forth in all its ancient splendour. Once more lights flashed from its windows, the sound of laughter was heard in its rooms, and again wedding guests assembled beneath its roof.

Robert Belding had carried out every wish of his deceased uncle with the utmost fidelity. The old library presented almost the same appearance it had done twenty years before. Grandma Belding's picture hung in precisely the same place; in fact, it could not well be otherwise, as its frame was a part of the oaken wall. It had not been removed, but simply dusted and left where it had hung so many years.

As the happy couple stood at the head of the stairs, about

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to descend to the drawing-room, where the invited guests were awaiting their coming, Robert laughingly asked the blushing Laura whether she wished to pay homage to Grandma Belding's portrait, and invoke the blessing of the deceased lady on the step she was about to take.

"Oh, Robert!" she exclaimed. "Do you wish to lose me, as Uncle Maxwell did his beloved Grace?"

"No fear of that!" answered Robert gaily. "There is no lover concealed in the shrubbery to spirit my fair one away. Are you afraid?"

"Afraid? Of what should I be afraid?"

"Nothing at all, my darling. Perhaps it would be well to respect the family traditions and customs, and if you wish to solicit the goodwill of the lady whose household virtues have been the admiration of the female members of our family for the last hundred years, signify your desire, and I am ready to conduct you to the shrine where you may offer up your petitions."

Laura laughingly took his arm; and, amid the raillery of the bridesmaids, and sundry cautions not to lose his bride, Robert led her gently to the library.

They entered together. A fire burnt brightly in the grate, and the lamps in the chandelier cast a brilliant light over the room. They glanced at the portrait, and the lovely face seemed to beam kindly upon them, as though in approbation of their union.

"I hope your life will be as happy and serene as was hers," said Robert tenderly, as he stooped to kiss her. "We must lose no time, as they are waiting for us. I will wait outside the door."

Then he left her.

Alone, Laura approached the portrait. It stood considerably higher than her head; and, in order to reach it, she was obliged to step upon a low shelf, or projection, about a foot from the floor. The shelf was only about three feet in length, by two feet in width, and was used as a receptacle for magazines and newspapers.

Pushing aside a pile of magazines, she stepped upon the shelf, her hands clasping the sides of the frame; and, rising on tiptoe, she reverently touched her lips to the canvas, devoutly breathing a prayer for the future happiness of herself and husband.

As the words died on her lips she felt a slight jar, a creaking and grinding noise sounded in her ears, the wall seemed to yawn before her, and a breath of damp, musty air to sweep over her; then the room appeared to float around her, and she became confused.

Shriek after shriek burst from her terrified lips. In a few moments she heard Robert's voice calling.

"Laura! Laura! Where are you? What has happened? Answer me!"

The words sounded muffled and distant, and the room was in total darkness. The sound of his voice restored her as she was on the point of swooning, and she replied, faintly:

"Oh, Robert! I am standing on the shelf before Grandma Belding's picture; but the light is out, and I am so cold! And what makes your voice sound so far away?"

"The light is not out, Laura; it is burning as brightly as ever; but I cannot see you at all. The shelf in front of the picture is quite empty; your voice seems to come from it, although it sounds distant and indistinct."

A moment later he spoke quickly:

"Laura, do not be alarmed; I see through the whole mystery now. Don't stir a step. The picture has simply turned round, and you are on the other side of it. A portion of the wall appears to be on pivots. A magazine has been caught in the joint, which keeps the panel from fitting closely. Be patient, and don't feel at all frightened. I will call help, and soon release you."

A few moments passed; then she heard a confused murmur of voices, some calling to her to keep up her courage and be a brave girl, and others giving commands and making suggestions, and intreating others to do things which they never seemed to think of doing themselves. At last someone called for a crowbar; and presently a stream of light flashed in her eyes as the heavy crowbar was forced into the opening, and the panel swung slowly back.

But long before it had regained its place she was snatched from her unpleasant position by Robert's strong arms, and transferred to those of the excited bridesmaids, who covered her with kisses, and wept over her as if she had just been rescued from the grave.

And so she had. For had not the magazine been caught in the closing panel, leaving an opening through which her voice reached Robert's listening ear, she would have been buried as effectually as though laid away in the family vault.

In a short time order was restored, and the festivities proceeded, although the bride was very pale, and the bridegroom a little more quiet and subdued than he had been an hour before. But they were very happy, and thankful for the kind Providence which had interposed between Laura and the dreadful fate that had overtaken Grace.

The next morning workmen again came to Belding Hall, and a certain picture was, after much manœuvring, induced to swing upon its concealed hinges, revealing a dark opening in the wall, from which a very steep flight of stairs led to a chamber below. At the bottom of the staircase they found something which caused their faces to blanch and their hearts to swell with emotion.

A skeleton lay there, attired in bridal robes—all that remained of Grace Atherton, Maxwell Belding's lost bride; snatched from his arms almost at the altar, her heart filled with the exquisite joy that belongs only to the fond woman who bestows her heart and hand upon the husband of her choice, and freely intrusts her happiness to his keeping.

It was found upon investigation that the panel was worked by a system of concealed weights and levers, which were set in motion by anyone who stood upon the shelf in the library, and pulled steadily upon the frame of the picture. Both sides of the panel were fitted with a portrait of Grandma Belding, executed by the same artist. The arrangement had evidently been devised by the designer and builder of Belding Hall, who had perhaps used the underground chamber during the Civil Wars as an asylum for refugees from the Puritan soldiers; or, in which to hold meetings for plotting and planning against the enemy. In it were found a number of old flint-lock muskets, swords, and other arms, rusty and tarnished, together with uniforms of cavalier officers and soldiers.

Tenderly Grace Atherton's ashes were laid away in the family vault beside those of Maxwell Belding; and on a beautiful marble tablet appears an inscription, recording the fate of the unhappy bride.

Charles Malcolm.

PONSONBY: "Sir, I have come to request the honour of your daughter's hand in marriage." Stern Parent: "Impossible! Never will I give my consent." Ponsonby (anxiously): "Is your decision fixed—irrevocable?" Stern Parent (firmly): "It is." Ponsonby (much relieved): "Thanks, awfully. Nellie has been pestering me to ask you, and I did it just to oblige her."

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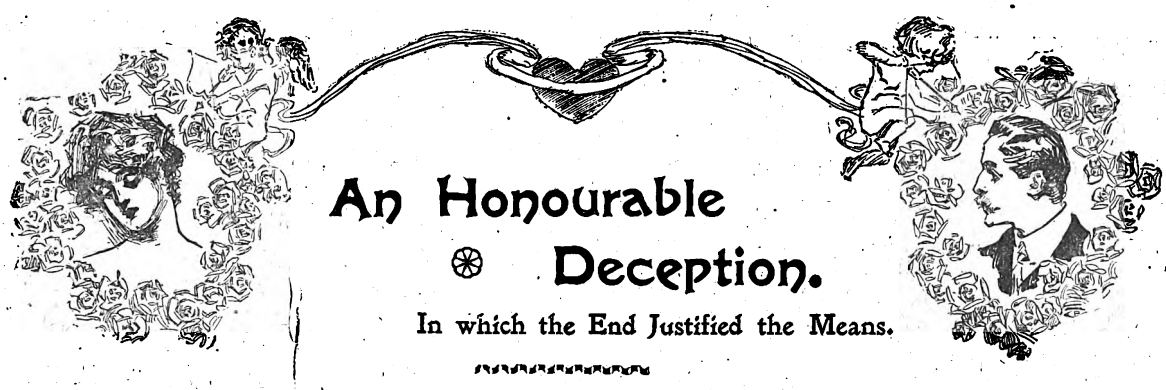

An Honourable Deception.

In which the End Justified the Means.

BERTIE LORRISTON sat before a blazing fire in a little spare sitting-room of his father's house which he and his brother Jack had for years used as a smoking-room and general place of retirement. He threw down the magazine he had been reading and tossed the stump of his cigar into the fire. An impatient sigh escaped his lips as he rose to his feet and looked towards the little gilt clock on the mantelpiece.

"I suppose I ought to go," he said in evident vexation. "I wish to goodness I hadn't made such a fool of myself! But it's done now, and, without a reasonable excuse for breaking it off, I can't see any way out of the difficulty. It's hard on Beryl, but I can't help it."

He paused for a moment to light a fresh cigar, and then added:

"If it had only been little Doris Cavill now!"

He glanced uneasily about the room as if fearing to be overheard. But he was alone, and could give his thoughts utterance.

"By all that's human," he went on savagely, "I can't—I won't do it! I know I ought never to have let Beryl's bewitching little face carry me off my feet. But it did, and now I'm in for it. Of course, the merest hint from me would suffice to break off the engagement, for Beryl has some spirit, but that would probably injure my chances with Doris. And I must shake off the one without losing my hold on the other. No, I must seek some other way."

He began to pace the room to and fro, turning over in his mind various plans which might lead to the attainment of this end. He was a handsome fellow, not more than seven-and-twenty, with clear skin and soft curly hair. But there was an air of irresolution about the handsome face that seemed to indicate a lack of ballast in his constitution. Gay, *debonair*, fascinating to a degree, it was small wonder that Bertie Lorriston was a particular favourite with the fair sex, or that he had captivated the heart of sweet Beryl Carrington.

His nature, too, was romantic, and, lacking that stability which might otherwise have saved him as well as others from later grief and humiliation, he allowed this unhappy predilection to lead him whithersoever it would.

And so it came to pass that, one night not three months before, he had "let himself drift," as he himself expressed it, and proposed to Beryl Carrington. How ardently he wished now that she had refused him! But the shy, sweet girl had long loved him in her secret heart, and she had run to him with a glad cry that could not be mistaken. It was but a passing infatuation, repented of almost before the morrow, and he would have given worlds to have undone the bonds which he himself had bound about his own neck. But his policy of "drift" was even here apparent, for he kept to the engagement, living in a temporary paradise that was, he well knew, anything but eternal.

And then he had met Doris Cavill, and, so far as he was capable of love in the truest sense of the word, he had given it to her without reserve. But he dared not tell her so, for she knew of his engagement to Beryl. And yet he felt sure that, were he free, Doris Cavill would favour his suit and smile upon his addresses.

He was not altogether bad—this Bertie Lorriston. He wanted to be straight, but he was weak and vacillating, and allowed the impulse of a moment to carry him away. And he loved Doris Cavill with all the ardour and passion that were characteristic of him, till that love made him callous of the pain and humiliation he gave to others.

A quick step sounded outside, and Jack Lorriston came into the room. He was two years younger than his brother Bert, but there was a striking likeness between them. Nor did the similarity end with their personal appearance, for, when Jack spoke, his voice would have caused a stranger to start, so great was the resemblance. Anyone could have told them apart who looked at them, but no one could have distinguished them by the pitch and intonation of their voices.

Jack was a shade less tall than his handsome brother, while his features were not so regular. But there was a frank, honest light in his clear blue eyes that marked him as a man to be trusted. He had always been called Jack, though that was his second name. His brother had been christened Herbert, and, from very infancy, he had been called Bertie. And when Mrs. Lorriston gave birth to a second son, he was christened Bertram John, after an uncle of his father's. But, as two Berties in one family would have led to much confusion, Mr. Lorriston had dubbed him Jack from the outset, and Jack had stuck to him ever since. He was not such a ladies' man as his brother Bertie, for he had strong views on the subject of "making a fool of a woman," stimulated, perhaps, by his brother's weakness in that direction. And he knew—ah, how bitterly!—the power and passion of a vigorous love.

To-night he was unusually agitated. Excitement—though partially suppressed—characterised his step and manner. Bertie looked up in some surprise as he entered. But Jack offered no explanation. Throwing a letter upon the table before his brother, he sat down in a chair facing Bertie and scanned his face as he opened and read the missive. Slowly the elder man read it through to the end, and then glanced across at his brother.

"Are you acquainted with the—er—contents of this note?" he asked in a strangely quiet voice. "I mean—do you know what it conveys?"

"Yes," said Jack shortly. "I met Miss Jocelyn this evening, and she told me the news."

There was a silence for a full minute, during which Jack scanned the face of his brother with growing resentment.

"What are you going to do?" he asked at last, and his tone was almost peremptory.

Bertie raised his eyebrows and looked across at his brother.

"Really," he said, "there is only one thing a fellow can do."

But he did not explain, and Jack waited in vain for him to proceed. There was plenty to read in Bertie's handsome face. Sympathy, sorrow, relief, hope, shame, triumph—all had their place for a brief moment on that dark countenance, and Jack, looking on, felt his resentment grow to anger.

"Well," he said at last, "and what may that be?"

Bertie looked at him in affected surprise

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"My dear fellow," he said, "you would not have me marry a—a blind woman! The position has become impossible, and, much as I regret and deplore the sad news this letter has conveyed to me, there is but one course open to me. I must put aside all further thought of making Miss Beryl Carrington my wife."

With a fierce cry of uncontrollable anger, Jack Lorriston sprang to his feet. Indignation was ablaze in his honest blue eyes and he flashed a look of ineffable contempt at his astonished brother.

"You—you cad!" he said in a fierce subdued whisper. "Are you dead to all nobility of feeling and impulse? Is your vaunted love so fleeting that it vanishes at the touch of sorrow? Love—true love—should leap into greater and more vigorous life when its object lies writhing under so terrible a blow as this! But yours—puny, selfish, empty—the love of a self-accused hypocrite—shrivels into rottenness at the first breath of dark affliction and lies stark and cold in the whited sepulchre to which you callously consign it!

"Why did you ever meddle with her heart? If you hold love so lightly, why exercise your power till you fill a woman's true heart with lifelong bitterness? And she has written to you—written out of the great, deep love she feels for you—for I know but too well of what this noble girl is capable—and now she waits for your coming—with her poor blind eyes turned beseechingly, wistfully, trustingly, towards the door by which you will never enter. And I—I have to call you brother!"

Bertie Lorriston's eyebrows were lifted even a little higher as he regarded his indignant brother. He did not appear in the least offended, though a flush of momentary shame, which he instantly smothered, had crossed his handsome face.

"My good fellow," he said, "you really ought to have been an actor. Really, you are simply splendid. Why, don't you go in for amateur theatricals? But, seriously, my dear boy, one would almost think you—er—were in love with the lady yourself."

A great wave of colour swept over Jack Lorriston's face and he trembled visibly as he heard the implied taunt.

"That is my affair," he said haughtily. And, without another word, he left the room, slamming the door behind him.

For two or three minutes Bertie gazed at the door by which he had gone out.

"Lucky I kept my temper," he said at last. "But, by Jove, I never suspected *that!* It's horrible for Beryl, but—but it means freedom for me—freedom and—Doris!"

He took up the letter once more and re-read it. It was a tearful little note, and any man's heart but Bertie Lorriston's would have been touched to the depths.

Beryl Carrington had buried her mother two months before—soon after her engagement to Bertie Lorriston—and the loss had left her almost broken-hearted. Grief plays terrible havoc with that marvellous and intricate piece of mechanism we call the body, and no consequence is perhaps half so awful as the sudden shattering of the delicate network of nerves that form the eye and the great impenetrable darkness that drops for ever upon the grief-stricken sufferer.

And this is what had befallen Beryl Carrington. Almost in an hour, the light had faded from her eyes and the pall of blindness had settled upon her young life. The letter intimated that she intended travelling to London, there to reside with an aunt, whom she knew would take care of her in her darkness.

And she wanted to see Bertie before she went.

"Can't do it," he said with a shrug of his shoulders. "I'm awfully sorry for the poor little thing, but the scene would be much too harrowing. I'd better write her a note."

He drew his chair to the table, and, taking a sheet of paper from a portfolio, wrote to the woman he had professed to love.

There were many expressions of sympathy and regret at the terrible affliction that had fallen upon her, but he said he could not, much as he desired to do so, call upon her that evening. And, as she left by the early morning train, he must give up all hope of seeing her before she went. He did not say it in so many words, but the letter was couched in terms which left an impression that the engagement would now have to be broken off.

This letter he dispatched to the sorrow-stricken girl, even leaving the reading of it to an outsider, since she would be unable to do so for herself, and thus adding to the humiliation it brought her.

The next day was Sunday, and among the congregation in the little country church were Bertie and Jack Lorriston. Jack marvelled how his brother could have come into that holy place. Poor little Beryl had gone away to London by the early morning train, and Jack's heart ached for her. Thank God he had spared her one bitter humiliation, but of this his brother did not as yet know. The service began, but Jack's thoughts were elsewhere, and, try as he might, he could not keep his attention from wandering. Suddenly, however, he grew interested. His head bent forward and a look of keen attention came into his face. It was during the reading of the first lesson, and the story was of Isaac, stricken in his old age with blindness, blessing his son Jacob instead of Esau his firstborn. "Thy voice is the voice of Jacob!" were the words that reached him, and Jack felt his breath come quick as a new and wonderful idea flashed into his mind. From that time forward he was wholly dead to the service in the little church. The theme of that first lesson whirled through his brain, and he began mechanically, though with inward excitement, to revolve the situation in his mind. The pronouncing of the benediction roused him from his meditations, and he went rapidly home.

As soon as he reached it, he went to the little private sitting-room and awaited his brother.

Five minutes later he came in and sat himself down in his favourite easy-chair.

Jack looked at him. Then he went to the door, closed it, and returned to his brother.

"Bertie," he said, with a note of constraint in his voice, "I am going to make a confession. But I want one from you first. After that, I shall make a suggestion. Tell me, honestly and straightforwardly, am I right in suspecting that you welcome this termination of your engagement because of your—er—love for another woman?" He could hardly use the term. It seemed like sacrilege to apply so holy a word to his callous-hearted brother. But it behoved him to bridle his tongue.

Bertie hesitated.

"Well," he said at last, "since you ask, my dear fellow, I am free to confess that you are right."

"Thanks," responded Jack, relieved to find that his suspicions had not been unfounded. "Now I will answer the question you put to me last night. I do love Beryl Carrington. I have loved her for more than a year, and was just on the eve of proposing to her when you stepped in between us and ruined my chances."

Bertie looked up quickly.

"Awfully sorry, old chap!" he said languidly. But there was a look of sympathy in his eyes which counteracted the tone.

Jack, however, appeared to notice neither. His face was pregnant with purpose, and Bertie looked at him, fascinated.

"Now for my suggestion," went on Jack rapidly. "Did the reading of the first lesson this morning appear to you in any way significant? Did you observe any parallel between that old-time story and the present position in which we—you and I, Bertie Lorriston—find ourselves placed?"

A look of bewilderment came into Bertie's handsome face.

"Don't see your drift," he said slowly. "Something about old Isaac blessing the wrong son, wasn't it?"

Jack nodded.

"Look here," he said, drawing nearer his brother, "I can see a way out of this difficulty which will make no earthly difference to you, and will give me what I have so long desired. Indeed, it may even help you, too."

Bertie shook his head.

"Still in the dark," he said. "For Heaven's sake, old fellow, be more explicit!"

Jack drew his seat to the table and faced his brother.

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"I will," he said. "Now listen to my suggestion. You want nothing further to do with Beryl Carrington. I do. Suppose, then, I travel up to London, see her, and call myself, not Jack, but Bertie Lorriston. No one can tell us apart by the sound of our voices—not even she. And—and she cannot see our faces. The aunt to whom she has gone has never set eyes on either of us, and I feel sure Beryl will not discover the—the deception. And you—you will be free to follow your own inclinations."

For some minutes there was silence in the little room.

Bertie Lorriston's face was a study to look upon. He chafed at the thought of his brother making love to the woman whose kisses had been wholly his—and in his name too. But the possibility of greater freedom was not without its attraction. Besides, the plan would relieve his conscience. His conscience didn't matter very much, but it was just as well to humour it when he lost nothing by doing so. But he foresaw one or two obstacles to the plan, and communicated them to his brother.

"What about the wedding-day?" he asked drily.

Jack smiled.

"You forget," he replied quickly. "Miss Carrington knows you, as does everyone else, by the name of Bertie Lorriston, and she knows me as Jack. I should, however, be married in my rightful name of Bertram, and she would naturally identify Bertram with the Bertie she had always known."

Bertie smiled.

"By Jove!" he said, "you're right, old fellow! I never thought of that. Fate seems to be helping you at last."

Jack's face flushed, but he made no reply.

"But do you think you could deceive Beryl?" Bertie went on. He did not relish the thought that he could be so easily superseded.

"I think so," Jack answered coldly. "The regard I have for her would help me more than you think."

Again Bertie was silent. Presently he said:

"There's one other obstacle which I must let you know. Last night I wrote her a letter. I did not say so outright, but I hinted that the engagement would now have to be broken off. I'm afraid your reception won't be a pleasant one."

Jack smiled, and, drawing a still unopened letter from his pocket, tossed it on the table.

"Fortunately," he said, "my indignation of last night made me so far considerate of Miss Carrington's feelings that I intercepted that letter. I guessed well enough what it contained, and would have torn it into fragments had I not realised in time that my brother might have suspected me of reading its contents before doing so. So I kept it intact, and it is fortunate I did so."

Bertie's list of objections was now exhausted, and, truth to tell, he was not wholly free from a feeling of relief that Jack had swept them away so effectually.

"All right," he said. "But you must keep her in London, or the truth will leak out."

Jack nodded.

"I'll see to that," he said quietly. And, with a stiff little nod to his brother, he left the room.

The afternoon train conveyed him to London, and a little after six o'clock he was ushered into the room where Beryl Carrington was sitting, her unseeing eyes turned towards him as he entered. Beryl's aunt, with a feeling of delicacy, closed the door softly on the two, and went, with a glad light in her kind, motherly eyes, to picture in the solitary state of the empty drawing-room the meeting between the two lovers.

Jack went swiftly forward and knelt down by Beryl's side.

"Darling," he said, while his voice shook with strong emotion, "I am sorry I could not come to you yesterday. But I have come now, dear."

He took her little hands in his and kissed them. There was no suspicion in the face that turned towards him. With a glad cry she put her arms about his neck and began to cry softly to herself, the tears falling upon Jack's crisp curls.

"Don't," he pleaded, drawing the tear-stained face down to his and kissing it tenderly. "You must not cry any more, darling. I am here to protect you, to care for you, and, if you will let me, to make a home for you."

A little glad sob rose in Beryl's throat.

"Oh," she said, "I can't let you, Bertie. You will not want a blind wife like me. You will grow tired of me. It is very noble of you to offer, dear, but I know it is only sympathy and pity which prompt you to do so. I must let you go, darling—I must, I must—and yet, I love you so—so dearly!"

She clung to him, and he soothed her again.

"Beryl," he said, and his words carried conviction to the girl beside him, "it is true I feel for you a sympathy I cannot express. But that is the least of all my present emotions. I love you, my sweet, with all the strength of a man's true heart. And life apart from you will not be life to me. I must have you, or my happiness will end from this day forth. And that which has befallen you only knits us together more closely in the bond of love."

Beryl clung to him as he spoke, and there were tears of joy shining in the sightless eyes that touched him to the heart.

So the days went by, and, at the end of two months, Beryl Carrington yielded to the pleadings of her lover and was quietly married to him in London.

She had loved Bertie Lorriston with all the idolatry of a romantic girl. Little things had jarred upon her sensitiveness, but love had excused them all. But since that great darkness had fallen upon her, he seemed to have changed. Before, he had been inclined to selfishness. Now his thoughts were only of her. It was the same dear, loved voice, but of late it had comforted her far more than ever it had done in the old days.

Then it had been she whose love seemed the greatest, the noblest, the truest. But now that love was met by another, as strong and deep and tender as her own, and she was learning to lean on this strong, self-reliant husband with a trustfulness that was touching to see. Strong? Yes, he was so strong. And yet he was as gentle as a child in his tender devotion to her, and the love in her heart grew day by day till its intensity swallowed up every other thought. And so the days grew into weeks and the weeks into months, till a year had gone over their heads since that well-remembered day when they had stood together by the altar-rails and voiced their vows to God. And then an unforeseen event occurred which for a time filled Jack's stout heart with dark foreboding.

Beryl had been persuaded by her aunt to seek fresh advice for her eyes, and Jack, not daring to raise any objection to the plan, had accompanied her to a rising specialist. A long and tedious examination resulted in the startling affirmation that there was reason to believe a cure might be effected. Beryl's heart bounded as she heard the glad news, but that of Jack sank with dread misgiving. But he said nothing, leaving it to Destiny to shape his fate as it listed. A month of dreary lying on her bed, with her eyes tightly bandaged and the room darkened, and one day the bandage was removed and Beryl could see.

When all was quiet, Jack stole into the room and knelt by his wife's bedside. She looked into his face long and earnestly, and Jack trembled as he waited, daring not to speak. For a long time there was no sound, while Jack's heart beat fast with suppressed excitement. And then the soft white arms of his dear wife stole round his neck and she whispered his name—the old name—in his ear:

"Jack—my husband—my—my love!"

The truth had come home to her in a flash as she looked into his face.

W. J. Mowbray.

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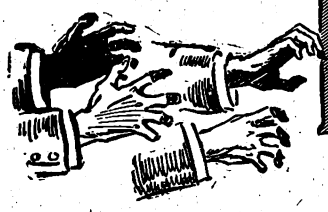
Fascinating Series.



THE PURSUIT OF SARA

The names of persons mentioned in this series are not necessarily the correct ones.

TO REFRESH YOUR MEMORY.

These are the principal characters in this series:

Sara Gillespie, the relater of these experiences. She takes some papers (which really belong to her lover, Sir Noel Masterman, and are of immense value) from her employers, Templeton and Co., and flees to Bedford. The firm follow her up, and using every means in their power to make Sara restore the papers, drive her to Northampton, Leicester, and Birmingham. She, however, successfully manages to elude capture.

Templeton and Co.—This is the firm of scoundrels who wish to do Noel Masterman so much harm. The partners are Templeton, Harrington Shackell, and Rigby Starr, all of them steeped in villainy.

Noel Masterman, who succeeded to the Baronetcy on the death of his cousin Herbert, who was foully murdered by Harrington Shackell. Sara heard the latter tell Templeton how he accomplished this act, but has no witnesses to prove it. Noel is in love with Sara, but is away on the Continent when she regains the fateful papers from Templeton and Co.; hence Sara has no one to help her.

Sidney Ilford.—An agent of the firm who tries to ensnare Sara.

Maggie Dunkley.—A young girl whose brother Sara rescues from death at Northampton. Sara confides in her, and is rendered great assistance.

Truscot Moran—Into whose hands Sara falls in Birmingham. He is an unscrupulous money-maker. In his house lives his niece, Lesbia, whom he is starving to death, so as to benefit by her insurance money. He forces Sara to pose as Lesbia in order to get the insurance policy signed, on the threat of exposing her to Templeton.

Arthur Merridew.—The lover of Lesbia, who conspires with Sara to help Lesbia to escape. This is successfully accomplished.

THE ACCIDENT AT NUNEATON.

PARALYSED with terror, I stood, waiting for the inevitable crash of the approaching car; even as I felt the breath of the engine hot in my face, even as the grinding jar of the wheels sent shock after shock along my nerves, I was seized tightly by the waist, thrown violently aside, and staggering, found myself, unhurt, once more upon the side of safety.

"A very near thing, Miss Gillespie," said a weak, quavering voice. "Another second and you would have been underneath the tram."

For a moment I did not realise what my preserver said, I did not even realise who he was, clinging to him instinctively as the one steady thing in a world that reeled about me in a mad whirl. An indistinct murmur of voices gradually swelling in volume to a roar, a sensation of icy coldness at my heart, and then—the mist cleared from my eyes, the earth was solid to my feet. I stood on the pavement in Corporation Street—Arthur Merridew at my side!

Even now the thought of my contemptuous regard for the youth brings an unpleasant twinge; I had looked on him as a weakling, a sentimental fool, with no capacity for daring, no courage, no foresight. I had patronised him and despised him, and now it was to him I owed my life. Something of what I felt, I tried to stammer out; Merridew cut me short.

"Don't say anything more, please," he said. "There isn't time for talk, much less thanks. We must get out of this as soon as possible. I doubt even now if we shall avoid that man"—he pointed to Templeton. "Ah!" as the senior partner hove in sight, "I was afraid of it. Look here, Miss Gillespie, you must let me take command of this affair, you must really; you don't know the man and have never heard of him, stick to that; I'll back you up and we shall pull through. Now then"—Merridew turned pugnaciously upon the head of the firm, "what do you mean by pushing against this lady? She's been nearly killed once already to-night. That's quite enough excitement for one evening, without your throwing her into the road."

The crowd, who had witnessed Merridew's brave act, cheered the speech with enthusiasm.

"Don't you dare to talk to me," went on my champion, "who are you to push women and children off the pavement! Call a policeman, will you? It will save me trouble if you do. I can give you into custody for obstructing the roadway."

For answer, Templeton firmly grasped my arm, and to the full extent of his powerful voice shouted "Police!" in a strident and determined fashion.

"Let go," cried Merridew, striking at the senior partner wildly. "Let go, I say," then, as Templeton, paying no attention to his lunges, still called for aid, still grasped me tightly, Merridew veered to another tack. "Help!" he screamed, "help! He's killing the girl. Murder! Help!"

The crowd, ready—as crowds ever are—to respond to a call of the kind, closed round us, and, pressing against Templeton, forced him, by the sheer weight of numbers, to release me. Waving his stick, Templeton still kept up his cry for the police, and to my consternation, I perceived the shining helmet of a man in blue, bearing down upon us.

By the time he arrived on the scene, however, Arthur and I had made good our escape. We dodged through the people, and, skirting the crowd, edged off up the left hand side of Old Square, and so into the maze of side turnings and narrow streets that lie at the back.

Once out of sight and sound of Templeton, we hailed a cab, and drove to Mrs. Merridew's, a small house in a turning off Moseley Road. Arthur informed me on the way that he and Lesbia had been so concerned for my safety, that he had started to go to the office in Colemore Row to find out if he

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could what had happened. He had, by great good fortune, crossed the Square in time to snatch me out of the way of the tram, and to prove that, sentiment notwithstanding, he was a man of courage and resource.

Lesbia was very pleased to see me and her gratitude for what I had done for her quite touched me. She looked very terrible, poor girl, and the doctor, whom Arthur had summoned to attend her, gave no great hopes of her recovery. He stated that she was suffering from blood-poisoning, that how she had contracted the complaint it was not easy to say. He listened to her account of Moran's treatment with evident incredulity, regarding her complaints as the fretful fancies of an invalid.

Lesbia, however, had guarded against such disbelief in a masterly fashion. She produced a parcel of food, some bread and meat, and a portion of rice pudding. The doctor tasted the latter, looked suddenly grave, and suggested that he should subject the remainder to an analysis.

Lesbia consented, and saw the departure of the medico and the pudding with feelings of elation.

"He will be found guilty," she cried, "and if I die, he will be hanged."

"You shall not die, my dearest," cried her lover, "you will get well and strong for my sake. Lesbia, you shall not die." He clasped her in his arms and kissed her tenderly.

Meantime Mrs. Merridew, with great good sense, prepared a meal, to which Arthur and I sat down together. It was late, past ten o'clock, and I was once more racking my brain as to how I should discover Noel's whereabouts, when there came a loud ring at the bell.

"That's Moran," said Arthur. "He's come for Lesbia."

"You won't give her up?" I cried excitedly.

"No," he said slowly, "I shall never give her up"—and he advanced to admit the enemy.

Startled out of his usual calm, impassive self, Truscot faced us, indignation struggling with fear.

"You have abducted my niece," he cried, "you, and that red-haired minx. You may not know that it is an offence punishable by law, and that the term of imprisonment for such an offence is a long one. In consideration of the fact that you are both young, however, and acted possibly more from folly than wickedness, I am prepared to forego prosecution—on one condition—that you take me to my niece, offer no opposition to my removing her from here at once, refuse——" he paused dramatically—"and I shall apply for a warrant for your arrest."

"I fancy you'll find yourself a bit late, Mr. Moran," said Arthur, "long before I'm in custody, you'll find yourself on trial for the attempted murder—please God it will stop at attempted—of Lesbia, your niece. Oh, don't think you can bluff me," as Truscot sprang towards him, virtuous indignation shining in his eyes, "you can protest from now until to-morrow morning, it won't make a bit of difference; facts are facts, and not all the protestations in the world can explain the poison out of a rice pudding. We've got it here," he motioned to the cupboard, "or rather we had it. 'Tis under the care of the doctor now, the man who analysed it."

"Rubbish," snarled Truscot, snapping his fingers. "The mere idle ravings of an hysterical girl are not *proofs!* and if my cook uses some new-fangled essence in a pudding am I to be held responsible? You talk nonsense, impudent, libellous nonsense certainly, but as for anyone paying attention to such a farrago of absurdities—the notion is absurd!"

"Besides the pudding, there was bread and meat," said Arthur calmly. "I don't think the Insurance Company will regard the analysis as nonsense. However," he smiled at me, "I shall be in a better position to give you their opinion to-morrow, when Miss Gillespie has made her statement!"

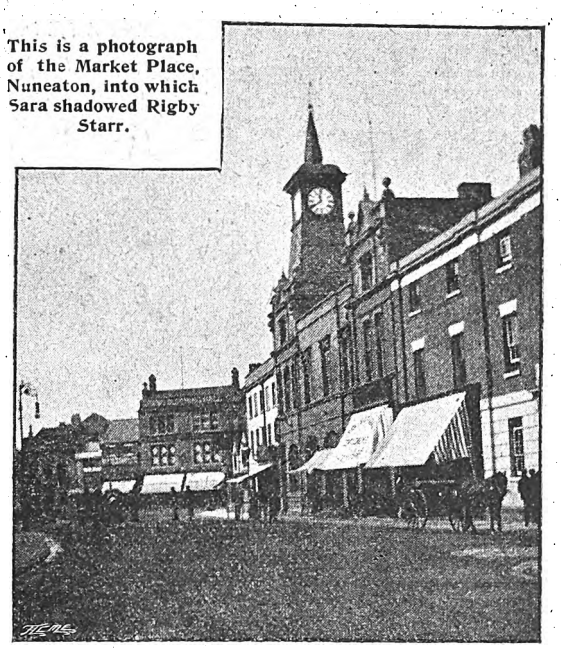
"If you confess to the fraud," he turned to me, "you implicate yourself. I don't fancy your philanthropy will carry you as far as going to prison, eh, Miss Gillespie; I shall be punished for my share in the conspiracy certainly, but don't suppose you'll get off scot free."

"I am prepared to run the risk," I answered doggedly. "To-morrow I shall go with Mr. Merridew to the insurance office and tell them the history of the whole affair. My statement, supported by Lesbia's story and the analysis of her food, will be strong enough to place you in a very awkward fix, I hope you will be sent to prison; at any rate, you will be disgraced."

"And you," he turned to me abruptly, "what will you gain by this? Come, Miss Gillespie, you're too sharp a business woman not to take advantage of your opportunities. Suppose you go to the insurance people, it would profit you nothing and inconvenience me a little—though by no means to the extent you suppose. Can't we come to an arrangement? If you withhold certain information, I might feel inclined to part with some. For instance——"

"Tell me where Noel is, and I'll keep silence," I cried impetuously. "I want to punish you—yes; but I want my lover more. Where is he?"

"One moment," interrupted Arthur; "how will you prove the accuracy of Mr. Moran's information? You may give



This is a photograph of the Market Place, Nuneaton, into which Sara shadowed Rigby Starr.

your promise, lose your opportunity, and then discover you have been fooled; possibly find yourself in the hands of your enemies."

"Let him tell me where Noel is," I answered, "and I will start off for the place at once. If what he says is true—if I find my sweetheart—well and good; he is safe, so far as I am concerned. If not, I shall return to Birmingham and call at the insurance offices to-morrow morning."

"You need not be afraid," said Truscot; "here," he took out a sheet of notepaper, "is the address, written in Templeton's own writing. You will see that it is a letter of instructions from the head of the firm to Rigby Starr, and it refers to Noel Masterman."

He held the letter near enough for me to recognise the writing, and to identify the paper as belonging to the firm.

"Give it to me," I urged. "I'll promise anything; give it to me," and with trembling hands I tried to snatch it from him.

"One minute, if you please. There are other matters to be considered first. It is not sufficient for you alone to promise; I must have an undertaking from my niece and Mr. Merridew that they will refrain from statements likely to damage my reputation; or, better still, a letter signed by them, stating their belief in my affection and good feeling."

"That," said Arthur steadily, "you shall never have. I

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am prepared, for Miss Gillespie's sake, to refrain from any action against you for the present, and Lesbia, at my request, will do the same. But," the young man's face grew stern, "farther than that I will not go. Sooner or later you will have to answer for your crime."

I looked at him with all the pleading my face could express. He glanced back at me, sympathy, kindness even in his eyes, but of yielding not a jot. The weak-minded, dreamy young man I had known had disappeared; the Arthur Merridew who stood before me was of very different stuff.

"Lesbia must come before all things," he said gravely. "If it was myself that was concerned, I would do as you ask. But for her sake I must refuse."

"Well," said Moran calmly, "what do you mean by the present?"

"A week, no longer, Mr. Moran. At the end of that time I shall follow up the proceedings against you to-day. For a week, however, I will do nothing, providing the information you give Miss Gillespie proves correct."

"Providing also," I interrupted, "that I do not fall into Templeton's hands. You will have to keep the senior partner under watch, and—Mr. Moran. If I am taken the contract falls to the ground."

"Very well," he said lightly, a strange smile twitching at his lips, "I accept your terms; a week's time from now if my information proves correct. Here is the letter," he threw the document towards me, "now give me your word to keep silence for a week."

There was something sinister in the fashion in which he spoke the words. I had it in my heart to warn Merridew not to accept—to let me fight my battle single-handed, and help himself and Lesbia out of the compact. I knew instinctively that mischief would ensue, mischief to Lesbia and her lover—her poor young lover, whose brave heart was their only weapon of defence. And yet how could I warn him, when the price of such warning was the knowledge of my lover's whereabouts? Sorry I was for them both; but for love's sake, for Noel's sake, I was ready to sacrifice them and the whole world too.

Tuttle Hill Quarry, where Sara experienced such a thrilling adventure. It was near here that the house in which Sara expected to find Noel was situated.

Arthur gave his promise, and a few minutes later Moran left the house, a light-hearted message to Lesbia on his lips.

"I'll throw the senior partner off the scent, my dear," he said to me familiarly. "You're safe for a week. By-the-bye," he patted me on the shoulder, "here's your salary; I've paid you for a week. You've done more in three days than most clerks in six." I took the money, and said nothing. Truly Truscot Moran was a remarkable man.

He smiled in his usual charming fashion, and his serenity fully restored, departed.

No sooner had the front door closed behind him than I hastily seized on Templeton's letter. It was an artfully-worded document; couched in business phraseology, the instructions apparently referred to consignments of goods awaiting Starr's attention. The particular consignment that aroused my interest was expected at Nuneaton. A Mr. Masterman, wrote the senior partner, would arrive at that town by the down train due at ten minutes past twelve midnight, on Friday of that week. Eagerly I turned the letter over and observed the date. It had been written on the previous Monday, it was therefore to-night—*to-night* that Noel was coming to Nuneaton.

"A time-table, quick!" I called to Arthur. "I must start immediately."

A quick scrutiny revealed the fact that there was a train leaving Birmingham at eleven thirty-five, which would reach Nuneaton at twelve three, just seven minutes before Noel. It wanted but a few minutes to eleven; there was no time to lose. Leaving Arthur to pack up some sandwiches for my refreshment, I rushed upstairs to say good-bye to Lesbia.

She clung to me despairingly, and begged me not to leave her longer than a day without a letter.

"Let me know where you are," she pleaded; "promise to let me know."

I said a few words of comfort to her, telling her not to worry, and bade her farewell.

Arthur was ready to take me to the station when I came down, Mrs. Merridew embraced me in a motherly fashion, and hoped that I should soon return. The poor lady did not in the least understand why all these things were happening in her house, nor, to do her justice, did she try to find out. Blessed is the woman who does not ask for tiresome explanations.

The train was some two or three minutes late, and anxiety lest I should miss Noel possessed me as I entered the carriage. It seemed a long journey. Imagination outstripping the engine, pictured my lover at the station, pictured myself just too late!

I craned my head through the window, studying eagerly the country side. In the darkness the hedges took strange shapes; the distant hills, wooded with thickly-growing trees, frowned darkly at me; the signal posts along the line pointed a spectral finger, a warning it seemed to me, of coming ill.

We reached the sleepy station of Nuneaton some few minutes late. I had barely time to cross the line to take up a position on the platform, where I could scan the passengers without being seen, when the twelve-ten steamed in.

Three men alighted—Shackell, Rigby Starr, and a tall, heavily-bearded man, a stranger to me. No one else got out of the train. Noel, apparently, had not arrived! I moved into the doorway of the waiting-room, well out of their line of vision, and thought out the situation. There was a hitch somewhere; Rigby Starr had been instructed to meet the twelve ten—there was no suggestion that he would be travelling in the train. I drew out Templeton's letter, and gazed hard at the date; to all appearances it had not been tampered with. Moran had not, as I was at first inclined to think, palmed off a forgery upon me. The senior partner had evidently changed his plans, and wired a fresh set of instructions.

Meanwhile where was Noel? The disappointment brought the tears to my eyes, and made me clench my hands, raging against my impotence. There was but one thing to be done—

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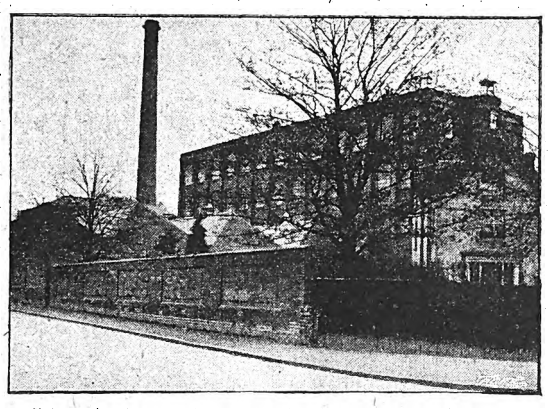


A silk factory in Nuneaton. It was at the gate of one of these factories that Sara encountered Sidney Ilford, and in consequence experienced—

I must follow the three men, Shackell, Rigby, and the stranger, and discover their destination.

My purpose was foiled, however; the two partners, arm in arm with the stranger, a dull-eyed man, whose heavy beard obscured his face, walked together from the station. Immediately outside Shackell hailed a shabby-looking carriage, in which the bearded man took his seat. Shackell stepped in after him, but Rigby Starr remained at the road side. For a moment I hesitated. Should I charter another conveyance and follow Shackell, or remain and keep Rigby well in sight? I decided on the latter course, and watched the carriage out of sight, waiting till Rigby chose to move.

It was a damp, unpleasant evening, the air was misty, the roads muddy, but undeterred, Rigby stepped out at a swinging pace, while I, at a discreet distance, followed, my heart quaking for fear I should be heard up Abbey Street—surely the longest street ever built—through a narrow turning into the Market Place, and then into the Bull Inn. Starr had evidently engaged a room, for his summons at the door was speedily attended to, and he was ushered through the portals with a hearty greeting.

A few minutes afterwards the door opened again, and a man, evidently employed in the establishment, passed into the street.

I crossed the road and met him at the corner.

"Can you tell me of a hotel?" I asked. "I've missed my train at the station, and find I shall have to stay here all night."

He stopped and looked at me with curiosity.

"The Bull is for commercials," he said slowly, "we don't take ladies there, you'll have to go to the Temperance place, they'll let you have a room. It stands at the top of Abbey Street, round the corner there, you can't miss it."

"Thank you," said I, and then, "I saw that gentleman go in to the Bull just now, is he stopping there?"

"For the night," he answered. Then, "Do you know him?"

"I think so, but I'm not quite sure. I only just caught a glimpse of his face. I should know if he is the man I think directly I saw him in the daylight."

"It's awkward like to speak to a stranger," said the lad.

"Very," I returned with feeling, "and yet if he is the gentleman I mean, he will be very disappointed not to meet me."

"I can take a message," was the answer.

"Oh, I sha'n't trouble so much as that. You might find out when he's leaving Nuneaton, and by what train; if you like to let me know, I'll pay you for your trouble."

By this time we had reached the Temperance Hotel; pealing the bell I waited for admittance. At last a footstep sounded in the hall. I turned to the lad from the Bull and slipped a shilling in his hand.

"Call here for me to-morrow about ten, and I'll give you as much again."

He pocketed the money gleefully, assured me he would find out what I wished to know, and went on his way rejoicing.

I stopped the night at the hotel, and, worn out with fatigue, slept soundly. Punctually at ten, my companion of the previous evening put in an appearance.

Rigby Starr, he said, was stopping at Nuneaton for a day or two. He had given orders for a trap at three that afternoon, and my friend, it seemed, was to drive him.

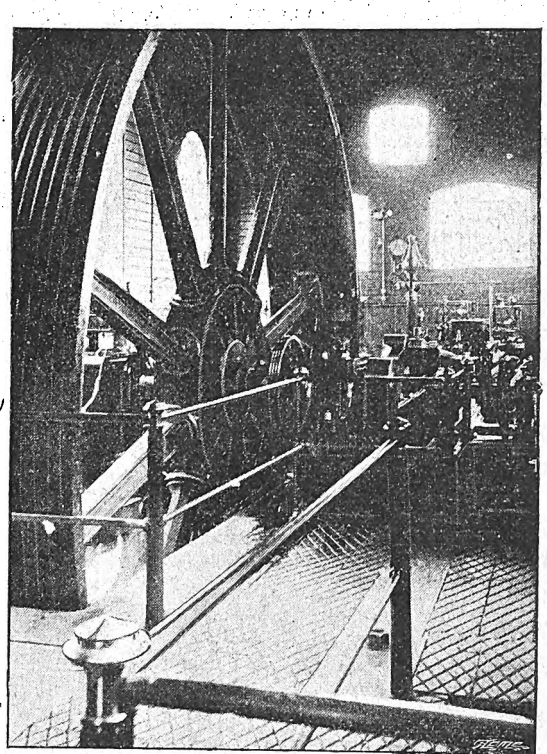
"We're going up Tuttle Hill," he said, "past the quarries. We shall be out the best part of three hours."

I rewarded my informant, and set out to study the geography of Tuttle Hill.

A long, straggling place, built without plan or sequence, Nuneaton is a depressing spot. It boasts no parks or open spaces, the small inclosure commonly called the Recreation Grounds being a sandy waste, in which islets of grass and hungry-looking shrubs form the "Grounds," and a few swings and see-saws the "Recreation." All day long its inhabitants toil in the neighbouring quarries, coal mines, and factories, returning after their day's labour to a tiny house in a cheerless street, empty of life, devoid of colour. All the dreary monotony of town existence, with none of its stir, all the sleepiness of village life, without its peaceful setting. An hour's walk from the green country, Nuneaton reminds me of those desolate suburbs that spring up almost in a night upon the fringe of London.

Slowly and by degrees, having regard to the yet weak condition of my ankle, I made my way through the town to Tuttle Hill, a long ascent at the extreme outskirts of Nuneaton.

Some distance up the hill I was attracted by a notice, setting forth that anyone who trespassed on the quarry and the grounds adjoining, would be prosecuted—fatigue and the inclination for forbidden things, inherent in human



—the perilous adventure by the great wheel. Our photograph shows a specimen of one of these huge machines, and the great danger that Sara was in can easily be imagined.

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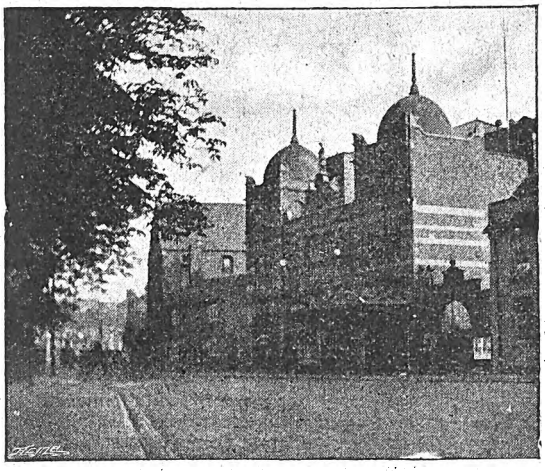


Nuneaton Theatre. It was outside this pretty place of amusement that Sara first had her attention drawn to the detective who was following her.

nature, induced me to scramble over the fence and make my way to the quarry's brink. A lonely, deserted spot, with not a workman in sight, it gave one a strange impression of desolation. Scarred by the many hands that had hewn huge blocks of granite from its side, the quarry yawned like an open grave beneath one's feet.

I stooped to look over the brink; then with a shudder drew back, dizzy at sight of the depths below.

Resting against a boulder at a safe distance from the edge, I fixed my eyes upon the road.

Some half hour later I heard the sound of a horse's hoofs galloping up the hill. It was no cart that hastened towards me, the pace was all too quick. I started to my feet and drew near to the fence that marked off the inclosure from the road—ready, if needs be, to conceal myself behind a clump of elder bushes. A trap stopped suddenly, the driver, my friend, the shabby lad, hailed me in cheery tones:

"Mr. Starr's got down yonder," he pointed over his shoulder. "He's taken a short cut to the house over there," and he motioned again to the other side of the quarry, where, on the brow of the hill, a square stone building was visible.

"You won't overtake him on the road, miss," said the boy. "If you want to catch him you'd best take the path by the quarry; you'll get there as quick as he will that way."

I nodded my thanks, and having ascertained that the lad was not to await Rigby's return retraced my steps. The path he spoke of skirted the edge of the great pit; on the one side yawned the quarry; on the other, steep banks perpendicular as a wall hedged it in. A false step might send me hurling into the gulf.

And yet it was essential I should reach the house upon the hill before Rigby arrived. In that bleak place, strong as a prison, silent and remote, something told me I should find Noel. I would clamour at the door, beat at the window till they let me in—into my lover, and he and I would surely find our way to liberty. If not, if at the worst, they kept us prisoners, it could not be for ever, and—we should be together!

I set my eyes upon the square house upon the hill, far, far above those shuddering depths; slowly, painfully, and with infinite care, I picked my way along the track.

Half the distance was traversed, when down the hill side, from the direction of the house, a man, running quickly, came into view. He glanced back, every now and then, over his shoulder, as if fearing pursuit. As he came nearer I recognised in him the dark-bearded stranger I had seen the previous night at the station.

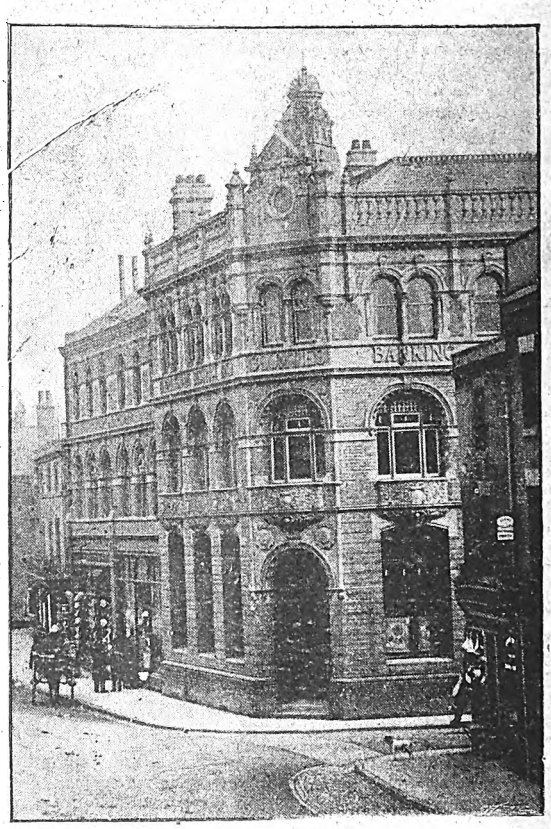
He appeared to be making for the quarry, and to my astonishment and fear—the descent was terribly precipitous—proceeded to clamber over the edge, hanging on to roots of shrubs and jutting stones, clinging ant-like to the face of the cliff.

Just as he touched the bottom, I caught sight of a figure moving amongst the boulders that strewed the ground, trying it seemed to hide from the new-comer.

The bearded man evidently shared my opinion, for, with a cry of rage, he rushed towards the other, bearing him to the ground.

In a second my mind leapt to a colourable explanation of what was taking place. Noel, by some happy chance, had escaped from the house on the hill, and was making his way through the quarry as a short cut to the road. The bearded man had discovered his absence and had given chase. In a short time Shackell would find it out also, and joined by Starr, would come to the rescue. At that very moment Shackell's big figure hurried down the hill. The two combatants were rolling over and over on the ground, Noel, or the man I thought was Noel, showed plenty of fight, and though smaller than the other, seemed able to give his adversary plenty of trouble. At last the bearded man clenched the situation by a savage blow that knocked the man flat upon his back. For a moment I was tempted to rush down the incline to his assistance; the next a more effective means of disabling his adversary suggested itself. I began to throw down pieces of stone hoping to distract the bearded man's attention. He glanced up as the pieces fell at his feet, and strained to see from where they came.

Encouraged by my success I launched a fusillade of stones, that had the effect of driving the bearded man still farther



The imposing-looking bank at Nuneaton to which Sara intended to go to endeavour to change two of the notes for gold, in order to pay Sidney Ilford.

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back from the prostrate figure of his enemy. One of these stones, larger than the rest, in its path down the quarry side, cannoned against a small granite boulder, which, thus set free, loosed in its rush a yet larger piece of rock. This last, with great velocity, rolled like a cannon-ball, jumping from ridge to ridge, from ledge to ledge, until it reached the bottom with an immense thud.

Immediately upon the thud, rose a piercing scream.

Someone was hurt, someone—I looked over the edge, a sickening fear at my heart. I had not meant to hurt the bearded man, and then I realised that it was the figure on the ground the stone had struck, the figure I had thought was Noel.

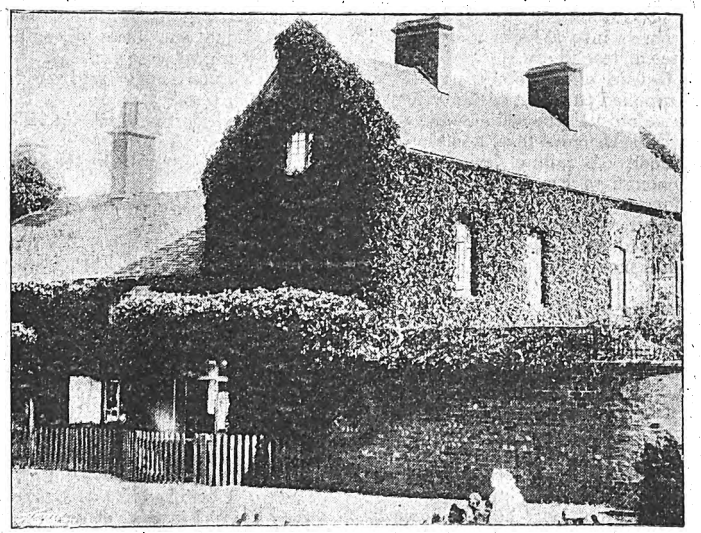
Again the shriek of agony came up to me, and then—silence. And in the warm sunshine I felt my heart turn chill, the blue of the sky turned to a sullen grey, the earth grew dark before me—I felt the bitterness of death!

I could not move, my limbs seemed turned to stone. I could not cry or call, but sat cold and motionless against the granite wall.

I did not faint, nor for a moment lose consciousness, but all apprehension of what was happening seemed to have left me.

I gazed at the scene below, and saw without understanding what took place.

Shackell, who by this time had reached the bottom of the quarry, advanced to the bearded man, who seemed inclined to extend hostilities in his direction. After some difficulty Shackell succeeded in convincing him of his friendly intentions, and induced him to take a longer but much safer path that led up the other side of the quarry. Neither of them so much as looked at that still white face upon the ground, neither put out a hand to help him. As the two disappeared from view, the possibility that after all the blow had not been fatal, after all my lover was stunned, not dead, came to me with a flash of hope. It seemed to bring fresh life to me, to put new strength into my limbs.



Griff House, the residence of the late George Eliot, where it was arranged that Sidney Ilford and Sara should meet.

I managed to make my way round the quarry's brink till I reached the path, by means of which Shackell and the other had ascended.

Soon, very soon, I reached the bottom of the quarry, and drew near to where he lay—the stone upon his breast.

With a great cry I knelt upon the ground, and lifting the stone away, I took his head upon my knees. Then, for my eyes were dim, bending down closer, I gazed into the face of *Rigby Starr!*

Not Noel! Not my beloved, but his enemy and mine lay in the dust. For the moment fierce joy of the discovery kept fear at bay—the fear that I had killed him. The next, fear had its way. I was a murderer; he was dead.

His heart, surely it had not ceased to beat? I grasped his wrist and felt for his pulse. I pressed my ear to his heart, and counted the faint, sobbing breaths.

He was not dead. Thank God—he was not dead! Then—and the question clutched at my heart, he being Starr, who was that other, who was the man that fought with him?

With shaking hands I loosened Rigby's collar, propping him up against the stone that all but ended his career. After a while he opened his eyes; but with reviving consciousness pain returned, and he moaned piteously. I placed him in an easier posture so that the pain abated. Then,

"Where is Noel Masterman?" I asked.

He did not know me, did not understand the full significance of the question.

"Over there," he motioned with his head towards the house on the hill.

"Why is he there?"

His lips twitched, suddenly a light of understanding gleamed in his eyes.

"Why is he there, you red-haired minx?" he gasped. "Why is Noel Masterman there? Because he's mad—stark, staring mad. We've drugged him until he's clean out of his mind; you'll never see him again; we've altered him completely, grown a beard for him, and, and——" his voice trailed off into a moan.

"Oh, heavens!" he cried, "the pain is horrible; can't you help me?"

"I can do nothing but fetch assistance. Shall I leave you?"

He nodded, white to the lips with the torture he endured. I needed no second bidding to quit the place and him. Mad! my sweetheart mad! It was a lie, a wicked, awful lie. And then the remembrance of his face, the dull look in his eyes, the strange, excited way in which he had behaved to Shackell, returned to me. I hurried along the road, pausing at the first cottage that I passed to ask for help for Rigby.

Shackell had already forestalled my request as it turned out, a party of workmen, I was informed, and a doctor, had already set out for the quarry.

My next step was to inquire the way to the house on the Hill. It was possible I might yet be in time to rescue Noel. Shackell having seen him home, would doubtless return to Rigby; it was possible that Noel was left in the custody of a stranger, who might be induced to let my sweetheart see me.

When I reached the house, however, it was empty! The front door was shut, but through a small door at the back I effected an entrance. The place was in confusion, and showed signs of a hasty departure. In one of the upstairs rooms some papers were smouldering in the grate; there were small fragments of a letter on the floor, and a portion of a telegram. I picked up the latter; there were the last syllables of two words, "ton" and "ster." The first I guessed was Templeton in its complete form, the second was more baffling. Probably the name of a place, perhaps their next destination. Was it Chester, Manchester, Worcester—a perplexing choice presented itself. I left the house, and turned towards the town, still undecided.

I resolved to make inquiries at the L.N.W. Railway Station; perhaps the fugitives could be traced from the ticket office. On the road to the station I passed various factories—straw plaiting, blanket weaving, shoe making, all bleak and forbidding places, from which the operatives issued like captives from a prison. The silk mills were more attractive,

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architecturally speaking. Instinctively I paused, glancing up at the tall chimneys and square front. The yard door was open, a knot of men were gossiping just inside. One of them, tall, slim, and good looking, moved towards me.

"Miss Gillespie," he said softly.

And with a gasp I answered:

"Sidney Ilford!"

"You need not be afraid," he said, with all the condescension of a coward. "I've no particular instructions in regard to you at this present moment."

"Where is Noel?" I asked. "Come, Mr. Ilford, don't pretend. Surely there's no need for that at this stage of our acquaintance. I want to know where your people have taken Noel! You want—don't protest—money for the information. I'll give you a hundred pounds for his address so soon as I've verified it."

"Come inside," he said, quietly; "we can't talk here." He glanced round with apprehension.

"I daresay you'd like to take a look round the works," he added, for the benefit of the bystanders. Then he moved towards a tall, spare man, evidently an official of the premises, and asked for permission to show me round.

"The engine room is the most interesting, in my opinion," said Ilford, and showed the way into a lofty room, full of the whirl of wheels, the clatter of machinery.

A gigantic wheel, sixty feet in circumference, revolving with an incredible velocity, supplied the motive power for the whole factory. It reached up almost to the ceiling—far above one's head and down deep beneath one's feet, a shaft being driven right through the floor. A railing fenced off the opening of the shaft, high enough to stop a fall, sufficiently low to lean upon with comfort.

Irresistibly attracted, I gazed at the great wheel. Then, shaking off its fascination, turned back again to Ilford.

"You know Rigby Starr has met with an accident?"

He shook his head.

"Where?" he asked incredulously.

"In the quarry, up at Tuttle Hill, near the house where Noel was imprisoned. He's been taken from there now," I added, stopping a ready lie upon his lips. "See here, Mr. Ilford, don't waste time and talk. Will you tell me where Shackell is taking him for a hundred pounds?"

His eyes, bright with greed, gazed hungrily at mine. He moved a little closer, resting his hand upon my arm. Instinctively my hand went to my side, in involuntary protection of the notes. The action seemed to madden him.

"A thousand—I must have a thousand," he said hoarsely.

The man who looked after the machinery was engaged in another part of the room. Ilford's expression frightened me. He looked desperate, as if—the next moment an awful thing had happened.

In his eagerness Ilford had pushed me close to the railings; with a shudder of repulsion I threw myself back to escape his touch. The draught from the great wheel came like a wind on my face—a wind that caught the loose ends of my scarf, entangling them among the spokes.

In a second I was caught from the ground, suspended by my scarf. A collar as of iron seemed round my throat, a whir as of many wings flashed through my brain. A second, no more, with the next revolution of the wheel I should be dashed down the shaft, crushed out of life!

In a flash my life, its past, its present, rushed before me. My life so soon to end, and then—the wheel stopped, eager hands caught and drew me gently to the ground. Death has passed by me, but his breath had chilled my very soul.

Ilford, white and shaking, murmured some incoherent words, whether of congratulation or regret I cannot say.

"You tried to kill me," I said slowly. "It was through you my scarf caught in the wheel. You did it to rob me of Noel's money."

He protested eagerly, and after a while I accepted his denials. Finally he agreed for £100 to tell me whither Noel had been removed.

"It will take some few hours for me to discover where they have taken him, Miss Gillespie. You had better meet me at a remote place, say near Griff House, this evening at seven. I shan't know before."

"Griff House is a long way from Nuneaton."

"That's why I choose it. I dare not be seen with you nearer the town. And now if you feel able you'd better get off. If you're wise, you'll keep in hiding till to-night at seven."

But I was past wisdom so far as my own safety was concerned. Noel and Noel's danger drove considerations for myself out of my mind; the pain, the short terror of my late experience only intensified my terror for him. If I had suffered, what must he have endured?

From the mill I went to the Market Place, meaning to call at the imposing looking bank opposite the Clock Tower. I wanted to inquire if they could change two of the notes for gold. It occurred to me that Ilford might demand payment in cash. I was deterred from making the inquiry, however, by reason of the strange conduct of a small, dapper-looking man, who watched me so intently, that I felt nervous, and, suspecting him to be the agent of Templeton and Co., hastened in the other direction. To my discomfiture he followed, at a distance, truly, keeping me well in sight.

I divined the reason later. Outside the theatre, a pretty building—the one place of amusement Nuneaton boasts—a lot of loungers were gathered.

"That's Smithers," said one to the other. "I wonder what he's up to."

"And who's Smithers?" asked a man, evidently not a native.

"He's a local detective," was the reply; "no fool either, I assure you."

A detective—following me! In a flash I realised what had happened. Shackell had been to the police, in regard to the accident to Rigby, and I was being shadowed so that at any moment they could lay their hands upon me.

All the afternoon the dapper individual kept me in sight. About six, however, I contrived to give him the slip. I had had tea at the hotel, and was half-way down the Coton Road, on my way to Griff House, the early home of the great novelist, George Eliot, when the detective hove in sight. It was quite dark, and impossible to accurately distinguish the outlines of his face, but his figure betrayed him. At the moment, a girl about my size and shape, and dressed in coat and skirt, came out of a house, and commenced to walk rapidly towards the town. Creeping into the shadow of a doorway, I watched the detective pause, hesitate, and finally follow the girl instead of me.

After that my spirits rose, and I set out on my long tramp—and what a tramp it is every devotee of George Eliot, who has paid a devotional visit to her early home, can testify—with high hopes of success.

I reached the quaint old house, with its flower-gardens, green lawns, and ivy-covered walls, just after seven. There was no sign of Ilford, nor when I questioned a group of girls laughing in the porch, could I hear any report of him. No stranger had been there that afternoon, they answered me. Bright-faced, pleasure-loving lasses all of them, pupils, so they told me, of Griff House, which the County Council had of late turned into a dairy farm, where daughters of leafy Warwickshire learnt to make cheese and butter.

They gossiped with me awhile, and discussed their chances of passing the forthcoming examination in butter-making. They seemed doubtful as to their success—the "theory," they explained, was far more difficult than the "practice." I wished them all "Good luck," and envious of their quiet life and simple happiness, returned to the highway—the road to Coventry—on the look-out for Ilford.

It had struck eight when he appeared, breathless with haste.

"Follow me," he said shortly, and led the way to a coppice by the road side.

"Masterman's going to Manchester to-night in charge of Templeton. Shackell took him to Birmingham this afternoon, they start from there by the eight-forty; if you're quick——"

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There was no time for him to finish the sentence, a figure crashed from the bushes at our side, and aiming a furious blow at Ilford, cut the words short.

"Shackell!" I gasped, and, unable to move, watched the two struggling.

"Make haste, you idiot!" screamed Ilford. "He'll telegraph to stop 'em if you don't make haste."

I needed no second warning, but flew as fast as my feet would carry me down the road. I had reached the canal bridge, when the pad of pursuing footsteps struck on my ear.

I realised the situation, and knew that before me lay the toughest struggle I had yet encountered.

It was past eight; the train left Birmingham in half an hour, if Shackell reached the Post Office before me—if I got there first—my breath came in great sobs, I staggered on, until the lamps of a receding cart flashed into view. With a mighty effort I put on a spurt, gained the cart's side, and clambered up. The shouts of Shackell came down upon the wind.

I urged the driver to put on top speed.

"I want to reach the Post Office." I gasped, "important wire."

"It's too late, miss," was the answer, "the office shuts at eight, you must go to the L. N. W. station; you can send a telegram from the signal-box."

"Are you going that way?" I asked.

"Only as far as Coton Road; we'll put you down there."

We drove off through the darkness, at a steady jog-trot, that not all my prayers could increase. I seemed to hear Shackell gaining upon us, over and over again I caught his voice shouting to us to stop. Thank Heaven! the driver did not hear him.

We stopped at Coton Road, and with hasty thanks I climbed down and ran along the dark, quiet streets. Through the Market Place, past the Clock Tower, past the theatre, where I heard those footsteps behind me, that voice calling me to stop.

At last the station comes in sight, I run into the platform, and essay to cross the line. An indignant porter drags me back, and points out the subway. I make a headlong dash down the steps. Up the steps at the other end, then I fly down the platform, and cover the distance between it and the signal-box in a flash.

Up the steps, rickety and dangerous, into the signal-box, slamming the door behind me, and then rapping violently upon the window, I call out to the clerk:

"No time to write," I cry, and dictate a long and rambling message. As I turn to go, Shackell rushes on to the steps, a telegraph form in his hand.

"Too late," I cry, "too late. The eight-forty has left for Birmingham, and I—I shall have it met at Manchester."

For answer Shackell moves aside, and motions to someone behind to approach.

I find myself face to face with the detective!

(The concluding instalment of "The Pursuit of Sara" next week.)

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Your Editor Chats.

I HAVE great pleasure in announcing that the winner of the guinea offered by me in respect to the first Unsolved Love Problem, "The Awkward Predicament of Edward Clements," is Mr. Chas. G. F. Chute, of 3, Belleville Avenue, Rathgar Road, and heartily I congratulate him upon his success. Although there were many interesting replies sent in, I consider that his was the best, both in good arguments and lucid reasoning.

I am glad to see that this feature has taken on so remarkably well, and next week I hope to be able to announce the winner in the Second Problem, "The Mistake of Millicent Howard."

Those who intend sending in replies to the Fourth Problem, "The Doubt of Mildred Dalrymple," must note that the latest day on which I can receive their letters is Friday, December 4th. None arriving after this date will be considered.

MRS. S. MCQUILLIN, 12 Carlton Street, Welford Road, Leicester, is the fortunate person who wins the Gramophone I offered for distributing leaflets advertising "The Pursuit of Sara." I sincerely trust that Mrs. McQuillin, who pressed her little son and her daughter into her service, will spend many a happy evening through the long winter months listening to the enjoyable entertainment of the prize she has won.

THE week after next will appear our grand Christmas Number. I hope you are making a note in your diary to order your copy early, for I fully expect that the issue will soon run out of print, and then you will be sorry that you missed it.

Besides the splendid humorous story by Mr. W. Pett Ridge, which nobody could read without a hearty laugh, and the numerous other fine stories and illustrations that go to make up the number, there will be the opening chapters of a marvellous new serial story from the pen of your favourite writer, Blanche Eardley. She it was who wrote: "The Bond Between," a romance that you were all delighted with, and so you will be with "Dupes of Destiny," the title of the coming story, because it is quite up to her very best standard. Besides this, there will be many valuable prizes offered in connection with some novel and interesting competitions.

IN our next issue "The Pursuit of Sara" concludes. The city of Manchester is the scene of the final instalment, and I think that you will all agree that the end is a brilliant climax to a thrilling series. Those who have followed Miss Gillespie throughout her adventures will doubtless be very eager to learn how love triumphs in her case over everything, and what befalls the hard-hearted scoundrels who are the cause of all the mischief. I can assure you that the concluding instalment is also a very enthralling one.

Your Editor.

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CLAUDIA'S RETALIATION.

The Story of a Hasty Conclusion.

"THAT must be Harold ringing me up!" cried Claudia Silburn as the whirring tinkle of the bell made itself heard from the small room at the end of the hall. "He is about to leave the office and he wishes to tell me that he will be here a little before the agreed time, I expect!"

She sprang from her seat and made her way to the door; Mrs. Silburn, placidly working through the maze of some very fancy crochet work, looked up in time to catch a glimpse of the happy face of her daughter, and the sight of those sparkling eyes and the flushed cheeks carried her thoughts back with a rush to the time when she was Claudia's age and also just engaged to the man of her choice.

Claudia went swiftly across the intervening space in order to reach the instrument before anyone else could answer it. The telephone was so convenient! She was glad that her father, a not-too-successful general practitioner, had taken advantage of the introduction of the "message rate" system to have the instrument installed in his house.

A moment later, Mrs. Silburn heard the following remarks through the two open doors:

"Yes, I am Miss Silburn!" A pause. "Oh!" in a tone of mingled disappointment and vexation; "thank you! I understand! Good-bye!" And then the combined receiver and transmitter was replaced on the hooks with quite unnecessary vigour.

"I won't tolerate it!" Claudia declared hotly, as she tumultuously re-entered the sitting-room and threw herself in her chair. "I wonder if Harold thinks he can play with me in *that* way!" This last remark was uttered in a scornful tone.

"Mother," she continued, turning to that worthy lady, who still sat placidly at her work, "can you imagine anything so—so rude and off-hand? Here is Harold actually getting his office boy—his *office boy!*—to ring me up and tell me that he is sorry that he cannot keep the appointment for this evening because he wishes to attend a meeting of the directors of his company, the Neverdull Paint Co.! I know very well that he is not bound to attend these meetings except *very* rarely; he was telling me only the other day that he was glad it was so, because they usually hold their meetings when everybody else wanted to go home!"

Claudia stopped through a deficiency of breath and an excess of indignation.

Mrs. Silburn looked up at the excited face of her daughter, noting mentally that Claudia appeared really very beautiful when she was cross, and was about to make some soothing reply when Claudia found breath enough to continue.

"He is commencing rather early, I think! Here have we been engaged one week only, and he slips away from the office early to keep an appointment which has more attraction for him—a music hall, very likely!—instead of coming to see me, as promised, and gets his office boy to ring me up at the proper time and tell me that he must attend a meeting of old directors!"

She ceased speaking once more, and Mrs. Silburn said a few words in her usual calm manner.

"Your father slipped away while we were on our honeymoon in order to play a game of cricket with his team, my dear, and he has turned out to be a very creditable husband, as, I suppose, you will admit!"

"Oh, yes! But then papa is different from Harold and—I don't care if he has gone cricketing or anywhere else. I call it downright neglect, and if I allow it now, what shall I have to put up with after marriage, I should like to know? And he has the audacity to say, through the office boy, that he is free of engagements for to-morrow evening!

"Free of engagements!" she repeated, as the significance of the phrase struck her. "I will see to that! He shall be quite free; he may conclude that our engagement is broken and that he can look out for another girl to deceive! I'll write to him so that he knows it first thing to-morrow morning!"

Mrs. Silburn sighed, her daughter was not like her, for she took things very equably, while Claudia was impulsive.

Mrs. Silburn thought of interfering, but she decided not to do so. Every generation must gain its experience in its own way and an impetuous nature can seldom be calmed without dashing itself against the rocks of suffering. Claudia would not listen to her if she spoke, she was afraid!

The girl had seated herself at a little writing-table and was viciously dipping the pen in the ink. She forgot the usual form of letter writing, and began at once, without address or date.

"My dear H——"

"No, that won't do!" she decided. "He isn't that any longer. I can alter the 'H' into 'M' and make it 'Mr.' quite easily!"

She did so. It did not look very well, and, moreover, why should she call him "My dear Mr. Churchill"? She tore up the sheet of notepaper, took another and dashed off the following:

DEAR MR. CHURCHILL—*I received your message through the intermediary of your office assistant. I understand that you are, or wish to be, free of all engagements to-morrow evening, so I hasten to let you know that I shall be too busy to-morrow evening to see anybody. Yours truly,* C. S.

"There!" she cried, passing the letter to her mother,

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"That will teach him that he mustn't play with the young ladies of the present day. It may have been all right in your time, mother, but this is different!"

"It's rather stiff, isn't it, Claudia?" ventured Mrs. Silburn. "It looks as if you didn't want him to call again!"

"I don't mind what it looks like!" said Claudia. Her mother's words caused a peculiar little sensation to strike her in the region of the heart, but she crushed it ruthlessly. "It means that I am not easily hoodwinked and not to be trifled with. I have read a good many things about husbands having to stay late at the office, and all that, and I shall nip it in the bud."

She folded the sheet of paper with much emphasis, pushed it into the envelope, sealed it, and took up a postage stamp.

"I'll post it at once!" she remarked, affixing the stamp in position with a vigorous dab.

She ran out with just her hat on, and jerked the letter into the slot of the wall-box about fifty yards from the house. She had just missed the 7.10 collection, so it would go by the 8.25. That was rather a pity, as the letter might have reached him the same evening if she had caught the 7.10. Well, it would make him uncomfortable at breakfast!

She went back to the sitting-room and took up her sewing once more. Needlework is a soothing occupation to those who are fond of it; Claudia liked it, which was somewhat surprising in a girl of such impulsive disposition, and after half an hour, she began to feel that she had been too hasty.

She tried to crush the feeling, but it rose to the surface in spite of her efforts, and her cheeks began to burn.

A sound caused her to start; it was the well-known ring of the telephone bell. For the second time that evening, Claudia dropped her work and hastened to answer the summons.

She shut the door behind her, so Mrs. Silburn could not hear any of the conversation. Three minutes later, Claudia returned with her face wreathed in smiles. It was the old happy look and Mrs. Silburn smiled wisely.

"Oh, mother, I wonder how I could have thought so ill of dear Harold. He has just rung me up to explain. The directors' meeting was unexpected; it was called by telegram this afternoon, and Harold thought it would be a good idea to take advantage of the occasion. He tried to ring up this afternoon so as to tell me himself and in good time, but the foolish girls at the exchange kept telling him that they could get no answer from us. At last he got through, but just at that moment he was called in to the room where the directors of the Neverdull Paint Co. were sitting, so he had to give a hurried message to the boy. He wished to attend the meeting in order to get the directors to settle on his leave of absence for our wedding, because, so he says"—this with a deep blush—"he is not going to wait! I am *so* sorry that I——"

"What's the matter, dear?" asked her mother, disturbed out of her equability for the first time by seeing Claudia's cheeks suddenly lose their bright colour and become deadly pale.

"I have posted that cruel letter, mother!" came slowly from the girl's lips. "What shall I do? He has left the office now, but it won't matter how much I explain, he will read the letter and he will think—— Oh, dear! I can't bear to imagine what he will think! I must get that letter back! I'll fish it out of the box with a piece of string and a gummed pad at the end, or I'll stick it with a wire skewer or something! It mustn't go!"

It was a hopeless kind of notion, and Claudia realised it when she began to make hasty preparations for carrying it into effect; but she finally determined to have a good try with the skewer! Meanwhile, the large hand of the clock was hurrying towards twenty-five minutes past, while the hour hand was painfully climbing towards the nine. Thus it came about that, while Claudia was engaged in the impossible task of inserting the skewer and her fingers into the slot in such a way as to effect the object she had in view, a hand was placed on her shoulder and a man's voice exclaimed:

"Trying to steal the letters, by Jingo! Got you this time, my lady!"

It was the postman come to collect the letters from the box at 8.25! Claudia uttered a cry of dismay.

"Oh, I am not trying to steal them, Mr. Postman, indeed I am not! You know me well enough, and you wouldn't think me guilty of that! I have dropped a letter into the box which I don't wish to go now! Will you give it back to me?"

"Can't do it, miss!" returned the man stoutly. He recognised Miss Silburn and dropped the accusation of stealing. "As soon as a letter is dropped into that 'ere box, miss, it is the property of His Majesty's Postmaster-General, you know! I can't do anything for you!"

"But I can tell you which one it is and who it is addressed to!" pleaded Claudia earnestly. "It will make several people unhappy now, if that letter goes. There!" as the man opened the box. "You will see it, for there are only three. It is the one in the lavender envelope."

"This is the one, I expect," said the man, picking up the lavender envelope and holding it tightly, lest Claudia should make a clutch at it. "I'm very sorry, but I can't give it to you! Hallo! Why, if you haven't slipped it in the box without addressing it!"

It was a fact! Claudia gazed at the blank envelope, with the red stamp fixed to the top right-hand corner, and vaguely wondered if this omission would help her. The man soon explained the position.

"That letter will come back to you, miss! When they get hold of it at the G.P.O., the first man will sling it into the 'blind' box, as they call it. That's when the letters ain't plainly addressed or anything o' that sort. After that, your letter will find its way to the Dead Letter Office; they'll open it, see your address and return it to you, unless you've put the name and address of the other party inside, which ladies don't do, as a rule! Good evening, miss! I hope as it'll be all right!"

He swung the door to with a clang and continued his round of collection. Claudia gave a happy little laugh and sped back home, dropping the skewer unconsciously as she ran along.

"There was no address inside, so they can't send it back to me or anyone else!" she laughed. "Oh, how glad I am!"

G. E. Lingen.

Handwriting Indicates Character.

So if you would like to know something about your own character and disposition, you should send a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped, addressed envelope, to RANEE, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. A reliable delineation of your character will be sent in return.

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POWERFUL ROMANCE.

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY:

Isolo Staunton, a criminal millionaire, who was once a convict on the Chincha Islands. He is the ruler of a kingdom under the sea, of the existence of which nobody knows. Here he forges in great number coins of every nationality. With the wealth he is amassing he intends to form a United States of South America and to make himself President.

Mercedes Staunton, his beautiful daughter, who falls in love with

Wilfrid Ellerton, a young man of whom Isolo Staunton is greatly afraid because he holds it in his power to send the millionaire back as a convict to the Chincha Islands. So Staunton secures Ellerton on board the *Isola*, his magnificent yacht, and consigns him to the Underworld. It is then given out that the young man has fallen overboard and been drowned.

Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia.—The right-hand friend and confidant of Staunton. He carries out the kidnapping of Ellerton.

M. Herarra.—The viceroy of Staunton in the Underworld.

Stanislaus Smith.—A detective, who is endeavouring to find the perpetrators of the colossal coin frauds. He lives a double life as Herr de Ronski, the famous musician, but only his wife and daughter, Paula, and Arthur Dennison, a Treasury solicitor, know of this.

Derrick Kesteven.—The partner of Staunton in all his great schemes. He has a beautiful daughter, named Cora.

Captain Percy Iddison and Lady Maud Hyam.—Two engaged persons who have suspicions about the nuptuousness of Staunton.

Janet Yuill.—A nurse who is taken on board the *Isola* to tend Mercedes, who falls ill when she hears of the alleged death of Ellerton. She there meets her husband, Herbert Darfield, once Arthur Culworth, criminal, and her suspicions are aroused.

TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

The Mint Below the Sea.

"YES," continued Ellerton, getting up and stretching himself, "I certainly should prefer a stroll after dinner instead of sitting down. I don't seem to have had much exercise lately. In fact, I feel more as though I were just recovering from a pretty bad illness."

"Which is exactly the case, Señor," replied Herarra, lying with a certain amount of truth. "I can assure you that your recent illness has not only been serious but prolonged."

"I suppose so," said Ellerton, beginning to walk up and down the room as he lighted his cigar. "Though, of course, I don't recollect anything about it. What was it, by the way?"

"An injury to the brain, followed by fever," replied Herarra according to instructions, "and now, if you are ready, we will go."

"With pleasure," said Ellerton. "I have distant memories of being very fond of engineering and chemistry, and I suppose that down here you have to depend on science for most, at any rate, of your necessaries and luxuries, saving, of course, your champagne and cigars, and that very excellent coffee, which, I presume, is not grown in a world without a sun?"

"No, no, naturally not," laughed Herarra. "Those come from what I may call another world—one of which your happily recovered memory doubtless affords you some pleasant if distant recollections."

"My worthy host has either been drinking too much champagne, or he must think he has got me very tight," mused Ellerton.

The fact was that, in a sense, Herarra was beginning to feel that the despot who held his liberty, indeed his life, in his hands, had put him into a somewhat difficult position.

For one thing he never expected that his prisoner-guest would be a man who could speak English and Spanish so perfectly, and could thus converse with both the slaves and the officials of his domain. In his own line he was one of the most expert criminals in the world, but his intelligence was limited to his craft, and, with the usual suspicion of his kind, he did not like Ellerton's queries as to the source of light and heat in his new world—of which he was himself entirely ignorant.

At the same time, believing as he did, that he would never leave the Underworld alive, he had no hesitation in obeying his instructions to allow Ellerton to learn all he liked, and to make himself useful to his captors.

Could he have foreseen the possible result of doing this, slave and all as he practically was, he would have taken the law into his own hands, and Ellerton would not have lived many minutes after he opened the steel door leading into the central chamber.

He felt instinctively that he had to deal with a man of a much higher intelligence than himself and he was disagreeably puzzled. At the same time, until he received further orders from the Lord of this World of Criminals he was helpless, and those orders could not possibly reach him until the *Isola* returned to the anchorage and re-established communication with the outside world. If he could have read the idea which was already working in Ellerton's mind this narrative would never have been written.

"That contrivance is not only distinctly ingenious but it hasn't been invented and installed here without some very

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definite purpose. I wonder whatever these people are doing down here. Under the sea and yet in communication with the other world, obviously by means of the yacht. What does it mean? Well, I suppose I shall find it out some day, if I live."

Thus Wilfrid Ellerton thought to himself as he watched the opening and the closing of the door. When they got into the central chamber, Herarra said:

"Now, as you reminded me that you are interested in engineering matters we will pay our first visit to Señor Battley's domain."

As they reached the opening of the Gallery towards which Herarra led the way, one of the grey clad figures rose from the ground out of the shadows, raised his hands to his forehead, and cried:

"Hail, master!"

Herarra nodded, and at the same moment Ellerton heard a bell tinkle and saw a light sparkle from the roof of the gallery about a hundred feet away.

"It looks as though we were expected," he said as they walked towards the light.

"The unexpected, Señor," replied Herarra out of the depths of his unsuspecting ignorance, "does not happen here."

"What a very admirable organisation you must have," said Ellerton with a laugh. "What a pity it is I have forgotten all this. Still, I suppose I shall have plenty of time to re-learn it all."

"On that subject, Señor, I think you can set your mind at rest. I can assure you that you will have ample time."

"Yes, I thought so," said Ellerton to himself, "that means imprisonment for life if they can do it," and then he went on aloud:

"It will be most interesting, I am sure. Yes, good evening again, Mr. Battley," he continued in English, as they stopped under the lamp and the engineer came forward to meet his master.

Their eyes met for an instant and then Mr. Battley turned his head away and Herarra said rather sharply:

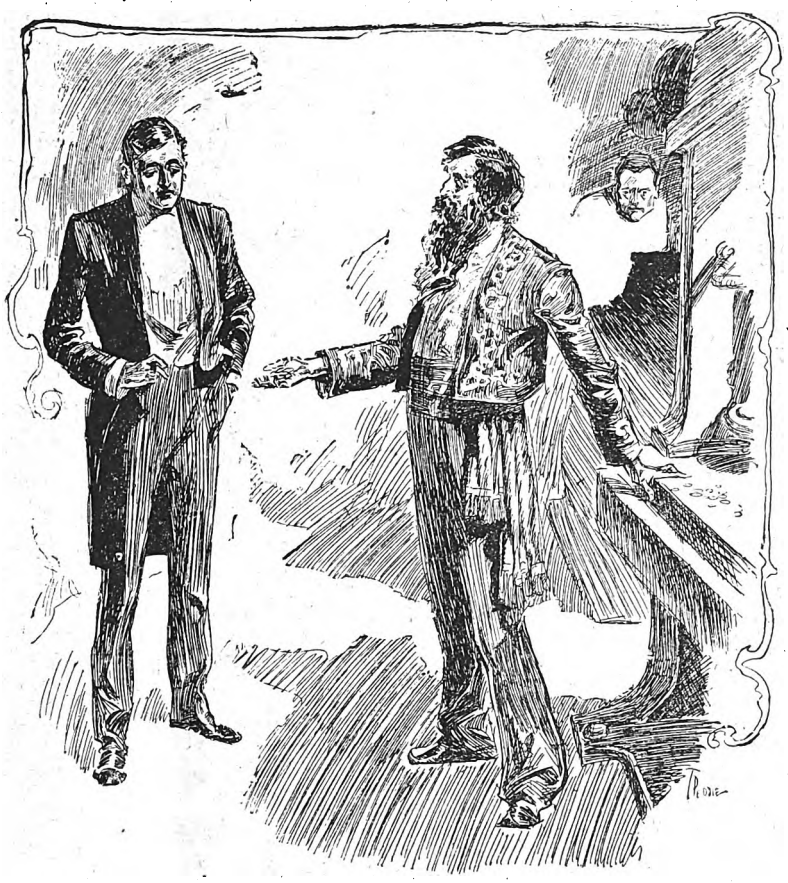
"We have come to have a look at the machinery. Mr. Ellerton is interested in that sort of thing."

"In everything, sir?" asked Mr. Battley, raising his eyes for a moment.

"Yes, everything, why not? Is he not a dweller amongst us?"

"It is as you wish, sir," said the engineer, wondering how he was going to get through the unexpectedly unpleasant experience. In one sense he was disconcerted and in another reassured by the fact that Ellerton continued to treat him as an absolute stranger.

Herarra led the way through a narrow tunnel, partly natural and partly hewn out of what certainly looked to Ellerton like the foundations of the world. This was about a hundred feet long, and when they were half way through, a light shone out from the farther end. As they passed under this Ellerton found himself in another tunnel much higher and broader than the one they had come through. He guessed it to be some fifty feet high and seventy-five broad.



Herarra showed Ellerton some of the coins they manufactured in the Underworld.

To his left hand, standing on a platform of levelled rock he saw three little engines, each with double fly-wheels, revolving at a tremendous speed and making a sound something like the purring of a dynamo. So far as he could see there were no boilers or steam pipes and yet the engines were of the ordinary double cylinder type, and from each of the fly-wheels a driving band ran up to a shafting in the roof. From the shafting other bands ran down to twenty-four machines which looked to him like stamping or cutting machines. There were twelve of these on each side of the gallery and in front of each of them was a pile of ingots of white metal. At every machine there were two of the grey-clad silent figures which had already become unpleasantly familiar to him.

"You don't seem to use steam with your engines, Mr. Battley," he asked in a tone of half careless inquiry.

"May I ask what your motive-power is?"

"Heat, sir," he replied, as though he were anxious to take refuge in a technical explanation. "You see we are fortunately situated here. We have that part of the work done for us and these engines which I had the honour of designing, merely translate the heat into energy and so we get the work done with very little trouble."

"And where do you get your heat from?"

"Oh, from the volcano, or rather from its tributaries, if I may call them so, of lava. I shall be happy to explain the whole process to you at any time it will suit you."

"Thanks," replied Ellerton, "I'll come round to-morrow, if you can give me an hour, but from what you say, I take it that they are really hot-air engines."

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"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Battley, "to a certain extent, but, to put it shortly, they are driven by superheated air under great pressure, so great indeed that, but for the amount of heat, the air would be almost liquid."

"I think I see," said Ellerton, remembering the stolen specifications, "but we can go into that to-morrow. I have got a sort of recollection of a plan of the kind, which, perhaps, I dreamt about."

As he said this he looked hard at Mr. Battley, who dropped his eyelids and turned away to look at one of the engines.

"And what might these machines be doing, Señor?" Ellerton continued in Spanish. "Like the rest, I have forgotten all about them."

"Let us go and see them, then," replied Herarra, moving towards the nearest of them, "I think you will very soon remember what they are."

It certainly did not take Ellerton very long to find out what they were, for a single glance at the first one of them told him that it was as perfect a minting machine as the wit of man had as yet devised.

The moment they had entered all the grey figures ceased work at the machines and stood to attention like so many school-boys, looking down at the rock-floor of the gallery.

Herarra looked round at them and exclaimed in a loud, harsh tone:

"Work, slaves!"

And instantly every motionless figure started into activity and the feeding of the machines was renewed.

Ellerton looked keenly at his host for a moment and said:

"I see that you employ slave labour, and," he continued, going behind one of the machines and looking at a pile of bright new silver coins, "you apparently find it, if you will excuse the play on the words, a money-making business. I never saw a better five-franc piece in my life. And these machines of yours seem to turn them out very quickly."

"Yes," laughed Herarra, "it is as you see," taking up a handful of the coins, "and as for speed, each machine can turn out its six thousand an hour, and as we mint only the larger values such as crowns, five-franc pieces, and dollars, we not only make money, but we make profits."

"And pretty large ones, too, I should think," said Ellerton, "provided always that you can spend the money, which you can hardly do here. Wherefore it stands to reason that these pretty things are made for export."

"Naturally," was the reply, "our goods find a most ready sale, I can assure you."

"No doubt. They are excellently made," said Ellerton shortly, as he walked on down the line of machines. "Ah, and I see you manufacture gold goods as well."

"Oh, yes, of all denominations. It is not quite as profitable perhaps as the silver manufacture, but as these for whom we work own their own mines, we have some knowledge of metallurgy, there is no fear of loss. And now," he went on, moving away into the middle of the chamber, "if you will follow me, I will show you another process of what you rightly called our money-making."

Ellerton followed him, thinking pretty hard all the time, into the central gallery, and down through another arched tunnel on the other side, which opened out into a large chamber somewhat similarly fitted with engines and machines, but the latter differed considerably from those they had just left. The slaves stood to attention as before, and were curtly ordered to go on with their work. The visitor glanced at the machines, and said:

"Ah, this is a much more profitable department even than the other, I presume. Here you must make millions—and most excellent forgeries they are, I must admit," he went on slowly, picking up a dozen or so of bank-notes of various nationalities and denominations.

"Pardon, Señor," Herarra corrected, "these are not forgeries, they are genuine in every sense; they are printed on genuine paper from blocks identical with those used in other manufacturies. There is no difference save in the authority by which they are made. When you have once got that far it is a simple process. Here is a piece of paper worth nothing. There is a block worth a few shillings. Bring the two into proper connection, and you have a thousand francs or a hundred pounds."

"Admirably simple!" laughed Ellerton briefly, for he was thinking harder than ever. "And now, what about the light and heat problem?" he continued, after a short pause. "All this is, of course, very wonderful and interesting, but I think that question would interest me even more. Will there be time to have a look into that question to-night, if one may use such a term here?"

"I fear not, Señor," replied Herarra, looking at his watch, "you see it is getting near what we call sleeping-time, and the works will be stopped in a few minutes. After breakfast, of course, if you wish."

"That will do just as well," replied Ellerton, who was beginning to feel a little sleepy and was, moreover, looking forward to the dreams in which he might perchance escape from this prison-land and rejoin his beloved Mercedes, wherever she might be now.

"But, look here, Señor," he continued. "I am quite well now and I don't want any attendants—I mean, of the sort you gave me when I was ill. Of course, if you can give me a decent servant, say one of these poor wretches that you call slaves, to look after me, well and good."

"Your wish shall be obeyed," was the reply. "There are several of them trained to personal service, and you can take your choice."

Half an hour later Ellerton was in bed in his gorgeous chamber, thinking hard of all he had seen and heard during the day until the thoughts got confused and melted away into oblivion, and ere long he found himself with Mercedes on the deck of the *Isola*, which, by some magic, changed into a submarine and started out on a trip to discover the entrance to the Land beneath the Sea.

TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Clue upon Clue.

Precisely at a quarter to two Dennison and Captain Iddison announced themselves at the Grand Hotel, Cimiez. M. de Ronski was waiting for them in the vestibule. He came forward and took Dennison by both hands in his admirably simulated foreign manner, saying in equally admirable foreign English:

"Welcome, my dear Monsieur Dennison, welcome. And this is your friend, the gallant Captain of whom you told me. Sir," he continued, turning to Iddison, "I am charmed to meet you. Please follow me. We shall find the ladies upstairs."

Iddison shook hands, and they went upstairs, Dennison saying to himself:

"Excellently done, my dear Mr. Smith. No wonder no one has ever penetrated that disguise of yours. Won't Iddison open his eyes when he's introduced to your other self!"

It would hardly have conduced to Lady Maud's temporary peace of mind could she have read the exact thoughts which passed through her engineer's soul during his introduction to Madame de Ronski and Paula. Not that his allegiance was shaken in the least, but no woman is quite so perfect as not to feel a trifle uncomfortable when she finds her lover in the company of a more beautiful woman than herself, though wild horses would not drag the admission out of him; and that is why Iddison's thoughts would not just

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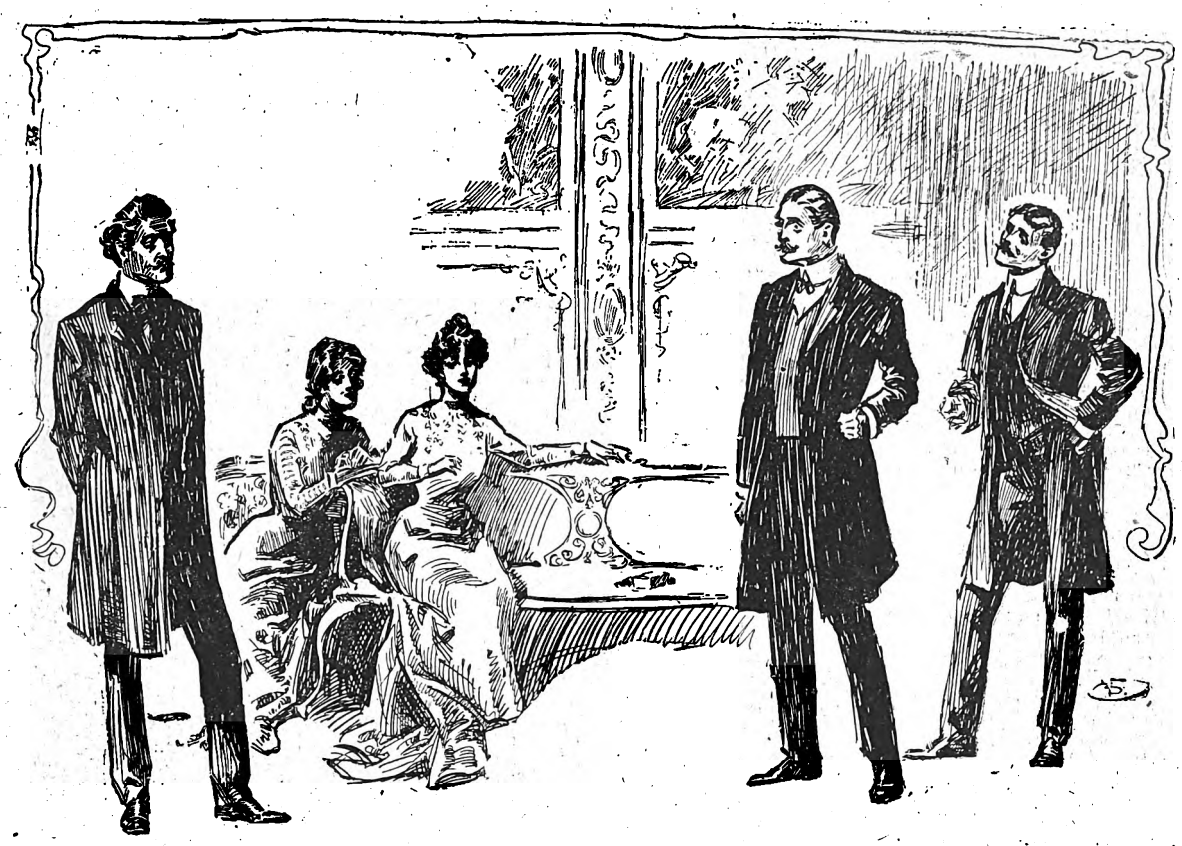

Captain Iddison was astounded when he was informed of the identity between Herr de Ronski and Stanislaus Smith.

then have been pleasant ones for his best beloved. As a matter of fact Madame de Ronski and Paula were by far the two most lovely women he had ever seen in his life, and, to himself, he frankly confessed that they were.

During lunch, de Ronski remained de Ronski, and the conversation ran on the general topics of the place and hour, from the last scandal of the Casino to the possibilities of war in the Near East. But when the cloth was removed and the waiter had brought the coffee and cigars and disappeared, Madame gave permission for cigarettes by lighting one herself, and de Ronski went out and locked the door of the outer room. When he came back he said to Dennison, in a voice totally unfamiliar to his friend:

"And now, my dear Dennison, as we are all quite assured that you would not have suggested that you should introduce Captain Iddison to me as well as to my friend de Ronski without some very good reason, and as we are quite alone now, the other introduction may as well take place at once."

"I beg your pardon, but what the—— I'm awfully sorry, but what in the name of impossibility does this mean?" exclaimed the soldier, getting up and staring blankly from his host to Dennison, "I was under the impression——"

"And a perfectly correct impression too, my dear fellow," laughed Dennison, hugely enjoying the bewildered expression of his friend's face. "This is Stanislas de Ronski, the musician of more than European fame. But he happens to be one of those fortunate men who possess two identities, and have come by both of them honestly. Allow me to present to you Mr. Stanislaus Smith, our London Chief of the International Police."

What Iddison would have said had there been no ladies present may be guessed at. What he did say, when he had sufficiently recovered himself, was:

"It's no use saying that I'm astounded, because the word doesn't half express it, and so you must take my feelings for granted. Mr. Smith I know, and M. de Ronski I know, but to find them both in the same person is almost beyond the limits of human credulity."

"Nevertheless, you see, it is true," smiled his host, passing his hand through his wig. "Were I to remove my professional adornment you would have no doubt of it."

"Oh, I have none, I can assure you," answered Iddison, still laughing, "I'm quite ready to take your word for it." And now he went on more seriously, "I suppose you will allow me to ask why a very humble person like myself should be permitted to learn a secret which cannot be known to many people in the world?"

"It is known only to those who are in this room," said Madame de Ronski, handing him a cup of coffee, and I don't suppose it will ever be known to any more."

"Not through me, of course," said the engineer stiffening up as he took the cup.

"That would be impossible," said Mr. Smith quickly. "And now that we understand each other let us get to business," he went on, sitting down. "My friend Dennison tells me that you were one of the guests on board Mr. Staunton's yacht when that unfortunate affair about poor young Ellerton happened. To save time, Captain, I am going to ask you, point-blank, whether you have any reasons for suspecting that that was not altogether an accident?"

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The directness and the utter unexpectedness of the question, as he would have said, stumped the soldier for a moment. Then he replied quite quietly:

"I know that you would not ask me that without very good reason, and so I will tell you candidly that I find it very difficult to believe that it was an accident. In fact it seemed to me, as well as to—well, Lady Maud Hyam, whom I am going to marry shortly, that it could not possibly have been one."

"Then if your suspicions are correct," said Mr. Smith slowly, "it must have been murder, and people don't commit murder without motives."

"That's exactly what bowls us out completely," replied Iddison, "but at the same time there is another very funny thing to be accounted for, if it can be. When Miss Staunton, who, as perhaps Dennison has told you, fell suddenly in love with poor Ellerton, and apparently as deeply as he did with her, became so seriously ill, why did her father leave her, and why did the yacht go to Iceland when she was evidently bound for the Riviera? That's what I'd like to know."

"And that is what a good many others would be very glad to know," said Mr. Smith. "Now, may I ask, Captain Iddison, if you could tell me anything more about the circumstances of what we may call Mr. Ellerton's disappearance?"

"Nothing of any importance, I am afraid," he replied, "except perhaps one thing that struck me, which so far I haven't mentioned to anybody, not even to Lady Maud, because I didn't want to upset her. I was awake when the accident happened and my porthole was open. I heard the cry of 'Man overboard!' and I saw through my porthole one of the boats splash down.

"Of course I jumped into my deck shoes and started for the deck. I found the saloon entrance locked. I tried at the smoking-room, but that was locked also, and that had never been done before during the trip. I must confess that to me it looked rather as though they intended the accident to be strictly private."

"Very likely," said Dennison, "if it was not an accident they would naturally not have wanted anyone like yourself to jump over after him."

"That certainly is a point, or rather a link in the chain, if a small one," said Mr. Smith, musingly, "and it may possibly have something to do with the main problem which we have in hand, a problem of which I am almost beginning to think even Mr. Ellerton's disappearance is only a part."

"You mean, of course, the great Silver Problem, papa," said Paula, leaning her elbows on the table and looking not without a certain maidenly admiration at Iddison's bronzed, clear-cut features and splendid length of limb. "Of course you have heard about that, Captain?"

"What," he exclaimed, looking round, "this mysterious flooding of the markets with money and notes which the Mints can't account for? Naturally I have heard of that, but surely, Miss de Ronski, you don't mean to suggest that Mr. Staunton, the great millionaire and financier, a man who, I am told, is a friend of statesmen and princes, could have anything to do with a swindle like that?"

"There is no telling nowadays, you know, how people get rich. I mean so very, very rich," she replied gently. "I don't make any charge against him, but, as papa will tell you, there are other things. For instance, why did the *Isola* go to Iceland to get here, and how did she manage to go to Iceland and get back here in about the same time that it would have taken her to come from Scotland, and, lastly, why did Mr. Staunton tell Lady Medcalf-Mears that they had come from Leith and say nothing at all about Iceland?

"Now," she continued, smiling, "I think it's a little bit suspicious."

"Certainly it is," replied Iddison, "especially as if he really did go to Iceland in an honest fashion, the yacht's papers should show it."

"That is also a point," said Mr. Smith, "and one which I shall clear up now. My friends at the Customs tell me that, according to her papers, she came straight from the port of Leith."

"Then in that case," said Dennison, "granted always that Miss Yuill was not mistaken, and I don't see how she could be, that trip to Iceland was a strictly private one. Now I wonder whether that has anything to do with Ellerton's disappearance, or the other thing."

"I think we are gradually getting out of the fog," said Mr. Smith, staring hard up at the ceiling. "We have certainly got far enough to permit ourselves to look upon Mr. Staunton and his millions with a certain amount of suspicion. And then there is another point. This yacht is registered as of twenty-one knots speed, and such a journey would be absolutely impossible unless she possessed a speed which not even the fastest destroyers could equal. Why is the fact of that speed concealed when I will say an honest owner of such a wonderful craft would be only too proud not only to admit it, but to prove it against all the ocean raters of the world?"

"Yes," said Dennison, "that is undoubtedly so. If an American millionaire had a thirty-five or forty knotter, as she must be, he'd put the American Eagle on her bows and go screaming over the Seven Seas. Yes, as you say, we're getting nearer. Go ahead, my friend."

"Then," continued their host, taking a thousand franc bank-note and a photograph of Pedro Ramiero out of his breast pocket, "we have these," and he proceeded to explain their inner meaning to Iddison.

"Oh, that's the man I met in the box last night," said Iddison, "right enough. A little younger and not so prosperous looking, but still, if I know anything about faces, that's either Don Ramiero Valdez or his twin brother. Another link, I suppose, or a mesh in the web that you appear to be weaving."

"And which I now believe we shall weave," said Mr. Smith decisively. "We have far to go yet, but, as I said, we are getting on. I am very glad to have your independent opinion of the photograph. Now this note," he went on, "had on it, or rather in it, a mark which can only be detected by those who know where to find it by the microscope. I may explain that as the counterfeit notes are so perfect that if you put one beside a genuine note of the same number an expert could not tell the difference. All genuine notes are now marked in this way by a high official after they have been delivered by the printers, so that even if the original block were stolen we could tell the notes printed from it to be forgeries. Now this note," he went on, taking one out of his pocket-book, "is a forgery, and it came from the *Isola*, and was cashed by the original of this photograph."

"Great Scott, you don't say so," exclaimed Iddison, for the moment half forgetting his perfect manners. "I should think that, as the children say, you are getting warm."

"I hope so," said Mr. Smith, "but warm is not hot, you know, and therefore it may be some time before we strike the iron. And now, Captain Iddison," he went on, looking steadily at him, "have you any objection to assist the course of justice by helping to lay the man whom I believe to be the greatest criminal of modern times by the heels?"

"You mean Staunton, I suppose?"

The detective nodded.

"It would be excellent sport," continued Iddison thoughtfully, "but, you see, it's hardly playing the game to accept a man's hospitality and help to run him in, is it? Besides, I should hardly like to take Lady Maud on to his pirate yacht, or whatever it is, under the circumstances. Of course you are not absolutely certain. Lots of good men have been suspected. Still I don't think I can help you in any detective way."

"Oh, no," said Mr. Smith, interrupting him, "by no means. That is the last thing I should ask you to do. I must have expressed myself clumsily. I should have asked you whether you were willing to tell our mutual friend Dennison anything that you may notice in connection with Mr. Staunton or the yacht during your visits."

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"Oh, of course I could do that," said Iddison, "even if I had not come here to-day, and I'll tell you what else I'll do. I believe Miss Yuill knows a little more than she told me, I don't mind having another talk with her, and, if you like, giving her a hint that there are distinct suspicions that everything is not right about the *Isola*. I'm quite certain that she has suspicions herself. If you like, too, I shall be most happy to bring you into personal communication with her."

"That is not at all a bad idea, Captain," said Mr. Smith, "but it will have to be done carefully, and I must see her in my other capacity. Yes, it is the thing to do, and I will do it."

TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

A Council of War.

On the morning of the same day, a little after eleven, Isolo Staunton was sitting at the head of the table in the Council Chamber, with Kesteven on his right and Don Ramiero on his left.

Five other gentlemen, all of unmistakably Spanish or Spanish-American appearance, dark or black-haired, bright-eyed, and bearded or moustachioed, were also seated round the table, each with a small dispatch-box and writing materials before him. The end of the table at which Staunton sat was covered with papers, mostly tied in bundles with green tape.

He looked not unlike a Chancellor or a Prime Minister holding a Cabinet meeting, and, as a matter of fact, the similé was not very far wrong, for these gentlemen, who were not incorrectly supposed to be his financial associates, were also a good deal more—they were literally the Ministers of a Government of which he was the head, a Government which it had been the ambition of his life to establish over one of the vastest divisions of the world, which only needed a strong united rule to make it also one of the richest and most powerful.

The true nature and object of the meeting may be best gathered from what follows here:

When an hour or so had been occupied in receiving and considering the reports of the "Ministers," who were in reality delegates from the Governments of Peru, Chili, the Argentine, Brazil and Colombo, representing further all the minor South American States, Staunton, or "the President," as he was wont to be called, took up a folded newspaper which was lying before him, and after a few words in English with Kesteven, began in Spanish:

"Señores, I think I may take to myself the pleasure of saying that all the reports are as satisfactory to myself and my colleague as they are, I trust, to your Governments and yourselves. The good work, the work to which we have devoted ourselves, some of us at very considerable risk, is progressing excellently, and so well, indeed, that the day is not now far distant when the signal may be given for the Latin nations of the West to rise as one united world power and take, by force if necessary, their proper place among the nations of the earth."

A murmur of applause ran round the table, and dark, fierce eyes gleamed meaningly at each other and at the speaker. He smiled and went on:

"We have done much. We have united warring interests which for so long have retarded the development of the countries we love; we have made friends of those who, unhappily, once were enemies, and, perhaps best of all, we have, as I firmly believe, stamped out the bane of Revolution.

"By common consent now, the man who raises the standard of revolt in any South American State henceforth will be treated as a common enemy by all the other States and crushed. Our plans for internal development are practically complete, even to the provision for the construction of the Panama Canal by South American capital and under

NO DINNER IS COMPLETE

Relish for food and power to digest it are essential to sound health, for only by the digestion and assimilation of food, can the wear and tear of bodily tissue be replenished and life sustained. When digestion fails, as in dyspepsia or indigestion, both body and brain are starved and the patient becomes languid and weak, incapable of active, vigorous effort, or clear sustained thought.

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THE WORLD'S ANTIDOTE

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For INDIGESTION.

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the flag of the United States of South America. I need hardly remind any gentleman present that the absolute command of the waterway from the Atlantic to the Pacific will not be the least of the sources of our strength."

Here there was a louder murmur of approbation, in which Kesteven did not join. He looked down at the papers before him, and his lips moved slightly under his moustache.

"But, Señores," Staunton continued in a graver tone, "in spite of all this progress, all this triumph, I had almost said, it is my duty to tell you that there is still need, urgent need, for the greatest caution and discretion. Remember that the nearer we get to victory the more perilous our path becomes. In the issue of the *Times* which arrived from London this morning there is a leading article which demands our most careful, indeed, anxious consideration.

"I need hardly tell you of what importance this article is to us. Our good friend Señor Valdez will translate the whole of it for your use during the day; just now I will only ask you to listen to a few extracts which it may be necessary to discuss at once."

He took up the paper and began to read aloud in Spanish some passages marked in blue pencil.

"'There are two points of great significance which cannot fail to have struck the careful observer of South American affairs.

"'One, and that the most important, as well as the most mysterious, is the fact that all the South American Republics, even the most insignificant, have been arming both by land and sea to an extent totally disproportionate to their ordinary needs. The second is that, during that period, not only have inter-state jealousies and difficulties disappeared, but, more wonderful still, by some magic or other the demon of Revolution has apparently been laid.

"'It is practically impossible that these results can have been achieved without some powerful influence working from outside, nor is it credible that, in their present financial state, the Republics can have borne the vastly increased expenditure unaided. And yet there has been no attempt to raise new loans, nor, so far as we know, has there been any increase in taxation. On the contrary, if anything, the taxes are lower now than they were two years ago.

"'So far as we can discover, cash has been paid for everything in the way of armaments, and, if that is so, cash must have been pouring into the Republics from somewhere. The question is where?

"'Who is the magician who has worked these miracles?'

"That, Señores," continued Staunton, "will be enough, I think, for the present. In my opinion this article shows that although we are still unknown, and, therefore, unsuspected, our work is beginning to attract the suspicious attention of the world. That, perhaps, was only to be expected, and I think my agents have taken sufficient care that, for some time at least, there shall be no inconvenient diplomatic interference with our plans. At the same time I should like to have your opinions on the subject."

"Let us settle the matter by striking at once," cried a revolutionist from Colombo.

"It would, I think, be better to wait a little until our political affairs are fully settled. We must be certain of everybody before we declare ourselves," objected Isidore Pinheiro, a short, shaggy-browed, Portuguese Jew from Brazil. "We might spoil everything by haste."

The Argentine envoy agreed with him, and, as both Staunton and Kesteven, the latter for reasons which he would not have cared to explain to the meeting, were also in favour of continuing their present policy for the present, the more ardent spirits were obliged to yield on receiving a promise from the "Señor President" that operations should be hastened as much as safety permitted.

As Don Ramiero stood aside for his master to pass out, Kesteven said in a low tone to Staunton:

"Say, partner, ask the Señor to go out and look after our guests for a bit while they get their cocktails. I want a word with you."

"Well, what's the matter?" asked Staunton, not too good-humouredly, as the doors closed.

"I've been thinking," replied Kesteven slowly, "that it's about time I asked you to let me out of this business. The fact is I've had enough."

"I'm sorry to hear you say that. May I ask what you have to complain of?"

Staunton spoke coldly, and with a note of something like hostility in his tone, for, truth to tell, the partners in the greatest swindle that had ever been worked off on civilised society, had not been the best of friends since they had almost quarrelled over the disappearance of Wilfrid Ellerton.

"I'm complaining of nothing," replied Kesteven just as coldly. "I'm just going to ask you to remember that when we became partners again it was on the understanding that, when the business was fixed up, either could go out when he wanted to."

"From my point of view the work is anything but finished. On the contrary, it is only just beginning. You know Spanish enough to have understood all that was said just now."

"And just because I did understand it I'm going out," said Kesteven, looking him full in the eyes. "I've told you before that I don't take any stock of this political business, and I won't have any. I've helped you so far, as I said I would, but you're going too far for my taste. If you want reasons you can have them. In the first place, even you, strong man as you are, will no more get these greasers to hang together than you'd get a hundred assorted snakes to dwell together in unity. It isn't in their evil nature to do it."

"I think that is my business, and it is certainly my belief," retorted Staunton angrily, for this was a tender subject with him. "And your other reasons?"

"Are a bit stronger than that. In the first place I've got Cora to think about, and she's dead against the scheme.

"She knows that I've made a pretty respectable pile, and she has the natural inclinations of the properly-raised American girl towards coronets. There are two or three in England and over here that she may have for the taking, and coronets don't go with South American politics—not much. But what I go on most is this, my friend, and you may as well take a note of it. Suppose you do get this proposition of yours through, you can bet your life there's going to be a heap of trouble over it, and the other United States are going to take a hand in that. Well, I'm an American."

As Staunton was about to reply the telephone-bell rang. He took up the transmitter, hung it up again, and said:

"Lunch will be served in a few minutes. We shall have to postpone this discussion."

"There's no discussion on my part," replied the other shortly. "I'm done. Of course I shall keep faith as tight as if I was with you, but you must consider me out of the business. It's getting too sultry for my health."

"Then, of course, you'll draw the reduced dividend under the circumstances," asked Staunton, not very pleasantly.

"Not a cent, partner. You can have the lot. I'm getting tired of that, too, and my pile's quite big enough to make it bigger by what they humorously call legitimate means."

"Eh?" asked Staunton, a trifle anxiously, "you've not heard anything in the way of suspicions, have you, Kesteven?"

"Nothing definite, but I had advice from London this morning that this Mr. Dennison is one of the smartest men in the British Prosecutions Department, and also that Mr. Stanislaus Smith, who I needn't tell you is known to our detectives as about the smartest man in the International, has made another of his mysterious disappearances.

"We also know that they work together a lot, and maybe he isn't down here altogether for a holiday. Well, I guess we oughtn't to keep the Señors waiting too long."

Staunton's face wore a very troubled look as he passed out.

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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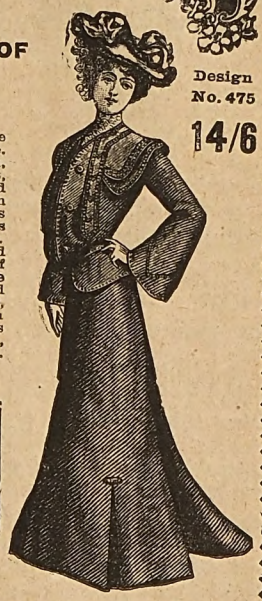

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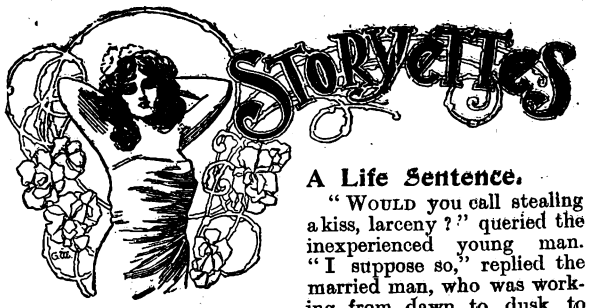

A Life Sentence.

"Would you call stealing a kiss, larceny?" queried the inexperienced young man. "I suppose so," replied the married man, who was working from dawn to dusk to support his family. "What is the penalty?" "Why, I stole a kiss once, and was sentenced to hard labour for life."

Market Prices were Low.

Mrs. Joy: "If I do say it, my husband is worth millions of money to me." Mrs. Blunt: "How lucky of you to snap him up when he was going cheap!"

The Same Thing.

Ethel: "Did you hear of the engagement of Jack and Penelope?" Harold: "Dear me! Then Jack has finally succeeded?" Ethel: "No; succumbed."

Why She Enjoyed it.

Laura: "Alice Flitter is such a restful friend." Charles: "Restful? She talks all the time." "That's it; I never have to think about what to say when I'm with her."

She was an Unkind Miss.

Mr. Softly: "I feel—aw—vewy strongly tempted to blow out my bwains." Miss Cutting: "What a pity nature has put such a tragedy out of the bounds of possibility!"

Won her Consent.

"I am amazed, sir, that you should propose to my daughter. You have not known her a week." "True, madam, but I have known you for some time and everybody says your daughter takes after you."

Prepared for Emergencies.

He: "If you loved me, why did you at first refuse me?" She: "I wanted to see what you would do." He: "But I might have rushed off without waiting for an explanation." She: "I had the door locked."

It Did not Reassure Him.

Mr. Softleigh: "Tommy, do you really think your sister likes to see me better than she does Mr. Brown?" Tommy: "I'm sure of it, for evenings when he's in the parlour she turns the light down so low she can't see him at all."

Satisfactory Evidence.

Father: "Now, if you want a good husband, marry Mr. Goodheart. He really and truly loves you." Daughter: "Are you sure of that, father?" Father: "Yes, indeed. I've been borrowing money from him for six months, and still he keeps coming."

They Slated him Dreadfully.

"Why, Clara, dear, what has happened? It is not a month since your marriage, and I find you in tears already!" "Ah, Hilda, darling! George is standing as member for the county, you know, and I've only just learnt from the opposition papers what a really dreadful man I have married!"

She Wanted Them Squeaky.

Blanche: "I want a pair of slippers for father—number tens, please, and—squeaky." Genial Shoemaker: "Squeaky, miss? I'm afraid we haven't any of that kind." Blanche: "I am so sorry. Couldn't you make him a squeaky pair? There is a certain young gentleman who visits me frequently, and it would be very convenient for him to know just when pa is coming downstairs."

That Silenced Him.

He: "Yes, I only need to talk with a lady fifteen minutes and I know just what she thinks of me." She: "But you must find it very unpleasant."

She Made a Bad Bargain then.

The Husband (during the quarrel): "You're always making bargains. Was there ever a time when you didn't?" The Wife: "Yes, sir; on my wedding-day."

The Reason.

He (mournfully): "I would I were a cloud." She: "What on earth for?" He: "Because they say that 'every cloud has a silver lining,' but my pockets are quite empty."

So What was the Good?

Mother: "I'm surprised at you! Couldn't you tell he was going to kiss you?" Daughter: "Yes, ma, but there was no one for me to tell, except him, and he knew it already."

Artful, Very.

"You want a keepsake that will always remind you of me?" she said. "I do, darling," he said tenderly. "What's the matter with myself?" she whispered. There will be a wedding shortly.

Better than He Expected.

Beryl: "Yes, when Jack married her he thought she was an angel, but it wasn't long before he found out his mistake." Sibyl: "Disappointed?" Beryl: "I should say not. He found she was a good cook."

The Worm Turned.

"John," she said, "there's nothing I enjoy more than reading the last words of great men. I wonder what your last words will be?" "Maria," he replied, "the last word is something I never expect to have." However, he got it that time.

They Wouldn't be Ladylike.

Young Mr. Spoonamore (who has just been accepted): "But what will your father say, darling? You know he doesn't like me any too well." The Young Woman: "Well, you can't expect me to use the exact language in which papa will express himself when he hears of it."

He was Not at all Poetic.

"Do you often wonder, George," she said softly, as they stood at the gate, "at the infinite number of stars, where that vast, silent, eternal procession is going, and whence it came?" "Ye-es," replied George, rather hesitatingly; "but don't you find that to look at the sky for any length of time makes the back of your neck ache?"

No Excuse for That.

She: "Have you been to see the menagerie yet?" He: "No; I intended going last evening, but was stopped by one of the animals." She: "How was that? Did one of the lions break loose?" He: "Oh, no; nothing so exciting. I was prevented from going by the reindeer. Er—you see, it was a wet night."

What He Intended.

"Young man," said a stern parent, "do you intend to stay here all night holding my daughter's hand and looking into her eyes like a sick calf?" "No, sir." "What do you intend to do, then?" "Well, I thought that when you did us the kindness to retire I would put my arm round her waist, and if she did not object too forcibly I might risk a kiss."

Affinity.

"Yes," sighed the fair young thing. "I admit that I like you—but it does not seem to me that we were ever meant for each other. We have not a single taste in common." Mournfully the young man studied the floor for some moments. At last he looked up with the dawn of hope in his eyes. "But, yes," he whispered. "Are you not very fond of onions?" Blushingly she nodded a confession. "So am I!" he cried rapturously.

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Early Morning Catarrh

In an editorial on Catarrh in the last number of the *Review of Nose and Throat Diseases*, there is mentioned the tendency of catarrhal diseases to become especially troublesome in the morning. The explanation of this is to be found in the fact that during the night when the body is recumbent, the catarrhal accumulations pass backward from the nasal cavities into the throat. In the morning, on waking, these accumulations cause hacking, coughing, or scraping to free the throat from the phlegm. Nearly all those who suffer from nasal complaints have this symptom, and in some cases it becomes so prominent as to be called "Early morning catarrh." This number of the *Review* also contains a "Supplement" giving the details of a large number of cases of catarrh cured by a new method, which has been successful where operative procedures and cauterisations have failed. There is, likewise, a Report Form, by means of which patients suffering with deafness, or ear, nose, or throat ailments can obtain free advice by post. Those who are interested can secure a copy of the *Review* (with supplement and report form), free by post by addressing the Editor, Drouet Institute, 10 Marble Arch, London, W. The Editor advises patients, however, when possible, to visit the Drouet Institute for a personal consultation with the medical staff. Consulting hours are—in the morning, 10 to 12, and in the afternoon, 2 to 4, week days only. A fee of five shillings is charged for personal consultations.

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BEECHAM'S PILLS

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette: All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

The Weary One.

"W. E. R." is afraid his sweetheart of three years' standing has grown tired of him. She does not seem as pleased to see him as she used, nor does she take as much interest in his doings. Besides, her letters have grown cold and uninteresting. What should he do?"

* * * * *

If you feel there has been a falling off in her affection for you, you should candidly ask her if she still wishes to keep to your engagement. Possibly she has really grown tired of you. You seem to describe the usual symptoms of weariness. Offer to release her, if she wishes, and make that the test of her feelings towards you.

Are Handsome Men Humbugs?

"QUEENIE" is receiving attentions from a very handsome young man, who is greatly admired by other girls, and does not seem to mind the admiration. What "QUEENIE" wants to know is, "are men of that kind usually sincere, and should she allow matters to go any further?"

* * * * *

I don't see why a handsome man should be any less sincere than anybody else. The fact that, with so many would-be admirers, he has selected yourself, seems to show that his sincerity is unusually genuine. As to the attentions of other girls, that is his misfortune, poor fellow. Make every allowance for it. That he "does not seem to mind it," may be just his good nature, and does not mean insincerity.

London for Honeymooners.

"I AM a country girl, and shall be married to a neighbouring farmer next month," writes "MAGGIE." "We very much want to spend our honeymoon in London. Do you think this advisable at this time of year?"

* * * * *

I think London a very nice place for a young married couple at any time of year, provided they do not foolishly overdo their programme of amusements. Do not wear yourself out by too much sight-seeing or theatre-going. A young married couple of my acquaintance spent a week in London lately, for their honeymoon, and found that they enjoyed themselves as much by riding on 'buses, and walking about the quaint old streets, looking at shops and dropping into funny little restaurants and tea-shops, as they would have done had they visited all the show places. I dare say you would find it the same. As to expense, if your means allow, there are plenty of quiet hotels in the Strand district, where you would be comfortable at very moderate cost, and would save the railway fares and fatigue of a stay in the suburbs.

Breaking it to the Other Girl.

"H. J." is engaged. He has announced the affair privately to one or two friends. There is another, however, who should know of it—a girl to whom he has been recently paying attentions—and "H. J." is perplexed to know how to acquaint her with the fact that all must now cease between them. He did not really love this girl, but found her society very agreeable, and corresponded with her. He thinks, however, that she is fond of him, and would be hurt at the news of his engagement.

* * * * *

"H. J." will gain nothing by deceptive methods. Evidently he has not behaved very openly with the girl in question, or he would have given her clearly to understand that his feelings for her were merely those of friendship. I advise him to write to her and tell her the whole truth. Her disappointment may be great, but she would be very hurt indeed if she thought he was ashamed to tell her the truth.

Trouble Over a Trousseau.

"I HAVE a very economical parent," writes "MILLIE." "He disbelieves in wedding expenses, and has even refused to pay for my trousseau. I am to be married next Spring, but my father gets angry every time I mention the subject, and meanwhile I am in a horrid position about the whole matter."

* * * * *

Probably your father wants educating, so don't get impatient. Wait until after Christmas, before you press him on the matter. I take it you have no mother, but surely you have an aunt, or a cousin, or a married sister, who would not mind taking your case in hand. If your father actually refuses, after this pressure, to grant you the necessary allowance, then tell your lover the plain, straightforward truth, and if he is really fond of you, he will not be particular about the trousseau. After all, there is a good deal of sham about the preparations many people make for weddings. A marriage without a trousseau would be a bit of a novelty, and no doubt later on in life, you and your husband will have a good laugh over the silly affair.

The Suicidal Sweetheart.

THE young man who makes love to "ETHEL" is very morbid and depressing. She likes him fairly well, but doubts if she really loves him. He, however, professes passionate attachment for her. When she talks of other people, or on general subjects, he persists in telling her he does not believe in her love. He also is always threatening to make away with himself. What is the best thing for "ETHEL" to do?

* * * * *

If you do not love him, "ETHEL," do not deceive him about it, no matter how much you fear hurting his feelings. The morbid young man, who always threatens to make away with himself on small pretexts, is probably not serious. A good many people talk like that, but very rarely carry out their threats. I knew a young man who was notorious for this kind of thing. He had paid attentions to some dozens of girls in his time, and with every one of them he had talked in this gloomy fashion. He is still living, and is, I believe, treating yet another sweetheart to the same dismal programme. Very little is gained by encouraging such men. Straightforward talk is the best tonic.

Cynthia

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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ON BEING SHY.

Jerome says, "A shy man's lot is not a happy one. The men dislike him, the women despise him, and he dislikes and despises himself." So "being shy" must be a sore evil under the sun. To be rich, or great, or good, or ambitious, on healthy lines is commendable, but to be shy seems to bring down on yourself universal contempt and pity, and the worst of it is you feel you don't deserve it. Of course Jerome refers to *men*, for you seldom meet a shy girl. Girls are merrie, and coy, and blushing, and nice (some of them exceptionally nice), but shy girls are as scarce as bank notes. One writer advertises a cure for shyness in men. He says, "Adopt an easy and pleasing manner, especially towards ladies." Easier said than done. Very seldom *married* men are shy. It would do some of them a lot of good if they were. But can you imagine a man or a woman either being too shy to go and purchase a box of Page Woodcock's Wind Pills, the finest remedy for the cure of Indigestion, Wind on the Stomach, Liver Complaints, Sick Headache, Costiveness, Nervous Debility, Palpitation of the Heart, Biliousness? No, I really can't.

Being purely vegetable, tasteless, mild, and tonic in action, they may be taken with perfect safety by the most delicate of either sex.

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Send P.O. with measurements: neck, neck to waist, sleeve under arm, ust, waist, length of skirt in front.

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A full list sent post free on application.

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21/- **Fine Old Violin**, by Pietro Antorious; magnificent rich solo tone; in perfect condition, with fully mounted bow and case; approval.

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8/6 **Fashionable Long Neck-chain**; genuine 18-carat rolled gold (stamped), beautifully finished; very choice design.

9/6 **Organ Toned Melodeon**; magnificent 26/- instrument. 12-fold bellows (metal bound), 3 sets steel bronze reeds, and 4 acting stops, including Tremolo and Diapason action; rich powerful tone, perfect order.

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MOTHER, SON AND DAUGHTER

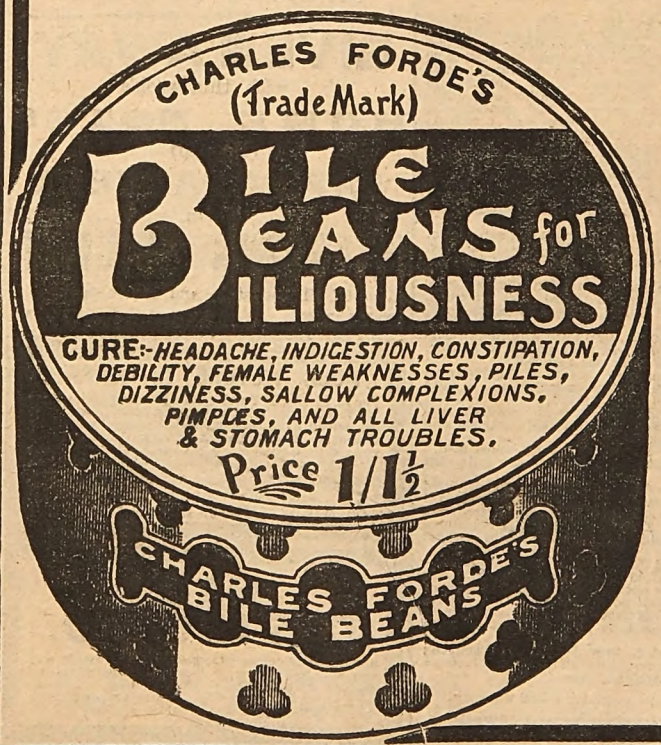
CURED OF INDIGESTION, DEBILITY, AND DIZZINESS.

"FOR a long time I suffered so from Indigestion, Weakness, and Debility that it was with difficulty I moved about," said Mrs. Turner, of Moorgate, Retford, in the course of an interview with a *Retford and Gainsboro' Times'* reporter. "I had a constant feeling of heaviness at the stomach, and, do what I would, I could not get rid of it. My breathing was laboured and caused great pain. Many a time, when outside, I had actually to stand still in order to get my breath, so bad had I become. One day a neighbour gave me a few Bile Beans to see if they would do me any good. I thought they did. I purchased some and from the time I began to take them I have gradually improved, until now I am quite well again." Mrs. Turner's daughter who had also suffered from nervous debility said:

"My strength left me, I became depressed, and lost all interest in everything. So dreadfully low did I get that I could hardly move about, and I felt as if I should like to go to bed and not get up again. My mother said it was dreadful to see me so ill, and gave me some of the Bile Beans, so I determined to give them a fair trial. Although only a short time has elapsed since I began to take them, my weakness and depression are gone, and my strength has returned. Bile Beans are certainly a wonderful medicine."

"A neighbour gave me a few Bile Beans."

Before the reporter left, Mrs. Turner said: "A short time ago my son could not go about his work in consequence of sick headache and dizziness. I gave him some of the Beans, and gradually his ailments ceased to trouble him. The Beans have done him worlds of good, and he is not slow to tell it. I myself am now well and strong, and can go about my work with gladness, and am the healthy, happy mother of a healthy family, thanks entirely to the marvellous efficacy of Bile Beans.



Bile Beans do not merely purge, giving temporary relief only, like the old-fashioned so-called remedies of forty or fifty years ago. They act directly on the liver and digestive organs, strengthening and stimulating those organs to perform their natural duties. They produce a gentle action on the bowels, curing or preventing constipation, cleansing the stomach, and ridding the system of all impurities. Do not be misled by claims of half a hundred pills in the box, where probably four to six constitute a dose, and the doses cannot be discontinued. ONE BILE BEAN is ONE DOSE. They can be discontinued after the cure is effected; they are purely vegetable; they contain no harmful drugs, and they are the SAFEST FAMILY MEDICINE.

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FREE SAMPLE COUPON.
Short Stories.
Dec. 5th, 1903

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(A Thrilling Incident from the Powerful Story, "A Modern Burnt-offering." See inside.)

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Veno's Lightning Cough Cure
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Short Stories

No. 780.] [One Penny.

Week Ending December 12th, 1903.

A MODERN BURNT-OFFERING.

Telling of the Heroic Deed of a Brave Girl.

Containing the Incident Depicted on the Cover.

It was morning, and the golden sun streamed in through the open windows of the pretty breakfast-room and fell upon silver and glass and snowy table-linen.

The morning post had just been delivered, and Arthur Garth and his sister Minnie were dividing their attention between breakfast and their respective correspondence. There was another and much more bulky letter-box downstairs, for the apartments were immediately over the great East India Bank, of which Arthur Garth was resident manager, but these could wait till business hours began and the bank threw open its heavy swing-doors for the day. To judge from the unruffled expression of Arthur Garth's face, there was nothing either important or remarkable in his correspondence. But his sister Minnie was more fortunate, and, strangely enough, the pleasure she evinced over the perusal of one dainty little note seemed, when its purport became known to him, to communicate its influence to him also.

"Arthur," she said, looking up from the letter with a sly little twinkle in her blue eyes—"Arthur, what do you think? I have asked an old school friend to come and stay with me for a week or two, and she is coming."

Arthur looked across at his sister and a flush mounted to his brow as he asked:

"Not Faith—I mean Miss Allardyce?"

Minnie laughed—a silvery, rippling laugh that appeared to add to her brother's embarrassment. But he was forced to laugh too—her mirth was so infectious.

"You poor old boy," she said banteringly, "you can't hide anything from me. Well, dear"—and her voice softened and dropped to a tone of infinite tenderness and affection—"I knew you would be pleased, so I thought I would give you a little surprise.

"You know, Arthur"—and the voice grew still more soft—"there is simply nothing so dear to me as your happiness. You have been father and mother and brother to me ever since our dear ones were taken from us, and the life that might otherwise have been solitary and sad, has been joyous and happy, because of the love and care you have always given me.

"And now—now that your own happiness depends on the winning of dear little Faith Allardyce—for, though you have not confided in me, I know this to be so—it is my turn to help you in the attainment of that wish."

Arthur Garth left his seat and went round the breakfast-table towards his sister. The latter rose as he approached, and he put his arms about her slender figure.

"Minnie," he said as he drew her face to his and kissed it; "I am lucky in having such a sweet sister as you. You have guessed rightly, dear.

"I love Faith Allardyce very dearly—more dearly than I can tell, even to you.

"I am very, very glad that you have asked her to visit you here, and I hope before she goes back home, that I shall hear from her own lips the answer I so ardently desire. But"—and he kissed her again—"my sister will be none the less dear to me, or important to my happiness, when a wife shall claim my first love. Our mother's dying trust to me to care for you—my friend as well as sister—shall never be forgotten, even if this happiest dream of my life be realised. Nor can I ever regard that sacred trust in the light of a duty—though duty it undoubtedly is—since its fulfilment affords me too much pleasure to be viewed in any other light than that as an honour, a privilege, and a real and lasting happiness."

There were tears in Minnie's eyes as she lifted them to her brother's face.

"Dear old boy," she said lovingly, "your assurances are very sweet to me, though I do not need them. I cannot think of you other than as the best and kindest of men."

Arthur pinched her cheek.

"Such views change," he said banteringly. "Your turn may come some day."

Minnie laughed, and then blushed prettily, as she disengaged herself from her brother's embrace.

"By the way," she said, "shall I put Faith in the room next mine?"

Arthur considered for a moment.

"No," he said at last. "My room is by far the most comfortable. Cannot you make the necessary transfers and put her there? And I could have the room next yours."

Minnie nodded.

"Just the thing," she said. "I'll see to it to-day. She is coming to-morrow, you know." And, breakfast being over, she went out to superintend the transfer at once, while Arthur Garth went down the broad stairs to the bank below to commence the business of the day.

That day and the next seemed long to ardent Arthur Garth. But at last they drew to an end, and, mounting the stairs from the bank at the close of the second day, he found his sister and their fair visitor chatting pleasantly together over old associations.

Faith Allardyce rose as he entered, and a soft pink blush heightened the colour of her cheek as he greeted her and gave her cordial welcome to their home.

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She was exquisitely lovely, with large hazel eyes and delicate complexion.

Tall and slender, and with that graceful ease of carriage that lends both dignity and distinction to the figure, Faith Allardyce was as sweet and perfect a type of womanhood as one could wish to see. But the greatest attraction of all was her hair. No one could see her without remarking both its beauty and abundance. Indeed, so luxuriant was it, that she had allowed her adherence to transitory fashion to lapse altogether, and habitually wound it, coil upon coil, above her gracefully poised head. Its hue was chestnut, but, whenever the sun caught it, it glowed and glistened like threads of fine-spun gold. It had a trick, too, of clustering in coy little curls above her low brow and about her small, shell-like ears in a manner which Arthur Garth thought positively bewitching. Nor was he at all prejudiced, for if ever that old saying was true, it assuredly was in the case of Faith Allardyce: "A woman's crowning glory is her hair." And Faith was not ignorant of the fact.

"Well, Mr. Garth," she said, "have you unburdened yourself of the business of the day?"

"Yes," replied Arthur, "and the process of 'unburdening' has been associated with more pleasure than I ever remember to have been the case before."

For a moment Faith was oblivious to the compliment implied.

"Does that mean that the day's business has been satisfactory or otherwise?" she asked. "The inference is a little vague."

Arthur smiled and looked out of the window.

"I am afraid it is," he said, with a humorous twinkle in his dark eyes. "And explanations are tiresome. But, really, Miss Allardyce, the day's business has been eminently satisfactory."

Faith looked into his face. And then the implied compliment in his first remark came home to her, and she blushed prettily, and turned away her eyes. Minnie, with true feminine perception, noticed her embarrassment and changed the conversation.

"Any of the directors been in to-day?" she asked.

Arthur nodded.

"They seem very satisfied," he said. "But there is to be one slight alteration—only a temporary one—for which there is a good and substantial reason."

"What is that?" asked Minnie.

"Mr. Dixon is to sleep on the premises for the next week or so," he replied gravely. And then, as Minnie still looked inquisitive, he added: "I am not at liberty to explain, dear. All I need say is that my present responsibilities are greatly augmented, and that the arrangement I have just referred to is the outcome of my own personal request."

Minnie sighed. She understood now. The bank strong-room had need of a second protector. The same thing had happened before, and Minnie always felt nervous at such times. But she made no further remark and allowed the subject to drop.

"I suppose you are likely to remain here for some time to come, Mr. Garth?" said Faith interrogatively.

"Yes, I expect so," was the reply. "There will be a vacancy in the head office a few months hence, owing to the present manager's intended retirement. But the post is too far removed from that which I now occupy to warrant even the hope of my appointment to it. There is some difference between seven hundred and fifty and fifteen hundred a year!"

Faith nodded.

"Rather!" she said. "But I thought you were ambitious, Mr. Garth?"

Arthur laughed.

"So I believe I am," he said.

Faith opened her eyes wide in affected surprise.

"An ambitious man—with no hope!" she said. "Isn't that something of a paradox?"

But Arthur was not easy to put down.

"I think not," he said smiling. "It is often the best policy for an ambitious man to realise the *present* hopelessness of some achievements, in order that he may devote all his energies to the attainment of lesser and humbler eminences, from which the ultimate height may be more easy to reach. In crossing the river, it is always unwise, in our desire to set foot on the opposite shore, to forget the next stepping-stone."

There was an admiring light in Faith's hazel eyes, to which she endeavoured to give the lie.

"Oh, you plodder!" she said with assumed impatience. "Well, I am more sanguine than you. My name is Faith, you know, and I believe you will get that appointment."

"Can't you make me believe it, too?" Arthur asked, a light dancing in his eyes. "I might do lots of things if that came true." And he looked ardently into the bright animated face of the girl before him.

Faith caught the glance and turned her head away.

"You should try," she said. "'All things are possible,' you know."

Arthur's heart beat fast as he listened to the words. "All things are possible!" Well, he would put one possibility to the test before the week was out. Of that he was determined.

* * * * *

It was three days later.

They had sat late over supper, and it was midnight when Faith Allardyce retired to the pretty little room which Minnie had assigned to her. But, late as it was, she did not go to bed. The day had been damp and chilly, and Minnie had ordered a fire to be lit in their visitor's room, before which Faith sat in idle meditation. She had disrobed herself ready for the night, and, attiring herself in a dainty dressing-gown, sat herself down in a deep-seated easy-chair before the grateful glow of the fire. There were many things to think about. Her holiday in the great Metropolis, the sights she saw, so strangely unfamiliar to her provincial eyes, the gaiety and bustle of the great city, the pleasant renewal of old-time friendship with her school-mate, Minnie, and, last, but not least, the evident admiration of her handsome brother Arthur.

The very thought of him caused Faith Allardyce to blush. She was not a simpering school-girl, affecting what she did not feel, or denying what she did. She had read her heart in these last few days, and knew, without question or concealment, that she loved this Arthur Garth as she would love no other man.

And she knew, too, that he loved her. The thought was pregnant with sweetness, and she sat there before the red fire, dwelling on the realisation, too happy to break the spell which that realisation had woven about her. How long she sat there she did not know, but, thinking her happy thoughts, she fell asleep.

She started into consciousness with the sound of someone moving about the room. Springing from her chair, she faced round, and, at the sight she saw, put her hand quickly to her heart with a convulsive catch at her throat. The electric light was still turned on, and by its light she saw the tall figure of a masked man close behind her, with the barrel of a grim revolver pointed at her breast. She could feel the night wind coming in through the open window, and knew instinctively that it was there the man had entered. She reeled, and would have cried out, but the voice of the armed man stopped her.

"If you utter a sound" he said, in a low, threatening tone, "I will shoot you as I would a bird!"

She cowered down in the chair and tried to think.

"I've made a little mistake, that's all," went on the man under his breath. "I thought this was Mr. Garth's room. The fact is"—and the mouth broadened into a cruel grin beneath the mask—"the fact is, I want to have a word or two with Mr. Garth on—er—important business."

Faith shivered. She understood now. Arthur's hint about augmented responsibilities recurred to her. Oh, what was she to do?

"Well," resumed the man, "I can't waste my time here, and it's equally evident I can't leave you without first taking some little precaution to insure your silence."

He looked down at her, and she, with terrified, startled eyes looked back at him.

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"The best way of doing that would be to—well, you know well enough what that is," he said calmly. "But you're awfully pretty, and I can't do it. Sentiment should never interfere with business, I know, but a man's a man, and a pretty woman makes a man a fool. But what can I do?"

Again he looked at her, and she, frightened, shrinking, terror-stricken, dropped her head upon her hands and hid her face from him. As she did so, the beautiful, long chestnut hair falling almost to her knees, attracted his attention.

"Ah!" he said, and looked about the room. Presently his eye fell on the big glass-panelled doors of a fine old wardrobe at one end of the room.

"The very thing!" he said. "Now then, miss, I am afraid I must trouble you to come with me. Do so without noise or resistance, and no harm shall come to you. But if you disobey my instructions or make the least sound, you must take the consequences."

He took her by the arm, and, lifting her up, led her over to the wardrobe. Reaching it, he took the long chestnut tresses in his hands and knotted it again and again at the end till it hung in a great clumsy knot some eighteen inches from her head. Then, opening one of the heavy doors of the wardrobe, he put the knot of hair within and shut the door to with a sharp thrust and turned the key in the lock.

"You can't follow me now," he said grimly, "and I'm going to take the key away with me. I might gag you if I wished, but I think you understand me well enough to know that, upon the slightest outcry, I would return, whatever the risk to myself, and take quick and summary vengeance on you for so doing. Don't forget!" And, with a cruel gleam in his dark, sinister eyes, he once more took out his revolver, picked up a dark lantern which lay on the table, and noiselessly left the room, closing the door behind him.

Faith Allardyce was alone.

Trembling with dread and apprehension, she tried to collect her scattered senses and think what she could do to save the man she loved. That he was in danger of his life, she knew now only too well.

She thought of him sleeping so soundly and peacefully, little dreaming of the terrible awakening that was soon to come. She pictured him opening his eyes to see the gleaming muzzle of that hideous revolver pressed against his temple and hearing that stern, peremptory demand for the keys of the bank strong-room. He would not yield, she knew, and then—then—oh, he would be murdered—murdered there in his bed.

The thought drove her almost frantic.

What could she do? She must do something! If nothing else occurred to her, she would scream for help, even though she paid the penalty with her own life. But was there no other way?

Her beautiful hair—the hair she, as well as others, had always admired so much—was holding her a prisoner and keeping her back from the man she loved. With starting eyes she looked about her for knife or scissors to cut through the lovely hair that bound her, but she could see neither, and her heart sank.

Then her eye fell on a long wax taper that lay within reach of her hand. A box of matches stood beside it, and a new idea flashed into her mind. Would there be time? She would try!

Snatching up the taper, she lit it, and, holding it behind her head, let the flame play among the strands of hair just where they were held by the doors of the wardrobe.

Her poor hair! Its beauty was being sacrificed now.

She could hear the hiss of singeing hair as the flame burnt its way steadily through the thick coil above it. But she gave no thought to the loss. Arthur Garth was in peril of his life, and that was all she could think of. And so the work of destruction went on, and at last she was free.

Springing to the door she opened it and looked along the dark passage. She thought she could see dimly in the distance, the figure of a man stooping to the lock of Arthur's door. A wide circle of light shone for an instant on the door, and she knew her sight had not deceived her.

The man had not heard her and she went stealthily down a transverse passage to the door of the room in which she knew Mr. Dixon had been put. Noiselessly she turned the handle, and, to her infinite relief, found the door unlocked. In she went, and, bending over the sleeping man, she silently roused him, and acquainted him with what was happening. Then, while Dixon leapt out of bed and hastily slipped on a few clothes, she stepped stealthily down the broad staircase of the bank, and, unshuttering a window, opened it and peered out into the dark, deserted street. Two or three moments and she heard the footstep of a passing police-constable. A stifled cry, and he was at her side. Another minute and he was through the open window and bounding up the stairs, while a great shout came from above, together with the sound of a desperate hand to hand encounter. It was Dixon and the burglar, and, just as the constable reached them, the burglar pointed the revolver full at his adversary's head. But the constable was too quick. With a blow from his truncheon, he knocked the weapon from his hand and it fell clattering to the floor.

At that moment the door of Arthur Garth's room was thrown open, and he stood amongst them, just aroused from sleep by the noise of the combat outside. A glance told him all, and the burglar was quickly under arrest. Dixon soon acquainted his chief with the manner in which he had been aroused, and Arthur Garth, looking down the dark passage, saw a slim white figure disappear within the doorway of her room.

"God bless her!" he murmured. "She has saved our lives, Dixon!"

Faith Allardyce did not appear at breakfast the following morning. Minnie had it conveyed to her room, and, soon after, went herself to see how her friend fared. She was closeted with her for a long time, and, when she came out, there was a suspicion of tears in her blue eyes. Her brother, waiting in vain for the appearance of the girl to whom he owed so much, was at last compelled to go downstairs to his office and begin the business of the day. There was a good deal of additional work for him that day—police investigations to satisfy, his presence in court, where his evidence, together with that of his subordinate, Dixon, was sworn to, and, finally, a full report of the proceedings to be drawn up and forwarded to the directors. But at last the day wore away to an end, and he went upstairs to his own quarters.

Somewhat to his surprise he found his sister absent. Faith was sitting on the couch, looking out of the window, and his heart beat fast as he approached her. She looked round as he entered, and a soft pink blush crept into her cheek.

"Minnie has run over to Mrs. Needham's," she said. "I expected her back before now, but I suppose something has detained her."

She wondered, as she said it, whether sly little Minnie had purposely delayed her return to allow for the *tête-à-tête* which was now impending. Arthur Garth sat down uninvited on the couch beside her.

"Miss Allardyce," he said in a low, earnest voice, "before I say anything else I must thank you most heartily and sin-

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cerely, for the very great service you rendered both myself and the directors of the bank last night."

"Bother the directors!" said Faith, attempting to hide the tell-tale light in her hazel eyes. "*They* needn't congratulate themselves. I never even thought of them."

Arthur flushed and looked deeper into the eyes of the girl at his side.

"Then I am to infer," he said quietly, "that your thoughts were confined to one individual?"

This was very embarrassing. The hands that lay in her lap trembled a little.

"Yes," she said, affecting to misunderstand. "I thought a good deal about—the burglar."

Arthur smiled.

"Ah!" he said. "That estimable gentleman has made a clean breast of it. He says he'll never let sentiment interfere with his business plans again. But, seriously, Miss Allardyce, how did you free yourself from the imprisonment to which he condemned you? I thought——" And he glanced curiously at her beautiful hair, now coiled in its former fashion above her head.

Faith coloured.

"Ah," she said, "that is the advantage of art! With a little dexterous manipulation I have made it look very much as it used to do. But in reality, it is more than half gone."

"Gone?" said Arthur.

"Yes," replied Faith, lowering her eyes, "I—I burnt it."

She took a packet from her writing-case, which lay at her side, and, unfolding it, disclosed a knotted mass of soft chestnut hair, with the ends all singed and burnt by the relentless taper. Arthur's hand trembled visibly as he touched it reverently. Then he took the girl's two hands in his and looked deep into her eyes.

"Faith," he whispered, "I have loved you from the very first day I saw you, two years ago. And, during the past few days, that love has increased until I can keep silent no longer. Faith, my own darling, will you share the home of a poor man? You may have more brilliant opportunities, dear, but you will not find a more loving and devoted husband than I. Will you—will you be my wife?"

"Yes," she whispered, resting her head upon his shoulder; "and—and—the love is not all—one-sided, Arthur."

With a cry of joy he caught her to his breast and kissed her passionately. A step sounded outside the door, and they released each other. There was a glad light in Arthur's eyes, and a self-conscious confusion about Faith's manner as Minnie entered, that was as legible to that understanding young lady as the type in an American headline. She sat down on a chair and laughed softly and triumphantly.

"That burglar wasn't such a bad lot after all," she said mysteriously. "Oh, dear, and I shall have to play gooseberry now!"

There was no misunderstanding the latter remark, and Faith, with flaming cheeks, went swiftly over to Minnie's side, and, kneeling down, hid her face in her friend's dress. Minnie put her soft hand on the artistically arranged hair and smoothed it lovingly.

"What about the appointment and the fifteen hundred a year?" she whispered, banteringly. "It isn't quite a certainty, you know."

Faith lifted her face and looked across at her lover.

"Never mind!" she said confidently. "I am sure he will get it!"

And he did.

W. J. Mowbray.

HOW IT ENDED.

The Tale of a Sacrificed Life.

"You cur! If ever you insult this lady in this manner again, I'll thrash your miserable life out of you."

The speaker's blue eyes were blazing with fury, and his grasp on the other's throat went near to choking out what little breath there was left in him.

"Oh, don't hurt him," said a girl's soft voice, as she put a restraining hand on to Norman Silverwood's arm. "He doesn't really know what he is doing."

"Then he ought to be taught," said the man furiously; but a second glance at the other's white, vacant face, with its tangled mass of reddish hair, seemed to tell him something of the truth, and he realised that it was scarcely a fair fight, for God's brightest gift of intelligence had been denied to the pitiful object he had almost shaken the life out of. Flinging him on to the soft grass, Norman said a little more gently:

"Remember what I say; if this occurs again you shall not escape so lightly as you have done to-day. Now go!"

Casting a malignant glance, full of hatred, at Norman, and muttering something about "paying him out for this," the poor half-witted creature rose to his feet and was soon lost sight of down the winding path which led to the village. As he disappeared through the trees Norman, drawing a small flask of brandy out of his pocket, said:

"What a lucky thing I had some left. Do take it, you look quite white and shaken."

Drawing her towards the stump of an old tree, he made her sit down, and in a few minutes—after one or two sips from Norman's flask—the pretty colour began to return to the girl's face, and looking up at him, she said:

"Thank you so much for your help. I am so glad you happened to be passing just at that moment. Although I don't think Stephen would have hurt me, I didn't want him to kiss me."

"I should think not, indeed," said Norman, throwing himself on to the grass by the girl's side. "Does he belong to the village?"

"Yes, he and his mother settled here about four years ago, soon after my father was made Vicar."

"Ah, that explains it," said Norman. "Then you are Miss Fairfax? I remember hearing of poor old Grantley's death soon after I went away, and my aunt has often spoken of you to me since I returned." Then, seeing the girl's look of bewilderment, he rose, and laughingly taking off his hat, bowed low to the ground as he said, "Norman Silverwood, at your service, madam."

"Why I know you quite well," said the girl naively; "at least"—correcting herself—"I mean Miss Silverwood has told me all about you. You're not a bit like what I thought you would be," she went on, "and I'm so glad."

"Why, what in the world did you expect to find?" asked the man, amused by the girl's frank outspokenness.

"Well, Miss Silverwood said you were so awfully handsome, and clever, and good, that I felt quite afraid of meeting you, and after all you are——"

But here the girl stopped, for Norman was laughing un-

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restrainedly at the absolute relief plainly written on her expressive face.

"'Wad some fay the giftie gie us, to see ourselves as ithers see us,'" quoth he. "I am glad Kismet put it into my way to remove such an awful impression from your mind. Handsome—clever—good; what a fearful thing to have to live up to all that, Miss Fairfax. I couldn't possibly do it."

"Well, you know," looking at him critically, "you are rather good looking after all." But another roar of laughter stopped Miss Fairfax's flow of eloquence, and she rose, saying with a blush, "I'm afraid I'm getting tied into a knot, Mr. Silverwood, I'd better go home."

"May I see you to the Vicarage?" he asked, picking up his fishing tackle, which had laid all this time where he flung it as he sprang to the girl's assistance. "What did you call him? Stephen may be loafing about somewhere in the glen, and you wouldn't like another encounter to-day, I'm sure."

"No," said the girl, as she thanked him for his escort. "A little of 'Mr. Stephen' goes a long way."

"Yes, he's not altogether an acquisition to the village, Miss Fairfax. Poor beggar! I'm sorry I handled him so roughly. After all, as you say, he would not know what he was doing."

When they arrived at the Vicarage gate they chanced upon Freda's father, a cheery, white-haired, benevolent-looking old gentleman, who, when he heard of the service Norman had done his daughter, who was the very apple of his eye, could not make enough of the young fellow.

"Come in, my boy, and dine with us," he said heartily; "that is, if you have nothing better to do, and Freda shall sing to us." As Norman looked down at his rough tweed suit, in a half-hearted sort of apology, the old man went on genially, "Oh, never mind your clothes, we are not smart people. Far from it, eh, Freda?"

She reached the pistol just in time to save the shot.

"No, father; and I think I can arrange for a wash and a brush-down for Mr. Silverwood, if that will ease his conscience at all." Norman agreed with ready alacrity, for he was in no great haste to part from his newly-made friends. Freda came down from her room looking very fresh and dainty in her clinging white gown, with her shining hair piled loosely on the top of her small head. Such pretty hair it was—Norman thought he had never seen any quite so pretty before—and then her eyes! They had a curious way of dilating when she was pleased or excited, which made Norman think how he could best rouse her interest and gain a look from those lustrous depths. As dinner proceeded, the talk turned to Freda's recent adventure, and Mr. Fairfax quite agreed with Norman when he suggested that it might be as well if the man were put under restraint.

"Oh, no, father," said Freda. "Stephen is really perfectly harmless, and it would almost break his mother's heart if she had to part with him. She has nobody else, you know."

"Yes, I am aware of that, Freda," said the old man, "but he is gradually getting worse, I am sure, and it will end in that eventually."

The conversation soon strayed to pleasanter topics, however, and Stephen was soon forgotten by the three he had helped so strangely to bring together. After dinner Freda kept her promise of singing to them, and as Norman listened to the clear, sympathetic voice, the charm of the girl's personality crept over him very strongly. When the old gentleman dropped into a light doze in his easy chair the two wandered out into the pleasant, old-fashioned garden, with its wealth of flowers, for it was just the time of the roses, and they were blooming, here, there, and everywhere, in luxurious profusion. To the two lingering there—although they scarcely realised it yet—it was the beginning of the "old, old story" which to young hearts is ever new, and when the "Good-nights" were said, and Mr. Fairfax gave Norman a hearty invitation for "any time," it was Freda's eyes which his own sought as he said:

"If I shall not be in your way? If I shall be welcome?"

"Yes, come in any time, Mr. Silverwood," she said, with a shy glance up at him. "We shall always be so pleased to see you."

And so the summer crept on apace, and soon it became a regular thing for Miss Fairfax and the "young Master," as the villagers called Norman, to be seen about together, and the old women, gossiping over their cups of tea, drew their own conclusions, which, to tell the truth, were not very wide of the mark.

"They be a fine couple, and she'll make a bonny mistress up at the old place." So ran the story, and great was the interest taken in the doings of the two.

One day just before Christmas, as Freda and Norman were sitting in the cosy drawing-room at the Vicarage, Norman, in an absent-minded manner, whistled a few bars of one of the dreamy waltzes Freda would at times play for him.

"How I should love a waltz," said the girl, a little wistfully.

"Yes, I shouldn't mind one myself," said Norman, "a downright good dance would be fine, wouldn't it?"

"Rather! I should say so," said the girl, "although I have never been to a proper dance—a ball, I mean—in my life."

"Never been to a ball!" repeated Norman. "Good gracious! How's that?"

"Well, they don't grow on trees about here," said the girl quaintly. Norman said nothing, but about ten days later Freda found an envelope with the Silverwood crest on her plate when she came down to breakfast, and opening it, gave a little shriek of delight when she saw the inclosure.

"Oh, father—listen," she cried; then reading from the thick, gilt-edged card, "Mr. Norman Silverwood presents his

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compliments to Miss Freda Fairfax, and requests the pleasure of her company at Silverwood Hall, Tuesday, Jan. 25th," then in one corner, "Dancing nine o'clock." "Oh, father, isn't it perfectly lovely?"

"Yes, my darling, I am very glad," he said, beaming at her over his gold-rimmed spectacles. Anything which gave pleasure to Freda was sure to please the old man. When the great day arrived, and Freda went down into the study to show herself in all her bravery to her father just before starting for the Hall, a very soft look came into the old man's eyes as he kissed her and bade her go and enjoy herself.

"You are your mother over again to-night," he said, and indeed Freda's resemblance to the lovely woman whose photograph always looked down from the old man's study walls was very great. "Good night, my pet," he went on, "be back in good time to-morrow."

Miss Silverwood had thoughtfully sent the girl word she should expect her to stay overnight, for Norman had made no secret of the fact that it was Freda, and Freda's enjoyment alone, which guided all his thoughts, as he and the old lady planned out this dance, to which half the countryside had been invited. She was prepared, therefore, to help Norman with all her heart, for Freda was a great favourite of the old lady.

What a fairyland it all seemed to Freda! Norman was amply repaid for all his thoughts and trouble by the sight of the girl's happy face. Her first ball—and with Norman close at hand to anticipate her every wish. What more could the heart of girlhood want?

"Are you enjoying it, Miss Fairfax?" he said as he led her towards the conservatory after one of their many dances together.

"Ah—more than I can say!" she answered, with eyes shining like twin stars. "And I owe it all to you!"

Looking down at her in all her loveliness, Norman felt more than ever how altogether desirable she was, and, instead of going into the conservatory, turned into the library—a cosy little room at the side of the house—unlighted for the time being by anything but the firelight, which was casting quaint shadows on to the walls.

"Freda, come in here," he said in a low, unsteady voice, "I want to speak to you." Closing the door behind him, he stood gazing at the girl, all his heart in his eyes, dumb, where he would fain said so much.

"What do you want?" she asked, half frightened by the intentness of his gaze.

"You," he answered, holding out his arms towards her. "Oh, Freda—darling—can't you see how much I want you—how much I love you——"

No need to ask if she loved him. As the soft white arms found their way round his neck, a whisper, light as a summer breeze, caught his ear.

"Norman—I love you with all my heart and soul."

As his arms closed round the slender figure, Norman felt that earth could hold no fairer thing for him than this one woman's love, given to him, as he felt, fresh and pure as a child's.

"When will you come to me, Freda?" he whispered. "There is nothing to keep my little wife away. We will be married in the Spring?" raising the sweet, shy face that he might read his answer there.

Just then they were both startled by a slight sound in the direction of the window, which opened straight on to the lawn, and as they turned, caught a glimpse, for a moment, of a white, vacant face, with its tangled reddish hair hanging almost to the eyes.

"It's Stephen," said Freda, grasping Norman's arm nervously, for the look on the man's face was not good to see and she felt that it boded evil for them.

"Yes," said Norman, as he rushed to the window, and out on to the lawn, but not a trace could he find of the poor, half-witted creature, who had evidently been attracted to the house by the lights. "Poor chap," said Norman, as he gave up the search and closed the window again. "He has never forgiven me for the shaking I gave him the day I met you in the glen. Freda, I think sometimes he would like to return the compliment, he glares at me so ferociously whenever I meet him."

"Oh, Norman, you don't think he will ever do you any harm, do you!" said Freda nervously, for the evil look on the man's face had upset her, and for the first time she found herself wishing that he was under restraint.

"Harm?" laughed Norman. "What harm could he do me, little one?" drawing up his six feet two inches of manly strength with conscious power written all over it. "But come, darling, little as I want to go, we must not desert Aunt Maggie too long, she will wonder whatever has become of us."

But Aunt Maggie had a shrewd idea as to the state of affairs, as she saw the two faces when they entered the ball-room together a few minutes later, and was quite prepared for Norman's announcement, after the guests had left, that Freda had promised to marry him in the Spring "if it was all right to father."

The old lady took the girl to her room herself, and left a very happy, if wakeful Freda, tucked comfortably amongst the white pillows. Ah! Life was so sweet, and love was so beautiful. The daylight had made its way broadly into the room, before Freda fell asleep, to dream it all over again.

* * * * *

It was the day before the wedding-day, and Norman had just left the Vicarage—purposely early—for there were many things to see to, and one or two letters to write, as he told Freda.

"Rest well, my darling," he said tenderly. "My little sweetheart must look her best to-morrow," and he had left her, with many a good-night kiss, more than usually unwilling to go. For half an hour, the girl sat lost in a happy dream, and then she caught sight of Norman's pocket-book, which he had evidently forgotten to replace, after looking at the letters he had said wanted answering.

"How annoyed he will be," she thought, and then, "I will slip across to the Hall with it myself, it is not late, and the maids are so busy with their preparations for to-morrow." Leaving word with Hannah—the old housekeeper—that she would be back in half an hour, she slipped on her cloak, pulling the hood over her bright hair as she went down the garden path. She met nobody as she quickly made her way to the Hall, and then, seeing lights coming from the library window, was just crossing the lawn to look in and see if Norman were there, when she was startled to see the figure of a man who was peering through the window, totally oblivious of her presence. Something in the uncouth figure struck her as strangely familiar, and as she crept softly towards him over the grass, she saw with a sickening feeling at her heart that it was Stephen.

"What could he want there again?" Looking into the brilliantly-lighted room she could distinctly see Norman, bending over his desk with his back to the window, engrossed in his writing. Paralysed with fear, the girl kept her eyes fixed on that hateful figure, fearing to move or to call out. Just then Stephen raised his right hand, and she saw with a horror which seemed to freeze the very blood in her veins that he was grasping a pistol. As he half turned with it in the moonlight his face was terrible to look upon. Always repulsive, his eyes had a wild, determined look in them now, which almost told the girl what his intention was. Creeping with heavily-beating heart and a wild prayer for help on her lips, she just reached him, as he raised his hand again, and pointed the deadly weapon towards the window.

With a heart-rending cry of "Norman! Norman!" she grasped the pistol, turning it, in her agony, as she did so, full upon herself, and when Norman rushed, half-maddened, to the window, it was to find Freda laid with the hood fallen from her sunny hair, the blood from that cruel wound staining her white gown, while Stephen stood looking on with the horrible laughter of madness on his face.

"There—will—be—no—to-morrow—for—us—Norman," gasped the girl. "Thank—God—I—was—in—time—to—save—you——"

But did he?

Biddy Lamb.

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A HIDEOUS MISTAKE.

A Tale of Love and Avarice.

THE day was done. André and Marie Anquetin were eating their simple evening meal. The little kitchen in which they sat was such a room as one may see in almost any of the farming districts of Normandy; small and neat.

The furniture was plain, but the white muslin curtains at the windows and a shelf filled with geraniums in bloom gave it an air of comfort. André and his wife were old. The deep wrinkles and hard lines of their faces, their bent figures and halting gait, told a tale of trouble and hard work.

"I do wish Jean would come home," said the woman, as she rose from the table and began clearing away the dishes. "It's fifteen years since he went away, and it does seem as if he might come back to see his old mother. If he had only been content like Lus Mignot and stayed at home, how happy we should have been."

"I told you," replied the old man, "that you should let well alone. The lad was a fine boy, and would have done as well here as in England. I firmly believe if you can't get your porridge among your own folks, strangers won't give it to you. It was your high notions that did it, and now we must bear it as best we can."

Marie was silenced, and without saying any more André went out and sat on the low wooden seat beside the door, while his wife washed the dishes and tidied up the room. When she had made the house neat she went and stood beside her husband. The sun was setting, making the rows of bright-coloured flowers in the little garden glow in the rich light. The apple trees were white with their snowy promises of harvest. In the distance the poppy-besprinkled grain waved in the gentle breeze.

"Ah, Marie," he said, taking her hard and wrinkled hand in his, "Normandy is beautiful in May."

She did not heed his remark. Drawing her hand away, she said, "I am going to mind Dame Robbe, and may not come home until late. The old woman is in a very bad state, and isn't long for this world. Don't sit up for me."

Taking his pipe from his mouth, the old man slowly rose and faced his wife.

"I don't like this," he said. "Before the lad went away you were always a-working and a-saving to set him up when he got big. He went and left us. You made him. He has been away for fifteen years, and ever since he left us you have been a-working and a-saving for him when he comes back. What good are we getting out of life? Not any. I think it is time to stop!"

"Why, André, you wouldn't have the old woman suffer for want of care, would you?"

"No," he continued; "but it is not Dame Robbe that you care for, it's her money that you want to save for the boy."

Without replying, Marie Anquetin moved up the street as fast as her bent form and halting steps would let her, and was soon lost to view in the gathering gloom.

Her husband watched her retreating figure, not without feelings of sorrow. When she could no longer be seen, he relit his pipe, which had gone out during the discussion, and resumed his place on the settle.

More than thirty years before he and Marie had married and moved into the little cottage. She was a beauty then. On market days, when they stood in the great square of Rouen selling their vegetables and flowers, many a passer-by would stop to look at the pretty flower vendor and her handsome husband. Those were happy days. When their child was born they called him Jean. His winning ways gained for him the goodwill of all the village people. André and Marie were justly proud of him. "I don't want him like we are," his mother would often say, as she and her husband talked about his prospects and planned for the future. "He must be like the fine folks that used to come to the château when you were under-butler and I was ladies' maid, André."

"Perhaps so, but it takes money, and piles of it, to be like them," the father would reply.

"I know that, dearie, but we can earn and save, and when he grows up he will have enough to start on. It will be a fine thing to have our Jean a great man."

Marie Anquetin was one of those people who could love intensely; yet such was her nature that many passions, many hopes, could not find a place in her heart at one time. Gradually the motherly instinct gained the ascendency, and while she yet loved her husband, she did not feel towards him as she had before the child was born. Her ruling passion was love for her boy. For him she lived, toiled, and hoarded the fruits of her labours. Year after year she gave her life to him.

One morning, coming from confession in St. Ouen's, before she took her place beside the little cart in the great square, she heard a man say to his companion that England was the best place on earth for a young man to become rich and prosperous. Her ideas of England were vague, but she at once resolved that Jean should go to that place, wherever it was. A dozen times she repeated the word to herself, that she might not forget it. An hour later, when the man stopped before the little cart, she made bold to ask him about this England of which he had spoken. On their way home she talked incessantly about that strange country and Jean, until André, wearied with her prattle, got down and walked far in advance of the cart.

From that day she never wavered in her determination that Jean should go to the land of riches. Sometimes she did

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think to herself, "Jean might stay here to help about the place," yet her motherly ambition kept her to her resolve.

When the boy was sixteen she had saved enough to pay his passage and start him in life, and, in spite of André's protests, Jean was sent across the sea to make his fortune.

"It almost breaks my heart to let him go," she said, when the neighbours came to bid him good-bye, "but a mother must not stand in the way of her child. He can love me as well away from me as here under my nose."

She saw him go down the road and across the fields, then she went into the house and shut herself away, in her boy's room, from her neighbours and husband.

The little cottage seemed very lonely after Jean had gone. In all those years of living and caring for the boy the wife had grown blind to the needs of the husband. Now that her idol had left her, he who remained behind neither cared for nor would receive the little kindnesses and tokens of affection that were resumed after many years of neglect. Not that they lived unhappily together—hundreds of families have the same existence—but the poetry of their early married life had become prose.

They both kept to their work—André that he might support himself and wife, and Marie that she might save for Jean. Every penny that she got was carefully hidden away along with the letters that came from over the sea from her boy.

When she had nothing else to do, which was seldom, or when a moment could be stolen from work, she would take from its hiding place the shining hoard, thinking, as she touched each piece, of her Jean and the good it would do him. When she could she would take from her husband's money a few centimes to add to her own store.

The years passed, the pile grew slowly but steadily, while old age crept on with relentless pace. She was no longer young and her beauty had gone. When she stood in the market place of Rouen no one noticed.

"Joan must go with us to market to-day," she said to her husband one morning. Her voice trembled, and a great tear rolled down her deep-wrinkled face. Joan was her niece. "I have ceased to be attractive. Joan is beautiful, and must take my place. If she succeeds, I will stay at home to work in the fields, and care for the sick. I shall be just as useful, and Jean's pile will grow."

Joan took her aunt's place, and Marie never went to market again. Mornings when Marie saw Joan leave for Rouen the tears would come to her eyes as she thought of the days when she was young and beautiful.

Even the dullest of us have times of reflection when the past comes back with startling clearness. As old André Anquetin sat there in the twilight the years seemed to roll by in a long, dismal procession. The light of his pipe went out, his head rested against the casement of the door; he had fallen asleep. A slight noise made by opening and shutting the gate aroused the sleeper. Before him stood a man. He was well dressed, wore a full beard, and carried in his hand a small bundle.

"My good man," he said, "can you direct me to the inn in this village?"

"There is no inn here. Strangers don't come this way. You will find an inn at the next place across the fields or at Rouen."

"I have travelled a long way, and am tired. Can't you give me lodging?" said the intruder.

André hesitated a moment. "No, I don't think I can," he said. "You see, Dame Anquetin is away, and might not like it. I don't think I can."

"Did you say your name was Anquetin?" said the stranger.

"Yes," replied the old man, "I am André Anquetin. My wife's name is Marie."

"I know a Jean Anquetin in England," continued the young man.

"You know Jean, you? Why, Heaven bless you, come in, and if Marie don't like it—well, well, she won't mind if you tell her of her Jean."

The old man seized the stranger and led him into the kitchen. "Well, well, you know our Jean! Sit down while I make a light. It's a blessing you came this way."

He bustled about to light a candle, and quickly set before the stranger the best he could find in the little cupboard, then he seated himself near his guest.

"Now tell me all about my son," he said. "Is he well? Is he rich? Will he soon come home? Tell me all."

"Yes," answered the stranger, "he is well, and in the years since he left home he has grown from a big boy into a strong, thoughtful man."

"Just like me," interrupted the old man, "just like me; but go on."

"He speaks of you often, and never ceases to think of you and his mother. He loves you both."

"Of course, and we both love him," said André, "while his mother works night and day to save money for him."

The young man laughed, yet had the candle given more light, old André might have seen the look of pain that came to the face of the young man.

"Works to save money for him! Why, he is rich, richer than anyone in this village, so he tells me," said the guest.

"But why doesn't he come home and let us share his fortune?" asked André. "We have worked and saved for him. He is a thoughtless, wicked lad not to help us in our old age. I told Marie she was silly and now I know it."

"Do not say that, he is working for you. Soon he hopes to come home and make you rich and happy all your life."

"If he don't come soon it will be too late; we sha'n't want his help."

In his excitement the old man moved the candle, which at best gave but a dim light, near his guest. As he did so, his eyes caught the flash of the ring upon the stranger's finger. It was one of those silver bands such as the peasants of Normandy wear, of no value, yet peculiar to themselves. He gazed at it for some time, then, reaching across the table, took the stranger's hand in his, and examined the bauble more closely.

"My son used to wear a ring like that," he said. "His mother gave it to him when he left home."

"And my mother gave me this," replied the stranger.

The old man looked up, the smiling eyes of the guest told their story, and in an instant they held each other in a close embrace.

"Heaven be praised for this. Come near the light, my boy, my eyes are dim; let me look at you. Your mother will be wild with delight. I will go to tell her at once."

"No, father," said the son; "let her continue her good work. Do not let her know until morning. She will be tired when she comes home, and seeing me may be too much for her. Let her know in the morning, and to-morrow we will have a holiday. Neither you nor she shall ever work again. But come, father, let us go into the garden; it is warm here."

The two men left the room, and, arm-in-arm, wandered through the garden and out into the fields. The moonlight shone upon them as they talked. The clock in the village struck ten.

"We must go in now," said the son; "we are both tired."

"Your room is ready for you," said old André. "Ever

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since you went away your mother has had it in readiness for you when you came back. Good night. Heaven bless you, as it has us all. Good night."

Taking the candle, the young man climbed the short flight of stairs and entered the little room. It was just as he had left it years before. There were his kite, his top, and all the playthings that he used to love so well, while on the table was a bunch of fresh flowers. The perfume came to him like a breath from Heaven.

As Jean was very tired, he was soon asleep, dreaming of childhood scenes. With the father it was different. His son's coming home gave him so much happiness that he could not sleep; besides, he must tell Marie, when she came back, that a stranger was upstairs. He laughed softly as he thought how curious she would be, and how surprised in the morning when she should find out that it was Jean.

Sometime after midnight the wife returned. Old Dame Robbe was dead. Marie had seen the work of the Great Destroyer so many times that his awful presence did not disturb her. She was droning a song of the people. She had hardly entered the house, when André arose to tell her the news.

"What, you up?" she said. "Get to bed."

"Hist, don't make so much noise. There is a visitor upstairs in the boy's room," said André.

The old woman stood glaring at her husband, surprised into a silence which gave him a chance to offer an apology for his offence. "He came here," he continued, "and begged me to take him in. He was tired out with walking, and so I let him sleep in the boy's room."

The old woman turned livid with rage.

"Beast!" she hissed, "a stranger in my boy's room! I won't have it. I will go and pull him out," and she moved towards the door which led to the stairs.

André caught her and held her fast. "Marie," he said, "have a care. The man has money, heaps of it. He will pay us well, more for his night's lodging than we can earn in weeks."

At mention of the money the woman became calmer, but she did not cease talking about it until after they were in bed.

"We must charge him a good price," she said. "It's no small thing to have a stranger in one's house. He ought to bless Heaven that he has a place to lay his head, instead of having to tramp across the fields. If he is rich, he can pay well, and our boy's pile grows so slowly."

"Come, come, Marie, enough of this. I want to sleep, so say no more about it. I will settle with him in the morning."

"You—you settle with him! No, not you. Why, you would let him go without paying a sou, and our boy's pile be no larger."

André Anquetin was soon asleep; not so his wife. The thought of the gold set her brain on fire; she could not sleep. A dozen times she asked herself how much she should charge the stranger for his night's lodging. Surely a shining gold piece would not be too much. He had been saved a long walk; perhaps he would give her two.

If she told him how she was saving that her boy might come home, no doubt he would be generous. A fever seized her. She clutched her hands together as if she already had the coins in her possession. Supposing he refused to pay her more than a few silver pieces. No, no, he would not do that, and yet he might.

Why should she not take just a few bits while he slept? She would be sure of them then, and very likely he would never miss them. Jean needed them more than this man. But if she should be found out, the gendarme would arrest her, and she would be sent to prison. The thought overpowered her, and she lay quite still. How loud and terrible seemed to her the heavy, regular breathing of her husband. She could endure it no longer. The darkness and the stillness affected her, and her great desire to possess the money took complete possession of her.

Rising from the bed, she put on an old short skirt and a heavy blouse. Her heart beat fast, and its throbs sounded so loud to her that she felt as if it must awaken her husband. She looked at him, but he was fast asleep. With stealthy tread she climbed the stairs. At the open door she stopped to listen. The breathing of the sleeper came to her distinct and clear, yet it was almost lost in the beating of her own heart. For a moment she hesitated, a thousand thoughts of other days surged through her brain as she stood there, but the one great desire that had brought her there urged her on.

The moonlight filled the room with a mellow glow. She could see the form of the stranger; the upper part of the face was hidden by his arm, thrown over the forehead, his clothes folded and laid over a chair, and on the table beside the flowers she had put there in the morning was a pile of shining gold.

She could see nothing else. The gold pieces fairly glowed before her excited vision. They seemed to burn great holes in her brain, and fill her whole soul with a wild delirium.

She thought only of that beautiful yellow pile and of her boy Jean. She felt like screaming with delight, but her parched lips gave no sound. Silently and carefully she tiptoed her way into the room like a cat approaching a mouse, and stood before the table and the golden treasure. The man slept. She took a few of the gold pieces and put them in her pocket, then she reached for more.

A slight noise stopped her. The man moved in his sleep. In her excited fancy she thought he was awake and had discovered her taking the gold. Her agitation knew no bounds, the blood coursed through her veins with quickened speed; the strength of fury and despair came to her.

She turned, and with a spring seized the sleeper by the throat, while her knees struck him upon the chest. The shock awoke him, and he tried to free himself, but the bedclothes hampered him. He could not speak, for she held him with a grasp of iron. The frenzy was on her, and to all his efforts she opposed an irresistible pressure. For an instant he looked into the face that bent over him, and, like one in an evil dream, knew it for the face of his mother, but, still like one in a dream, struggled vainly to speak.

Little by little his convulsive writhings lessened. In a few moments he ceased to struggle and was still. He was dead.

Relaxing her grip, for her strength was gone, she got down from the bed, catching her foot in the coverings as she did so. For a moment she thought that the man had seized her, and she turned pale with fear. Giving a fierce pull at her clothes, she loosened the coverings of the bed, and the hand of the man was exposed. The ring upon the finger glistened in the moonlight and attracted her attention. Raising the hand fearfully in hers, she turned the ring upon the finger. A sickening fear overcame her, for the little silver band had a strange, familiar look.

"No, no," she muttered to herself. Her heart almost stopped beating. With a terrible despair she seized the head of the man and dragged it into the strong moonlight.

Then she understood.

In the morning while dressing himself, André Anquetin softly hummed a tune such as long years ago he used to sing when he wished to send little Jean into the land of dreams. "Marie has awakened before me," he thought, "but I will have my little surprise. I will go to wake Jean." He smiled at the thought of the meeting. Slowly he climbed the stairs and stood at the door of Jean's room. He saw his son upon the bed, and, kneeling beside him, the mother, singing her gentle lullaby, the lullaby of a mother and a woman bereft of reason. It was only for an instant; the next moment the disease, that of the heart, which for so many years he had feared, mercifully smote him. He was again with his son.

Years have passed since then, yet the peasants, when they go by the deserted house and the barren fields, still cross themselves and utter a prayer.

Leonard Burbank.

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For the Sake of His Love.

How Eric Rayburn Bravely Sacrificed His Prospects.

ERIC RAYBURN, private secretary to Sir Arthur Mostyn, K.C.B., M.P., and Cabinet Minister, stood with a disconsolate expression on his face in the study at Mostyn House.

He was of an average type, but there was something striking in his frank, clear-cut features and honest, blue eyes. A firm chin added strength to an already strong face.

"Slowcoach!" he muttered. "Well, I suppose I am; but I wish I had not heard her say so."

The previous evening he had strolled out into the grounds to enjoy a pipe, and, whilst he stood leaning against a tree and watching the last crimson streaks of fire fade from the western sky, he suddenly became conscious of voices.

The speakers, who were Sir Arthur Mostyn and Freda, his daughter, were on the other side of the thick hedge which separates the lawns from the orchard.

"I think I shall get in again," Sir Arthur was saying—he referred to the forthcoming elections. "Rayburn is a very good man for helping me."

"Yes, father," Freda had replied. "But don't you think he is rather a slowcoach?"

Then their voices had died away.

So he paced up and down the study floor, with his hands thrust deep in his pockets, and a thoughtful frown puckering up his face.

Eric Rayburn was quite alone in the world. His father, who had been Sir Arthur Mostyn's dearest friend, had died when Eric was about sixteen years old. He gave his boy into Sir Arthur's keeping, and received a promise from him that he would look after Eric for old times' sake; ill-fortune had left Mr. Rayburn with little to leave in the shape of money.

Eric had gone to Cambridge, and there had done exceedingly well. Sir Arthur's idea was to start him in a political career, and for that reason had taken him as his Parliamentary secretary.

Hardly had Eric made the acquaintance of Freda Mostyn ere he had fallen deeply in love with her.

But he was but a private secretary with his way to make in the world. She was the heiress to all the Mostyn estates, and the daughter of a Cabinet Minister. Again, he was a slowcoach—how that word rankled!

Perhaps he was a slowcoach in comparison with the Honourable Gordon Knevytt, who was first favourite with Freda Mostyn.

Gordon Knevytt was evidently created for the express purpose of winning women's hearts. He was as handsome a man as there was in the county, a first-rate shot and whip, and as much at home in the saddle as on foot. In addition he had a splendid voice and charming manners.

But this was all on the surface. For as long as it suited him, Gordon Knevytt could win and keep a woman's heart; but when her charms began to bore him, as they very often did, he tossed her aside without the slightest compunction; but still they loved him.

Beneath the surface there was a hard, selfish, callous nature which would kill the respect of any woman after a time.

However, his shortcomings were only known to the several women whose lives he had wrecked, and they were too proud to speak to the world of him.

But many men knew him for what he was. A man sees many things in another man which would not be apparent to a woman. So Eric Rayburn read Gordon Knevytt and knew him, and his heart was heavy with the knowledge that the woman he would give his life for was rapidly falling under the fascinations of this heartless schemer, who would feed on her sweetness until it tired him, and then—then he would seek fresh prey.

But what could Eric do? What right had he to say to Freda that Knevytt was only passing the time with her? He could bring no absolute proofs. Besides, whom would she believe—the man who fascinated her, or the man whom she designated as "Slowcoach"?

Gordon Knevytt had been staying at Mostyn House for over a month, and showed no signs whatever of curtailing his visit.

A merry laugh rang out; it was Freda's laugh. Eric walked to the window and looked out upon the terrace. There, in a little secluded alcove, were Knevytt and Freda. A pang of jealousy passed through his already torn heart. Why should he, who loved Freda with all the pure love of an honest man, have to stand by and watch this scoundrel throw his coils around her.

Now he stood and watched her sweet, expressive face

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lighting up with pleasure one moment, and then scarlet with blushes as Knevytt utilised his fascinating wiles.

What was that! Heavens above! Knevytt was kissing her, and she lay in his arms without resistance.

Then it was all over. He choked back the great sob that seemed to fill his throat, and blindly strove to continue his work.

But it was impossible, the vision of Freda in Knevytt's arms rose between him and his manuscript.

He felt he would go mad if he stayed where he was; so, hastily clearing up his papers, he sought relief in a ten mile tramp.

Some time passed by until one day Freda appeared to Eric to be worried. She hardly laughed, and when she spoke it appeared that she forced herself to it.

Eric intently watched Knevytt, but he seemed in no way different. Light-hearted and good-humoured, he appeared to be as ever. But, once or twice, Eric fancied he saw a slightly worried expression cross his face.

The engagement had not occasioned much surprise, but, from one or two remarks his chief had dropped, Eric was of the opinion that Sir Arthur was not greatly pleased. This gave him a certain amount of comfort, for he had determined to show Knevytt up; better a little sharp pang for Freda now, than a life-long misery.

He sat up late that night endeavouring to concoct a plan of action whereby he might save Freda from Knevytt.

What was that!

He jumped to his feet and went towards the door. Surely he heard footsteps. Cautiously he opened the door, but all was still as death. He stood for a few seconds listening. Surely he could hear something now.

There it was again, very muffled and slight, certainly, but it was the sound of some person moving about downstairs.

He crept out into the corridor, and stole to the head of the stairs. Then he looked over, down into the entrance-hall.

There was a light in the dining-room.

In that particular room was Sir Arthur Mostyn's safe, cleverly disguised with a wooden front as a bookcase. It was an idea of his own to outwit burglars, and in the study was another safe with nothing of any importance in it.

Cautiously he proceeded down the stairs, taking every precaution. He crept across the hall, and peeped into the room. What he saw caused his heart to almost stop beating, and it was only by a superhuman effort that he prevented himself from crying out.

Freda Mostyn was standing before the open safe, and in her hands was a bundle of bank-notes!

Freda a thief! What could it mean? Then he hesitated no longer, but went boldly into the room.

The girl swung round as she heard him, and gazed at him with terror-stricken eyes. Her face assumed the hue of death, and she swayed to and fro as though she would fall.

Then she recovered and tried to speak. But all she could do was to give utterance to a dry choking gasp.

At last speech came to her, and in trembling accents she whispered to her silent accuser.

"Don't tell father! For God's sake, don't tell father!"

"What does all this mean?" inquired Eric in a low tone, whilst he longed to take the trembling girl in his arms and comfort her.

She did not reply. A battle was going on within her; one voice urged her to confide in him, but an equally strong one told her to keep her secret. So she stood before him in an agony of dread, not knowing what to do.

"Don't be afraid, Miss Mostyn; I will do all I can to help you."

His kind, though gravely spoken, words did much to strengthen her; so that she decided to tell him all.

"You'll keep my secret?" she whispered.

"Yes, it will be safe with me."

"Gordon——"

"Ah!" he muttered, "as I thought!"

"Gordon," she went on with a mute appeal in her eyes, "has got deeply into debt, and he asked me if I could help him."

"Cad!" whispered Eric, but to Freda it sounded only like a swift intake of breath.

"He said he must have £200 by to-morrow, otherwise he would be arrested, and this was the only means I could think of getting it. I managed to obtain father's keys during the evening.

"What does this mean?" cried Sir Arthur. "What are you doing with those bank-notes?"

"Oh, don't be too hard!" she half sobbed. "I was going to put it back by selling some of my diamonds."

"Did Mr. Knevytt know how you were going to obtain the money?"

"No."

"Did he not ask what means you would use?"

"No; he only left it for me to do."

"The blackguard!" was Eric's unspoken thought, whilst aloud he said:

"If you will allow me, I will advance you the money." It just about represented his whole savings, but he was quite willing to do anything he could to help this poor helpless girl.

He took the banknotes from her trembling fingers as he spoke. She made a feeble show of resistance, whilst she watched him still with those soft, frightened eyes.

"You shall have my cheque in the morning, Miss Mostyn."

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"Oh, Mr. Rayburn, how——"

"*Hush!*" he whispered quickly.

In wild affright she clutched his arm until he almost winced.

There was someone coming down the stairs!

"Get behind these curtains, quick!" Eric whispered, as he pushed her into the shelter, and then he turned back to the safe.

"Why, what does this mean?" exclaimed Sir Arthur Mostyn as he entered the room.

Eric made no reply, but simply stood facing his chief.

"One o'clock in the morning, and you down here with the safe door open. And, as I live, banknotes?"

"Tell me, Rayburn," he continued quickly, "what does it mean? Quick, man, I'm waiting for your explanation."

"I have no explanation," said Eric, in a hard, dry voice which he hardly recognised as his own.

"Good Heavens! You must have an explanation. You don't mean that you were——" Sir Arthur paused, unable to frame the word.

Eric was silent.

"Eric, lad, speak up!" cried Sir Arthur. "If you're in want of money you have only to tell me. Come, give me your explanation, and let us go to bed."

"I have no explanation," again said Eric.

"I cannot believe that you were going to take the money. Will you not tell me?" intreated Sir Arthur.

Eric simply shook his head.

Sir Arthur Mostyn thrust back the notes, and locked the safe door. Then he turned to Eric.

"I will see that you are placed on the St. Petersburg Embassy immediately," he said. "Were I not certain that you are not morally guilty of the crime you were going to commit, I would wash my hands of you entirely. To-morrow, however, you will see about getting your things together."

"You are very good, Sir Arthur."

"I am sorry this has occurred, Eric. But you must carve your own way, now. Paris would have been your destination but for this, and I would have remained at your back, lad, but I cannot now."

Eric simply bowed his head.

Then Sir Arthur motioned him to go upstairs, standing and watching him as he went. And there were tears in his eyes, for Eric had held a great place in his heart.

Half an hour later, when all was still, Freda, pale and trembling, stole to her room and threw herself on the bed in an agony of grief.

Presently she got up, and restlessly walked up and down the room. Then she faced herself in the mirror, and saw her dead-white countenance, and great staring eyes.

"Oh, you little coward!" she muttered. "You little coward, why did you not speak? You have ruined a good man this night."

For some moments she stood surveying herself, and then she broke out in her condemnations again.

"Ugh! How could you? How could you? You despicable little coward! But it was for Gordon, for his sake."

And not for one moment did she blame Gordon Knevytt. Herself she despised, but not him.

Then the room seemed to spin round her, and, with a sobbing cry, she staggered to her bed, and, falling on it, fainted.

In the morning at the breakfast-table she appeared with pale face, and great black rings under her eyes. She explained that she had passed a sleepless night.

Both Sir Arthur Mostyn and Eric also showed traces of not having slept, but Eric wore a determined look, whereas there was a sad expression on Sir Arthur's countenance.

"I shall be going to town to-day, you had better pack your trunk, for I shall arrange for your departure in two days' time. There is a vacant third secretaryship which you will be appointed to," said Sir Arthur later on.

"Won't you take me into your confidence, lad?" he continued, with a winning smile.

"I cannot, Sir Arthur," Eric replied.

His chief's face resumed its stern, set look, and he departed for London.

A servant took a note to Freda from Eric, it contained his cheque for £200, and read as follows—

"Dear Miss Mostyn,—*I inclose you the cheque as promised. Please do not trouble to see me, as I am leaving here to-day for London, and I go to St. Petersburg on Friday. Wishing you all happiness in the future.—Believe me, your devoted servant,*

"Arthur Rayburn."

Freda shed tears over this pathetic little note, whilst she murmured, "For Gordon's sake."

And that afternoon Arthur Rayburn left Mostyn House, having previously addressed a letter to Sir Arthur giving him his address.

"So you've got it, Freda?" said Gordon Knevytt. "Rayburn's cheque! What does this mean?"

Then she told him, in faltering accents, the history of the previous night.

"Well, he's a pretty fair specimen of a fool!" was all the thanks that Knevytt offered for the two hundred pounds.

The callousness of it caused Freda to shudder, and she saw her lover for a moment in a very different light. She shrank from him as he strove to put his arms around her.

"Why," he said roughly, "what's the matter?"

"You are hardly grateful to Mr. Rayburn," she said in low tones.

"Grateful to that fool—why should I be?" he replied. "He hasn't done it out of any love for me, rather for you, I should say."

"For me?" she said. "What do you mean?"

"You are not going to tell me that you have not seen that this poor fool is madly in love with you?"

Freda gazed at him in astonishment, and then a great light dawned on her.

"For my sake?" she whispered.

"Oh, come, drop the melodrama! Let us talk about ourselves, when can we be married?"

Another time this question would have aroused very different feelings in Freda, but now the idea seemed almost repellent to her.

"I do not know," she murmured slowly. "I would rather not talk about it."

In London that night Eric Rayburn sat in a tawdry room in a Bloomsbury hotel, and his heart was well-nigh broken.

* * * * *

"There's a man to see Miss Freda," said a servant to Sir Arthur on the next day. "She has gone to Trowport, sir."

Trowport was the nearest town to Mostyn House.

"Show him up," said Sir Arthur. "I will see him."

The man was ushered in, he had come from the Bank.

"Can I do anything for you?" asked Sir Arthur.

"Well, sir, this cheque made out to Miss Mostyn has been presented, but it is wrongly indorsed, and we want her proper signature."

Sir Arthur took the cheque and looked at it.

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"Two hundred pounds, Eric Rayburn," he muttered wonderingly. "Whatever is this?"

He gazed at it for some moments, and then dismissed the man, saying that the cheque would be sent on.

"What does it mean?" he said again and again. "Is this—why——" he paused, unable to go on.

For some time he sat gazing at the cheque, whilst his amazement grew more and more profound.

When Freda came in she was told that Sir Arthur desired to see her, and, accordingly made her way to his study.

"How did you come by this?" was Sir Arthur's stern greeting.

She gazed at the cheque, then turned white as marble, but made no reply.

By dint of questioning, Sir Arthur got all the details from her in tearful accents.

"So," he said grimly, "Mr. Gordon Knevytt is at the bottom of this, is he?

"I am glad I made some inquiries about this gentleman; except that he was a son of Lord Ventnor we knew nothing of him. My invitation to him at the Conservative was purely a matter of form, I did not expect him to accept," continued Sir Arthur. "Do you love him, Freda?"

The directness of the question completely nonplussed her, and she could only reply brokenly.

"I—er—think so."

"Well, my dear girl," he went on, "as far as I can make out, Gordon Knevytt is a precious scoundrel, and the sooner you think differently the better. I will have more to say to you on the subject later."

The next development that arose was that Gordon Knevytt had been arrested by a firm of Jews, for Sir Arthur had intimated to the Trowport Bank that the cheque for two hundred pounds would not be cashed.

Meanwhile, Eric's departure had been postponed awaiting the result of Sir Arthur's investigations through the medium of a private detective agency. Eric had no conception of the real state of affairs.

The detective agency had only a sorry tale to tell. It was to the effect that Gordon Knevytt was deeply in debt everywhere, and was staving off his creditors with the prospects of his father's death, and also his marriage with Miss Mostyn. Further, Knevytt had married a woman in London in 1899, but she had disappeared, and was supposed to be in America.

This was the final blow, and now Freda realised that what she mistook for love was but an evil fascination. Now she saw clearly all the many bad traits which before she had glossed over.

The horror of it all completely unnerved her, and she took to her bed, wrecked in mind and body.

Brain fever followed, and for three weeks she hung between life and death. When she recovered consciousness her first question was of Eric.

She was told that he had not gone to Russia, but had been reinstated, and that things were as ever between him and Sir Arthur.

As she lay there through her slow recovery, she thought of him, day in, day out, until she was almost ashamed at the manner in which he occupied her thoughts.

"I wonder," she murmured aloud. "Did he really love me—poor Eric?" A vivid blush suffused her face as she heard herself repeat his name, and it deepened as a voice alongside her said:

"He did, my child." She glanced up in wonder, to see Sir Arthur standing by her bedside. He had come in quietly, and unnoticed.

"Oh, father, I am so miserable!" she cried, and then the tears came.

"Get well quickly, my dear," muttered Sir Arthur brokenly, "and come and comfort the boy, for he is more miserable than you."

When she was alone she gave herself up to her thoughts, and the wonderful new feeling that she experienced.

"I never knew it," she murmured. "Will he forgive me?"

Soon she was allowed to sit up in her room, and then she was strong enough to come downstairs.

She sat before a big fire in the drawing-room wrapped up in the depths of a great armchair. The door opened and Eric entered.

"Welcome downstairs, Miss Mostyn!" he exclaimed.

"And you," she replied, "you are very welcome, for I owe much to you which I can never repay."

Her fragile beauty filled him with a wondrous pity, and he knelt by her side and murmured:

"You can, Freda. Only give yourself to me, and you will far more than repay."

"I am not worthy," she whispered brokenly.

"Worthy?" he whispered back. "Why, dear, you are far more worthy of happiness than I. Freda, darling, I love you."

Her downcast eyes looked up for a moment into his, and in that brief space he read all that he desired. Tenderly he placed his arms round her and kissed her on the lips.

E. Newton Bungey.

Your Editor Chats.

Mr. H. Peacock, of 149, Sefton Street, Southport, carries off the guinea offered for what I considered the best solution of the second Unsolved Love Problem, "The Mistake of Millicent Howard." Judging by the number of replies received, I gather that these problems are a great success, and I am sure you will all be glad to hear that another one, making the fifth of the series, will appear next week. In the same number I shall announce the winner of the guinea offered in connection with the problem, "The Dilemma of Betty Carteret."

And now a few words as to our Christmas Number. I hope nobody will accuse me of blowing my own trumpet when I state that it is the finest Christmas number that I have ever helped to produce. This I may say without exaggeration, for I have, in company with my staff, spent many hours in its preparation, with the result that I have got together as excellent a production as I possibly could. All your favourite writers will contribute to it, as well as W. Pett Ridge, John K. Prothero, and others. There will be competitions with valuable prizes offered, and there will be the first instalment of a grand new serial.

This will be from the pen of Blanche Eardley, whom readers will remember as the author of "The Bond Between." The title of the serial will be "Dupes of Destiny," and it is a most striking romance. The authoress has exerted her best powers in this story, and it is destined to be one of the finest romances that *Short Stories* has ever had. I should recommend everyone to read "Dupes of Destiny," for exciting episodes follow each other in rapid succession, and the plot of the story is an exceptionally strong one.

A lady reader, who writes in praise of our Tartan covers, wishes to know if the name of Dickson is connected with any Scottish clan. I am afraid that I cannot answer her question off hand, but perhaps some of my readers North of the Tweed might be able to volunteer information.

Your Editor.

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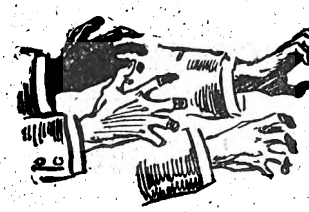

THE PURSUIT OF SARA

The names of persons mentioned in this series are not necessarily the correct ones.

MY LAST JOURNEY.

I DID not waste time in argument, but deliberately ignoring Shackell, turned abruptly to the detective.

"I am glad you are here," I said, much to his surprise; "I believe you want to see me about an accident that occurred in the quarry up Tuttle Hill? If you will lead the way I will follow you; it is impossible to talk here."

He moved away with a puzzled look. I followed him. Shackell went into the office and wrote out a lengthy telegram. Thank goodness, the wire would not reach Templeton until he arrived at his destination. The train was an express and did not stop until it reached the Central Station, Manchester.

"Now," I said quietly to the detective; "how do we stand?"

"You're wanted in regard to what happened this morning, miss. If you'll come with me quietly, it will make things easier for both of us."

"Have you a warrant for my arrest?" I returned; "if so I should like to see it."

"You're only making matters worse for yourself by talking. It's my duty to warn you that anything you say will be used——"

I interrupted him unceremoniously.

"It is your duty, first of all, to read the warrant; without that warrant you'll be committing an illegal act in trying to detain me."

"The warrant will be shown in good time," he said sullenly.

"That means you haven't it," I said triumphantly, "so you can do nothing."

"I can follow you, miss; also," he grinned maliciously, "I can have you detained at the police-station, as a suspicious character."

"You need not do that," I answered quickly. "I prefer your first proposal; you can follow me; I shall be glad of your protection. In fact,"—Shackell's figure showed at the top of the steps leading from the signal box—"in fact, I claim it. That man"—I pointed to Harrington—"has threatened to murder me, as he has murdered others. Ask him how Sir Herbert Masterman met with his death, ask him——"

Harrington, gathering something of the conversation, interposed:

"I give this girl in charge," he said, "for the attempted murder of Rigby Starr."

"And I demand that you shall take this man in custody for the attempted murder of Sidney Ilford, who, not an hour ago was brutally attacked by him in my presence, on the Coventry Road. At this moment Ilford lies there, suffering—perhaps dying—you must send help to him, if necessary, I will go myself to the police station and demand that he shall be fetched. His evidence will bear out mine."

The detective seemed nonplussed. I guessed Shackell had employed him in the hope that his appearance on the scene would insure my collapse. Remembering the terror a limb of the law usually inspires in the feminine breast, he had judged I should be ready to make terms, under the threat of arrest. My present attitude was quite unlooked for. The detective—his name was Alfred Smithers—realising that the affair was a more complicated one than he had at first supposed, assumed an official air.

"The two of you had better come with me to the station. The inspector can sift your charges and act upon them as he thinks best."

"Meantime Sidney Ilford is to be left to die? For shame," I turned on Smithers fiercely, "while you are arguing over red tape and official procedure, he is suffering. At any rate send someone to help him. There"—I pointed to a cab just arrived at the station to wait for the next train—"send that man to the spot I describe, with instructions to find Ilford and bring him back to the police-station."

For a moment the detective hesitated, he was not a man of quick thought or prompt action; the next, he whistled to the driver and gave him his instructions.

"Drive to the police-station and tell the inspector to send a man with you to the plantation just past the canal bridge, on the Coventry Road. By all accounts there's been a fight there and a man has been hurt. Now then, please"—he turned to me—"we'll get on to the station ourselves."

"It's absurd to bring me along," protested Shackell; "the girl's telling a cock and bull story; it's a mere quibble on her part to gain time. I've an appointment I must keep. I'll call in at the station later."

"The appointment must wait, Mr. Shackell. You must come with me to the station. If the girl is telling lies, all the easier for you to prove the truth of what you say. Come along, sir, sharp's the word."

He laid his hand on the other's arm as he spoke. In the dim light of the station lamps I saw Harrington Shackell wince at the touch. His face paled, his square jaw relaxed. For a second a glint almost of terror flickered in his eyes. Then he regained his self-control.

"I'm ready," he said; "but you're making the biggest mistake of your life all the same."

"I'm prepared to abide by the consequences, sir," returned Smithers drily, and directed our steps from the station into the road beyond.

The lights of the town shone faintly through the darkness; the road loomed black as night before us. There was not a soul to be seen; not a sound to be heard. The wheels of the station cab had passed into the distance; we three—strange trio—seemed enveloped in a stillness deep and profound. Suddenly Shackell lagged behind.

"My bootlace has come unfastened," he said, and stooped down as if to do it up.

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The next moment Smithers was staggering under the weight of a heavy blow, aimed from the back, and Shackell running swiftly down the road, was passing rapidly out of sight.

Smithers recovered himself fairly quickly, but not soon enough to overtake his assailant.

"He might have killed me," he muttered savagely; "I'll be even with him for it, I'll swear. Now then"—he turned to me sharply—"you say you saw him assault this man, Ilford. Are you prepared to swear to it?"

"Yes, but not now. Listen a minute"—I leant towards him in the darkness and spoke with all the earnestness, all the eloquence I could command. "You've made one mistake to-night, if you're not careful you'll make another. Shackell is one of a gang of swindlers; and I have interfered with their schemes. I have prevented them, so far, from carrying out a plot, far reaching in its consequences. They planned, first to ruin, then to murder Sir Noel Masterman, as they murdered his cousin, the late Sir Herbert; I heard Shackell confess to the murder, and when the time comes, I shall be ready to swear to the truth of what I say. Shackell has for the time being escaped you, but, follow my advice and you will be able to put your hand on him when you choose.

"To-night the head of the gang, the cleverest scoundrel of them all, is arriving at Manchester, with Sir Noel Masterman. Come with me and I will prove the truth of what I say. Come, and you will hold in the hollow of your hand the whole gang. Rigby Starr, who is here, dangerously ill, Templeton, whom you will meet at Manchester, and Shackell, whom you will eventually trace, by watching the others."

"And who are you to know so much of the business of the gang?" he asked.

"I was engaged as typine in their office at Great St. Helen's. They were apparently a most respectable firm, and I had no suspicions until I overheard a conversation in which Shackell confessed to the murder of Sir Herbert Masterman. The plot against his heir, Sir Noel—the man to whom I am engaged—was arranged. They had induced Sir Noel to sign a paper, by means of which, while he was abroad, they could administer his estate. I rushed from my hiding-place and snatched the paper from them. Since then they have persecuted me, tracking me from place to place, striving to entrap, to imprison me—even to take my life. But I have defeated them; I have defied them; in spite of everything I kept, and I still keep, the papers safe."

I took the precious document from its resting-place, close to my heart, and held it for Smithers to examine. He struck a match and peered at it suspiciously.

"In the meantime what has become of Sir Noel himself?"

"It was some time before I could get in communication with him," I answered. "My letters and telegrams were intercepted; at last, however, he received a letter from me stating what had happened, and telling him where I was. A meeting was arranged between us, and then, *then* at the last moment things went wrong. I fell into the hands of one of Templeton's agents—this very Sidney Ilford that Shackell attacked—and he, my lover, was decoyed by Templeton himself. Since then they have dragged him from place to place, drugging him until he lost his reason, disguised him until even I—the woman he loves—could not recognise him. Yesterday they brought him here, to the house on the hill above the quarry."

"You know this as a fact?"

"I can prove it. Ilford will substantiate all I say." Then without pausing, I told him all I had seen, all I had discovered. How Noel had escaped from the house into the quarry and how Shackell, pursuing him, had induced him to return.

"And now, to-night, Templeton has taken my lover to Manchester, there to hand him over to the safe keeping of another of the gang. Ilford told me so himself. Shackell overhearing us, attacked him in revenge."

"What brought you here?" asked the detective. "Why did you not go straight to the police-station?"

"I wanted to stop Shackell from warning Templeton that his plans were discovered. This station is the nearest place from which to send a wire—after the post office is shut. The train left Birmingham at 8.40, if I could reach the signal box before Shackell I could prevent him warning Templeton before the train left Birmingham. It was a race for life almost, a race I won. I held the wires until the train had left—the train that took Templeton and the man I love to Manchester."

"To whom did you telegraph?" persisted Smithers.

"To friends in Northampton, instructing them to wire to the police at Manchester, to meet the express and shadow Templeton and his companion until further orders."

The detective eyed me keenly.

"What do you propose doing next?" he asked. "Supposing I dropped the charge against you for the present."

"I shall take a special trian," I replied, "and go with you to Manchester, in time to save my sweetheart and arrest Templeton.

"Come," I urged, "why should you hesitate? You lose nothing by coming, and stand to gain a great deal. On my own responsibility I will promise you a hundred pounds. Sir Noel is wealthy, and not likely to grudge any money to the man who helps me."

"And who's to pay for the special?" he asked, half persuaded.

"I will. I have notes here that will more than meet the expense." He still hesitated, and, losing patience, I pushed my last argument.

"If you take me to the inspector you'll have to confess that

Templeton and Noel, pale and haggard, came up the platform together. The detective touched the former on the arm, saying, "A partner of Harrington Shackell, I believe?"

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Shackell has escaped. I shall tell him the whole story and insist he sends someone down to Manchester. As likely as not he'll choose another man, and you'll lose all the reputation of a clever capture. Don't be a fool"—I shook him in my impatience—"can't you see the sense of what I say?"

He allowed himself to be persuaded, influenced, perhaps by the seductive crackle of the packet of bank notes, which, like the document, I had withdrawn from hiding. We hurried to the station, where, backed up by Smithers' influence, the station-master was induced to let me have a "special." I handed him the two halves of a £100 note, and, reading surprise in his face, stopped all controversy as to change, by telling him to hold the balance until the next day, when I or Mr. Smithers, the detective, would call.

"We're bound to reach Manchester just behind the Birmingham express," said Smithers, when the engine was under weigh. He was roused to action by the general excitement. "Can you do it?" he asked the engine driver.

"It will be a near thing," replied the man, "but, saving accidents and stoppages, if we get a clear line, I'll just be able to get her in, but only just."

Close on the words I jumped into the carriage, followed by Smithers. The whistle sounded, screaming wildly through the night, the engine, slowly at first, with conscious dignity, steamed ahead. We had started on the journey, a journey that might end the chapter of my troubles or prove the beginning of another and a sadder one.

Now that he was committed to a definite course of action, the detective grew alternately enthusiastic and pessimistic as to the wisdom of the step he had taken. I had once more to recount the story of my engagement to Noel, my employment at the office in Great St. Helens, my discovery of the true nature of the business transacted therein.

The astute reader will have noticed I made several omissions in my first account of the matter.

I did not mention that I had taken a packet of banknotes, as well as the document, from Templeton's table, and for very sufficient reasons. I could explain much and gain credence for much of my story from Smithers, but once include the fact that I had taken the notes—no matter for what motive—and all hope of his assistance would have ended. Theft is theft in the eyes of the police; justification of the act may be proved later, before a magistrate or judge, but it does not come within their province.

I had also departed from the strict letter of the word, when I said I had told my friends in Northampton to wire the Manchester Police. The same difficulty would have arisen with them, as might even now arise with Smithers. Templeton would accuse me of stealing the notes and my case against him for the time being would collapse. As a matter of fact I had wired to Jim Goodman, begging him to telegraph to a reliable man—I knew he had friends in Manchester—to meet the express at the Central Station. Failing to see me on the platform, they were to follow Templeton and wire results to Jim, who would telegraph back to me at the post office. I felt sure the little groom would help me; for Maggie's sake, if not for mine, he would do his best to save me and Noel.

As the train rushed through the darkness, I decided on my plan of action. I would tell Smithers to keep an eye on Templeton while I, with the help of Jim's friends, would make a dash for Noel. As we neared our destination Smithers grew restive and perturbed.

"You are prepared to swear that this man, Templeton, connived at the murder of Sir Herbert?"

"I am."

"Then," said the detective slowly, "I shall take Templeton to the station on suspicion, founded on your information. You will have to repeat what you say to the inspector."

I nodded a readiness I was far from feeling.

No one could play a better game of bluff than the senior partner. Once let Smithers mention my name—and the case was lost. It was useless to hope that Noel would recognise me and substantiate my statement. If he were sufficiently himself to do that, he would have refused to go with Templeton at all

I should have to rely on Jim's friends and my own audacity.

"Whatever happens," I said, "don't lose sight of Templeton. He's a clever man and will have a dozen explanations on the tip of his tongue. Believe them or not as you like, *but don't lose sight of him.*"

"No fear of that," said Smithers; "I've no fondness for a wild goose chase, I assure you. Someone's got to be nabbed this journey, I can tell you that!" and he glanced viciously towards me.

About twenty miles from Manchester we put on speed, flashing along the lines, that gleamed like silver in the clear, cold night, rushing past hedges, fields, homesteads, and orchards with frightful velocity.

"He's sighted the express," said Smithers, and craned anxiously out of the window.

A shrill whistle sounded from the distance, trumpeting defiance. Our engine answered the challenge with a triumphant call, and dashed on through the night. I clung to the slings at the window, and my heart, my soul, my whole being concentrated in the cry upon my lips.

"Make haste! Make haste! Make haste!"

As we neared the station we slackened our pace, our imagination, tortured beyond control, saw the express draw up ahead of us by minutes; pictured the sleek figure of the senior partner, leading my lover from the station to some place, secret and remote, a place where, bereft of health, he would slowly, surely die. I stretched out longing arms to clasp him, impotent hands to draw him back.

"Noel! Noel! my darling, I am coming." The words broke from my lips, as for an instant I seemed to see my lover's face, feel the regard of his dear eyes. Then it passed from me—I was staring at Smithers' stolid countenance!

With a last defiant shriek the engine ran into the station. Barely waiting till we had stopped, I jumped to the platform, and, rushing to an official, asked if the express had come in.

He pointed to the opposite platform; the train had been in a minute, at least, the crowd of passengers already lessening. Signing to Smithers to follow, I hastened across the bridge and down the stairs. As I gained the platform, two men advanced, glancing at me observantly. They seemed hurriedly to compare notes, then came close to where I stood, as if waiting for me to speak.

"You were sent here by Jim Goodman?" I asked.

"That's so, miss," answered the elder of the two, a square-shouldered, brawny-looking person, who suggested a professional pugilist.

"Tell me what you want done, and me and my mate will carry it through."

I nodded comprehension, and searched the platform eagerly for Noel and the senior partner.

Smithers, at my elbow, looked apprehensive, almost suspicious, as the time went by without a sign or token that I had found them. At last, just as doubt had changed to fear, Templeton, benevolent as ever, came into view.

His arm linked in Noel's, he accommodated his steps to the other's dragging pace, regarding him with a perfect simulation of sympathy.

Noel, no longer with the disguising beard and moustache, but, his face pale and haggard, was strangely altered, and his eyes wore a vacant, stupid look.

I called the more sturdy of my assistants to attention.

"You see that man," I pointed to Noel, "leaning on the stout person's arm? When I give the signal, I want you and your friend to seize hold of him, and take him outside the station, put him in a cab, and wait till I join you. There will be a row, I have no doubt, but you mustn't mind that. Follow my instruction, and I'll see you don't lose, whatever happens."

"What about the stout party, miss?"

"Take no notice of him, my friend"—I pointed to the detective—"will see to him. He belongs to the police," I added softly, "and he thinks you do, too, don't forget." The big man smiled, and chuckled understanding, repeating the message to his comrade.

"Now then, Mr. Smithers," I cried excitedly, "there's your man. "Look—coming towards us, with Sir Noel—

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that is Sir Noel—leaning on his arm. Templeton? Of course it's Templeton, the head of the gang, who murdered Herbert Masterman; now's your time"—and I gave the renowned Smithers a gentle push.

"Richard Templeton, of Great St. Helen's? I think," said the detective, touching the senior partner lightly on the arm.

"That's my name," was the quiet reply. "Who are you, and what is your business?"

For answer, the detective handed him a card, bearing his name—and describing his calling.

"I believe you are a partner of Mr. Harrington Shackell?"

"Yes." Templeton's face whitened, but his self-control remained unshaken.

"Doubtless you can furnish us with certain information respecting Mr. Shackell. An attempt has been made on the life of a man named Sidney Ilford, in which your partner is concerned."

"Does Ilford himself accuse my partner?"

Smithers paused. "He is not yet in a condition to be examined," he replied slowly. "This lady"—he motioned towards me, hiding behind the substantial figure of Jim's friend—"this lady was an eye-witness of the affair. Miss Gillespie, please come forward."

This of course let the cat out of the bag, with a vengeance.

I did not wait for Templeton's reply, "That lady is a thief, who stole money when in my employment," but gave my friends the signal to join in.

The platform was empty—save for our little group—not even an official was in sight, the place for the moment deserted.

"Now," I whispered, "quick!" and, darting like a flash across the platform, and out of the station, left Jim's friends to follow on with Noel.

They managed the business in a masterly fashion. The brawny gentleman, I afterwards heard, occupied himself with Templeton, rolling the senior partner over, much as a big dog serves an impertinent puppy, while his young friend collared poor Noel and half-led, half-carried him to where in a frenzy of impatience I waited with a cab.

"Get in quick," he cried, bundling first me, then my lover, into the vehicle, "my pal's having a row with the 'tec, it will mean a night's lodging for him in a cell, I'm thinking. However, you can see to that to-morrow; where shall he drive to, miss?"

"To some hotel," I answered. "I don't mind which. Tell him to hurry, he must get away before the others see us."

With a nod, he gave the man the necessary directions, "Blank's Hotel will suit you," he said. "I shall look you up to-morrow, and tell you about Sam. Good-night, miss," and he walked off.

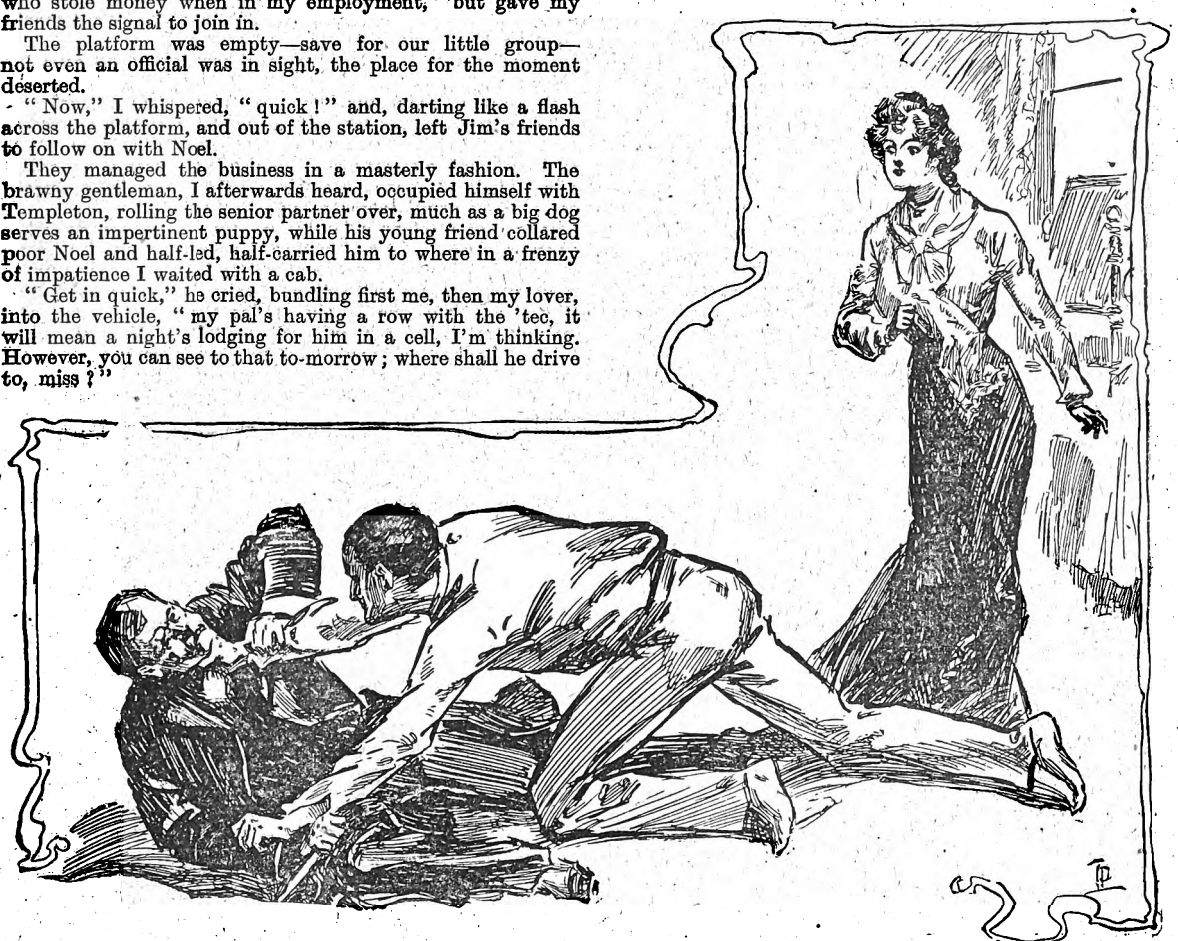
For a moment I felt I could not let him go, I had risen to call him back, to appeal to him to stay, but he had disappeared already from sight. I was left to make my last fight for life and liberty, alone! Noel, dull and impassive, drugged into a state of indifference, strange and pitiable to witness, could take no part in what ensued. It rested with me to hold our enemies at bay until—until—he became once more the Noel I knew and loved.

The cab drove rapidly along the road, and turning round a side street, drew up at a quiet-looking place, bearing the legend, "Blank's Hotel."

I paid cabby his fare, and induced Noel to accompany me up the steps. He was in a state of semi-stupor, and I had difficulty to make him realise what I wanted him to do.

The hotel people regarded both of us with surprise, not to say suspicion. I got over that, however, by announcing Noel's name and station.

"Sir Noel Masterman is recovering from an illness," I explained, "and is going abroad. We should have gone on



Noel grappled with Harrington Shackell, and hurled him to the ground.

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to Liverpool to-night but he could not stand the fatigue, so we decided to break the journey here."

We were shown to a comfortable suite of rooms, and, having established Noel in an arm-chair by the fire, I summoned a messenger and sent him for the nearest doctor.

It was some little time before the medico made his appearance, and Noel had shown signs of feverish excitement, infinitely more alarming than his previous insensibility. I told the doctor briefly what had occurred.

"Sir Noel has been stopping with some people whom I suspect of foul play. In my belief they have administered some strong opiate to him. That is the only way I can account for his appearance."

The doctor made a close and careful scrutiny, and at last gave it as his opinion that Noel was suffering from the action of a powerful drug, well-known in Eastern countries, but little used in England.

"Its effects are very marked, but the action is not lasting. The patient becomes alternately excited and morose, his mind, for the time being, is disordered, and is incapable of connected thought."

"He seems to have lost the power of recognition," I said, with a catch in my voice. "Will his memory come back?"

"As the drug wears off, his memory will return. There will be, I hope, some slight improvement by to-morrow morning if he has a good night's rest. I will send round a draught that should insure some hours of healthy sleep, but"—the doctor spoke impressively—"on no account must he be disturbed. If he is suddenly roused, the result might be disastrous to his mental health."

"Nothing shall wake him," I answered earnestly. "I will sit up with him all night."

The doctor suggested I might like a nurse, but I had learnt by bitter experience, the risk I ran from trusting strangers, and gave a decided negative to the proposal.

By the time the draught arrived, and Noel, dozing on the sofa, had been induced to swallow it, it was close on two o'clock. I made up the fire, and, drawing a chair close to the couch, commenced my vigil.

In his sleep Noel's face had regained something of its wonted expression. The mouth had fallen into the tender lines I knew so well, the brow was smooth, the cheeks had lost their ashen pallor. The tears sprang to my eyes as I watched him. How greatly he had suffered since that day—how long ago—when he bade me farewell in the office at Great St. Helen's.

What strange and terrible things had happened! All the sorrow of the past weeks came back to me. But—the thought gave me courage to endure what ever else might come upon me—at last we were together—my sweetheart and I! Changed he was, so changed from the tender lover I had known, that it was pain to hear him speak; but that would pass away. Soon, very soon, the cloud would lift from his dear eyes. To-morrow—did not the doctor say—to-morrow?—he would know me once again. I dare not face the thought that the insensibility might still continue. To-morrow, if not to-night, we should be traced, and spurred on by the enmity of Templeton, Smithers might arrest me. No use for me to plead I was defending Noel's rights, when I took the notes, if Noel could not substantiate my story. I set my teeth, and vowed, that come what might, nothing should separate me from my lover, and yet what chance had I against them all? How could I hope to hold my own against them? I rested my head beside his on the cushion, and the tears, unchecked, fell from my tired eyes. I had so longed for Noel—for a touch of his hand, the sound of his voice. I had so hungered for his help and his protection, and now, now—I had found him, he did not know the woman who had dared so greatly for his sake.

After awhile, the tears stopped, I felt weak and tired, too tired to lift my head. Against my will, against my inclination, my eyes closed. Sleep, catching me unawares, threw her cloak of silence round about me. I slipped into a slumber, sound and deep.

I woke with a sense of apprehension and alarm. The fire had lost its ruddy glow, and smouldered, a dull, black heap in the grate. The lamp burnt dimly, the air felt raw and chill. Suddenly I remembered with a thrill of self-reproach, that I had forgotten to lock the door. It stood ajar, doubtless that accounted for the draught. I rose from my seat to cross the room, and shut and bolt the door.

As I stood drowsy, and with eyes yet dim from sleep, a heavy hand clasped me by the arm; I was pushed, slowly but surely back into the chair.

I did not cry out, the doctor's warning against rousing Noel suddenly from his sleep, set a seal upon my lips. Looking up I gazed at the face of my assailant, silent and grim he stood before me, his grip tightening upon my arm, his eyes met mine.

"Shackell!" The name broke from me in a hoarse whisper.

"The notes," he said slowly, and bent nearer, "the notes, or——" He raised his right arm, and I caught the flash of steel. I pointed to a table by the window, and signed that he would find them in the drawer. I reckoned on his falling into the trap, and leaving me, to seek the money. In which case I could have rung the bell and summoned the night porter.

"And the document," he asked again, "the power of attorney?"

I motioned once more towards the table. For a moment he hesitated, then with a sudden jerk pulled me up on to my feet.

"Come and find them," he said, and dragged me to the table. Noel gave a slight stir, as if rousing. Instinctively I put my finger to my lip.

"Don't wake him," I whispered; "for Heaven's sake don't wake him."

"Give me the notes and the paper, then," was the reply.

Thus urged, I ransacked the table drawer, turning over the contents in order to gain time. The paper and the notes for once had left my possession. I had slipped them under Noel's pillow, that he might find them there when he woke—to consciousness and understanding.

Had I still retained them, I doubt not I should have yielded them to Shackell. Weighed against Noel's recovery they sank into insignificance. He could recall the paper so soon as he recovered, and his recovery—partially at least—was hoped for the next morning. As things were, however, it was impossible for me to give them up, I dare not run the risk of waking Noel; the penalty of disturbing him would be too great.

"They are gone," I said at last, "someone must have taken them."

"Who could have taken them?" he jeered, and tightened his hold upon my arm.

"You came in without rousing me; someone else may have done the same thing. Perhaps Templeton himself has been here."

"Drop that," he said impatiently, "Templeton's not been within a yard of the place. You have the papers somewhere, and you've got to give them up, or——" He glanced significantly at the couch.

"Wake him if you choose," I said defiantly, for all my fear; "but you'll be the first to regret it if you do. If he's disturbed he'll be like a madman; there'll be no quieting him. The place will be roused, and you'll be discovered."

He knew as well as I the truth of what I said, and the reflection goaded him to fury.

"Give them up," he said, still speaking in a low, hoarse whisper, "or I'll take them from you."

"They are not on me," I replied.

"That's a lie, you always carry them about with you. Give them to me——" Maddened at my resistance, he seized me by the throat, forcing me against the wall. His eyes blazed into mine, his mouth tightened into the line of hate I knew so well. Into his face there crept the look of murder I had seen it wear on the day he had killed Sir Herbert.

He raised his right hand, and the flash of steel came between me and the light. He would kill me, and then, blind fool, he would discover it was all in vain. I tried to stop him, tried to clutch at his wrist, strove to speak, to scream, but the iron

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grip of his fingers at my throat choked me; my feeble strength was powerless against his.

Was I to die? Was this to be the end of all my struggles? My eyes turned despairingly toward Noel; I would have waked him without compunction, if I could. But I was powerless—and he slept on.

Throwing myself forward, I managed to drop upon my knees, but the alteration in my attitude did little for me. With a muttered execration, Shackell swore that he would finish matters once and for all. His arm shot up, another moment and the knife—the pitiless, cruel knife, would descend—another moment——

Sudden as a flash of light a tall figure launched itself between us, and, grappling with Shackell, hurled him to the ground.

"Noel! Noel!" I screamed, half in anguish, half in triumph—and flying to the bell, pealed it again and yet again.

The room filled as in an instant with strange faces. A babel of cries and screams rang through the place. The floor seemed to give way beneath me, I was falling, falling—and then two strong arms caught and held me, and a voice, my lover's voice, bade me look up.

And I knew as his eyes met mine that my journey was over—the pursuit of Sara had ended at last!

* * * *

I always have to add a sort of postscript when telling my adventures, and now when, for the first time they are in print, I suppose I must do the same. Noel did not soon regain his normal health, the sudden spurt of strength, physical and mental—which my danger had called forth, left him in a terrible state of nervous depression. He was haunted by the fear that we should again be separated, and nothing would satisfy him but an immediate marriage.

I conceded the point, and, waiving my trousseau, became his wife—with Maggie and Jim at my wedding to wish us joy.

The last named faithful couple soon followed our example, and set up housekeeping on Noel's wedding gift.

The firm of Templeton & Co., long since dissolved, met with a portion, at least, of their deserts. Shackell was sent to prison for seven years, as a result of his attack on me, but in regard to the murder of Sir Herbert, he escaped all penalty.

The evidence, in the opinion of experts, was not strong enough to convict! There were, these clever lawyers said, no proofs of his guilt.

As if his own words were not sufficient to hang a man twice over!

The senior partner escaped to the Continent where he continued his nefarious schemes, until recently, when he was arrested by the French police and sent to prison.

Sidney Ilford, quite recovered from Shackell's brutal attack, has returned to a more reputable way of living since the break-up of the gang. Noel gave him the £100 I had promised at Nuneaton, and another £50 besides.

Rigby Starr has, for the present, disappeared from view; one day he will doubtless reappear—in the annals of the police court.

Lesbia Moran and her faithful Arthur reaped the reward of their constancy. Careful nursing restored to her some measure of health, though she will never be strong again. They still live in Birmingham, and Arthur is the manager of a flourishing business. He obtained his wife's fortune with very little trouble from his uncle, Truscot being too clever a man not to know when he was beaten. He wrote me a charming letter of congratulation on my marriage.

For the rest, I am the happiest woman imaginable and—a last word—I am even reconciled to my red hair—for Noel admires it!

The End.

NEXT WEEK—

. . In Our Grand Xmas Number . .

STARTS—

"DUPES OF DESTINY."

By BLANCHE EARDLEY. Author of "The Bond Between."

The Sad Tale of Two Lives Made Wretched.

"Did she really love him?" He had just finished reading her letter, and there was a numb feeling about his heart as he asked himself the question. She expressed herself in such precise, formal terms, that to his ardent temperament her love—if love it were—seemed a mean thing, pale and cold.

"You say you have at last won a position, and ask me to join you at once. Are you quite sure that you truly want me; or is it only that you desire to remain true to the words you spoke when we parted one year ago? Am I still necessary to your happiness? Reflect well before you answer. To form a life partnership is a serious thing, and should not be done without much consideration."

These words concluded her letter. For a year he had lived a lonely life in a strange land, and in that time, by dint of hard work, had become a leading young solicitor in a rising town. How he had loved the girl who had remained, and who had written him so unsatisfactory a letter! But it was all over now. He could never think of linking himself for life to an icicle.

The girl waited in vain. She never received an answer to her letter; but no one ever knew her anguish, for she suffered in silence. Unlike him, she sought no consolation.

Years afterwards, she saw him again, and he told her a story; sad indeed, but scarcely strange. It was a common tale enough, for a wrecked life is by no means unusual.

He had quarrelled with the other woman. He had prospered, and he intended to pass the remainder of his days in comfort, in the country of his youth. All these things he told the girl, and then he dared to speak to her of a vague hope which he had for some time cherished. He spoke passionately, without careful choice of words, as men do when swayed by strong emotions. He told her how he had loved her all the long years, and that without her his "life would be lonely beyond endurance. Would she come to him even now?" In the past her seeming coldness had chilled him and driven him to do a foolish thing. But he had bitterly repented, and he realised now how blind he had been. "Take me to your heart again," he cried.

And as the girl listened her soul became filled with a great tenderness, and her eyes were moist as she thought of what might have been. But in justice to herself she felt that she could not consent to pass her life with a man so little fitted to understand her. He had thought her cold and selfish when her every thought had been for him. Something of the old-time love revived as she talked with him, but her better judgment warned her against acceding to his wishes.

Gently, with a woman's softness, she told him that the past was dead for ever, and begged him to put an end to his pleading. "Leave me," she said, "for what you ask me to do would surely make you unhappy. You are lonely now, and you think that you love me; but your love would not endure. It would die again as it died befor . '

And when he heard her he ceased to recall painful memories. His pride was hurt, and he was very angry. With him vanity was ever dominant, and once more he failed to appreciate the depth of her nature. He only understood that he had been refused. The woman he had desired so strongly had had the power to resist him. Deeply mortified he turned and left her. As he walked away with head erect and eyes flashing with rage, the woman was well-nigh overcome with a great yearning to call him back and clasp him in her arms. But she remained alone.

And so they parted for all time.

Oliver Fiske.

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It was Safer Not to.

She: "Now let me play you the 'Moonlight Sonata.'" He: "I beg of you don't. That thing is responsible for my having twice become engaged—inadvertently, as it were. I prefer to do it deliberately the next time."

Jealous Creature!

Kitty: "Fred called me a dream last evening." Bertha: "How funny! It was only last week Fred was telling me what awful dreams he had."

A Natural Question.

"Has that young man who wants to marry you any money?" "Money! He gave me this cluster diamond brooch studded with pearls." "Yes, I know. Has he any money left?"

He Mistook her Meaning.

Clara: "Oh, John, what lovely flowers! They look as if they had just been gathered. Why, there's a little dew upon them!" John (somewhat embarrassed): "Due upon them! Not a penny, Clara, I assure you, not a penny!"

He Knew How to Do it.

Mrs. C.: "Doctor, you were at the last illness of my eldest boy?" Doctor: "Yes." Mrs. C.: "You also tended professionally to my first husband, who died?" Doctor: "Yes." Mrs. C.: "Well, my second husband is ill and I would like you to see him through, too."

She Had No Right to Publish the Banns.

"But I can't marry you, Charlie," she said sadly. "Don't say that, darling! Oh, don't say that! Why can't you?" "Because, Charlie, I am neither a minister nor a registrar, and have no authority." Then the soul of Charlie was quieted and a great light shone round about him.

A Very Hard World.

"Mamma," asked six-year-old Flossie one day, "if I get married will I have to have a husband like pa?" "Yes," replied the mother, with an amused smile. "And if I don't get married will I have to be an old maid like Aunt Kate?" "Yes." "Mamma"—after a pause—"it's a hard world for us women, isn't it?"

She was Disappointed.

Mr. Allstyle (gazing out of the window): "Well, I declare! If there doesn't go Brown with the woman to whom he was engaged long before his marriage. They used to say he loved——" Mrs. Allstyle (rushing to the window): "Where! Where! Let me see!" Mr. Allstyle: "There, see?" Mrs. Allstyle: (reaching the window) "Ah—pshaw—why, that's his wife!" Mr. Allstyle: "Exactly."

That Settled it.

They were fond of each other, very, and had been engaged. But they quarrelled, and were too proud to make it up. He called a few days ago at her father's house—to see the old gentleman on business, of course. She answered his ring at the door bell. Said he: "Ah, Miss Jones, I believe? Is your father within?" "No, sir," she replied; "father is not in at present. Do you wish to see him personally?" "Yes, miss," was his bluff response, feeling that she was yielding, "on very particular personal business," and he proudly turned to go away. "I beg your pardon," she called after him as he reached the lowest step, "but who shall I say called?" He never smiled again.

Couldn't Scare her.

"You are sure you won't be nervous at the altar?" said he before the wedding. "I never have been yet," replied the widow with touching modesty.

A Businesslike Suggestion.

He was looking for a rich wife and thought he was on the trail. "I love you," he said in rich, warm tones, "more than I can tell you in words." "You'd better try figures," she replied coldly, for she was not so green as she looked.

He Had Good Cause.

Stranger: "You are the only gentleman in the room." Guest: "What do you mean, sir?" Stranger: "When I tripped in the dance and went sprawling on the floor, tearing my fair partner's dress, you were the only one in the room who did not laugh." Guest: "The lady is my wife, and I paid for the dress."

She Thought they were Marriage Knots.

Pretty Passenger: "Captain, did the ship really make twenty knots every hour last night?" The Captain: "Yes, miss." Pretty Passenger: "And what do you do with so many knots?" The Captain (gruffly): "Toss 'em overboard." Pretty Passenger: "Oh, how queer! I thought the sailors had to untie them during the day."

A Wicked Confession.

"Do you mean to say you never loved any man in all your life?" asked an impertinent friend who had led Miss Oldmayde into some indiscreet confessions. "Not a single one!" replied Miss Oldmayde, emphatically. "Gracious!" exclaimed the caller, excitedly. "You don't mean to imply that you have ever loved any married men, I hope?"

Diplomacy.

"Anything wrong with the coffee this morning, John?" "No, it's good enough." "Porridge all right?" "I haven't any fault to find with the porridge." "Bacon cooked all right?" "I don't see anything wrong with the bacon." "No complaint to be made about anything?" "No." "John, I wish you would let me have a sovereign to buy some ribbons."

Did Not Love him that Much.

"Miss Gladys," said old Moneybags, "if my suit is not agreeable to you, say so frankly, but do not, I beg of you, tell me that old, old story that you will always look upon me as a brother." "Sir," replied the lovely maiden, as her eye lit up with the deathless flame of a pure young heart's deep devotion. "I do not love you well enough for a brother, but I have no objection to taking you as a husband."

Where Hubby Laughed.

Husband (kindly): "My dear, you have nothing decent to wear, have you?" Wife (with alacrity): "No, indeed, I haven't; not a thing. I'd be ashamed to be seen anywhere. My very newest party dress has been worn three times already." Husband: "Yes, that's what I told Bliffkins when he offered me two tickets for the theatre to-night. I knew if I took them they'd be wasted, so I just got one. You won't mind if I hurry off?"

A Woman's Way.

She: "Oh, don't you think Miss Browne is the nicest girl in the world?" He: "Why, yes, of course, if you think so." She: "And her eyes; oh, don't you think they are splendid?" He: "Very." She: "And hasn't she the prettiest little mouth, and the kindest, dearest face?" He: "Yes, indeed." She: "And then, isn't she graceful, and doesn't she waltz divinely?" He: "Of course she does." She: "And isn't she the sweetest, sweetest girl?" He: "Yes, indeed." She: "And don't you think she knows an awful lot, and don't you—oo-ooo-ooo t-hi-n-k——?" He: "Why, what's the matter, Mabel?" She: "O-h! I t-h-o-u-g-h-t y-o-u l-o-v-e-d me, Tom?" He: "Why, so I do." She: "W-e-l-l, then, how can you bear to talk so a-b-o-u-t t-h-a-t h-o-r-r-i-b-l-e o-l-d, u-g-l-y Browne girl?"

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RED TULIPS.

A Pretty Tale of Charity and Love.

"PLEASE, ma'am, will you give me one of them red tulips?"

The eager voice woke Helen from her reverie, and, looking up, she saw a little girl holding on to the iron railing with one hand, while the other pointed to a bed of red and yellow tulips waving in the sunshine.

"I can't give you one, child, for they don't belong to me," answered Helen, looking at the wistful face, over which her words brought a shadow of disappointment.

"I thought perhaps you lived in this house, or knew those who did; and I *do* want one of them flowers dreadful bad," said the girl, regarding the gay tulips with a look of intense desire.

"I wish I could give you one; but it would be stealing, you know. Perhaps, if you go and ask the owner he may let you have one—there are so many."

And having offered all the consolation in her power, Helen went on, busy with a certain disappointment of her own, which just then weighed very heavily on her girlish heart.

Half-an-hour later, as she came down the street on the opposite side, she saw the same girl sitting on a doorstep, still gazing at the tulips with hopeless admiration.

The child looked up as she approached, and recognising the pretty young lady who had spoken kindly to her, smiled and nodded so confidingly, that Helen could not resist stopping to say:

"Did you ask over there?"

"Yes, ma'am; but the girl said 'No,' and told me to clear out; so I came over here to sit and look at the flowers since I can't have none," she answered, with a patient sigh.

"You shall have some!" cried Helen, remembering how easily she could gratify the innocent longing of the poor child, and feeling a curious sympathy with all disappointed people. "Come with me, dear; there is a flower-shop round the corner, and you shall have a nosegay of some sort."

Such wonder, gratitude, and delight shone in Betty's face that Helen felt rejoiced for her small kindness.

As they walked, she questioned her about herself, and quite won her heart by the friendly interest expressed in Betty's mother, Betty's kitten, and Betty's affairs generally.

When they came to the flower-shop, little Bet felt as if she had got into a fairy tale; and when Helen gave her a pot with a blue hyacinth and a rosy tulip blooming prettily together, she felt as if a lovely fairy had granted all her wishes in the good old way.

"It's lovely! and I don't know how to thank you, miss. But mother takes in washing, and she'll love to do yours specially well, 'cause you done this for me!" cried Betty, embracing the flower-pot in one hand, and squeezing Miss Helen's with the other.

Helen promised to come and see her new friend, and, when they parted, kept turning round to watch the little figure trotting up the hill, often pausing to turn and show her a beaming face, all smiles and delight, as Betty threw her kisses, and hugged the tulip like a treasure of great price.

When she vanished, Helen said to herself, with a smile and a sigh:

"There, I feel better for that little job, and it is a comfort to know that someone has got what she wants, though it's not I."

Some weeks later, when Helen was preparing to go into the country for the summer, and wanted certain dresses cleaned, she remembered what Betty had said about her mother, and had a fancy to see how the child and her flowers prospered.

She found them in a small, poor room, hot and close, and full of washtubs and flat-irons. The mother was busy at her work, and Betty sat by the one window.

When she saw the face at the door she jumped up and clapped her hands, crying delightedly:

"Oh, mammy, it's my lady! my dear, pretty lady truly come at last!"

Such a welcome made friends of the three at once, and Mrs. Simms gladly undertook the work Helen offered.

"And how are the flowers?" asked the young lady, as she rose to go.

"Only leaves now, miss; but I take good care of 'em, and mammy says they will bloom again next Spring," answered Betty, showing her poor little garden, which consisted of the hyacinth, tulip, and one stout dandelion, blooming bravely in an old tea-pot.

"That will be a long time to wait, won't it?"

"Yes'm; but I go and take peeps at them flowers in the shop, and once the man gave me a pink that hadn't no stem. Maybe he will again, and so I'll get along," said Betty, softly touching her cheerful dandelion as if it were a friend.

"I wish you would come and see my garden, little Betty. You should pick as many flowers as you liked and play there all day long. I suppose your mother couldn't spare you for a visit, could she?"

Betty's face shone at the blissful thought; then the smile faded, and she shook her head, saying steadily:

"No, miss, I don't think she could; for she gets so tired, I like to help her by carrying home the clothes. Some other day maybe I can come."

Something in the patient little face touched Helen, and made her feel as if she had been too busy thinking of her own burden to help others bear theirs.

She longed to do something, but did not know how till Mrs. Simms showed her the way by saying, as she stroked the frizzly little head that leant against her:

"Betty thinks a heap of flowers, and seems to get lots of comfort out of 'em. She's a good child, and some day we are going to see the country—soon as ever we can afford it."

"Meantime the country must come to you," said Helen, with a happy thought shining in her face. "If you are willing, I will make a nice little plan with Betty, so she can

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have a nosegay all the time. I shall come to town twice a week, and if Betty will be at the corner of the park every Wednesday and Saturday morning at ten o'clock, I'll have a nice nosegay for her."

If she had proposed to present the child with all the sweets of a confectioner's shop, it would not have given her greater joy.

Betty could only dance a jig of rapture among the wash-tubs, and Mrs. Simms thanked Helen with tears in her eyes.

"Ain't she just like a good fairy, mammy?" said Betty, settling down in an empty clothes-basket to brood over the joyful prospect.

"No, she's an angel," answered mammy, folding her tired hands for a moment's rest when her guest had gone.

Helen heard both question and answer, and sighed to herself:

"I wish somebody else thought so."

When the first Wednesday came, Betty was at the meeting-place half-an-hour too soon.

That meeting was a pretty sight, though only an old apple-woman saw it.

Helen was half-hidden behind a great nosegay of June roses, lilies-of-the-valley, sweet jonquils and narcissus, sprays of tender green and white lilac plumes.

Betty gave one cry of rapture as she clutched it in both hands, trembling with delight, for never had she dreamt of owning such a treasure as this.

"All for me! All for me!" she said, as if it were hard to believe. "Oh, what will mammy say?"

"Run home and see. Never mind thanks. Get your posy into water as soon as you can, and come again Saturday," said Helen, as she went on, with a nod and a smile, while Betty raced home to fill every cup and plate they owned, and make a garden of the poor little room where mamma worked all day.

All through the summer, rain or shine, these two friends kept tryst, and though Helen seemed no nearer getting *her* wish, this little flower mission of hers helped her to wait.

Strangers watched the pretty girl with her nosegays, and felt refreshed by the winsome sight. Friends joked her about her little Flora, and would-be lovers pleaded in vain for one bud from her bouquets.

She found real happiness in this small duty, and did it faithfully for its own sake, little dreaming that someone was tracking her by the flowers she left behind her in the highways of her life.

For, seeing how much these fragrant messengers were to Betty and her mother, Helen fell into the way of taking flowers to others also, and never went to town without a handful to leave here and there. By some sick-bed, in a child's hand, or on a needle-woman's table.

And all unconsciously these glimpses of poverty, pain, neglect and loneliness taught her a lesson she never learnt before. For the gay girl was discovering that life was not a summer day, and she was something better than a butterfly.

When autumn came, and she returned to her home, her young friends discovered that Helen's quiet season had improved her wonderfully, for behind the belle they found a tender-hearted woman.

She took up her old life where she laid it down apparently; but to those who knew her best there was a difference now, for, in many unsuspected ways, pretty Helen was unconsciously fitting herself for the happiness that was coming to her very soon.

Betty helped to bring it, though she never guessed that her measles was a blessing to her dear lady. When Dr. Strong, finding a hot-house bouquet beside her bed, very naturally asked where it came from, Betty told all about Miss Helen, from the time of her red tulips to the fine tea-roses in her hand.

"She has lots of bunches like these sent to her, and she gives 'em to us poor folks. This one was for her to take to a splendid ball, but she kept it fresh, and came herself to give it to me. Isn't she kind?"

"Very, to you, but rather cruel to the gentlemen who hope to see her wear their gifts, for one evening at least," answered the doctor, examining the bouquet with an odd smile

"Oh, she does keep some, when they are from folks she likes. I was there one day when some violets came in with a book, and she wouldn't give me one. But I didn't care at all, for I had two great posies, all red geranium and pinks, instead.

"She likes violets, then?" and the doctor gently patted Betty's head, as if he had grown suddenly fond of her.

"I think she does, for when I went the next week, that very bunch was in the vase on her table all dead and yellow, and she wouldn't let me fling it away when I wanted to put in a rose from the bunch she gave me."

"You are a grateful little girl, my dear, and a very observing child. Now keep warm and quiet, and we'll have you again trotting off to Miss Helen in a week or so."

The doctor stole a sprig of rose geranium out of Betty's last bouquet, and went away looking as if he had found something even sweeter than that in the dingy room where his patient lay.

Next day Miss Helen had fresh violets in the vase on her table, and fresh roses blooming on her cheeks. Dr. Strong advised her not to visit Betty, as there was fever in the neighbourhood, but kindly called every day or two to let Helen know how her little friend was getting on.

After one of these calls the doctor went away, saying to himself, with an air of tender pride and satisfaction:

"I was mistaken, and judged too hastily last year. Helen is not what I thought her, a frivolous, fashionable beauty, but a sweet, sensible girl, who is tired of that empty life, and quietly tries to make it beautiful and useful in the best and truest way. I hope I read the blue eyes right, and I think I may venture to say now what I dared not say last year."

After that same visit Helen sat thinking to herself, with a face full of happiness and humility:

"He finds me improved, so I have not waited in vain; and I believe I shall not be disappointed after all."

It is evident that the doctor did venture and that Helen was not disappointed, for on the first day of June, Betty and her mother, all in their best, went to a certain church and were shown to the best seat in the gallery, where several other humble friends were gathered to see their dear Miss Helen married.

Betty was in high spirits, with yellow ribbons in her hat, and lighted up the seat like an animated rainbow.

Full of delight and importance was Miss Betty, for she had been in the midst of the festive preparations, and told glowing tales to her interested listeners while they waited for the bride.

When the music sounded, Betty held her breath and rolled up her eyes in a pious rapture.

When a general stir announced the grand arrival, she leant so far over the gallery that she would have gone head first, if her mother had not caught her legs; and when the misty white figure passed up the aisle, Betty audibly remarked:

"If she had wings, she'd look just like an angel, wouldn't she, mammy?"

She sat like a little statue all through the service; but she had something on her mind, and the moment the bridal couple turned to go, Betty was off, scrambling downstairs, dodging under people's arms, hopping over ladies' skirts, and steadily making her way to the carriage in waiting for the happy pair.

The door had just closed, when a little face, with a yellow hat surrounding it like a glory, appeared at the window.

An arm was thrust in, offering a bunch of flowers, and a breathless voice cried resolutely:

"Oh, please do let me give 'em to my lady! They bloomed a-purpose for her, and she *must* have 'em!"

Those outside saw a sweet face bend to kiss the little one, but they did not see what happened afterwards, for Helen, remembering a year ago, said, smiling:

"Patient waiters are no losers. The poor child has red tulips all her own at last."

"And I have mine," answered the happy doctor, gently kissing his young wife as the carriage rolled away, leaving Betty to retire in triumph.

Louise M. Alcott.

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POWERFUL ROMANCE.

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY:

Isolo Staunton, a criminal millionaire, who was once a convict on the Chincha Islands. He is the ruler of a kingdom under the sea, of the existence of which nobody knows. Here he forges in great number coins of every nationality. With the wealth he is amassing he intends to form a United States of South America and to make himself President.

Mercedes Staunton, his beautiful daughter, who falls in love with

Wilfrid Ellerton, a young man of whom Isolo Staunton is greatly afraid because he holds it in his power to send the millionaire back as a convict to the Chincha Islands. So Staunton secures Ellerton on board the *Isola*, his magnificent yacht, and consigns him to the Underworld. It is then given out that the young man has fallen overboard and been drowned.

Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia.—The right-hand friend and confidant of Staunton. He carries out the kidnapping of Ellerton.

M. Herarra.—The viceroy of Staunton in the Underworld.

Stanislaus Smith.—A detective, who is endeavouring to find the perpetrators of the colossal coin frauds. He lives a double life as Herr de Ronski, the famous musician, but only his wife and daughter, Paula, and Arthur Dennison, a Treasury solicitor, know of this.

Derrick Kesteven.—The partner of Staunton in all his great schemes. He has a beautiful daughter, named Cora.

Captain Percy Iddison and Lady Maud Hyam.—Two engaged persons who have suspicions about the unscrupulousness of Staunton.

Janet Yuill.—A nurse who is taken on board the *Isola* to tend Mercedes, who falls ill when she hears of the alleged death of Ellerton. She there meets her husband, Herbert Darfield, once Arthur Culworth, criminal, and her suspicions are aroused.

TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

A Luncheon Party.

MERCEDES had now so completely recovered her physical health that the second nurse had been sent home, and Janet Yuill only remained in attendance on her by her own particular request.

During her convalescence she had formed an intensely strong attachment for the grave, yet gentle and beautiful, woman, whom she had first seen leaning over her bed when the light of reason dawned once more in her eyes, and it was Janet's soft voice, with its musical undertones of Scottish accent, which had welcomed her back to the world of real things.

But Janet, in addition to her affection for her lovely patient, to say nothing of the splendid terms with which Staunton had tempted her to remain, had other and deeper reasons for not leaving the *Isola*, at any rate for the time being.

Hers was one of those deep, strong woman-natures which, having once loved, can forgive anything, even dishonour, for the sake of love.

Since that terrible night on the confines of the Arctic Sea, when she had seen the snow-cap of Mount Hekla floating high up in the moon-lit sky, she had only spoken to her husband two or three times, and only once on the subject that lay nearest to their hearts.

Then, in answer to his despairing appeal, she had raised him, for the moment at least, back into the heaven which he had once shared with her by telling him that she had already forgiven him, and that, in spite of everything, she was his true wife still.

And then he had said

"I have been guilty, Janet dear, but I had repented of my crime, and I had paid bitterly for it before, it may be, the mercy of heaven brought you on board this ship; but I am in the grip of a man who never loosed his hold on what he wanted until he had done with it, and when he has done that with a man he takes good care that he shall be of no use to anyone else. Many a time I have longed to give myself up to justice and take my punishment, for it couldn't be worse than slavery like this."

"Then, why not do it, Arthur?" she had asked, "and when you are a free man again, you shall come back to me, and we will forget everything, except that we are man and wife."

"I daren't, Janet," he had answered in a frightened whisper. "I'm a prisoner for life.

"Like the others, I have more money than I can spend, and everything that man can want except honour and liberty, but to desert is death. The Señor, as they call him, never forgives. One of the officers, our second, tried to desert once, but in twelve hours he was brought back. He was kept in irons in a dark cell down below there till we got up north yonder, and then, well, I can't tell you the rest—but we never saw him again."

The conversation had been interrupted at this point by the appearance of Doctor Billaud, who, after a suspicious glance at them, had told Janet that her presence was wanted below. The next time they had met her husband had passed her a piece of twisted paper, on which she found written:

"Never be seen speaking to me alone!"

She had obeyed him, but the secret had been a heavy one for her to carry, and now that they had returned to civilisation, she had determined with all the strength of her

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resolute nature, to remain on the yacht and at any risk clear up the mystery which surrounded the beautiful and luxurious craft. It was for this reason that she had, as it were, drawn a bow at a venture, and told Captain Iddison about seeing the snowcap of Hekla during the supposed voyage from Leith to the Riviera. It was indeed a very important piece of news.

The lunch on board the yacht the day following the holding of the council of war, was a very different function from that at which the "Señor President" had entertained the South American delegates.

That, it must be confessed, had degenerated into something of the nature of an orgie, at least on the part of two or three of the eminent diplomatists.

This was as dainty and brilliant as money and taste could make it, and, moreover, it was graced by the presence of semi-royalty in the presence of the Grand Duke of Warschaua, whom Kesteven had met in the course of a mutual plunge at the tables in which his Highness had lost rather more than he could afford; while Kesteven, playing with the sublime confidence inspired by the possession of superfluous millions, had twice broken the bank.

They had met before in Paris, Vienna, and Venice, and half the smartest pleasure resorts in Europe, with the result that Miss Cora had taken a very understandable liking to him, since he was everything that the ideal Grand Duke in the later twenties might be expected to be—clean, healthy, fairly good-looking, a well-bred gentleman, and a thorough sportsman.

On his part his Highness had found very little difficulty in persuading himself that, of all the maidens whose mammas would have so gladly given them to share his name and dignity, this bright and beautiful American girl was distinctly the most desirable.

Her prospective millions may have had something to do with the preference, but that was only in grand-ducal human nature.

Be that as it may, his Highness Eugene Alexis of Warschaua formed one of the principal reasons for what Kesteven had said to Staunton after the council meeting the day before.

After the presentation had taken place before lunch, Staunton could not resist taking his partner aside and saying:

"Well, my dear fellow, I must confess that I admire your taste and judgment. Still, one can hardly help seeing the grim humour of the situation—a grand-ducal coronet, gilded by our own manufacture of the necessary article! I wonder what he would think of the millions which, of course, Cora will take him, if he knew where they came from?"

"It would be a mighty cold day for anyone who told him," replied Kesteven carelessly, as he turned away towards the little group of which his Highness and Lady Medcalf-Mears formed the centre.

Shortly afterwards the Duke began to compliment Staunton on the beauty of the *Isola*. He was a keen yachtsman himself, and owned the fastest and smartest schooner in the Bay, and, like all good sailors, looked upon this floating palace rather as a luxurious means of transit than as a real ship. Still, for what she was, he could not help admiring her, and he expressed his admiration very frankly.

"Now isn't he just good," whispered Cora to Mercedes, as she put her arm through hers and drew her away from the others. "Until I met him I had no idea they raised men like that at the other end of this effete old Europe."

"Good?" echoed Mercedes, looking up and laughing. "He seems delightful. I think I shall have to ask papa to find a nice Grand Duke for me, and then, when its all settled, you and I can be Grand Duchesses together. Don't you think we should make a very creditable pair?"

"Yes, dear, why, of course we should," replied Cora softly, "but I don't think I'd quite like to go in front of you at a Court presentation. Still, it'll be time enough to talk about coronets when they're offered us. The Grand Duke hasn't *exactly* laid his at my feet, you know. And now, tell me how you liked the concert. Isn't Paula de Ronski just too lovely for anything?"

She changed the subject from the one that interested her most for a very good reason. She was a good, honest, tender-hearted girl, utterly innocent of the nefarious fashion in which the millions which were to be hers had been won, and it hurt her sorely to hear poor Mercedes speak with such careless ignorance of the fate which had overtaken her own lover.

"Yes," replied Mercedes, looking up at the blue hills beyond the town, "do you know, Cora, that when she was singing that love-song I found myself thinking of something, I don't know what it could have been, that seemed to have been in my life once and then gone out of it again.

"Of course it can only have been a fancy of mine, and, after all, if we cannot dream while we are listening to such exquisite music as that there can't be very much of it in our souls.

"Did I tell you, Cora, that papa is going to try and get the de Ronskis to come and play and sing for us on board?"

"No," exclaimed Cora, "now that is a gorgeous idea! But do you think they'll come? They've only just begun their season here and——"

"Oh, I hope so," Mercedes interrupted. "That nice Mr. Dennison, Captain Iddison's friend, who seems to know everybody, confided to me this morning that he knows the great musician very well, and so I took him at once to papa and made him promise that he would do everything he could to help us. Wasn't that lucky?

"And if they do come we are going to have dinner in the Bay and then, as soon as the moon has got up, we shall steam out to sea and have our concert on deck. What do you think of that?"

"Think?" cried Cora, stopping short in her walk, "I guess you'll have to give me time for that, dear. The idea's quite too splendid to get a grip of all at once. Ah, Mr. Dennison, we were just talking about you. Mercedes has been telling me about the concert plan, and how you so kindly said you'd help with the Professor. Now, do—won't you?"

"Everything I can, I assure you, Miss Kesteven," he replied, and then, as he looked at Mercedes and her lovely eyes met his, joining Cora's in pleading the cause of the concert, for the first time in his professional career a thrill, not of remorse, but of keen regret passed through his soul.

This innocent, exquisitely beautiful girl, radiant with youth and health and happiness, believing herself the heiress of honestly-won millions—this was the daughter of the man he and Mr. Smith already suspected of being, not only the greatest swindler of the age, but, if that were true, the man who must be responsible for a score of deliberate murders as well.

The idea seemed hideous to him. Then he seemed to see Paula standing in her place. It was too horrible for thought.

He dismissed it and went on:

"But may I make a suggestion?"

"Why certainly you can," exclaimed Cora impetuously. And then apologetically: "I beg your pardon, Mercedes, but I'm so struck on this concert that I'm forgetting my manners."

"Nonsense!" laughed Mercedes—and, save one, he thought he had never heard so sweet a laugh. "Yes, Mr. Dennison, please do."

"Then it is this. My friend de Ronski, like most great musicians, has his little feelings, as they say. Both he and his wife are of very good old Polish stock and so I need hardly say that he is as proud as Lucifer. He is a rich man and, if he took it into his head to say 'no' a million down would not tempt him to say 'yes.' Wherefore, if Mr. Staunton would allow you, as hostess of the *Isola*, to make his personal acquaintance first——"

"Of course I should be only too delighted," replied Mercedes with a radiant smile, "I see exactly what you mean. I must prevent papa from making what one might call a business offer to him, and just invite him and his wife and daughter in a social sort of way——"

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"To meet the Grand Duke, for instance," whispered Cora, as his Highness approached them after a brief search for her charming self.

"Duke, what do you think of this?" she went on as he joined the group.

"Of what, Miss Cora?" he inquired with a bow. "It must be something of a delightful nature if it has originated on board this floating paradise. Truthfully I have been in very like a dream since I have been on board."

His English was almost perfect, but his accent made him seem so delightfully boyish that Cora would not even have had him speak American.

Then she began to rattle off the scheme of the concert, enlarging on its splendid possibilities with such an exquisite vivacity of voice, manner, and gesture that his Highness was completely dazzled and entranced long before she had finished.

"There, now," she ended with an inimitable gesture of her hands towards him which made him want to take hold of them and kiss them, "what does your Highness think of that for an improvement on the Arabian Nights Entertainment?"

The simile was not particularly exact, but it was the only one she thought of at the moment, and, as she would have put it, "it went."

"It is almost too charming a prospect to be truthful," replied the Duke, looking at her with grave, dark brown eyes in which she saw two sparks, possibly kindled by her own. "But I have taken the liberty to come to ask you if you would take what I think you call the constitutional before lunch?" he went on with a slight motion of his arm towards her.

"Why, certainly, Duke," she laughed, taking his arm, "you'll excuse me, won't you. Mercedes?"

"Of course," smiled her hostess as they walked away. "And now, Mr. Dennison," she went on, "there is only one little difficulty that I see about this very kind offer of yours. You see, papa has got some of the old South American, in fact, the Spanish ideas, and I am half Spanish. You understand me? The difficulty is one of chaperonage, and in this hideously wicked place—ah, there is my question answered at once! Here comes my beloved Janet. She nursed me, you know, when I was so ill—though I never could find out what made me ill. She has come to tell me lunch is ready, I suppose. She is just like a mother to me. I couldn't have a better chaperon, could I, Mr. Dennison?"

"Under the circumstances, certainly not," he replied, holding out his hand as Janet approached.

"Oh, you know my Janet, do you?" exclaimed Mercedes, as they shook hands.

"Yes, Iddison introduced me. Miss Yuill was out at the Front and she nursed a lot of his men until the Company stopped calling her 'Sister' and called her 'Angel' so he tells me."

"Oh, you wicked Janet!" cried Mercedes to her blushing nurse, "and you never told me a word about all that! And so you are a heroine as well as the sweetest dear that ever was.

"Now listen, I want you to do something for me; Mr. Dennison, will you kindly tell Janet all about it? I see papa beckoning to me over there."

It did not take him very long to persuade Janet to do what Mercedes had suggested, for she, too, had begun to be troubled with fears for the safety of her darling on board this mysterious craft, and when Dennison assured her that it was entirely in her interest that he desired her to make the acquaintance of the de Ronskis she consented at once.

OUR XMAS NUMBER, ready next week, will be full of seasonable fiction.

TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.

Treason!

The de Ronskis gave another concert that night, and, of course, everyone who could resist the fatal fascinations of the Casino went to it.

When it was over Dennison managed to get away from the party and join his friend and colleague in his private room behind the stage. As he went in de Ronski was just putting his violin tenderly to rest in its case. He looked up and said:

"Ah, my friend, is it you! I saw you and your party, and also the Señor Staunton in front. I hope you all enjoyed yourselves?"

"That goes without saying," laughed Dennison as he closed the door. "If I could say so with truth I should say that you and Madame and Mademoiselle had excelled yourselves, but not even you could do that."

"That's all right," said the other, in the voice of Mr. Smith, "but I don't suppose you came here to flatter us. Any news? I know, of course, that you have been lunching and having a general good time on board the *Isola* to-day. By the way, what a lovely girl our friend Staunton's daughter is! Francesca and Paula have both fallen in love with her, and I—well, I must confess, she appeals strongly to my artistic sense. I suppose, granted that we are on the right track, that she knows nothing."

"Good heavens, man, no!" exclaimed Dennison, almost angrily. "As you know, I am not a particularly sentimental or credulous person, but I'd stake all I have or hope for in the world on her absolute innocence. The thing's inconceivable!"

"I'm glad you think so. No one would accuse me of that sort of weakness, I think, but, although I have had some queer experiences of pretty women in the criminal line, I should want very strong proof before I believe that a girl with an angel face like hers could be the accomplice of a criminal, even though he happened to be her own father."

"That is exactly the thing that I called to see you about," replied Dennison. "Have you half an hour to spare?"

"An hour, if you like. My wife and Paula have gone back with my manager to the hotel already. I shall be in town all night. And that reminds me, if you have nothing better to do when we have had our talk you might as well come with me and make the acquaintance of my colleague Trapané."

"What, Trapané of Paris? What's he doing here? Also down for a holiday?"

The other laughed in reply.

"Well," said Dennison, after a long pull at his cigar, "things seem to be getting into a bit of a tangle; more tangle than I like, in fact."

"My dear fellow, did you ever know a case worth having that wasn't tangled up? That's just what makes ours the most interesting profession on earth."

"I wasn't speaking professionally," said Dennison, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees. "You see it's this way. It is absolutely certain, I take it, that Miss Staunton knows nothing, allowing that we are right——"

"Which we are," interrupted Mr. Smith quietly.

Dennison looked hard at him and nodded.

"I thought so," he went on, "and from one point of view that makes it as bad as possible. As I told you, Staunton wants you to go and dine on the *Isola* some evening, and take part in a sort of al-fresco sea concert, and, for other professional reasons, you said you would.

"Now, Miss Staunton is enraptured with the idea, and I suggested to her this morning that, as it wouldn't be much

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use approaching Stanislas de Ronski on the business plane, she would allow me, as a friend of the family, to introduce her to your wife as hostess of the *Isola*, and invite you to dinner in a social way."

"That would be much better in every way. Of course, under the circumstances, my friend de Ronski couldn't think of charging a fee to a man whom *I* hope to lock up. Well?"

"The natural difficulty of a chaperone arose," Dennison resumed, "and it solved itself very happily by the appearance just at that moment of Miss Janet Yuill, the Sister who nursed Miss Staunton through her illness. It appears that she has formed an intense attachment for her, and she is now, I suppose, permanently installed as her companion."

"Ah," said Mr. Smith, looking up, "that is the young lady who saw the ice-cap of Hekla on the voyage from Leith to the Riviera?"

"Yes, and from what she told me later on, she is getting still more suspicious of the true nature of the *Isola*. For instance, it is a rather curious thing that she has been some days in port now and no one has seen her captain. Of course, you understand, it isn't possible for guests to make inquiries on a matter of that sort, except in quite a casual way. I asked Miss Yuill, and she told me, rather clumsily for a straightforward woman like her, that he was supposed to be confined to his room with sickness of some sort, but she looked so awkward over it that I really didn't care to press the point."

"Quite right, my dear Dennison," said Mr. Smith. "Never press a point too far. One often learns a good deal more from silence than from speech. And now as to Miss Staunton. I presume that in the first place you wish us to make her personal acquaintance, so that we may satisfy ourselves, I mean, of course, my wife and daughter, as to her innocence, so that if the crash comes there can be no question of her being involved."

"Yes, that is the first point," said Dennison, "and the second is this. Given the crash, she will, of course, be friendless. Those who would scheme and almost fight for her invitations now will turn their backs on her then.

"She will be the daughter of a convict, probably of a murderer, and she will want friends who know that she is innocent. In other words, I don't want the sins of the father to fall upon the child. It isn't fair!"

"Dennison," exclaimed Mr. Smith, getting up and filling the glasses, "you're a brick! You can rest assured that when Miss Staunton wants friends she'll find them in my house. And now it's about time we were off."

He put on his soft hat, rang the bell, and instantly became Stanislas de Ronski once more. The attendant appeared, and he ordered his brougham.

When it came round he gave an address to the driver, and as he sat down beside Dennison and the carriage rolled away smoothly on its rubber tyres, he laid his hand on his knee and said:

"For the present I should like you to hear what you are going to hear to-night as my friend and not as a Treasury official. You see, the French police work differently from the English, and at present we are the guests of the French police. Afterwards, when the time comes to act, you shall have your full share, if only for the sake of the very valuable clue you have given to us in the person of Miss Yuill. You take me, of course."

"Certainly, my dear fellow," replied Dennison. "You needn't have any fear of that. To-night I have neither official eyes nor ears. I am here on leave, and the office has nothing to do with it."

"Very well, that is quite enough," was the reply, and Mr. Smith relapsed into silence until the brougham, after a somewhat winding, up-hill course, entered a gate flanked by two dwarf palms and pulled up before the steps of a white, two-storied, verandahed house, half smothered by the luxuriant sub-tropical vegetation.

Mr. Smith opened the door and got out.

A servant standing at the bottom of the steps came forward, and said in French, with a gesture of deference:

"Monsieur Justin awaits you, sir."

"Good. Kindly tell him that I have brought a friend with me."

"*Bien, monsieur.*"

And the man led the way up the steps.

"Come along," said de Ronski, as he was now, in French, and he added in a whisper, "Don't forget that our friend Trapané is not known here."

Dennison nodded, and they entered.

The man led them upstairs, and knocked softly at a door. A voice within said, "*Entrez*," and the door opened.

De Ronski went in first, and as the door closed behind him Dennison found himself in the presence of an amiable-looking old gentleman with thin, curly grey hair and straggly white beard and moustache—and, to his utter amazement, Doctor Eymar Billaud, to whom he had been introduced at lunch that day as Isolo Staunton's physician-in-ordinary on the yacht!

"Monsieur Justin," said de Ronski, after they had shaken hands, "permit me to present to you a great friend of mine, Monsieur Dennison, for whom I have taken the liberty of asking a share of your hospitality. But pardon," he continued, looking round at the doctor, who was staring hard at Dennison and looking as though he would very much rather be on the other side of the door. "I see you have another guest."

"Yes, yes," said Monsieur Justin. "This is Doctor Billaud, physician of the *Isolo*, the wonderful yacht of the great millionaire, Monsieur Staunton. Doctor Billaud, you, of course, know who this is?"

"Who does not?" replied Billaud, in a not over steady voice, his eyes still turning towards Dennison. He bowed, and de Ronski said:

"Mr. Dennison, of course, you know the Doctor? I believe you have already met on board the yacht?"

Dennison returned Billaud's bow and said:

"Oh, yes. I had the pleasure of meeting the Doctor at lunch to-day."

"Well, now, gentlemen," said Monsieur Justin, moving his hand towards the table, "there you have cognac and whisky, syphons and cigars; help yourselves and sit down, and we will talk."

Before they were settled Doctor Billaud turned to his host and said, with manifest nervousness:

"I wish to give no offence, Monsieur Justin, but I must remind you that I was not aware that I was to have the pleasure of meeting Monsieur Dennison to-night."

"My dear Doctor," replied his host, "any friend of Monsieur de Ronski is a friend of mine, and therefore, as long as our present satisfactory relations continue, a friend of yours."

"Then, of course, I am perfectly content," replied Billaud, sitting down and taking a gulp at the fairly stiff brandy and soda that he had mixed for himself.

"And now, doctor," continued the host, "as I have told you, you are among friends who, under certain conditions can be trusted implicitly, and, therefore, I am able to ask you to speak with perfect plainness.

"Be good enough, then, to fulfil the promise which you made to me a short time ago, and repeat in the presence of these gentlemen the very interesting narrative with which you have been kind enough to favour myself."

And then, to Dennison's utter amazement, Billaud began from the moment at which Wilfrid Ellerton was supposed to have fallen overboard from the *Isola* and told the whole story, which is already in the reader's possession, down to the moment at which he lost sight of him, and was compelled to return by the lift into the Council Chamber.

There was a little silence after he had finished, during which, with trembling hand, he raised another glass of brandy and soda which his host had poured out for him, to his pale, quivering lips, and drained it in convulsive gulps. He set the glass down with a bang and threw himself back in his

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chair, breathing hard like a man recovering himself after some intense exertion.

"Interesting, most marvellously interesting!" said de Ronski, between the puffs of his cigar. "What do you think, my dear Monsieur Dennison? Have you ever heard such a romance of tragedy as that before?"

"Never," he replied. "In fact, if I had not heard it from a gentleman of Doctor Billaud's undoubted veracity and under these particular circumstances, I should have found it quite impossible of belief."

"You will, of course, understand, gentlemen," said Billaud, pulling himself upright by the arms of his chair, and turning towards them, "that by saying what I have done to-night, I have put my life in your hands. A man's life is as nothing in the eyes of Isolo Staunton.

"I have been his slave for nearly five years now, and I have seen him send men, yes, and women, too, to instant death with a word, even for the suspicion of treason, and sometimes, to my shame and misery I say it, I have myself been compelled to execute the sentence—to make the victim ill with one drug, and, while pretending to cure, kill him with another.

"It has been horrible, and I can endure it no longer.

"But now that I have confessed all that I know, you will protect me, good Monsieur Justin, will you not?"

"I have promised," replied his host. "Keep faith and continue in what you justly call your slavery, and it shall not be long before the yoke shall be broken, and you shall be free—pardoned of everything."

"Now, how on earth was that brought about?" said Dennison to Mr. Smith as they were driving away in the brougham half an hour later. "It looks at first sight incomprehensible."

"And yet, like most seeming miracles, very easy of explanation when you know all the circumstances. When I was playing the other night I recognised Billaud as a very clever physician who got into trouble in a particularly unpleasant case in Paris about seven years ago. I was working on the case with Trapané, and when he was caught I saw him measured, on the Bertillon system. He was condemned to fifteen years, and, at the last moment by some means—a bribed official, I suppose, bought by our friend Staunton, no doubt,—he slipped through our fingers.

"He has passed the age when a man's head or features alter. He made the mistake of showing himself in the concert room clean shaven—and there you are. I sent my friend Trapané a note. He sent another to the physician of the *Isola*, making an appointment for to-night, and Billaud had either to accept it or be arrested."

III

TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Social Interlude.

As soon as Mercedes mentioned the idea of her visit to the de Ronskis to her father he at once fell in with it, saying:

"I am very glad, dearest, that you hit upon the idea of taking Miss Yuill with you to-morrow, because I happen to be very busy just now with these everlasting financial matters, and I shall have to go over to Mentone for two or three days. Indeed I was just going to tell you that I shall have to start by the first train in the morning."

"But you will not be away long, papa, will you? You

BOVRIL prevents

"catching colds."

ASK YOUR DOCTOR!

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know Lady Medcalf-Mears is only staying about a week longer, and we must have the concert before she and her party go."

"Oh, of course! Let me see. To-day is Thursday. I shall certainly be back early on Monday, and so, if it will suit the de Ronskis and everybody else that you want to ask, arrange it for Tuesday. The best thing to do will be for you and her ladyship and Cora to put your heads together and work the whole matter out. Women can arrange these things infinitely better than men, and really, as I say, I have so many business concerns to attend to that I really haven't the time to spare. Give Dinaud *carte blanche* as to the feeding and decorations and all that, and you arrange all the rest. And you know, dearest," he went on, putting his hand under her chin and turning her sweet face up to his, "the more money you spend the better I shall be pleased.'

"You need not tell me that, dearest and most generous of papas!" she laughed when she had returned his kiss. "When you come back you shall find that I have been as wickedly extravagant as even you could wish, my splendid spendthrift."

The next morning she went ashore with Cora to see him off, and when they got back to the Promenade des Anglais, almost the first people they met were Madame de Ronski and Paula, escorted by the Grand Duke and Dennison.

Mercedes noticed the quick flush which rose for an instant to Cora's cheeks as she exclaimed:

"Why, there they are! Now, isn't that good! We can have the introductions right away. Heavens, how lovely that girl is. It's hardly right to let her around loose."

"Perhaps she is not the only one," laughed Mercedes softly, as they approached the party.

"Excellently well met!' exclaimed Dennison, raising his panama. The Grand Duke did the same, looking the while at Cora with eyes so full of honest admiration and something more that the momentary twinge, not of jealousy, but of half-misgiving of which her conscience accused her, instantly gave place to a mental glow of supreme content.

Dennison, as a common friend, made the introductions, and when they were completed, his Highness of Warschaua said:

"We were about going to my launch yonder to go to the yacht and beg the honour of your company at lunch at one o'clock at the London House. May I hope that you have not any other engagement?"

"No, your Highness," replied Mercedes, "we have just seen papa off to Mentone by the train. He has gone to see about some of these eternal financial matters—just as if he hadn't a great deal too much money as it is—and so I am quite free until Monday. And I don't think you have any very pressing engagements, Cora, have you?"

"Now, Miss Mercedes, you just know I haven't," laughed Cora, "and I think lunch at the London would be just delightful."

"Then that arranges itself perfectly," said the Duke, stealing another look at Cora, "and, since there is no concert to-night, and it happens to be my birthday, if Madame will continue to give us her countenance, why should we not go up afterwards to Monte Carlo, dine with Maître François, and lose a few francs at the tables by way of diversion? Ah, see who comes! It is Mr. Kesteven himself. Truly this is a morning of fortunate meetings."

"Good morning, your Highness, and——"

He stopped with his hat uplifted, looking at Paula and her mother.

"Let me have the honour, my dear Kesteven," resumed the Duke, "of presenting you to Madame and Mademoiselle de Ronski, already not unknown to you."

"I guess the honour is mostly to me, Duke," answered Kesteven, as he bowed again to the two ladies. "And now," he went on, "I want to say that I found it a trifle dull on board, and so I came ashore to see if I could find someone who would be kind enough to come and have lunch with m."

"You're just two minutes behind the procession for once in your life, poppa," laughed Cora. "It's all fixed. The Duke has just invited us to London House——"

"Then, in that case I reckon I'd better invite myself in sheer self defence," laughed her father. "Will you have me, Duke?"

"I should be obliged to send a friend to visit you, my dear Kesteven, if you had the effrontery to lunch anywhere else. It would be unheard of!" replied his Highness with mock gravity.

"Then, since that is all settled," said Madame de Ronski, "I think, Paula, that we had better go and do our shopping."

"And if we may come, too," said Mercedes, "that is just what Cora and I were going to do."

Kesteven, who was feeling on very good terms with himself and the world since he had convinced Staunton of his resolve to end the partnership, and "swindle respectably," as he put it, willingly fell in with the Duke's proposal to dine with François and spend the evening in the "gilded Gehenna," to use Miss Cora's euphemism, and so the whole party was in excellent humour when it assembled for lunch, with the sole exception of Dennison, who every time he heard Mercedes laugh felt a pang of heart-ache for pity of her sweetness and innocence.

When lunch was over Mercedes said to Cora:

"If we are going to tempt the goddess in her temple to-night I shall have to go on board and get some money or my cheque-book. I am almost penniless after the shopping. Really, the shopkeepers here are simply a set of privileged thieves."

"Don't you worry about that, Mercedes," said Kesteven quickly, "I'll be your banker for to-night. My cheque's good for a million up there, and I reckon you can't lose much more than that, and if you or Cora want any now you can have a couple of thousand francs to go on with."

He spoke carelessly, but Dennison's trained ear caught an undernote of anxiety in his voice. He thought of the thousand-franc note that Valdez had changed on the night of the first concert. He looked at Madame de Ronski and Paula, and saw that they also had caught the tone. He waited anxiously for Mercedes to speak.

"Oh, very well!" she laughed, to his intense relief, for he knew how strict a watch was being kept, and the idea of her being caught passing a counterfeit at the tables was too horrible to realise. "That is very kind of you, Uncle Dirk"—which had been her pet name for him since she was a schoolgirl—"that will be better.

"Papa told me to be as extravagant as I could while he was away, and so a few thousand francs won't matter to him. But still, I should like to go on board because I have something to say to Janet. It won't take me an hour."

"Miss Janet is the lady who nursed you during your illness, is she not?" asked Madame de Ronski. "I have heard about her. Mr. Dennison told me that you were going to bring her to call at the hotel. And Captain Iddison told me that she nursed his men during the war, and made them worship her. You will let us know her, will you not?"

"With pleasure!" exclaimed Mercedes, her eyes lighting up. "My Janet is the dearest and noblest woman alive. You will love her the moment you know her. We have nothing to do till the half-past five train, why should you not all come and have afternoon tea with me on the yacht? It will be much nicer and fresher out there than ashore."

"Do say yes, mamma," said Paula. "I am longing to see this floating palace of Mr. Staunton's."

"With the greatest pleasure. It will be delightful," assented her mother. "I am quite as curious as you are, I think."

"Then after that," laughed Mercedes, who had been unfolding the scheme of the concert during lunch, "I shall take no refusal for Tuesday. Will your Highness condescend to join us at tea?" she went on, turning to the Duke.

"Mademoiselle, I am very sorry, but I cannot," he replied

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with a despairing look towards Cora. "It would be Paradise, but I am shut out by a mere business man, a banker, with whom I must talk this afternoon, till I shall want to kill him. But this Miss Janet of whom you have spoken? I have seen her on the yacht, and, as you say, she is adorable. Do you think she would do me the honour and favour to join our party to-night?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Mercedes, leaning back in her chair and laughing so musically that some of the other people who were taking their coffee on the verandah looked up towards her. "Just fancy my good angel Janet in that sink of iniquity! Beatrice in the Inferno! I am afraid I cannot promise, your Highness, but if she will come I shall be delighted to bring her."

"You are about as good as human nature will let you be, Mercedes," said Kesteven with an almost inaudible chuckle, "but I guess that shows you are a woman after all."

"Now that's just real mean, poppa," laughed Cora. "Don't you think so, Duke?"

"No, no," he replied, returning her glance with interest, "that is a compliment. Since there is nothing in the world so adorable as woman——"

He hesitated. A swift flush which all her self-control could not command had risen to Cora's cheeks, and his instinct pulled him up short. At the same moment Cora created a happy diversion by exclaiming:

"Ah, there is papa coming! I thought he would soon be looking for his runaways. Now if you will ask him to tea, Miss Staunton, no doubt he will escort us, and then you will have him at your mercy in the matter of the concert."

De Ronski had been lunching with his friend "M. Justin" at one of the clubs. He accepted Mercedes' invitation, and in a few minutes the party broke up to meet again at the station. Kesteven excused himself and went away with his Highness, but Dennison looked at Paula and decided to go to tea.

Somewhat to Mercedes' surprise, Janet Yuill accepted the invitation to Monte Carlo almost eagerly. She had heard so much about the evilly-famous paradise of ruin and shame, and such an opportunity of seeing it would probably never come to her again, so she said. Her real reason for wishing to go would have been incredible to Mercedes, although M. de Ronski would have understood it perfectly.

The dinner at the Grand was as perfect as are all dinners for which the famous M. Francois is responsible. The oft-described Casino, the salons and the tables, with their cosmopolitan crowds of men and women, chained fast in the deadly fascination of the whirling ball and the turning cards, were revelations to Mercedes and Janet. To Madame de Ronski and Paula they were commonplaces, rather wearisome than otherwise.

They did not play. They were quite content to take Janet about the rooms and to show her the wonderful beauty of the gardens in the moonlight. As soon as the others got places Mercedes proceeded to fulfil her threat, and lost five thousand francs in almost record time. Kesteven played his usual "hard-shell game" until he won them back for her, and then stopped, giving up his place to a man behind him who had been playing with very bad luck.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Darfield, is it?" he said as he rose and looked at him. "You've had pretty mean luck. Maybe the chair'll change it. Some of them here would give a thousand francs for it. I've broken the bank twice in it this trip."

As Darfield sat down he looked up and saw Janet standing opposite behind the little crowd on the other side of the table. She made no sign of recognition beyond the slight bow that she would have given to any ordinary acquaintance, but he could read intense anxiety in her eyes. If he could have listened to the conversation which she had just had with Dennison and the de Ronskis in the gardens, he would not only have understood, but he would have stopped playing at once, for then he would have known that, with every stake he made, he was not only playing against the bank for money, but against the Fates themselves for issues of which no amount of money could represent the vital importance.

TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.

In the Casino.

Cora and the Grand Duke had got seats almost opposite to Darfield. She nodded across to him and opened a silver net bag attached to her belt by strong silver chains. The Duke saw that it was stuffed with notes and gold. He put his hand on it and said to her in a whisper:

"Miss Cora, have you the goodness to grant me a great favour?"

"Why, certainly," she replied. "What is it, Duke?"

"It is this," he murmured, his hand still resting on hers over the bag. "In my country we have a superstition that it is unlucky to tempt fortune on one's birthday. This is mine, as I have told you. Please leave your own money for the present and play with mine. I will watch. No doubt you will bring me good luck."

The idea fell in with her humour. She closed her bag with a snap, took the thick roll of notes which he offered her, and said with a flash of her eyes into his:

"With pleasure if you want me to, but don't blame me if the bank gets it all."

"It will be well lost," he replied, looking into her eyes till she dropped her lids, "if it goes through such hands as yours."

Her colour deepened, and he saw her smile as she looked down at the notes he had given her—after which he felt perfectly content to lose them to the last louis.

She picked out a thousand-franc note, saying:

"Suppose we begin with this. This is what I should have done for myself."

She put it on black. Black came up and she left the 2,000 francs on black. It turned again. She took back the original stake. Once more black came up, and now she had 6,000 francs to the good.

"Luck in threes," she whispered, and pushed the notes over to the red compartment. Red turned, and she took 6,000 francs away. Again red came up. "This can't go on," she laughed, as though she were playing with pennies, and moved the 12,000 francs (the maximum allowed at Rouge et Noir) on to the black. It turned. She took away 18,000 francs, leaving 6,000 on the black. Red came up. She put 12,000 on red and it turned again, and twice more she backed it with the maximum and won. Then she shifted to black, and in three turns she cleared 36,000 francs.

Nearly all the players had stopped, as often happens at the tables when there is a phenomenal run of luck towards a player, especially if that player be a woman—young and pretty.

Darfield, however, continued. He had followed her at first, but he went wrong the time she lost on red, and never got back into the run. He plunged again and again with the maximum until both Cora and the Grand Duke wondered how it was possible for a man in his position to sit and lose £480 at a time, as though the louis were so many shillings, but, to Janet's utter distress, it was plain that he had quite lost his head for the time being.

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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The Symptoms of Catarrh.

The subject of catarrh is becoming of such universal interest, that the following questions have been selected as a guide for those who think they are afflicted:

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Does the nose discharge?
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Do you have sneezing spells?
Is the sonse of smell leaving?
Is there fulness in the throat?
Do you have to clear the throat?
Do you expectorate frequently?
Do you sleep with the mouth open?
Are you nauseated in the morning?
Do you have aching pains in the limbs?
Is there pain in the front of the head?
Is there dropping of phlegm in the throat?

A further explanation of the causes of these symptoms, and a more complete description of the various forms of catarrh, can be found in the last issue of **The Review of Ear, Nose and Throat Diseases.** Those who are interested can obtain a free copy of this Medical Publication by addressing The Editor, Drouet Institute, 10 Marble Arch, London, W.

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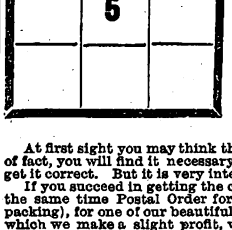

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The diagram shows nine squares, with the figure 5 occupying the centre square. The puzzle is to place a different figure in each of the remaining eight squares, so that on the columns being added the result will be 15 each way. That is to say, each column will add 15 up and down, across each row, and diagonally from corner to corner. You can use the figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and can place them exactly as you choose in order to obtain the result, but the figure 5 must not be removed from the centre of the square.

At first sight you may think the puzzle is much simpler than it really is. As a matter of fact, you will find it necessary to think hard and experiment a good deal before you get it correct. But it is very interesting and is surely well worth trying.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Marrying a French Girl.

"I AM about to go and live in France for several years," writes "D. U. R.," "and my people are chaffing me and warning me not to fall in love with a French lady and marry her. Of course I don't know what my love affairs may be, but supposing I should fall in love with a French girl, would it be an inadvisable marriage?"

* * * * *

If "D. U. R." falls in love with a French girl, he is to be envied, as marriages between our two countries, in cases that one knows, have been very happy ones indeed. The British and French are so different in character and temperament, that a couple might be exceedingly happy together. French women are as a rule very womanly and graceful, and full of outward charm, and likely to appeal to the more stolid Briton. At the same time, I do not counsel "D. U. R." to deliberately forsake his own countrywomen. I am only supposing that he may fall in love with a French girl, as he says, and should he do so, I do not see why he should not marry her.

Two Broken Engagements.

I HAVE received two letters from readers, one of which seems to provide the answer to the other. It is a story of broken engagements. Firstly there is "SOUTH AFRICA," who tells me the following tale of woe: "I was engaged to a girl for two years until the other day, when, without knowing what I was doing, I broke it off with her, and offended her parents. I am still madly in love with her, and try to forget it, but cannot. Neither she nor her parents will now have anything to do with me."

* * * * *

Before I answer this, I will just quote "J. O.'s" letter. He says: "I used to walk out with a girl who had a rather hasty temper. We quarrelled over another girl, and she told me she never wished to see my face again. Her mother has written to me since, and wants me to go and see the girl, and explain matters, as she seems much upset about it. I don't know what to do, as I *do not care for her now.*"

* * * * *

"J. O.'s" last words probably hit off both his own position and that of "SOUTH AFRICA." Both of them have quarrelled with their sweethearts, and used hasty words. Both sweethearts have taken mortal offence and refuse to be reconciled. Well, that is not surprising. When one's feelings have been deeply wounded—the love one has had for another may be completely destroyed. The only healer is time. I have often said that I do not believe very much in mere spoken apologies after a deep offence, but I think that, if a couple are really in love, time will sooner or later force them back again to each other.

Meeting in the Street.

"GIRLIE." You are sixteen, and you often see a boy whom you would like to know, but know nobody who could introduce you. Would it be forward of you to speak to him as you pass him in the street? You think he would speak to you if you made the start.

* * * * *

Certainly, it would be forward for you to do so. I don't think if I were you I should speak to him. After all, if he very much wishes to know you, he will find some way of getting the introduction.

Christmas Proposals.

"Is Christmas a good time to 'pop the question'?" asks "GEORGE." "I am very fond of a girl, and have often visited her people, but have not yet said anything, as I doubt whether her father thinks I am well-enough off. Should I propose at Christmas, or would it be better to postpone it?"

* * * * *

Christmas is a very good time indeed to propose. If you are visiting the family during the festivities, and the time seems ripe for a proposal, you should take advantage of the prevailing goodwill to perform the dread task. But be careful to catch papa before he gets his Christmas bills sent in. That is usually a very bad time for the proposing young man.

The Art of Talking.

"WHEN one is in conversation with a lady," writes "T. E.," "ought one to always address her by her name, or simply say 'yes,' and 'no,' as the case may be? Do you know of any book dealing with such matters?"

* * * * *

It would be very foolish to repeat a lady's name with every fresh remark. Mention it occasionally, if it seems necessary in giving your sentence a finish, but do not do it in an obsequious way, as that makes a man ridiculous. The art of polite conversation is to make your phrases sound polished, even if there is no particular sense in them. A book will not teach you such an act, which is inborn, and I should not recommend any man to study conversation from a book, unless I wished him to develop into a hopeless prig. Just talk to a girl naturally, and she will like you all the better for it.

Quarrel Between Brothers.

"S. E. F." tells me of a serious family quarrel, and asks if I can advise a settlement of it. Two sons of a friend of his have had words, in which the elder said something to the younger which he will not forgive unless there is an apology. Some months have now elapsed since the row, with no signs of reconciliation. The elder brother is three years older than the other. "S. E. F." wishes to know how the parents could deal with such a matter.

* * * * *

I am afraid that such quarrels between brothers are very frequent, and more difficult to reconcile than ordinary quarrels between friends. If an estrangement once sets in a family the chances are against peace. I fear, too, that an apology so late in the day could not have the desired result. Perhaps after a while the two brothers will see that this estrangement is very foolish, and will agree to shake hands and forget the whole affair, regardless of the rights and wrongs. An apology usually means that one or other is humiliated, and that feeling is one which rankles. Forgetfulness will be the best cure for the quarrel in question.

Cynthia

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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Christmas Double Number. 2D.

No. 781. Week Ending December 19th, 1903.

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(A Dramatic Incident from our New Serial, "DUPES OF DESTINY.")

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SHORT STORIES
CHRISTMAS NUMBER

No 781. Week ending December 19th, 1903 Price Twopence.

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SPLENDID NEW SERIAL STARTS IN THIS NUMBER.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Fardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

PROLOGUE.

I.

The Man and His Inheritance.

Outside the grimy buildings in Walbrook, devoted solely to chambers for solicitors and other professional men, a hansom pulled up at No. 32, where a brass plate notified that "Messrs. Samuel Sharpe and Quirke, solicitors and commissioners of oaths" were to be found on the fourth floor.

A youth sprang out of the hansom on to the kerb, and a pretty typine hurrying past, turned to look at him again. He was tall and lithely built, and the face the girl had noticed was worth a second glance even in the busy thoroughfare of Walbrook. His skin was pale and innocent of hair, almost effeminate in its delicacy, and the broad white brow, with a suspicion of crisp yellow curls showing under the shabby sombrero, together with the straight, classic nose, and beautifully moulded mouth and chin made up a whole both rare and pleasing. A captious critic might have said that the merry gleam in the blue eyes had a trick of losing itself in a flash of steel-like rapidity, and that behind the frank, ingenious smile there lurked a snarl ready at the least provocation to startle the person who provoked it. But the pretty typine was no physiognomist, and she admired the handsome face of the boy in the shabby clothes.

In the meantime the boy on the kerb had taken a handful of money from his pocket, and picking out a bright two-shilling piece, gave it to the waiting Jehu.

"Here you are, cabby," he said, with a brilliant smile; "a bob over your fare."

The man grinned and touched his cap. "Thank'ee, sir. Good luck and good day to 'ee, sir!"

As he went with light, springy steps up the narrow, carpetless stairs that led to Messrs. Sharpe and Quirke's, the shabby stranger laughed softly: "I'm glad I got rid of that piece of money! It would never do for 'Sir' Cyprian Rust to pass spurious coin of the realm! And I'm almost certain it's all right now! These old rotters have had their six months for investigations. They would have written had they heard anything."

He turned the handle of the door that led into the outer office. "Now to make assurance doubly sure."

Immediately he entered he was taken into the private room of Mr. Sharpe, the senior partner, who greeted him suavely, apparently oblivious to the down-at-heel appearance of his client.

"You are up to time, Mr. Rust," he said, a slight smile touching his lips.

The young man laughed pleasantly. "I always am, Mr. Sharpe, where there is money to be gained! If you knew the hand-to-mouth existence I have been leading these last six months, waiting for this blessed will to be proved, and you to satisfy yourself that there is no grandson living to claim my uncle's title and money, you would understand a little of my impatience. For I am honestly eager to know the best or the worst," he went on passionately; "I'm not a hypocrite to pretend to hate money; I don't; and what's more, I want it badly—jolly badly!"

Mr. Sharpe nodded thoughtfully. The boyish outburst was natural, he thought, uncertainty in a position that may either mean poverty or riches is enough to try the patience of most men.

"So painting is not a success, then?" he said, busying himself with a bundle of blue documents as he spoke.

Cyprian Rust shrugged his shoulders. His eyes were following the movements of the older man with idle curiosity.

"Hardly," he answered, with a short laugh. "Art with money at your back is a beautiful vocation, but without the means of providing the necessary equipments such as a studio and models—to say nothing of paints—a crossing sweeper's work is preferable."

Mr. Sharpe smiled sympathetically.

"And you have no other way open to you to earn your living?"

The fair, boyish face flushed warmly, and from his blue eyes

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there flamed one of those rare flashes that would have startled Mr. Sharpe had he seen it.

"I have no other profession open to me," he answered curtly; "and I suppose all these questions are a prelude to telling me that I may disabuse my mind of the idea of inheriting this money? Out with it!" he laughed bitterly. "I have had too many knock-down blows to feel it—much! Has the precious kid turned up?"

Mr. Sharpe, the family solicitor for many years to the late Sir Basil Wingate, rose with slow dignity, and, drawing his chair back from the table, said:

"You will remember, Mr. Rust, at the reading of the will, the title, which by special remainder he had power to dispose of, and the money were left by Sir Basil Wingate to the elder son of his run-away only daughter, Helen Jerningham, *should* she have one; and failing a son being born to her, the title and the money *with* the estate, should go to you, his nephew; afterwards to *your* son—should you marry, or to the *son* of your daughter; no child of the feminine sex directly inheriting it."

"Yes," Cyprian Rust said impatiently. "I know all that jargon. Why worry me with it now? If I'm not to have it, then I'm indifferent to the whole concern."

"One moment, Mr. Rust," continued the dispassionate voice of the solicitor. "During the six months that have intervened between the reading of the will and the proving of it, I have searched high and low for news of Mrs. Jerningham. It is two years since she ran away, and hearing she went to Australia, I had advertisements inserted in all the Australian papers requesting her to communicate with us in the event of her having a male child, and I sent advertisements to the American papers also, with the result that——"

He stopped suddenly, startled by the almost deathly pallor of the young artist's face. It was bloodless, even to his lips, and his eyes were black with the intensity of his suppressed emotion.

"Go on, for Heaven's sake, man, tell me the worst!" he breathed hoarsely.

Mr. Sharpe drew himself up; he was not accustomed to such language.

"With the result," he continued, "that the will being proved, and no claim being set up against it, I have much pleasure in congratulating you upon your good fortune, Sir Cyprian."

For a moment the room danced before the eyes of the late Sir Basil Wingate's nephew, and he fell into a chair, burying his face in his hands.

Sir Cyprian! Sir Cyprian Rust, and owner of unlimited wealth! It was too good to be true, in spite of his boast that there could be no other result. His relief at the news showed him how unwarranted had been his assurance before.

"Are you quite certain," he said anxiously, "that it is all right? Suppose—afterwards—a son of Helen Jerningham turned up, what then?"

The solicitor shrugged his shoulders. "Then, Sir Cyprian, after due inquiries and proving the authenticity of legal documents, you would go back to your former position in life! But you need have no fear of being sent back to poverty," he said, noting the strained look about the boy's mouth; "your position is impregnable—absolutely assured; for if the poor lady had been living she would have seen one of those advertisements."

Sir Cyprian Rust breathed deeply; then a tremulous laugh rose to his lips. "I am still a beggar, Sharpe. I don't possess a red cent in spite of my new honours! Can I touch you for an advance? I must rig myself up decently. I shall not believe it is true until I am wearing some garments that have not come from a 'reach-me-down' shop!"

"Certainly, Sir Cyprian," said the old solicitor graciously. "I will give you notes for one hundred pounds. That will do to go on with, until you get your cheque-book from the bank. And I trust," he added pompously, "that as we understand the entire working of the property, you will retain us as your solicitors?"

The youngm an laughed. "Certainly, Sharpe. You shall have no cause to complain! But, buck up with that money, there's a good chap!"

At that moment the office boy put his head in at the door.

"Please, sir, you are wanted at the telephone," and with an excuse Mr. Sharpe left Sir Cyprian Rust alone in his private room.

He walked up and down the narrow little office with quick, impatient steps, planning his life anew, and arranging the cutting away of awkward associates. Once he shook his handsome head and smiled slightly. "No, I won't throw *that* up. It is too exciting, and my blood needs the stimulant the uncertainty gives! Only I will be more careful! My position demands it—now!"

The door re-opened to admit not the solicitor, but the office boy, who placed several letters on the desk and retired.

Moved by an idle impulse the young man turned them over curiously; then, suddenly his face grew livid, and he stifled an exclamation by biting his nether lip savagely.

The letter that had caused his discomfiture was a dirty-looking envelope, but the writing was that of someone he had begun to hope dead, since she stood between him and a fortune. It was that of Helen Jerningham, his cousin, and Sir Basil's once-loved daughter.

Fascinated and shivering as though with ague, he examined the postmark. She was not in England then! For it was the Sydney stamp on the envelope. Why was she writing? Suppose it was to announce the birth of a son and heir! Then once more he, Cyprian Rust, would be the penniless Bohemian artist, obscure and uncourted; while, if the letter failed to reach the man for whom it was intended, then he would be safe, and could watch that no others followed it!

A step outside decided him. He grasped the letter, and had just time to conceal it in his waistcoat pocket, when Mr. Sharpe returned.

He was too pre-occupied to notice that the new baronet's hand was trembling, or that his hairless upper lip was moist and twitching.

A few moments later, with bank notes to the value of a hundred pounds in his pocket, the new Sir Cyprian Rust found himself in the street once more. Seeking the nearest public house, he entered and had a glass of neat brandy, which he drained quickly.

That night, over a cigarette, and clad in immaculate evening dress in a private room at the Hotel Cecil, he drew from his pocket the letter that might have dealt the death blow to his ambition. He opened it and read:

DEAR MR. SHARPE—*I have seen your advertisement in the* Sydney Herald, *and am coming to England shortly, in order that the future heir—if a boy—to the title and property of my dear late father, Sir Basil Wingate, may be born in his own country. I am very poor, having left my husband, and if you could send my fare to London, c/o. the General Post Office, Plymouth, to meet me, I shall be able to call and see you, as, of course, you will be the trustee for my child. Hoping to hear from you, as I shall not write again,*

I am,
Faithfully yours,
HELEN JERNINGHAM.

That was all; but the new baronet shivered over his wine, as he realised the result this letter would have had upon the words Mr. Sharpe had spoken to him that morning. The letter was dated nearly two months back; then the heir—if there was one—would soon be in England!

"It was touch-and-go with Fate this morning!" he muttered. "Had old Sharpe not gone out of the room I could not have seen this! Then——"

He rose, and taking a match, struck it, then held the letter over the flame.

"I am afraid my dear cousin Helen will not find that money waiting at Plymouth," he said slowly as he carefully dusted away the ashes of what had once been another man's letter, "but I will make it my duty to watch every liner that comes to Plymouth from now."

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He glanced at his reflection in the glass, and smiled as he saw how much better he looked in his present attire than in the careless Bohemian dress of the morning.

But his laughing, brilliant eyes grew dark as he muttered:

"Sir Cyprian, you hold the cards now! It rests with you to keep them!"

II.

The Broken Sentence.

THE woman moved her head and opened her eyes wearily. The hot air in the close-smelling little cabin barely moved the loose hair on her brow. The third-class passengers of the home-coming liner were as usual crowded out, and the narrow cabin where the woman lay, held three bunks.

"Now, my good woman," said the kindly, brusque voice of the ship's doctor, "you must not look about and mope. There are two strapping boys waiting to be introduced."

The woman pushed back the heavy strands of black hair, and said in a curiously breathless voice:

"Boys! Boys! Tell me—is it true? Then has my prayer been answered?"

The doctor looked at her sharply. In spite of her common, poor clothing, and want of money, he knew at once that the woman with the great, eager eyes and hollow cheeks, was a gentlewoman whom Fate had dealt hardly by.

"Yes, yes, that's it—boys," he said in a more gentle tone. "Now you must go to sleep, Mrs.——?" He glanced at her left hand, and experienced a curious sensation of personal disappointment at seeing that it was ringless.

"Never mind my name," the woman muttered, her pale face flushing, and her eyes glittering feverishly. "My boys—will they live? The truth—as God is your witness! Will they live?"

"They will," the doctor replied gravely.

The woman's answer was a strange one. She fell back on the tiny pillow with a sigh. "Then I shall die in peace!"

Wondering greatly, but fearing to excite her by further conversation, the doctor slipped outside into another cabin, where a kindly-hearted passenger was playing the *rôle* of nurse to the tiny atoms of humanity to which the lonely creature next door was mother.

"They are flourishing," he said curtly, glancing at the bundles of flannel from which strange noises came forth, "but I am afraid"—and he jerked his head in the direction of the cabin—"that *she* will go. She only seems to have lived with the desire to give life to these boys. That done, she is content to die! Did she tell you her name?"

The eyes of the homely creature filled slowly with tears.

"No, sir, she's very close. 'Ardly spoke to anyone, and she's not one that you can ask questions of. There's something that stops you."

The doctor agreed, and after another glance at the mother in the adjoining cabin, returned to his companions on the promenade deck.

In the meantime the woman acting as nurse put the infants to sleep in a berth, then stole softly to the side of the mother. She listened to her breathing with a strange fear, for the marble-like face had the impression of death on it. Suddenly the large dark eyes opened, and, reading their expression rightly, the woman bent close over the bunk.

"Yes, dearie," she said soothingly, "they are all right; sleeping for all the world as though they had been brought up to it as a profession. Don't take on so!"

The pallid lips moved, and the kindly creature bent lower still.

"Boys' certificates of birth! I—want—the—doctor!"

Hurriedly the doctor was sent for, and left the smoking-saloon at once.

The eyes of the dying woman brightened as they fell upon him.

"What can I do?" he said gently. "Don't be afraid—tell me!"

"Certificates—of—birth!" The words came painfully. The doctor nodded encouragingly.

"That will be done. What name—what surname?"

She moved her head restlessly. "Send certificates—the elder is—the—future—Sir——" Her voice faltered, and the doctor saw that her mind was beginning to ramble.

"Yes," he said earnestly. "The certificates shall be sent anywhere you like, but they cannot be properly christened unless you give me their names—the surname—the name of their father."

She started up with a cry of terror. "No, no! He was cruel—not his name—put that of my father instead on the certificates, and send them to Mr.——" She paused. "I can't remember—but—he—is—in—London. He knows about, them—he—has—the—will—the—heir——" Her voice trailed off into a moan.

The doctor looked at the passenger who had taken care of the babies. "Cannot you rouse her?" he whispered. "If this poor girl has anything on her mind to right these children we must get the name of the father, or someone."

"Dearie," said the woman, leaning over the figure on the bunk, "tell us the name of the gentleman or lady who's to 'ave the babies."

The weary eyes opened. "I'm sorry, father! Forgive me! You were right—I was wrong! But the boys—the heir—the old place!"

The doctor sighed hopelessly. He was watching a secret being buried in a grave.

"The name! The name!" he said desperately.

A tender smile broke over the face of the woman.

"I remember," she murmured. "The solicitor's name was Samuel——" she stopped again, and a grey pallor spread imperceptibly over her face.

"The boys' name! For their sakes! The boys' sakes! The name of their father!" he said earnestly.

"For their sakes!" she murmured softly. "His name is—Jer—Jer——" Then she paused once more, and the doctor, bending over her, knew that she had died with the unfinished half of her sons' name on her lips.

FIRST CHAPTER.

Marcella.

"Is my father in, Wermen?"

"Yes, miss, but he does not wish to be disturbed," answered the low-voiced servant respectfully.

"Is he in his study?" the girl said quickly.

"No, miss, in the studio," and the man left the room as noiselessly as he had entered it.

Marcella Rust sighed wearily. Her father, to whom she had returned from the convent in Brussels, where she had spent her childhood, and the first few years of her girlhood, was as much a stranger to her now as in the days when she had heard his name on the occasion when the Mother Superior had sent for her to receive his annual letter.

It was their first Christmas Eve together since she had returned home for "good," and she could not help wondering sorely why her father preferred to shut himself up in his studio—that mysterious room he allowed no one to enter save his valet, Deacon.

"He might have stayed with me on Christmas Eve," she mused. "This large, gloomy house is a like palace under the sea! So lonely, dark, and forbidding! And he won't have any of my friends to stay with me! He seems to hate people!"

But Marcella Rust was not the type of girl to mope because her father was unsociable. She was young—just twenty-one—with a tall, graceful figure, set off by a face that was beyond

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the usual type of prettiness, being too intense and full of character to please the passer-by, yet the glowing, soft brown eyes, with their black lashes, and the rich, brown hair, waving rebelliously about her creamy brow and neck, were beautiful things to look upon. Her mouth, a trifle large for strict beauty, was vivid and sensitive, grave in repose, but the instant she spoke it dimpled at the corners, and revealed two even rows of milk-white teeth, while her short, straight nose, with its fine nostrils, indicated a nature both proud and noble.

Such was Marcella Rust, the only child of Sir Cyprian Rust, the rich man who spurned the world and all its vanities,

Marcella uttered a cry of amazement. The object the mysterious man had hidden was a spade guinea!

to revel in the delights of his hobby, that of collecting rare paintings, tapestries, china, and jewels, to say nothing of being a connoisseur in art as well.

Marcella rose, and, after gazing out upon the world of snow, turned away from the window with a laugh.

"Well, as I am alone, I may as well find something to do. I have not seen half the rooms in this rambling old house. I will begin a tour of investigation."

Another strange freak of her father's was to have as few servants as possible at the Court, so Marcella went down corridors, up flights of winding stairs, and into rooms that had long lain under the seal of dust. She looked about puzzled. The wing to which she had been lucky enough to find the key was absolutely going to rack and ruin for want of habitation. And yet it faced a south aspect, and the rooms were larger and more modern than those now used.

She was about to leave the corridor when a door at the extreme end opened, and her father's valet, Deacon, came out breathlessly, as though having run up a flight of stairs, looking pale and astonished when he saw the tall figure of his master's daughter.

"What room is that, Deacon?" Marcella said. "I did not know these were the servants' quarters."

"No, Miss, they are not," the man replied civilly, breathing quickly. "This is a lumber room."

"A lumber room?" Marcella said, puzzled, noticing the man's sudden discomfiture. "What lumber room? Let me see!" and she took a step towards the door, but quickly it was slammed to, and Deacon barred the way.

"I'm afraid, Miss," he said apologetically, "that you must not go in. It is not the kind of room Sir Cyprian would like you to be in."

"Not like me to be in?" she repeated in angry surprise. "What nonsense is this, Deacon? A lumber room is no curiosity to me. Why should not see this one?"

"It is full of dust, for one thing, Miss," the servant replied, civilly, "it would ruin your skirt for you."

Marcella looked at the feet of her father's valet. They were clad in shining, black patent slippers; both they and the bottoms of the man's trousers were innocent of dust!

"Really," she said slowly, "you must take great care to keep your own feet out of the dust, Deacon!"

A shadowy smile flitted across the man's mouth. "I know where to put them, Miss! Sir Cyprian's orders are that no one goes into that lumber room but myself."

"It is not my intention to bandy words with my father's servant!" Marcella said coldly, moving away; "but I shall certainly see the inside of that room soon, Deacon. My father's orders to the servants do not include me!"

As she strolled haughtily away, the valet smiled oilily. "I think they do, Miss!" he muttered; "more than anyone else!"

When Marcella, still burning with indignation, regained that portion of the Court to which she was accustomed, she heard voices as she was crossing the hall.

"Sir Cyprian is engaged, sir," Wermen was saying.

"Tell Sir Cyprian that I will not keep him very long," said the other voice, also a man's; and Marcella recognised, with a quickening of her pulses, the voice of the new, interesting curate of the parish church, who, in spite of being a recent comer, and with no rich relatives in the church to secure a living for him, was thought nearly as much of by the parish as her father who had rebuilt half the village, as well as given a new organ to the church.

"I'm sorry, sir," Wermen said firmly. "Sir Cyprian would not be disturbed for the world! They are his orders."

The curate hesitated. He seemed curiously loth to leave the Court without accomplishing his errand.

"Is—is Miss Rust at home?" he said, after a pause.

"Miss Rust is engaged, sir. I—can give a message for you."

Marcella stepped forward. It was intolerable that these horrid servants of her father's should have been trained

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to lie so callously, and to a clergyman, too! Ever since she had been home she had heard nothing but "Sir Cyprian's orders"!

"I will see Mr. Nullius, Wermen," she said, in a clear, high voice; "and when next you undertake to make a statement about me, please see that it is the truth. *I* am the mistress here, and receive whom I like. You may show Mr. Nullius into the drawing-room, and bring tea."

When, a few seconds later, Wermen ushered the curate into the presence of the strong-minded young mistress of Wingate Court, his face was impassive, but when he closed the door he chuckled softly, as though tickled by a subtle joke:

"There is going to be a tug-of-war here, now she's come. It did me good to hear her speak up. It was like old times when the mistress first started having her own way. But she soon stopped; the master's will beat hers, and she went out for sheer want of spirit! But this one"—he chuckled again—"there's something about her that won't be easy to break!"

SECOND CHAPTER.

"The Son of No One."

In the meantime, ignorant of the old man-servant's eulogy in her favour, Marcella was greeting the tall, athletic-looking curate, whose lean, strong face was lit by a smile of amusement that for a brief moment relieved his classic mouth of its usual expression of stern harshness, and lit his dark, grey eyes with a sudden laugh. Marcella thought, inconsequently, how that flash of youth changed him from a sad, over-worked curate into a strangely handsome man.

"Well done, Miss Rust!" he said, in a deep, musical voice; "your method of subduing the Philistines was primitive but effective."

Marcella laughed. "Yes, my father has so centred his thoughts round his works of art in his studio, that the servants have had nearly everything their own way! But you came to see him on important business, did you not?"

Her words had the unintentional effect of reminding the curate that he was in the presence of the daughter of the richest man in the county, and that he was only in her drawing-room on sufferance, as the bearer of a message, not as a friend.

"Yes," he replied, relapsing into his clerical manner. "A poor woman recently come to the parish, is ill, and I was called to see her this afternoon, as dangerous symptoms were developing; and when I got there, I found her in a very excited condition. She is an Australian, I believe, and once might have been very handsome, but disease and want have played havoc with her. I tried to comfort her, but she kept asking to see the owner of the Court, so I naturally thought Sir Cyprian would like to know."

"Naturally," Marcella answered. "What is her name?"

"I am not sure," he replied. "Mrs. 'Graves' or 'Grey.' But I promised to let the owner of the Court know that she wanted to see him. Perhaps," he added, "Sir Cyprian would go round this evening? She is at 14 Digges Row, with Mrs. Samson."

"I will tell him," she said thoughtfully. She was wondering what a woman in such a place as Digges Row could have to say to her retiring and fastidious father.

She looked up and caught a glance from the curate's dark, glowing eyes, that for some unaccountable reason made her heart flutter strangely; and she plunged into the conversation with the first question that came into her head.

"You must have felt very lonely coming to Crawley from London, Mr. Nullius. To leave a large city, full of life, for this village, and, perhaps," she added shyly, "a bright home full of brothers and sisters, for dull lodgings."

The curate's face flushed, then paled.

"On the contrary, Miss Rust," he said, in a low, sad voice, "I have only exchanged a lesser loneliness for a greater! I have never had a home, nor brothers and sisters. I"—and his voice trembled slightly—"I was brought up in the Foundling Hospital, and from there the kindly notice of an old clergyman rescued me, and got me into St. Paul's School, where I was lucky enough to win one or two scholarships, and so went to Oxford, where I took my degree. I have lived alone—even my name illustrates my isolation"—he laughed, a bitter inflection in his voice. "It was originally 'Filius Nullius,' the son of no one, now corrupted to Philip Nullius!"

"Filius Nullius," she murmured. "It has an attractive sound! Why, Mr. Nullius," she cried, "in the days of Nero that name might have belonged to a Roman noble—or even 'a king in Babylon,'" she quoted softly. Then, moved by an impulsive fancy, she reached out her hand to him. "I am also lonely," she said; "more so, because I have no interests to take me away from my loneliness. Let us be friends, Mr. Nullius."

The curate took her hand in his very gently.

"Thank you, Miss Rust," he said simply. "I am grateful. Yours is the first hand held out to me in friendship. And even were it only pity I would clutch it gladly. Now I must be going," he said, in a changed voice. "I have a lot to do. You won't forget to ask Sir Cyprian if he can manage to visit the poor soul, will you?"

With a lingering contact of hands he took his leave, and the eyes of Sir Cyprian Rust's daughter gazed after him wistfully.

"Pity," she whispered softly, "is akin to——" Then with a sudden blush, she turned to leave the room. "I had better find father, and give him that message; I won't trust it to a servant."

She ran lightly upstairs, and as she paused outside the door of the forbidden corridor, a man came suddenly out. He had black hair, beard, and moustache, and the dim glimmer of light in the unused corridor showed him to be a man of tall, well-made proportions.

Marcella shrank back into the shadow of a welcome corner. Her first impulse had been to scream, but she suppressed the desire and steadily watched the man. His movements were peculiar. He looked back quickly down the passage that led to the door to which her father's valet, Deacon, had refused her admittance earlier, and then taking something from his pocket, he stooped and placed it under the mat that lay at his feet, then, shutting the door, he locked it, put the key in his pocket, and had vanished before Marcella had recovered her presence of mind to follow him and raise an alarm. She had never seen the man before, of that she was certain, and yet there was that in his manner strangely familiar. His obvious knowledge of the complicated passages and the exit, together with his calm pocketing of the key of the door of the corridor, proved that he had been in the house before.

Marcella waited until the corridor was in silence, then slipping from her hiding-place, she raised the rug in front of the door the strange man had locked, and picked up the secret thing he had concealed. It felt like a sovereign, but it was too dark to make it out; so she hurried to her room, enjoying the uncommon sensation of excitement within the dull walls of the Court, and switching on the electric light, she turned over the coin in her hand curiously. It was a piece of gold to the value of twenty-one shillings, that had long since become obsolete among the current coin of the Realm, having on one side the head of the King, then George III., and on the reverse side a spade-formed shield, with the coat-of-arms. Marcella uttered a cry of amazement.

"A spade guinea! How odd! And what could that strange man have meant by putting it under the mat?"

Then she slipped it into the jewelled bag at her waist, and began to dress thoughtfully for dinner.

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THIRD CHAPTER.

Sir Cyprian's Appointment.

"Father," Marcella said, that night at dinner, "who is that dark man I saw coming out of the forbidden corridor this evening?"

Sir Cyprian Rust raised his calm blue eyes and glanced down the length of the dining-table ablaze with silver épergnes, and costly Christmas roses, interspersed here and there by glittering fairy-lamps in the shape of pink and yellow butterflies, while tall wax candles, standing in massive silver candelabras, lent a softened old-world tint to the dazzling effect of modern luxury.

But Sir Cyprian was not regarding the display of wealth on the dinner-table, he was accustomed to that; the years had made him callous to what had at first been a continual feast of beauty to him. He looked instead at the radiant, uncommon beauty of his daughter, who, in her dark, vivid personality, was the extreme antithesis to her father's pale golden hair and fresh complexion.

"My dear Marcella," he said, in soft, conventional tones of surprise; "what a strange question! Allow me to answer it by putting another. What 'dark man,' and why 'forbidden corridor'?"

Marcella's answer was like her nature—straight and to the point.

"He was very dark," she said. "Hair, beard, and moustache inky black; though it was not so much his appearance that I noticed as his manner, and a secret sort of air about him made me wonder what he could be doing alone outside the door of the corridor leading to an end room to which your valet denied me admittance this afternoon!"

Sir Cyprian laughed, and his laugh was very musical and pleasant to hear. "I think I can easily satisfy your curiosity, my dear. I gave orders for some alterations to be made in one of the rooms in that corridor. Probably that was the fellow you saw coming out. As for Deacon having told you that the room at the extreme end of the corridor was forbidden to anyone, he was perfectly right, for those were my wishes. I am having valuables stored in strong safes in the room, and don't wish the work to be disturbed."

Marcella listened politely. She believed her father implicitly, though a vague feeling of distrust lingered in her mind regarding the mysterious stranger who did not resemble a workman.

"By the way, my dear," Sir Cyprian continued suavely; "I suppose you passed on to your own apartments when that man came out of the corridor?"

"On the contrary," she replied lightly, "I was too astonishd to move! I kept back within the shadow, and he rather interested me, because——"

The butler, Wermen, who, during this conversation had been moving about the room, paused for a moment in the act of pouring some champagne into a glass, as though waiting to hear the end of her sentence.

Sir Cyprian smiled, and stroked the leaves of one of the flowers nearest him with gentle fingers.

"Interested you, dear child; how was that?"

"He put something under the rug at the door," she answered; "and after he had gone, I stooped to satisfy myself what it was, and to my surprise found an article not at all dreadful or blood-curdling, but extremely fascinating. It was a spade guinea!"

"We must watch that girl, Wermen," said Sir Cyprian. "She is uncommonly alert."

At that moment there was a crash of glass at the sideboard. Wermen had knocked over a Venetian vase of which Sir Cyprian was particularly fond.

A slight frown wrinkled the almost boyish brow of his master.

"How clumsy you are, Wermen! Leave the room!"

As they finished their dessert Marcella said abruptly—"Oh, I nearly forgot to give you a message Mr. Nullius left for you," and a faint flush rose to her cheeks as she remembered how loth she had been to see the handsome curate leave that afternoon.

Her father looked at her sharply. His thoughts had been intent on something else, and it was with a struggle against impatience that he said:

"What message had Mr. Nullius, the curate, that it would not keep until he saw me? I suppose it was to drain me for some charity?"

Marcella's large brown eyes flashed.

"Mr. Nullius called here, and had I not overheard Wermen telling him a string of lies about my being engaged when he asked to see *me* as you were in your studio, he would have been obliged to go without leaving a dying woman's message."

For an instant a curious change came over the still remarkably handsome face of the baronet. It seemed almost as though his fair skin had tightened into a network of fine wrinkles, and his mouth quivered under the sweeping yellow moustache. But before Marcella could do more than fancy

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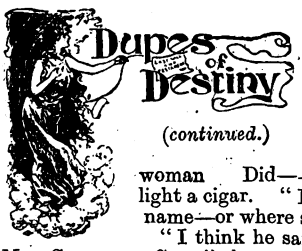

(*continued.*)

that her eyes had played her a trick, her father rose quickly from the table with an expression of concern.

"That's very sad! Of course, my dear, in that case I should have been told at once. A dying woman Did——" He turned his back to light a cigar. "Did Mr. Nullius tell you her name—or where she came from?"

"I think he said that her name was either Mrs. Graves, or Grey," she answered slowly. "She is at 14 Digges Row, and she comes from Australia."

Sir Cyprian held the match in his hand so long that it burnt his fingers, and he dropped it with a soft exclamation.

"I will go to her at once," he said, then, as though he had remembered something, he turned to the girl gazing dreamily into the fire, and said:

"Let me have that spade guinea, my dear. That fellow must have found it on the floor, and thinking better of stealing it, replaced it where it would probably have been found in time. I would not lose it for the world, as it has taken me a long period to get a collection of them—they are very rare."

Marcella took it from the little bag at her waist, and handed it back to her father, then said suddenly:

"Will you let me come and see your collection one day, father? I have been home nearly a month, and you have never let me see you working in your studio yet."

A gentle smile curved Sir Cyprian's lips. "I am very sensitive about allowing my daubs to be seen. But I will send some of my pictures up to you one day. My studio is a rough sort of place, unfit for a woman to visit; you would be all over paint in two minutes."

Marcella laughed. "Did my mother ever see your studio, father?"

Sir Cyprian did not answer immediately, but the pupils of his bright blue eyes expanded for a moment, then he put his hand on his daughter's shoulder:

"Once, Marcella. Your mother had no taste for art. I hope," he went on, "that I shall find you are an obedient daughter. If you obey my wishes and don't thwart my instructions to the servants, you will find me a kind, indulgent father; but"—and he smiled slightly—"go against them, and you will dash your little head against a stone wall! Your mother went contrary to me—once, and regretted it ever after. So now I warn you in time!"

He stooped and a light caress fell upon the girl's brown hair and the next moment Sir Cyprian Rust had closed the door gently behind him, leaving his only child silent from bewilderment at her unexpected reproof.

In the hall the baronet, clad in a long dark overcoat and a soft, slouch hat, was speaking with low, rapid gestures to Wermen, who held the door open for his master.

"Don't let an exhibition like that occur again," he said curtly; "I thought all these years had schooled you never to show surprise at anything."

The old man's hand trembled. "I'm very sorry, sir," he muttered, "but it came so sudden, and made me think of the—the mistress, the first time she—talked like that."

Sir Cyprian's fair face clouded. "Then keep your thoughts to yourself next time," he snarled; adding quickly, "I suppose the 'Shovel' got off safely?"

"Yes, sir," answered the other in a low tone; "although he was worried at not finding the usual sign that all was safe."

"Ah!" Sir Cyprian breathed; "it was an awkward occurrence this afternoon. Before, there was no great occasion for care. We must watch that girl, Wermen! Don't be careless with the keys. She is uncommonly alert. I want no bungling."

Then, with a curt movement of his head that denoted the conversation was finished, Sir Cyprian Rust left the Court, walking rapidly in the direction of Digges Row, the sordid end of the village from where the dying woman had sent her disturbing message.

FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Tardy Confession.

When he reached the humble abode of No. 14, Sir Cyprian Rust hesitated. He was naturally a cool man, but somehow his nerves were slightly shaken, perhaps by the fact that his daughter seemed to be more self-reliant than he had desired or expected her to be.

"Bah!" he muttered. "I put off having her back from Belgium as long as I could, but when she reached her twenty-first birthday, I could not invent another excuse to keep her away. But I will show her that I am master—as I showed that other fool. And this—this beggar, can only be a poor wretch wanting refuge from the workhouse, and knowing that I am a rich man, wants to plead for money."

He knocked at the door softly.

A woman answered it, and in his long coat and slouch hat that nearly covered his eyes, did not recognise at first the owner of the Court.

"Mrs. Graves is expecting you, I think, sir," she said, and led the way into a dark, narrow, little room at the back of the house where, on a bed in the corner, a woman lay.

"Ah!" she breathed in a low tone of relief. "I was afraid you would not come. That I might die before I could say what I wanted!"

"If there is anything I can do for you, my good creature," said Sir Cyprian, in a patronising voice; "tell me as quickly as you can, for I have an engagement, and only came here because your request was so very unusual."

The woman laughed weakly. "And *I* have an Engagement, too; so will not keep you long in case *I* have to go before I unburden myself to you."

An uneasy sensation seized the man of wealth who stood looking down on the thin, wasted face of the woman, who, in the dim light, looked about forty years old.

She beckoned him nearer to her; "Years ago, sir, I was maid to Sir Basil Wingate's daughter, Miss Helen—afterwards Mrs. Jerningham. I was jealous of her—for reasons I need not say now; and, God forgive me! I did her a great wrong of which I have long repented and sought to find her. It was with that reason that I left England and went to Australia, seeking for Mr. Jerningham or those belonging to her. I—I—nearly found Mrs. Jerningham once, but he had gone when I got to the place; then—then, I married and settled down there; but I could not rest, and I had to come back."

"You have not yet told me what you did," Sir Cyprian said coldly. "Why this sudden storm is a teacup over what must have taken place more than twenty years ago? Besides, my good creature, I should be unable to help you."

"No, sir! You could right the wrong for me!" the woman panted. "You could seek out those that I had sinned against, and put them in their proper places!"

"What did you do?" he said again; this time his curiosity excited to a strange pitch.

She raised herself on her elbow, and fixing him with glittering eyes, said: "I stole the will—the real will, written by Sir Basil Wingate on his death-bed, leaving everything he possessed to his daughter, Mrs. Jerningham, in trust for her children—whether *boys* or girls—and failing them, sir, it was to pass over *you*, and go to your child, if you had one. Oh, I learnt it all!" she said wearily. "I never forgave myself for concealing it. But you will take the will, sir, and seek for the child of Helen Jerningham, won't you?"

Sir Cyprian Rust did not reply immediately. He had felt so sure after all these years that both the inconvenient cousin and her possible son had died before leaving Australia, that to hear that there was a later will still in existence likely to threaten his security, was a blow so dreadful that it dazed him at first.

"You have the will here?" he said eagerly. "Of—of course, I will put everything in the hands of the solicitors at once. I am independent of Sir Basil Wingate's money, but—but I have a child also"—and his eyes glinted oddly—"she will be only too glad to waive aside all her rights should she have a cousin living."

"But she has, sir!" the woman whispered; "your daughter

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can never have that money—or you the title; for the boys of Helen Jerningham are somewhere in the world, wanting their inheritance."

Sir Cyprian caught his breath sharply. What arrant nonsense was this creature talking, and why did it make his heart flutter wildly and the blood tingle in his veins like quicksilver?

"Your mind must be wandering," he said brusquely; "there were no boys born to my cousin, or the solicitors and myself would have heard of it at once. There were advertisements in the papers for six months for news of her or the child and—no notice was taken of them."

"I know what I know," the woman whispered, her pale lips shaping the words painfully. "I heard she left for England—but never reached it alive; the stewardess on board the ship that took her on her last journey told me, when I met her on the arrival of the ship at Sydney, that a woman had died among the third-class passengers, giving birth to two boys—and I know that the woman was Mrs. Jerningham."

"Why didn't you pursue your inquiries regarding the boys then?" sneered the baronet with a chilly laugh.

"I did; and heard that one of them had been adopted, the other sent to a home."

Then she raised herself on the pillows. "Something tells me, sir, that they—or one of them—is alive now. Promise me that you will seek them out; they must be men by this time, and Fate has cheated them of their rights for a long time."

"Yes, yes," muttered Sir Cyprian quickly; "I will do my best to find them. But—but I can do nothing without the will—the new will you say you stole from the dying baronet. That must be produced before any steps can be taken."

The woman's hand fumbled beneath her pillows, and Sir Cyprian held his breath with suspense.

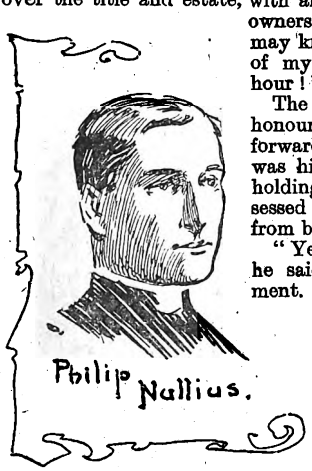
"This is the will," she murmured; "I have always kept it by me in case anything happened; and I put it under my pillow when Mr. Nullius, the curate, told me he would have my message given to you. He is a good man."

Sir Cyprian made an impatient movement. He did not care about the virtues of the village curate, he only wanted to possess the will that the creature who lay at her last gasp held in her power.

He reached out his hand with a smothered ejaculation: "Let me have it," he said hoarsely—beads of perspiration standing on his white brow.

A strange instinct warned the woman on the dirty little bed, that the interests of the baronet were at variance with those of the wronged, and she regretted that she had not trusted her secret with one less interested in the issues of the new will.

She kept her hand under the pillow, while she said earnestly: "Promise, on your oath, before the God in whose presence I shortly shall be, that you will use this will for the furthering of justice; that you will seek out those motherless boys and make over the title and estate, with all the money, to the rightful owners! Promise me, so that I may know that I have done a little of my duty even at the eleventh hour!"



The baronet—who wore his honours like a giant's robe—leant forward, nearer the hand that was hidden under the pillow, still holding the document that possessed the power to cut the ground from beneath his feet.

"Yes, yes; of course I do!" he said, suppressing his excitement. "I promise everything!"

Still the woman held back, eyeing him fearfully, and with increasing doubt in his mind. Her instinct, quickened by the approach of the Great Reaper, detected the false note in his voice.

"I have changed my mind," she murmured nervously. "Perhaps it will be better to give it to the curate, Mr. Nullius. Then no one can misjudge you, sir. Will you call him? He said he would be here soon."

An ugly gleam flickered in Sir Cyprian's usually seraphic eyes and he bit his lip vindictively.

With a swift movement he wrenched the woman's hand from beneath her pillow and seized the precious document in a second.

"It is quite safe with me," he said roughly. "You have no cause to doubt me. I gave you my promise and will keep it, when I have mastered the contents of the will."

She flung out her hand. "Give it back, I say! You are false! I know you are! I will let Mr. Nullius take it; I can put perfect faith in him, and he will be here now."

She raised her head suddenly and cried: "Mr. Nullius, come quick! I want you! I want——"

In another moment a strong white hand was clapped to her mouth and increased in pressure until the woman's struggles suddenly ceased, and she lay quiet.

* * * * *

Sir Cyprian Rust rose from the awkward position in which he had been kneeling, and stroked back the damp hair that had fallen across his forehead. His knees were stiff also, and he breathed quickly.

At the door he came face to face with the curate, Philip Nullius.

"I have just received a strange confession from that poor soul," he said; "she has evidently suffered much through her sin, but none of us can afford to throw stones," he continued gently; "and I am going to do the best I can for those she has left in my care. I think, Mr. Nullius, that you are the only person whose aid she needs now."

With a brief nod on either side the two men parted and the curate entered the darkened room.

After one swift glance at the face on the pillow he fell on his knees and began to murmur the prayers for the dead.

FIFTH CHAPTER.
The Gold King.

Caleb J. Johnson, financier, company promoter, Society lion, and City scamp, smiled as he ran through the papers and letters placed by his side at the breakfast-table.

He was not a commonplace man—in fact his personality was inclined to be magnetic, to which fact he owed the greater part of his success; for, few and far between were the men and women who could withstand that plausible tongue or facile imagination, that would explain in terms of sugared conviction the prospectus of a new mine in which he was interested, or rather, in which he desired the public to be interested—which was quite another matter.

Enormously tall, with square shoulders, and weighing nearly fifteen stone, he was a conspicuous figure at any time. His head was large, but with the largeness of a brilliant intelligence rather than that of the brainless idiot.

His eyes were smallish, twinkling and expressionless, not unlike stars, nearly buried in clouds of fat of eyelid and cheek. His nose was straight and characterless, his skin flabby, and his chin had long since effaced itself in layers of other more recent chins.

Yet, like the bull-dog, his ugliness was his beauty, for it served as a foil to his perfect courtesy, his inimitable tact, and indomitable perseverance to come out on top in whatever piece of villainy he participated—whether swindling in the City, or posing in Society.

Of the past, before he swooped upon the market with his boundless wealth and breathless prospectuses, no one ever

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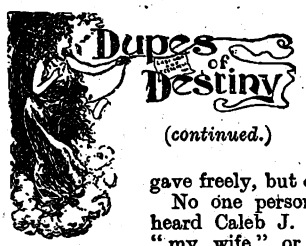

(*continued.*)

heard him speak; and it never occurred to anyone to question him. Caleb J. Johnson, the gold king, was all they cared about. His capital interested the world more than his inner life; and of his money he gave freely, but of himself he spoke rarely.

No one person could say they had ever heard Caleb J. Johnson mention the words "my wife" or "my family"—the man's gold seemed to have grown round him, placing a glittering barrier between him and the outer circle.

And over the top of that yellow wall the little twinkling eyes of the man laughed at those who scrambled for his favours, and took upon themselves the brunt of his erratic humours for the sake of the money that filtered through his fingers. His name stood well in the City, and it had never yet headed a bogus prospectus.

"Fat, fifty, and famous!" a man had once described him as being, and, sitting at his well-spread table, with its neat bachelor appointments, the words were very apt.

He tossed most of the letters aside with a contemptuous smile. He knew why he was invited to all the big crushes of the season; not on account of his appearance or his birth—for he possessed neither the one nor the other. But the mothers in Society had daughters in the market that were labelled with a price, and to the highest bidder that came along those mothers were prepared to knock down, to the tune of "going—going—gone!" the souls of their children. And Caleb J. Johnson knew that when he turned his beady glance upon one fair Society flower, a dozen maternal pulses throbbed with envy.

He picked up one letter, and his smile lost its twist of contempt. It was from a woman he respected—one who treated him—for all his wealth—with the same languid interest she would bestow upon a Battersea pariah. He had met her at several balls, "at homes," and week-end parties, and his interest had grown to admiration.

He opened the letter curiously. It was a dainty epistle, redolent of violets, and prettily worded:

"Dear Mr. Johnson,—*Will you dine with me on Thursday next? Quite an informal party, consisting of myself, my nephew, and Sir Cyprian Rust. I do hope your many engagements will allow you to come, for I will be more than pleased to show you my humble home.—Yours sincerely,*

"Violet Frayne-Lennox."

"Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox," the financier murmured, thoughtfully. "Age forty, and looks thirty; elegant, and an aristocrat to the finger-tips. A widow with a competence and no encumbrances. A rare woman who, in spite of the whirlpool that is always near her, has avoided the eddies. A woman who would be a credit to the position of a millionaire's wife. She has had a sufficient lack of money to make her appreciate the handling of unlimited coin, and sufficient breeding to make her treat the possessor of it like dirt!"

He clasped his large, capable hands together, and smiled oddly.

"So she has the baronet, Sir Cyprian Rust, staying with her! A strange coincidence! I remember Sir Cyprian's name, and he probably heard me mentioned in terms not exactly those of love, when that little fool led me innocently to believe that she was an heiress!"

He rose suddenly. "Those days are dead, Caleb J. Johnson, the millionaire, has no truck with the penniless, headstrong Caleb J. ——" He smiled, and cut the end of a cigar with thoughtful precision. "'Lady Violet Johnson' is not so pretty, but one day we may do away with the 'Johnson,' and if she prefers it, adopt the other. I will meet this Sir Cyprian Rust! It will be amusing to see the man whom I envied and reviled as a boy! Also, I will study Lady Violet."

He touched a bell, and dictated one or two letters to his secretary, then wrote a neat, conventional acceptance of the only invitation he had opened.

* * * * *

The strains of the Green Hungarian Band floated from the windows of the house next door to that of Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox, who was entertaining only a very small party that evening, nearly all the guests of which were already in the house.

The hostess was the first to arrive in the large Louis XVI. drawing-room. She was a beautiful woman, but her dark, restless eyes conveyed an impression of always suppressing and fighting some hidden longing. That look was a puzzle to most people, and one or two imagined they had found the key to it. But Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox knew that she had herself flung away the key to forgetfulness with wilful fingers.

She halted before a long cheval glass. Her glittering robe of black sequins clinging to her lissom figure, threw into bold relief the dead white of her marble skin, and the sleek, well-groomed head, with its coronet of brown hair surmounting a small, patrician face, curiously defiant and supplicating at the same time.

"I think he may ask me to-night," she murmured. "He seems to have made up his mind; and, after all, there is little risk in it. More than seven years have passed since that incubus ceased to bleed me. I may with impunity consider myself what the world imagines me. And his money will be very acceptable! Yes; if he proposes to-night it will be a matter of congratulation to my dressmaker, and of gall and wormwood to my friends!"

The door opened noiselessly, and a man stood on the threshold, smiling at the vision of feminine loveliness and charm appreciating its own powers.

"Age cannot wither her," he laughed, and a mocking note touched his mirth with satire.

Lady Violet turned slowly from the glass. Her hands were trembling, and her eyes sparkled ominously.

"Age passes us both by, Cyprian," she answered, "you still retain your sheen of youth and golden hair as of yore. You are no older in appearance than when——" She paused and her mouth quivered.

"Than when," the man finished, smiling strangely, "you and I, my charming Violet, contracted a very convenient compact giving us each what we both wanted at the time—you, money, and I——" he shrugged his shoulders. "A very poor bargain after all!"

"What do you mean?" the woman flashed. "I gave of my life and soul, you only a few pounds that you barely missed! I gave blood, you paltry gold!"

"Hardly paltry, my dear sister-in-law," murmured the baronet, casting a glance round the richly-appointed room in which they stood, "since for twenty years it has kept up this place for you, and given your beauty a decent background. On the other hand, it is *I* who should grumble. Your sister—my dear, lamented wife"—his voice was curiously low—"did not prove the gold mine I expected of her. There was no heir to take my title and the money after me, and I am placed in the unhappy position of being unable to marry again."

The woman clasped her white hands, on the fingers of which glittered precious stones.

"You killed her soul, and flung open the windows of her

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mind! You allowed her to—tumble upon the truth—the awful truth that she told me!"

Sir Cyprian Rust smiled gently. "Have you seen Marcella yet? She is a promising girl, but I had cause to reprimand her some days ago. She discovered too much. She found—a spade guinea!"

Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox shuddered, and her eyes grew distended with an unspoken thought.

"Marcella! Oh, God, spare her!" she murmured, turning a white, strained face to him. "Don't let *her* know, Marcella—my——"

"Your niece, Violet," said the cold voice, "is my daughter, and my heiress. After me she inherits the property. Her life is valuable, don't fear."

"Then why did you insure her life when a baby?" she said slowly. "What has caused it to be so valuable—now?"

He smiled slightly. "The life of a child is uncertain—sometimes! Marcella has every reason to live to old age as far as I am concerned."

"But *she* died!" breathed the woman.

"Yes!" he answered, slowly. "Her death was her own fault. The insurance on her life was paid over to me only after due inquiries had been made by the insurance people. Now," he continued, sarcastically, "that you have satisfied your inquiries, I have my wishes to express to you."

Her eyes dilated suddenly. "They are?"

"The house of that millionaire chap, Johnson, contains a valuable lot of plate, and you have the *entrée* to it. When next you visit it there are certain details I wish you to note, and——"

"Not *that* house!" she gasped. "I cannot, even to you! He will be here to-night, as my guest."

He looked at her curiously. "You either do this for me, or Marcella will know that for a certain sum her—aunt—sold her!"

For one brief moment the woman hesitated, then her answer came, slowly:

"I will do it; for my task-master is a hard one!"

As voices drew near they separated, and presently Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox was laughing and chatting with Marcella, who was statuesque in soft silver gauze, while Sir Cyprian Rust and Mr. Caleb J. Johnson discussed the City.

Lady Violet drew the girl aside. "Are you happy, dear, with—with your father?"

Marcella's eyes opened. "Oh, yes, auntie! But he's a fearful recluse at home, and spends all his time in his studio."

Lady Violet shivered and turned to her nephew, Edward Day, a slim, fair, young man, with a weak, effeminate face.

"You must take Marcella to see the conservatory after dinner, Edward; she has not been here before."

In the drawing-room, towards the end of the evening, when Sir Cyprian was playing Bridge with Edward Day, Johnson seized the chance for which he had come.

"Lady Violet, I am a plain, bluff man, like my name but I want to ask you a question. Will you marry me?"

Although she had expected the question, Lady Violet was not prepared with an answer.

"I—I——" she murmured, "am not sure that I can marry you, Mr. Johnson!"

"Why not?" said the financier, coolly. "You are a widow—I, a bachelor. Why should we not marry, if you think we can jog along together comfortably? Is there any just cause or impediment?"

A faint smile touched her lips.

"No, Mr. Johnson. As far as I know, there is no just cause or impediment. I am perfectly free to marry you."

A low, amused laugh broke the stillness that followed her words. It did not come from the financier, but from the balcony that had wide windows flung open.

Lady Violet turned sharply. Her lips were white.

"What was that noise?" she said, hoarsely.

The financier looked at her in surprise. "Some loafer outside," he said. "But, come, Violet; you have not said that you would marry me."

Again the laugh sounded, mockingly derisive; then the palms in front of the window parted suddenly, and a man lurched heavily into the room.

(Another long instalment of this fine serial next week.)

A LOST MEMORY.

The Tale of a Christmas Gift.

THE operation was over.

The cleverest surgeon that could be obtained had finished his work, and now, with the family physician, awaited a final interview with the father of his patient.

There was good and bad news to tell John Chambers about his son.

He came into the room and advanced towards them, with his teeth set; what would their report be? He waited for it anxiously.

'We are glad to say that our work has been successful in one direction, that of saving life, Mr. Chambers, your son will live, but——" the surgeon paused.

"But, sir."

Outwardly calm and possessed, yet with the demon of suspense tugging at his heart, the great financier awaited the conclusion of the sentence. The patient was his only son, in whom all his ambition and hopes were planted.

"We are sorry to state, that when your son recovers consciousness, he will have no memory; all the past will be as a blank; he will not even remember his name, nor the fact that you are his father."

"Thank Heaven!"

Was the man mad? To thank Heaven that his son would be as a complete stranger to him—that his intellect would be clouded of aught that had happened, even as a little child; he would be obliged to trace his progress up the ladder of education. To thank Heaven for *that*!

"I am afraid you do not fully understand your son's position, sir—what such a state means," said the physician gravely. "Your son will have no affection for you; practically he has to begin life over again."

"Thank you, gentlemen, but I think I fully realise my son's position; physically he will soon be well; mentally, nothing remains to him of the past, no promises he has made or anything of that sort."

The surgeon bowed.

"And for that loss of memory—as his father—I again say 'Thank God,' but I must not keep you waiting. Accept my grateful thanks for what you have done, sir, and this"—handing the astonished surgeon an envelope; "you, doctor, will watch over Edward until he is restored to his normal strength. I have the honour to wish you both 'Good-day.'"

And Mr. Chambers left the room with a brighter step than when he had entered it.

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Doctors Aknew and Renfrew stared blankly at one another, then the latter said:

"I think it must be this, Mr. Chambers is a most arbitrary and ambitious man. I heard he had set his heart on some marriage for his son, but young Ned turned restive, and vowed he would only marry some penniless lassie whom he had met, and lately there have been rumours of ructions between father and son."

"There may be something in that," responded his companion; "still, it is strange."

* * * * *

John Chambers went to his study, and, unlocking a drawer, took three letters, all written in the same girlish hand, one bearing the postmark of that morning; this he read with a sneer on his face:

"My Dear, Dear Ned,—*Why don't you come or write? I am getting so anxious. It is now three weeks since I heard from you, and it will be Christmas Day on Friday. Ned, darling it's not like you to keep your little girl in suspense. Come darling, soon, to your own.* "Mary."

This was the reason; this Mary was the girl for whom his son Ned had taken such a mad infatuation; a dancing master's daughter, earning her living at teaching music; a nice wife for his son, who would be heir to over half a million. Fate, however, had played into his hand. He would go to this girl, and in his son's name break off all connection with her. If he had promised to marry her, so much the worse. If she insisted on seeing him, well, she could, for his memory would be a blank as regarded her as well as everyone else. Her voice and figure would awaken no chord. And the hard man chuckled.

He wrote down the address, 2 Rose Mansions, Maida Vale. He would drive there at once.

* * * * *

In her tiny flat Mary Chambers waited and waited for a letter or the appearance of her husband, for Ned Chambers had married her some three months previously, trusting time would soften the old man's heart, and then their secret marriage would be forgiven.

Mary had been averse to the deception, but she was not strong, and the constant out-of-door journeys she was obliged to take—for her music pupils were very scattered—had weakened her constitution, and after a sharp attack of influenza, she had given way and consented, and had promised never to mention the fact that she was married to Edward Chambers to anyone, until he gave her leave.

Edward Chambers had been too much in love to consider the consequences of such a step. His allowance from his father would provide for his wife, and he resolved meantime to fit himself for some profession, so that if in time he should be disinherited because of his refusal to carry out his father's wishes, he would be enabled to maintain himself and his wife.

Fond of engineering, he had for some months been studying it, both practically and otherwise, much to Mr. Chambers' disgust, who, to have more hold upon his son, had purposely prevented his taking up a profession.

In the midst of the girl's sad reflections she heard the bell, and she ran joyfully to answer it: perhaps it was a message from Ned.

In the dusk of the December afternoon she at first thought it was her husband, and she exclaimed:

"Oh! Ned." But as the stranger followed her into the light she saw she had made a mistake, though from his appearance and likeness she knew her visitor to be Ned's father.

"You are my Ned's father, I can tell; is he ill?" she asked anxiously, and her eyes filled with tears, while terror seized her; this hard, stern-faced man had not come as a friend.

John Chambers leisurely surveyed the room, which gave unmistakable evidence of his son's visits. In one corner was his walking-stick, on a small table his engineering books; this was where he spent his time—with this girl.

No mercy should be shown to her.

"I have brought a message to you from my son," he said coldly. "He has gone abroad on special business for me, but before going he asked me to call upon you."

"I do not understand," faltered the girl. "Is Ned ill?"

"Perfectly well." He told the lie without a quiver. She had evidently heard nothing of the motor smash and its sad result—and should continue to know nothing.

Placing an envelope on the table, he said:

"My son desired me to say that he has grown tired of his—ahem!—entanglement with you, and that he desires to forget it, and bade me bring you this," pointing to the letter.

Grown tired of her? What did it mean? Mechanically Mary opened the envelope and saw that its sole contents was a bank-note. The room seemed to be dancing round her. How could he send her that message? He was her husband. This dreadful man did not know that; she would tell him, but—she remembered she had promised not.

She collected her courage, and facing her visitor bravely, said:

"Take back this money, though you are Ned's father. I do not believe he sent it to me, or the message you have brought. I will see him myself."

"You are welcome to, on his return," he answered roughly; "but you will find he will deny all knowledge of you." He added scornfully: "His words to me were, 'if she persists in seeing me, father, I shall deny having known her.'"

Taking no notice of this taunt, Mary said quietly:

"When does he return?"

He made a rapid calculation. It was now December the 24th. If he allowed Ned a month, that would do.

"A month from to-day."

"Very well. I shall call at your house in Palace Gardens on the 24th of January at three o'clock," and with a gentle, dignified manner, she held open the door for her unwelcome visitor to depart.

That night, as he visited the sick-room, and heard the nurse's report as to the progress of her patient, the bells from St. Mary Abbot's chimed out their message of love, forgiveness, and peace—the message which every year they rang out afresh, but they touched no string in the financier's heart; the dust of ambition and avarice had corroded the strings of love and peace. His only son should wed rank and money, not a penniless girl, whose only dower was her looks, so the bells taught him nothing.

But they rang a whisper of comfort and hope to the poor deserted girl bride. There was a God, who would protect and care for her and Ned, for she believed not a word of what that cruel man had said; only she must be patient and wait.

But that Christmas Day was a sad one to the lonely little wife.

Where was Ned?

A month later Mr. Chambers sat after lunch chatting to his son, who, apparently quite well, was trying to grasp everything that those around him endeavoured to impart. But it was hard work.

He could recall nothing, and could only do exactly what he was told, and as the man, who said he was his father, directed.

The butler entered, and whispered something to the elder man.

"All right, show her up in two minutes, Dale. Ned, my boy, I want you to listen to me. There is a lady coming here; she will speak to you, and ask you things, you must simply say, 'I do not know you.' Do you understand?"

"Yes, father," he repeated slowly. "I—do—not—know—you."

Mary Chambers came softly into the room and walked straight to her husband's side. Her voice was sweet and gentle, as she tried to take his hand, saying:

"Ned, why have you not been to see me?" But he strove to push her away, and said in a mechanical way:

"I—do—not—know—you."

The anxiety of the last month had strained Mary's powers of endurance, and when she heard those words from her own husband it was too much: she fell fainting at his feet.

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When she recovered he was gone out of the room, and her only wish was to be gone also, and, refusing all aid, she walked into the street, alone and friendless, denied by the man who had sworn to cherish her, with the knowledge that for the future she must protect and care for herself.

* * * * *

"This is passing strange, Aknew; a year to-day you operated on him, and we had to tell his father the sad result, and now this afternoon that you should have to operate again. It was unfortunate his getting in this railway smash," said Dr. Renfrew.

"It may be fortunate. I am hopeful that this blow will cause a transformation. I think when I have finished and he awakes his memory will have returned, and only the past twelve months will be a blank."

Mr. Chambers came to them.

"I am glad to see you, sir."

"I hope after I have been with my patient to have some good news for you, Mr. Chambers; but I want to impress upon you this: If your son recovers consciousness, he will, I believe, fancy himself back in the events which happened before he was in that motor smash, and whatever he asks for, whomever he wishes to see—in short, what he wants, must be given to him. His desire must be satisfied if you wish his memory to return," said the surgeon.

"I do *indeed* wish it," said his listener, and the men of science went away to their patient.

Only a year ago—only one year, and yet to the financier it had seemed a lifetime. *That* his son Edward; that stupid, inanimate piece of humanity, whose sole wish appeared to be allowed to eat and sleep; this to be his survivor to carry on his race and endow it with distinction and honour. For his treachery Mr. Chambers had indeed been punished.

He had followed the movements of the girl whom his son had loved; she had left her flat and was living in one room, supporting herself with needlework, he discovered. He had many times sent her money, but it was always returned with the one sentence, "Your son denied me, so I can accept nothing from you or him," and in his heart he admired her. She was proud; he liked pride. If only she had been wealthy. Still, if his son's restoration to his normal self meant marriage with her, he would gladly give his consent.

Anxiously he paced the corridor, awaiting the surgeon's report. Suddenly the sound of voices came to him, someone was wishing a companion the compliments of the season. It was Christmas Eve again. What would this Christmas bring to him?

The door of the room in which his son lay opened quickly, and a nurse came to him.

"Your son is conscious and asking for you," she whispered.

"Father," said Ned's voice faintly, "father, have I been ill long? It—all seems—strange. I want my wife—Mary. I married her; that little music teacher, Mary. I want my wife, father, before I die."

"Satisfy him," whispered the surgeon; "say you will bring her; say something, man," for speech appeared to have left Mr. Chambers. Everything was swallowed up in the great thought; it was the voice of his son Ned who spoke; it was no stranger who touched him.

"I will bring her to you, Ned, my boy. Only rest," he said thankfully.

"You—will not be angry with—Mary, father? It was not her fault. You will love her," said the sick man, feverishly.

"Yes, Ned; she shall be a daughter to me," answered his father. And then as swiftly the motor could take him, he went to Shirland, to the poor abode where Mary lived.

Why had not the girl told him Ned had married her? Things would have been different then; he would not have allowed his son's wife to live in this manner, silly girl!

And now perhaps she would never forgive. She and Ned would be reconciled, and he, for his treason and revenge, would be an outsider in their happiness, and the old man sighed. Ned was all he had to love and care for.

Mary answered his knock, and his white face and changed look told her something had happened.

"Come at once," he said hurriedly. "Ned is ill and wants you." And then as they drove to the hospital he explained.

"He was thrown out of a motor a twelvemonth ago, and while he lay ill I opened your letters. When he recovered he had lost his memory, and I saw in that a chance to part you; but I did not know you were his wife. To-day he was injured in the collision at King's Cross, and by almost a miracle the operation has restored his memory. Only he remembers nothing of the events of the last twelve months. He is conscious and asking for you; but why—why did you not tell me he had married you?"

"I had promised Ned not to," she answered simply. But her eyes were shining with hope and joy. Ned had never been false.

Anxiously the medical men awaited their arrival; but their fears were allayed when Mary stole to their patient's side, and, pressing her face to his, whispered his name.

He would live now, and, best of all, regain his mental balance.

Softly they left the room for a few moments, and Mr. Chambers watched the girl kneeling by the bedside with an aching heart. Would Ned ever forgive?

Just then the bells from the neighbouring church rang out their merry chime, and their message this time awoke a response in the old man's heart.

"Ring out the false, ring out the false," that was what they were saying. When his son recovered he would be accounted false, and rung out of the lives of the two he had tried to separate.

He buried his face in his hands.

Then a gentle touch made him look up, and he saw the girl he had deceived standing by his side, and there was no hatred in her face, only a tender pity. He was Ned's father, and it was Christmas, and Ned was given back to her.

"Come to Ned," she whispered, "he wants you," and she led the broken man to his son's side.

"I'm—getting—sleepy, father," said the young fellow, "but before I rest I want to give you my Christmas present—a daughter, my Mary," and he placed the girl's hand in his father's.

And then the nurse gently pushed them away, and said her patient must be quiet, and the old man led his daughter from the room.

"Can you really forgive me, Mary?" he said in astonishment.

"Ah, yes, father, for you too, have something to forgive. We were wrong to deceive you; henceforth there shall be no deception, and Ned and I will try to make you happy."

And the bells chimed out again. But this time their message was "Ring in the new."

Robert Murray.

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The Heart of Dorothy Nevill.

The Story of a Love that was Cast Aside, but which was Happily Regained.

THE door stood open, showing a glimpse of the sweet, old-fashioned garden, bathed in sunlight, and sweet with the scent of roses, mignonette, and the spicy odour of the tall, white phlox. In the field below they were carrying the corn, and the voices of the reapers sounded pleasantly—the deep tones of the men, the shrill trebles of the children, and sometimes the fuller, sweeter notes of a woman's voice.

I have seen and heard it all, so many, many times, but never before had the summer seemed so glad, never before had the sun shone, the roses bloomed, the nightingale sung, as in that summer. And in all the countryside, I thought, there could not be a happier girl than I, Dorothy Nevill.

All the afternoon I had dreamt under the shade of the tall beech trees, dreamt of all that made life so fair, so gorgeous a thing. But when the sun grew low in the Heavens, I hastened home, and hurrying to my room, slipped on my daintiest frock, a quaintly fashioned gown of pale mauve muslin.

Then, when I was ready I stood before the glass, a tall, slim figure, a childish face, with brown eyes and lips scarlet as the poppy in the corn. Surely I was a pretty thing in those days—days so long ago that I may well be pardoned for remembering.

I had reason for pleasure in my looks, the best, the only reason worth the name. I had a sweetheart, tall, strong, with brave blue eyes and a sunny smile, and I loved him—loved him with all my heart. He was waiting for me now, this moment. I wonder did he keep watch for me as anxiously as I for him?

I passed down the wide oak staircase, pausing a moment as I reached the garden door to pluck a deep red rose. I remember it so well—the cool hush of the twilight, the singing of the birds, and the drowsy humming of the insects in the grass.

As I crossed the meadow I caught sight of Mark standing head and shoulders above the men in the middle of the field. He did not see me, and I felt relieved. Mark was very good to me—a more loving brother no girl ever had—but he was just a little strict, and would as like as not have ordered me back. I had fancied more than once that he had guessed my secret, for he had asked cousin Will how it was "young Verner was always hanging round the place," and had muttered something about "teaching him to keep his distance," in a tone which sent the hot blood to my face.

But Mark, Will, and all else went from my mind as I entered the beech grove, for, coming to meet me with glad eyes and outstretched hands, was my sweetheart, Allen Verner.

"Red as a rose is she," he said, laughing, and kissed my face again to make it redder. "Have you never a word for me, Dorothy?"

I stood there, blushing and confused, the loving speeches in my heart dying away before they reached my lips.

"I thought the time would never come," I faltered out at last.

"You wanted me, Dorothy? That is good news. See what I have brought for you."

He made me shut my eyes, drawing my head upon his shoulder. I felt his fingers touch my wrist, and, looking up, I uttered a little cry of pleasure and surprise.

"Do you like it, dearest?" he said. "I had some difficulty to find a bracelet small enough for such a dainty wrist."

It was an exquisitely-fashioned bracelet of gold, made in the form of a tiny handcuff, with scrolls, and leaves, and flowers, in open work, while here and there peeped out a rosebud of diamonds or a wreath of pearls.

"It is too beautiful for me," I murmured, but he laughed my doubts away.

"Don't I deserve a kiss for it, sweetheart? You've never given me one yet."

"Not for the bracelet," I said reproachfully.

"Well, then, for myself."

Flushing, I raised my face, and wondering greatly at my boldness, clasped my arms about his neck.

"Not for the bracelet, but because I love you," I said softly. Then I kissed him. And I never hear the soft, west wind sighing among the beech trees on the hill, but I remember. He held me to his heart, and called me strange, sweet names, and I was happy beyond all knowledge, past all thought.

The moon had touched the trees to silver, when with a start I thought of Mark.

"It is late," I said, "I must go, I am afraid Mark will be angry."

I half hoped Allen would offer to come with me and explain matters—better than I could—to my brother, but he frowned at the mention of Mark's name, and turned aside with an impatient gesture.

"Why should you worry about your brother, Dorothy?" he said. "You're not a child. Surely you need not ask permission to go for a walk. Take my advice and don't allow any questions. Tell your brother it is not for him to say where you shall go, what you shall do."

He did not ask me, as he usually did, to meet him again. I was seized with a sudden fear that I had vexed him, that he did not mean to see me any more.

"Allen," I cried, "are you angry? Have I said something that you didn't like?"

"Why, Dorothy, how could you vex me? Do you care

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as much as that?" he whispered, and I noticed a touch almost of sadness in his voice. "I am not worth it; indeed, I think it would be best for you if I went right away."

But that I could not bear, and clinging to him I cried out that I should die if he ceased to care for me, to love me.

They told me many things against Allen Verner—many, alas! I found out for myself; but I know that he spoke the truth that evening, when he answered that I was very dear to him.

"I'm going up to town to-morrow," he said, after a while, "so I sha'n't see you for the next week. Will you be here on Wednesday, Dorothy?"

My heart sank at the thought of a whole week without him, but I was made happy once again when he declared that time away from me would be intolerable.

A last embrace, and then we parted, and as I reached the the top of the beech grove I turned and waved my hand. Allen was standing in the moonlight, I could see the smile upon his lips, the tender greeting in his eyes.

I hastened down the road, but as I passed the meadow—quite deserted now—I saw two figures coming from the farm. I recognised them as visitors at the Hall, and one of them, Captain Burton, as Allen's special friend. Somehow I did not want to meet them, so I slipped behind the hedge and waited till they had passed.

"It's a charming old place," said Captain Burton, "and as for the girl, I've never seen a lovelier face the whole world over. The brother's a superior sort of chap, too, for a farmer, isn't he?"

"The Nevills are of good family, I believe," returned the other carelessly, "at least, so Verner told me."

"It strikes me Allen will find the brother an awkward customer to tackle," he went on, "if he gets up to his usual games, let alone that Lady Helen is sure to hear about it."

"You're mistaken, Tollington. I wouldn't forgive Allen if he tampers with the poor child's happiness. He is not incapable of such a thing."

"All the same, my dear chap, she's very pretty, and he's—well, we all know what Verner is where a woman's concerned. I fancy Lady Helen will have rather a time of it."

What they mean, I wondered. Who was Lady Helen, and what had she to do with Allen. And whose happiness were they afraid he'd tamper with, he who had shown *me* what true happiness was? I felt a sudden chill of fear, and though I thrust it from me, a vague dread remained, and I wished, I wished a thousand times, that Allen was a farmer just like Mark.

And through the night the chill crept ever closer to my heart; but at the quickening of the dawn I heard the glad birds sing, and on the wings of their sweet melody my fear took flight, and with a happy smile I fell asleep.

* * * * *

Ever since I could remember my cousin Will, half in play, half in earnest, had called me his little wife, and until I met Allen I had placidly accepted the future the words implied. But now that I had learnt what true love really meant, I understood how impossible it would have been for me to have married Will, and, foolishly, I took it for granted that he looked upon the matter in the same light as I.

Far from that being so, however, Will was only waiting till I was eighteen to speak to me, and, to my dismay, on the evening of my birthday, he commenced in a serious tone.

"I'm thinking, Dorothy," he said, "that it is time that you and I were promised man and wife. You know I've loved you since you were no higher than my hand, and now, my dear, that you're a woman grown, I think, and Mark agrees, we don't need to wait longer."

"Wait longer?" I stammered. "For what? What do you mean, Will?"

He came quite close and would have put his arm about me but that I pushed it off.

"I asked you, Dorothy, last summer, if you'd marry me?" he said.

"And my reply was 'Some day.' Well, who knows? 'Some day' I may."

But he was not to be so easily disposed of. High words passed between us, and at last, with flushed cheeks and tear-dimmed eyes, I left him brooding over what he called his "wrongs." Both of us had lost our tempers.

I was late at my meeting with Allen, and therefore stayed out later than I mostly did. When I reached the farm Mark was waiting for me at the gate.

"I want you, Dorothy," he said, and with a trembling heart I followed him into the oak-panelled parlour, where Will was waiting.

"You're late," said Mark at last, "Where have you been?"

Something—I know not what—told me that Mark knew about Allen. My brother, quick to blame, was always doubly angered at prevarication. I would answer, I decided, to the point. After all, as Allen said, was I not my own mistress in such a matter?

"I have been for a walk in the beech grove."

"With whom, Dorothy?"

"That has to do with me, Mark. Your question sounds more like a command than I care for."

"I'll answer for you," broke in Will. "You were with Allen Verner, the young squire."

"And what then?" I asked defiantly.

"And what is more," continued Will, paying no heed to the look of defiance that I cast at him, "you've met him almost every evening through the summer. I've heard whispers this long while down in the village, but I never thought it was Dorothy they meant. Dorothy, the girl I've trusted, loved, and cared for, all my life. I never dreamt that she would steal out secretly to meet that scoundrel, Allen Verner."

"How dare you say such things of him—*scoundrel*—he, the truest lover a woman ever had. It is not like you, Will, to call a man such names when no one is by to defend him but a girl. What is it to do with you that I meet Allen Verner? You say you love me. I don't want your love, for I—I *hate* you just as much as I love him."

He staggered a little as I finished, and stood against the wall with a dazed look in his eyes.

"Dorothy," said Mark, "you've acted in a foolish, nay, a wicked fashion. When have I ever refused you anything that you should steal out of the house as though you feared me? Had you but given me your confidence, I could have spared you bitter suffering. He's not a good man, Dorothy; you'll rue the day you met him yet."

"That's what is said of every man like Allen," I retorted. "What has he done so bad?"

"You tell me, Dorothy, you love him, and that he loves you?"

"I know he does," I cried, "I'll swear it."

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My brother laid his hand upon my shoulder and there was kindness in his face, almost pity.

"And has he asked you to be his wife?"

"He means to, he is only waiting. Why do you look like that? Why do you torture and torment me so? What do you mean, Mark, what do you mean?"

But it was not my brother who answered me. He had pity on my white, set face.

"Tell her, Will," he answered hoarsely, "I can't."

"I said that Allen Verner was a scoundrel, and I say it once again," said Will. "All the time that he's been meeting you and winning your heart away from home, from Mark, from me, he meant to marry another woman. He is engaged to marry Lady Helen Stuart in the Spring."

"It is false," I cried; "you're saying it to hurt me. It is not true, I——" but my words died away, and, like a cold hand in the darkness came the memory of the words I'd heard, "I'll not forgive him if he tampers with the girl's happiness," and "Lady Helen will hear of it."

With a bitter cry I turned on both of them. In my despair I uttered words cruel as untrue. I taunted them, my dear, kind brother, and the man who loved me as his life, with speeches, and mad threats poured from my lips, till panting and utterly exhausted, I fell trembling into a chair.

"I'll not believe it," I said sullenly, "unless he tells me so."

Mark called Will to one side, and they talked earnestly for a few moments. Then he told me what he had decided.

"I shall go to the Hall to-night, Dorothy, and see Mr. Verner. If he tells me that he wishes, or intends to marry you, well and good. If not, I shall warn him against seeing you again. In any case I promise to bring you his decision in his own handwriting."

The gate clanged after the two—Will was going to walk up to the Hall with Mark and in the scented darkness of the summer night I waited.

Ah, me! how much I suffered. Each breath seemed but to add to the dull heaviness that pressed upon me.

"It's not true," I sobbed, and lingered to hear Mark's footsteps up the path returning—surely it would be so—with the news that Allen was loyal to me. Even as I told myself that this was so, the doubt weighing upon my heart cried out, "He never loved you," and the clock ticked to the same refrain, and the lilac trees beat with their branches at the window—"Never loved you," and the wind rose to a wail, and the clouds gathered in the summer sky, because he never loved me.

I heard Mark's voice as he came through the gate. I tried to meet him calmly, tried to smile and seem confident of Allen. But when he entered my strength went from me. With a cry I put out my hand and snatched the note.

It ran as follows: "My Dorothy, for the last time I call you mine. I have deceived you wilfully, cruelly; I loved you, and had not the courage to tell you that I was bound to another woman. That I was going to marry Lady Helen Stuart."

The wind was shrieking now, and the rain beating with pitiless force upon the roses—happy roses, they could die, but I, alas, what was there left to me? Alas! he never loved me.

* * * * *

It was two days after that I awoke—just as the blue-grey mists of the early dawn were rising from the valley—with a great start, to find my heart beating as I have seen a bird beat with its wings against a cage. After a while I lay down again, but a sharp noise on the window pane as though a handful of small gravel had been thrown, startled me once more.

Fancying I knew not what, I crept to the window and looked out. Slight as was the noise I made, it had been heard.

"Miss Nevill," said a voice I recognised as Captain Burton's, "Verner's leaving England. He wants to see you once again before he goes, and begs that you will meet him in the beech grove—where he's waiting."

"Now?" I gasped.

"It is the only chance," he said. "I've tried my best to dissuade him, but he swears that he will see you. He wanted to come up to the house last evening, but I feared a quarrel with your brother. If you don't come now, Miss Nevill, I sha'n't be able to prevent him coming round to-morrow, and there may be trouble."

How could I refuse, when I remembered Mark's threat if Allen should again try to see me?

Once again I passed across the meadow, the last buttercups, heavy with dew, brushing against my ankles.

Once again I stood beside my lover at the old familiar spot.

Captain Burton was waiting a short distance down the road with a dogcart to drive Allen to the station after our last "Good-bye."

Even now I cannot recall those last sad words unmoved. But I remember—oh, how gladly—that I forgave him, fully, freely, and that when he talked of breaking faith with Lady Helen I bade him keep true to her and forget me. He had not been so much to blame as Mark had thought. Lady Helen was an heiress, and had been engaged to Allen since they were girl and boy. It was, in fact, a family affair, and his mother would, I think, have broken her heart had her pet scheme fallen through. For Lady Helen's thousands would pay off the many mortgages on the estate and leave her with an unencumbered income.

A lingering hand-clasp, a last fond look, and then I threw my arms about his neck and pressed my lips to his.

"For the last time," I said with a break in my voice, and then a rustling in the bushes, a muttered oath, a shot—Allen lay stretched upon the ground, and at his side, a grim look upon his face, stood Will.

"You thought to steal away with her this morning," he said. "Thank God, I've stopped your villainy once and for all."

I watched dazed, uncomprehending. As they lifted Allen from the ground, I heard him whisper, "Remember, Burton, the gun went off by accident. Don't let them know that Dorothy was here—poor Dorothy."

I followed Will up to the farm—and then for the first time I understood how terrible a thing had happened.

Allen was shot, and Will, my cousin Will, was guilty, if he died, of murder!

A merciful unconsciousness came over me, and I remember nothing more.

* * * * *

When I came downstairs once more I found the snow upon the ground in place of the rose petals I had left.

Allen had recovered sooner than was expected, and, Mark told me in a hesitating voice, was already married. Will had gone abroad, but before he went had been up to the Hall to visit Allen, and the two had shaken hands and parted, if not on friendly, still not on terms of enmity. No one had learnt the truth of the affair, and if Lady Helen guessed the wound was not a self-inflicted one she made no sign.

After a while I missed Will's face, his kindly smile, and pleasant voice.

"Why does not Will come back?" I said to Mark. But he only looked at me and sighed.

Christmas had come and gone before they thought me strong enough to venture out, and at the first step that I took I was reminded once again of Will.

The Winter snows had gone, and the first violets blossomed, and still he had not come. The freshness of the Spring seemed to lay a cool calm hand upon me. I saw with clearer eyes, with better judgment, and gradually I understood that my feeling towards Allen had been but "the first mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart," and at the same moment I realised the value of the love which I had cast aside.

"Mark," I said one night, "will he never come?"

But on an April morning when the earth was fair with daffodils, and tall Lent lilies, Mark called me to go into the garden.

There, under the hawthorn tree was Will—love in his eyes, love in his heart, and both for me.

"I've come back, Dorothy," he said quite quietly, "shall I stay?"

And with my hands in his, my eyes fixed on his own, I answered with a sob:

"For ever."

John K. Prothero.

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Under the Mistletoe

A TALE OF THE AWAKENING OF LOVE

"How dare you kiss me, Gerald Loraine!"

"How dare you kiss me, Gerald Loraine!" exclaimed Marian, her voice filled with the sudden anger his caress aroused.

"Well, weren't you under the mistletoe, and isn't it a man's privilege at this season to kiss the maid he finds there?" inquired the offender with exasperating coolness, holding her fast.

"Do you imagine I could forego so tempting a pleasure when it was within my grasp? A joy for which I have hungered for three long years! Then you promised that the sweetness of these lips would be for me alone, and now that I have come to claim the fulfilment of the pledge you gave me, I receive cold words and scornful glances."

"Gerald, you are mad!" cried the girl, in terror lest someone should enter the room and see them. "In pity, release me—you have forgotten yourself. You are cruel."

"I have forgotten nothing, save that to-morrow we part! But for this moment you are mine—mine!" exclaimed Gerald. "Marian, do not grudge me this mite of happiness, for he will possess you during all the future, while I must be content with the memory of that which I have lost!"

"Let me go, Gerald," she pleaded again. "Someone will see us."

"Let them; let *him* come and see you in your rightful place," retorted Gerald recklessly. "Oh, Marian, how can you sell yourself to that old man? What has come over you that you can find in his withered life, and empty title, a recompense for your youth, beauty, and stainless womanhood? Oh, my darling, cannot you see that he cares for no one but himself?"

"I am perfectly aware of the gentleman's motive in desiring to marry me, just as everyone else is," she answered, a little frightened by the stern look that had settled on his face, and the unflinching gaze bent upon her. "It isn't complimentary to a woman, nor could it possibly prove agreeable to one who, from her earliest infancy, was taught to hold honour and virtue, mind and soul, above worldly position, purple and gold.

"I doubt that any girl today is so unsophisticated, so devoid of natural reasoning powers that she fails to detect the genuine from the counterfeit. It is a plain business transaction in which sentiment plays no part, and if the purchaser secures all he wants and the seller is likewise satisfied, then they are quits.

"Others have sold themselves knowingly, willingly, have counted the cost and considered the prize worth the sacrifice, why should not I if I wish?" She raised her head and looked at him.

"Yes, why?" he repeated after her slowly.

The words so quietly uttered cut like a keen blade, yet his manner piqued her pride and urged her to further malice. Compelling her eyes to meet his steady regard, she flung another taunt into his face.

"Love and marriage do not always go hand-in-hand; a man may love one woman but find it more to his interest to wed some other one; I have no means of knowing that other men, if less frank, are not impelled by the same spirit that animates my ancient moneyed suitor."

There was no mistaking the implied accusation contained in the words, and the face she gazed at flushed, then every vestige of colour receded and left it white.

There was a quick indrawing of the breath as if it had received a sudden shock, that momentarily confused and surprised him, and into his eyes there crept a shadow of mute wonder and pain.

"I did not think of that, Marian, and I should never have thought that you would either," came the answer. The passion that had been surging through his heart died, leaving behind sorrow and pity for her and himself.

"When the news reached me long ago on the other side of the world that Marian Wybrant was to marry a nobleman, I did not believe it, I trusted you too implicitly. I felt that if such were true you would inform me of it, as certainly your promise gave me the right to know.

"At our parting you asked for three years to test your love and mine. I waited the full time, God knows how

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impatiently, but at last it was over and I came for my final answer.

"That you could change, that you should choose another was very possible, but surely you could have told me that such was the case; instead you met me as a stranger, and treated me as someone guilty of wrongdoing. Was that fair, Marian? Is it just to condemn me without a hearing? Why I don't even know of what I am accused."

He paused, hoping she might make some answer, but although she felt the justice of his appeal, and was already repenting her hasty, ungenerous insinuations, she made no reply.

"I never stopped to consider my position as a poor, struggling artist," continued Gerald, in the same quiet, even tone, drawing a step nearer to her and trying to read in the averted face some sign of relenting. "Strange, but it never occurred to me that I might be looked upon as mercenary because Fate had willed it that I should love a girl who some day was destined to be an heiress; for it seems that as long as I can remember but two things filled my thoughts—you and my art."

"Are you sure?" interrupted Marian, the desire to hear him speak of the woman she imagined her rival, overcoming her determination not to be the first to broach the subject.

"I am sure," he returned, with calm emphasis. "And now that I have what I came for, there is no necessity to fore you longer with my presence. This is not my first bailure, however," he added wearily, "and doubtless it will not be the last; but its pain will linger and be hard to endure!"

"But Madeline will help you bear it, and comfort you for my loss," said Marian, as he turned and walked towards the door.

Gerald stood for an instant like a person stunned. Those few involuntary words were a revelation. In the habitually soft, musical voice there echoed a note of unmistakable jealousy, bitter and despairing. Then he remembered the innocent one whose name she had spoken.

"How dare you speak of her in that fashion?" he demanded, wheeling round on Marian. "What do you know about Madeline that you bring up her name here? Has she anything to do with you or me—with your broken faith? No, but even you must cast a stone at that child of misfortune! Poor Madeline, would to Heaven I knew where you were this night!"

Gerald went to the window and gazed with sorrowful wistfulness out upon the snow-clad landscape.

"I know nothing about the person except what others have said," said Marian coldly. "The names of Gerald Loraine and his beautiful model have been public property for some time, and they who talked seemingly knew——"

"Hush!" he interposed. "I know what you are going to say—it is the old, old story of the artist in love with the maid who poses for him. The story is old enough to be new again, and absurd enough for a joke."

"But do you?" The question seemed literally forced from her lips, so mad was her desire to hear a denial. "I have heard it reiterated everywhere I went. Tell me, Gerald?"

She drew nearer, looking at him with her soul in her eyes, while a desperate fear tugged at her heart.

Gerald was touched by the unconscious confession; joy thrilled through every nerve and fibre of his being, he longed to take her in his arms; but with an effort he controlled the impulse, and responded calmly:

"Yes, I do love Madeline as a friend or brother might. Her beauty I admired as I love and admire the wild grandeur of the mountains, or the perfect loveliness of that flower upon your breast; and her spirit matched the setting. That was all; Madeline liked me in return, but the one great love that a woman gives, was won before I had ever seen her. There was a husband and child——"

"A husband and child!" she gasped. "Oh, how miserably mean I have been—how cruelly unjust!"

"Yes, unjust, Marian," said Gerald softly. "This girl is no older than yourself, yet she had endured more wretchedness in her short life than you can even conceive of. Her husband was stricken down by an accident at the mills where he was making for her and his child a good living, and left a hopeless invalid, to be a burden upon the wife he idolised. For his sake and that of the helpless little one, she serves me as model."

Marian remorsefully turned up to him a face that the flickering firelight revealed wet with tears, holding out her hands with a repentant gesture:

"I—I don't deserve it, but—but, oh, Gerald, forgive me! —it drove me almost distracted to hear everybody saying that you loved——"

He did not wait for her to finish, but catching her to his breast, smothered the words on her lips.

"Is it true, Marian, that the poor, struggling artist is cared for when you have so many of these great titled knights at your feet?" he cried.

"Can you ask, Gerald?" was all she answered.

Nellie G. Coleman.

A Little Misunderstanding.

Which Originated in a Little Miss Understanding Too Much.

Freda and Dora Cuthbert were sisters, and furthermore they were both very pretty. Freda was twenty-one years of age, and fair. Dora was sixteen, and dark. They were the only children of a wealthy merchant, a widower, who lived in a large mansion somewhere in the Northern part of the county of Middlesex.

Now, how this story came to be written originates in the fact that Freda Cuthbert had lost her heart to a Mr. Wilfred Maitland, who was a doctor. In addition, this gentleman reciprocated the feeling, whilst neither knew how affairs were with each other, so to speak.

Wilfred Maitland was certainly an attractive man, and presumably that was why Dora Cuthbert gave her youthful heart to him without his being aware of the fact.

Thus we have a triangular love affair. Freda and Dora both love Wilfred; Wilfred loves Freda; Wilfred does not love Dora; Freda does not know Wilfred loves her, and *vice versa*; neither does Freda know Dora loves Wilfred; Dora, however, is fully aware of Freda's feelings and resents them.

I hope you have understood this somewhat tangled statement.

At "The Briars," which is the name of Mr. Cuthbert's house, they have a telephone, which telephone is an unwitting factor to this story.

It was two days before Christmas that the tinkle of the telephone bell caused Dora to jump up from her seat by the fire, and rush to answer the ring.

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"Hullo, is that 'The Briars'?"

"Yes, who are you?"

"Wilfred Maitland," came the reply. "I want to speak to Miss Dora."

"That's me," came the prompt, albeit ungrammatical reply.

"Oh, how do you do, Miss Dora? I say, I want you to do a little favour for me, will you?"

"With pleasure, Mr. Maitland."

"Thank you so much. I am sending a little Christmas present for your sister. I want it to surprise her, so, if you don't mind, I will send it to you, and you can give it to her on Christmas Day."

Dora's face went red with vexation as she heard this request, and her little foot tapped the floor angrily. However, she did not permit her annoyance to be heard in her voice as she replied:

"Very well, Mr. Maitland. You send it addressed to me, and I shall know what to do with it."

"Thank you very much, Miss Dora," came Maitland's voice over the wires. "Merry Christmas to you."

"Thanks, same to you! Good-bye," answered Dora.

"Good-bye!"

Then the bell tinkled again.

"A present for Freda," muttered Dora, "and from him, too. Ugh! I could——" She paused, and then began to smile. "But perhaps he will send me one, too. I'll wait and see."

On the following afternoon a small parcel addressed to Dora arrived by special messenger. She took it up to her room and eagerly opened it.

"Oh!" she gasped as she saw an exquisitely wrought chain to which was attached a glistening diamond pendant. "Oh, how lovely!"

After feasting her eyes on the present for some while, she turned her attention to the note which accompanied it. This was very short.

"Dear Miss Dora,—*You know what to do with the inclosed. I am unexpectedly called away to the country for Christmas. My address will be 'The Grange, Lonsby Hill, Berkshire.' With best wishes for a happy Christmas.—Believe me, yours sincerely,* "Wilfred Maitland."

"And this is for Freda?" she muttered, as she gazed at the handsome gift. A wave of jealous anger rushed through her, and she clenched her fists, her eyes blazing.

"She sha'n't have it unless he's sent me something," she whispered through her set teeth.

Dora Cuthbert's temper had always been a great trial to Mr. Cuthbert, and he had endeavoured to curb it, but had failed. Now she was the picture of simmering wrath, with her dark eyes flashing with tears of anger.

Christmas morning dawned. Dora was downstairs early, and eagerly examined the many presents that had fallen to her lot, but there was nothing from Wilfred Maitland beyond a card. Concealing her vexation, she hastened back to her room, and took out the chain and pendant.

"Freda shall pay for having it," she muttered. "I'll do it, yes, I'll do it."

In her outspoken thoughts she was referring to a plan which she had formulated during the night. She read and re-read the letter, and was apparently satisfied with the result. Then she placed Wilfred's present around her neck, and, with the letter grasped in her hand, she sought Freda's room, for she knew that her sister had not gone downstairs yet.

"Merry Christmas, Dora," cried Freda. "I'm just coming down. I've had a lovely lot of presents, father sent them up to me."

Before Dora could answer, Freda had caught sight of the diamond pendant.

"Oh, Dora!" she exclaimed rapturously. "How beautiful? Whoever gave you that?"

"Wilfred Maitland."

"What!"

"Why, you seem surprised, Freda. Yes, Wilfred sent it with this note." She handed Freda the letter which Wilfred had sent to her. Then she stood and watched her sister's pale face, while she gloated over her triumph.

With wistful eyes Freda read the letter, and all the colour left her face. An involuntary sigh rose to her lips, but she checked it as she cried,

"But, Dora, why did he send you this?"

"Why?" questioned her sister in apparently surprised tones. "Why do men send girls presents?"

"But you're only a child, Dora."

"Oh?"

"Still, it's very nice of Mr. Maitland."

"Am I only a child, Freda? Do you think Wilfred would have sent me this if he had thought so. What a pity it is he had to go away so soon."

Dora walked towards the door as she spoke. Then, with a sudden cruel whim, she raised the pendant to her lips and went out.

Freda stood still for a few moments as Dora had left her. Then she threw herself on her bed in an agony of grief.

"Oh, Wilfred," she moaned, "I love you so!"

Presently she stood up, and, with a queer little shrug of her shoulders, she laughed.

"Oh, well," she muttered. "What does it matter? I I don't care, no, not a bit."

But she did, and in her heart of hearts she knew it.

Meanwhile, Dora had returned to her room full of gratification. She replaced the present in its case, and then sat down to think.

"It's a good job I'm going abroad with aunt in a fortnight," she murmured. "There will be a terrible fuss if it comes out, but by the time I return they will have forgotten it. Ugh! I hate him!"

With a rapid change characteristic of her temperament, Dora's infatuation for Wilfred had turned into fierce hate.

"I'd better tell Freda to keep it dark for the present," she went on, still speaking her thoughts aloud.

She met her sister in the corridor. To Dora's discomfiture, Freda showed no signs of being at all upset.

"Look here, Freda," she said. "I don't want you to say anything to father about Wilfred's present to me. Not yet, at any rate. Do you understand?"

"Oh, perfectly!" answered Freda. "I shall not concern myself with it in any way. As a matter of fact, I had completely forgotten about it."

Dora, however, immediately saw how deep her shaft had gone home, despite her sister's calm exterior, and her wicked little spirit rejoiced exceedingly.

Christmas Day passed very slowly for Freda, she could hardly call to mind a more miserable Christmas. Boxing Day went in a similarly dreary manner, leaving Freda more sad than ever.

Away down in the country Wilfred Maitland looked eagerly for a letter from Freda, but none came, and it was two days since Christmas.

"I suppose I ought not to have given her that," he mused. "Just like me, impetuous, and then I spoil everything."

At that moment a message came that he was wanted on the telephone.

"Is that Mr. Maitland?" came a voice, rather faintly.

"Yes."

"I'm Dora Cuthbert. I'm speaking from home."

"Oh, yes!" answered Wilfred, and his heart gave a great leap.

"Are you going to be at the Coleridges' ball on Friday?"

"Yes," he replied. "Are you going?"

"Oh, rather?"

"And your sister, as well?"

"Yes," replied Dora. "We shall see you then, I suppose?"

"Oh, I am certain to be there!"

"Good-bye, Mr. Maitland, till Friday."

"Good-bye," he answered in puzzled tones.

He replaced the receiver and walked thoughtfully away. Then a light seemed to dawn on him.

"Of course," he cried, "that's it. Hardly liked to write to me, I expect."

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At the other end of the wire Dora was laughing silently as she walked from the instrument.

"Just been speaking to Wilfred," she said to her sister shortly afterwards.

"What, is he here?" cried Freda, whilst a vivid blush suffused her countenance.

"Oh, no! He spoke to me on the telephone from Berkshire," answered Dora. "He told me he would be at the Coleridges' ball on Friday."

"Oh, yes!" murmured Freda in reply, whilst she made a mental note not to go to the ball.

If the careful reader has noticed, it will be seen that Dora has not told an untruth at all. But all that she has said has been calculated to be understood in an erroneous manner. For instance, she said that Wilfred had sent her the chain and pendant. So he had. Thus she consoled herself as she ruminated over all she was doing, and began to grow aghast at all that was happening and would happen.

Once she had made up her mind to make a clean breast of it all to Freda, but the latter only added to her own unhappiness by unwittingly frustrating Dora. It happened in this manner.

"Freda," said Dora, "aren't you sorry Wilfred did not send you anything?"

"Sorry, why should I be sorry?"

"Well, he sent me that lovely pendant and chain——"

"My dear Dora," broke in Freda rather sharply, "If Mr. Maitland chooses to throw away costly presents on children who have not yet completed their education, in what manner does it concern me?"

Dora's face went white with anger, and with a malevolent glance at her sister she left the room, all feelings of repentance gone from her. And Freda—must I record it—well, Freda went to her room and sobbed as though her heart would break, whilst down in Berkshire, Wilfred went to and fro with a light heart and happy face.

When Friday came round Freda pleaded a headache, and declared her intention of staying at home. Consequently Mr. Cuthbert and Dora went on to the ball alone, which was exactly as Dora had anticipated.

Wilfred Maitland had returned from Berkshire that afternoon. He had rooms in a house at High Barnet, which was several miles away from "The Briars." The mansion wherein the ball was to take place was very close to the Cuthberts' home, and Wilfred had to pass "The Briars" to reach his destination.

At the ball Dora Cuthbert watched for the appearance of Wilfred Maitland. Her plan was to make him think, although she would not actually say it, that Freda would not come to the ball when she heard he was coming.

She watched the entrance to the ballroom, every moment growing angrier. But Wilfred did not appear, and her venomous appetite remained unappeased.

As Wilfred passed the entrance to "The Briars," he decided that he would call in and accompany the Cuthberts to the ball. But, as he passed in at the west entrance to the grounds, Mr. Cuthbert and Dora in the carriage passed out of the east entrance. However, Wilfred was not to know that, as he made his inquiry from the footman.

"Mr. Cuthbert and Miss Dora have gone out, sir, but Miss Cuthbert is in," the footman informed him.

Freda in! What did this mean? Was she not going to the ball? But Dora had told him that they were both going. Perhaps he had really offended her, and she was not going for that reason.

These and a host of other thoughts rushed through Wilfred's brain as he heard the footman's reply. Then, all in a moment, he resolved that he would hesitate no longer, but would see Freda and find out for himself how matters really stood.

"Will you tell Miss Cuthbert I wish to see her?" he said.

The man departed on his errand, and presently came back with the reply that Miss Dora had gone to the ball.

"But I wish to see Miss Freda Cuthbert," Wilfred said, "not Miss Dora. Will you please say that?"

The footman went away once more, and presently returned with the message that Miss Cuthbert would see him. Wilfred followed the man into the library where Freda was seated before a huge fire.

"Good evening, Mr. Maitland," said Freda in level tones, as the footman closed the door.

Then they stood and looked at each other, both feeling very nervous, neither knowing what to say. At last Freda spoke.

"When I sent that message out I was under the impression that you wished to see Dora, and not me."

"I was not aware," he replied in slightly nettled tones, "that I have shown such a marked preference for your sister's society."

"That is hardly a question we need discuss," said Freda in a dignified manner.

"I must have offended her," he thought. "However am I to find out?"

Once again they faced each other, quite at a loss for words.

"Are you not going to the ball?" said Freda at last. "You will be late; I expect Dora will be waiting for you."

"Dora again!" cried Wilfred. "Why do you continually refer to Dora and myself in such a marked way?"

"Well, you see," commenced Freda, now somewhat ill at ease. "I thought that—er—you rather liked Dora."

"I like your little sister, of course I do," he answered in puzzled tones.

"Well, Mr. Maitland," cried Freda, "I should think you do, considering your present to her at Christmas."

"My present to her at Christmas?" he repeated, more mystified than ever.

"Yes, surely you remember? Or do you give away so many presents to your girl friends?" Freda replied somewhat sarcastically.

"I do not remember giving Dora anything," he said.

"Then you must evidently be quite accustomed to give away diamond pendants and gold chains," cried Freda, stung to angry utterance by his apparent unconcern.

"What!" he cried. "I gave Dora a diamond pendant? Do you mean to say that she kept——" he paused and stared in amazement at Freda.

"Well, Mr. Maitland, she showed me your letter and present. But perhaps I ought not to have said anything; it was meant to be a secret, wasn't it?"

He was still gazing at her in undisguised astonishment, too astounded to speak.

"Why," he said at last, "I only sent one present at Christmas, and that was to you."

"To me?" she cried.

"Yes, I asked Dora on the telephone to give it you. I sent a note as well."

"B—but Dora said you sent it to her."

"So I did, but to give to you."

"Oh!" cried Freda, she could say nothing more.

Somehow her heart grew light, and the dead weight of oppression was gone from her.

"Yes, Freda," went on Wilfred. "I sent it to you, dear, because I love you."

"You do?" she cried joyously, and then they both laughed, and gazed into each other's eyes.

"Yes," he cried. "I love you, Freda."

"Oh!" was once more the only reply she could make, but her eyes gave him all the answer he wanted.

"My Freda," he whispered as he took her in his arms, and then their lips met and they tasted the joy that only comes to man and woman when true love meets true love.

"But what about Dora?" Freda said some time later on, when they both occupied the same armchair before the fire.

"I cannot understand it," he said. "I must have offended her in some way, and it was a childish spite on her part."

But Freda was a woman, and she knew her sex as man can never do; therefore she knew different.

"Let us forgive her, dear," Freda said.

"Very well, but mind you get back my Christmas present," was his laughing reply.

And there we will leave them.

B. N. E.

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The Miser's Christmas Holiday.

Telling of a Good Deed Well Done.

LONDON is frost and fog-bound; and Morgan Carlaw, money-lender and miser, bending over his well-thumbed ledgers shivers with the cold.

The room he calls his "office"—one in a great nest of more or less reputable chambers within sound of St. Paul's chimes—is a small one, but the fire in the dust-choked grate is too small even for it, and the solitary gas-jet that fights against the fog diffuses little heat.

As his master shivers, so does Godfrey Chatterton, his clerk, scowling in turn at the miserable fire, the feeble light, and the safe in the corner.

It seems strange that Morgan Carlaw, owner of the bonds and securities in that safe—totalling how much he alone knows—should deny himself ordinary creature comforts on such an inclement December 24th as this; but the miser's mind is warped out of all reason by long years of business selfishness, and solitude, and he grudges the spending of every penny.

There is but one redeeming feature about him, his clerk thinks. For the sake of appearances he dresses, if not well, at least tidily and clean. Lean, keen-jawed, grey-haired, iron-souled, methodical, merciless—that is how his clerk sums him up.

Godfrey Chatterton himself is also old, grey, and cadaverous, eking out a miserable existence on a mean salary, because his employer knows certain things about his past.

Business is slack this morning, and callers few. The spider at the centre of his web is not perturbed, for at the close of the year his victims do not care for many personal interviews; but in fastening his strands yet more securely round them per post and legal process, he always finds something to do.

Chatterton is glad when his employer, five minutes later than his usual time, goes out to dinner, leaving him in charge of the office and in sole control of the coal-box.

Outside the snow lies thick on neglected pavements, and Morgan Carlaw, buttoning his overcoat closely on his spare figure, creeps carefully along the dim streets to the cheap cook-shop he favours with his mean patronage.

So dense is the fog that traffic is almost suspended, and the shops, with their outspread Christmas cheer, make but a poor show in the gloom.

A street away from the restaurant, a small boy, coming round a corner, runs up against Mr. Carlaw, and but for the latter's outstretched hand, would fall from the recoil. He is a very small boy, of puny limbs and pinched face, with blue nose, and eyes that give evidence of recent tears.

"You should look where you are going, boy," says the moneylender sharply; "especially in this fog."

"Please, sir, I didn't hear you coming. Can you tell me the way to the big stores? I have asked ever so many, and they all tell me to keep on this way."

Morgan Carlaw looks closely at the small, cold, drawn face and the big, pleading eyes, a strange expression coming into his own.

"What's your name, my boy?" he asks quickly, but more kindly than usual for him.

"Gifford—Teddy Gifford—sir," says the boy, wondering.

Though the idea has occurred to him, Carlaw starts. These are *her* eyes; that is *her* very expression; the boy's voice is like her voice; and Gifford is her name now. And where has he heard the name during the past year?

"Come in here, Teddy," he says, taking the boy's hand and leading him into the shelter of an archway. "Now tell me, is your mother's name Mary?"

"Yes, sir. Father used to call her Mary."

"Umph! What do you want to go to the big stores for? What stores?"

"Please, I don't know," says the boy in a quavering tone, reverting to his misery. "Mother's poor, now—now father's gone, and we can't get nice things now to eat—and she cries often—and I heard Lizzie—that's the little girl in the next room—say that people get Santa Claus from the big stores at Christmas. And this morning a letter came, a blue one from Mr. Carlaw, who wants some money—and mother cried because she hadn't any, and I thought I'd go and find Santa Claus and ask him to bring us some money instead of other things."

The little fellow stops, out of breath with so unusually long a speech, and tears tremble in his eyes.

"Do you think he will do it, if I ask him?" he says.

"No, I am afraid not, Teddy," says the miser, in a tone that sounds strange even to his own ears. "He doesn't take notice of anyone but grown-up people. You had better be going back to mother, or she will think you are lost. It is not so dark now, see."

"I must go back if mother wants me; I never thought of that," says Teddy; then adds wistfully: "But will you go and ask Santa Claus for me, sir—you are a grown-up man, aren't you?"

"I think so," says Morgan Carlaw. "I will ask him for you. You must run back now. Wait a bit, though."

He hurries the boy to a confectioner's, goes in with a gait and air long foreign to him, and purchases a loaf of bread and another of cake. These he gives to Teddy, with a sense of immense sacrifice, and scarcely hearing or heeding the astonished recipient's grave thanks, hastens him off on his

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homeward way. Then, with the same strange gait and air, he pursues his own journey to the cook-shop and orders his usual dinner.

He eats the niggardly meal and goes back to the office like a man in a waking dream. The sudden revivifying of an old memory has pierced his soul to the core. Scenes of the past come before him—the past that he had thought buried out of sight and mind.

He had thought, as others had done, that his soul was all shrivelled to dry husk; and he finds that he is yet human within.

A few moments of reminiscence, aided by the speaking likeness of little Teddy's face, has undone the work of years of miserly scheming.

Morgan Carlaw has not always been as he is now. He remembers, as plainly as though it had only been yesterday, his courtship of Mary Howarth; their weekly walks and talks; some nights at a suburban theatre; a few excursions to Margate, and once up the river; her unfailing freshness of spirits and charm of face; his dim knowledge that she was too bright and good for his even then sordid temperament.

He remembers how the brief dream of happiness passed, and one more worthy of her, more fitting to win her love, had taken her from him. He remembers, bitterly, how he resolved to cast her out of his life, to crush down every thought of her, and to be revenged on the man who had robbed him of happiness.

He remembers, remorsefully now, how he compassed that man's ruin, and struck Mary down to poverty at the same time; and how, in a moment of repentant sanity, he made a will bequeathing all his possessions to Mary or her children, and would even have helped her temporarily had she not refused his aid with anger, and moving to another address, escaped his further notice.

It is some consolation to him now to reflect that he had never told her his profession, or his professional name—Carlaw. She would never think of him as the vulture he knows himself to be.

He knows how he has given himself up, body and soul, to money-getting, until avarice has become both first and second nature.

And he remembers having "business transactions" with several Giffords during the past year; and Teddy's pitiful story of the blue letter that made his mother cry, brings to his mind that one of them was a widow who had tried to raise money on a disputed will of her husband's parents.

He had put Chatterton in charge of the affair when the payments began to fail, with instructions to go on without reference to the woman's appeals for delay—she never came personally, always writing.

He sees it all clearly now, as he goes through the yellow mist and smudgy snow to his den—his Mary, left alone in the world, had sunk from poverty to penury, had tried to obtain the money left to her husband, but had been defrauded by his family; and finally, had borrowed, unwittingly, of *him*.

It was *his* order that had dispatched the pitiless letter that had sent Teddy into the streets to seek Santa Claus.

It affords him a sort of negative satisfaction to know that he has not destroyed the will made in Mary's favour. He had meant to do, but had put it off, thinking that there was ample time.

His first words, when he gets back to the office, startle Chatterton more than anything he has heard for many a year.

"You can go as soon as you like to-day, Chatterton," he says, "and I sha'n't want you back till Thursday."

"But what about business?" asks the clerk, staring incredulously at his employer. "We have always balanced the books on Christmas Day. It'll be the first time we've had a day off since I came here! Are you actually going to have a holiday?"

"Yes; I'm going to take a holiday," says Carlaw, testily. "I suppose I can do as I like without asking you? Take yourself off, and you needn't come on Friday if you don't like."

"All right, Mr. Carlaw," says the clerk, quickly changing his tone. "No offence meant. I'll come Friday. Merry Christmas!"

Morgan Carlaw does not answer this grim pleasantry. His mind is still busy with the past, and sub-consciously working out a problem of the future.

He sits in the decrepit chair beside the desk for more than an hour after Chatterton's departure, in a fixed attitude—his chin on his collar, his hands grasping the chair arms.

The fire goes out, its red heart slowly dying to grey ash; and the growing darkness outside seems merely accentuated by the puny gas jet over the desk.

At last he gets up, seizes pen and paper, and writes a brief note to his solicitor, then takes from a pigeon-hole a dust-grimed document marked "Last Will and Testament of William Carter, *alias* Morgan Carlaw," and incloses it with the letter, which he goes out and posts.

At any rate, that is safe now from Chatterton's possible tampering; and when he dies Mary's troubles will be at an end.

Back again, he sets to work to balance his books alone, poring over apparently interminable agreements, securities, deeds, approaching a total that he knows will over-reach five figures—a total that will all be Mary's.

Ten o'clock comes—eleven—twelve, and Christmas Eve passes into Christmas Day; two, three, four, five, and joy-bells ring in the city, and life becomes more evident in the snow-whitened streets; and still the miser toils on in gloom and cold, shivering, with cramped fingers, over the details of his hoarded wealth.

As the figures grow, he gloats over them in ecstasy, forgetting his discomfort, forgetting all but his overmastering avarice.

Six, seven, eight, strike and on the eve of nine o'clock on Christmas morning his task is over.

He sits up, stretching and chafing his chilled and aching limbs; then putting the balance sheet into a big blue envelope addresses to his solicitor and sealing it with red wax, pigeon-holes it.

Outside the snow has ceased falling, the fog has gone, and people are exchanging the old-time greetings in the fresh, cold, sunlit day.

A ray of sunlight, escaping the forbidding roof-angles around, shoots at last into Morgan Carlaw's office, and piercing its gloom and floating dust, settles on the chimney-piece.

The miser, seeing it, extinguishes the wasteful gas-jet, and takes from the crowded shelf a small, dark-blue bottle, black with smoke. He brushes it carefully with his coat-sleeve, exposing to view the red label upon it, and at what he reads on the label, smiles.

Yes, he thinks, he has chosen well. He is glad he made the will in Mary's favour; gladder that he had never altered it. It is the best way he can atone for the past—can prove himself worthy of something higher than greed of gain.

All his wealth will be Mary's—all—when he is dead. It is better than helping her whilst he is alive—and he always objects to charity, on principle—and he feels sure she would refuse his aid, even if offered.

Yes, it is best as he has chosen. Whilst he lives this wealth is his—all his; after his death it will be hers, and she will know at last that he is not quite all mercenary husk.

He picks up the little bottle, regarding it as a silent friend and long companion who promises a final consolation after the wreck of his wasted years, and uncorking it, sniffs the contents; then, with a quick, resolute effort, drains it.

A moment later he falls, face forward, on the desk. The ray of sunlight, journeying across the room, reaches the label of the empty bottle at the silent man's elbow, and picks out in letters of black on a dull red ground the one word: "Poison."

Morgan Carlaw, money-lender and miser, has set out upon his Christmas holiday; and before the New Year dawns little Teddy Gifford knows that the kind gentleman's intercession with Santa Claus has not been in vain.

Geo. Wallis.

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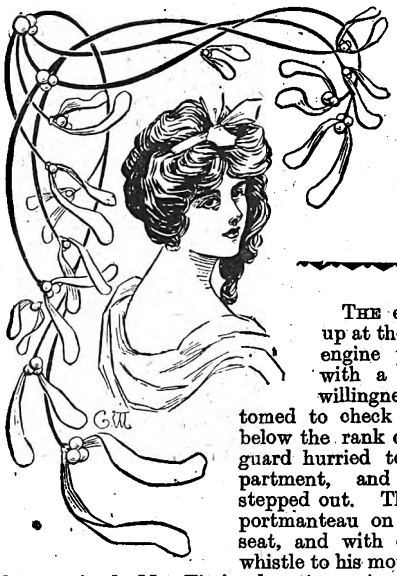

A Sense of Humour.

The Story of a Literary Lion.

By W. PETT RIDGE.

THE express train pulled up at the small station; the engine performing the act with a suggestion of unwillingnesss, as one unaccustomed to check itself at anything below the rank of a junction. The guard hurried to a first-class compartment, and Mr. Andrew Tite stepped out. The guard placed the portmanteau on the rustic garden-seat, and with one hand held his whistle to his mouth; with the other he received Mr. Tite's donation. A porter of amazing youthfulness strolled up from the signal-box at the end of the platform as the train started.

"Now then, ten-twenty," said the infantile porter to the guard, with much truculence, "'urry up."

The train hastened away, and the small porter watched it.

"That train ain't stopped 'ere," he said, with a reminiscent air, to Mr. Andrew Tite, "not for the last free months. Last gent it stopped for was Sir 'Enry——"

"I want this portmanteau taken up to the Unicorn," interrupted Mr. Tite sharply. "Do you know it?"

"Well," said the boy, "I ort to."

"Certainly you ought. But do you?"

"There ain't many men that knows the Unicorn better than me," said the small porter, with a knowing smile. "If I don't know the Unicorn, why nobody don't know it."

"That's all right, then. Bring this up there as soon as you can, and I'll walk on."

"You go through this orchard," explained the boy, "and you bear jest the least bit to the left, and you come to a——"

"I know the way quite well," said Andrew Tite. "I used to live here."

"What name, may I ask?" said the boy. He took a piece of chalk from his pocket.

"Tite," said Andrew Tite.

"It's new to me," remarked the boy. And he wrote carefully on the portmanteau with a piece of chalk one word:

TIGHT.

Mr. Andrew Tite crossed the line and opened the gate of the orchard. He had had so much of praise during the past year that he should have been glad to be exempt from it for a time; yet, somehow, he could not help feeling disappointment at the small porter's ignorance of his fame. To come back after a few years of absence to the village where he had spent his early days had occurred to him as a pleasing and an impressive thing to do, and though he had a special difficulty to face in the shape of a visit to the doctor's house—Florence Saxby was a niece of Doctor Parr—even there it would be agreeable to hear their opinions of his books. What he proposed to do was to call after lunch and just stay for half-an-hour or so.

"Poor little Florence!" said Mr. Andrew Tite.

He kicked a stone out of his way and adjusted his tie. It was rather a large flowing tie with a fine suggestion of the Boulevards about it, and when, of late, lady journalists had interviewed the newest literary lion, his tie was always made the subject of a separate paragraph.

"It's hard on her, of course," acknowledged Andrew Tite to himself. "Very hard, and very disappointing. And really up to last year I thought I should have kept up the correspondence and the love of years ago. But, good gracious, such a lot of things have happened since then. For instance, there's Miss Vanbury."

It was surprising to find how very small the small village seemed. In five minutes he was near to the one hotel of the place, and he had always had an impression that it was quite a long distance from the station. He looked up at his old school-house, and made a mental note to call in to-morrow and request for the boys a special half-holiday. This would be a genial, semi-regal, inexpensive action, which would be in every way gratifying.

At the Unicorn, a pleasant scent of lunch. A bustle and hurrying to and fro of white-aproned maids. A look of gay expectancy on the face of Mrs. Hostess, mingled with some nervousness.

"This way, sir," said Mrs. Hostess, bustling out of her room into the dim entrance. "We had your wire and the room is ready, and we sent word to Jim Turley, and he's going to call later on, and he says the links are in perfect condition, and there's no reason, Sir Henry, why you shouldn't begin to-morrow, and Jim Turley has got a cousin who can——"

"I beg your pardon," said Andrew crossly. "Pray don't talk so fast, and pray tell me what in the world you are talking about. I'm not Sir Henry Anybody."

"I'm afraid I am," said a big voice behind him. "Hullo, Tite, is that you? What the dickens are you doing here? What has induced you to——"

"I was born here," said Andrew. He dropped his pince-nez and took limply the hand which the breezy youth offered.

"Well, that's some excuse, certainly. Even a novelist, I suppose, must be born somewhere."

"Perhaps you will allow me, Rowlands, to ask what is your reason for coming to a place like this. It isn't Tooting Common, and it isn't Chingford."

"Wish to goodness it were. The links here are not good, but I'm down here partly for a bit of quiet practice, and partly for—well, that's about all. It does one good to have a change."

"What I want just now," said Andrew, "is not so much change as lunch."

"I'll see to that, sir," said Mrs. Hostess, interposing. "At the same table?"

"At the same table," said Rowlands. "Tite, you will be my guest for this feed?"

Andrew Tite fixed his pince-nez carefully on the bridge of his nose, and surveyed the impulsive youth before him. They happened to be members of the same club in town, where they knew just enough of each other to quarrel on political questions. Rowlands was a man so accustomed to score at golf that he kept up the method in other games, and this brought him into conflict with other masterful players.

"Be my guest at lunch?" repeated Rowlands.

"You're very good," said Andrew Tite. "I will."

"In a quarter of an hour, sir," said Mrs. Hostess anxiously, "and not a moment later."

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"I'll see that he is punctual," said young Sir Henry Rowlands.

They strolled down the village together, passing *en route* the doctor's house. It stood well back from the road, and Andrew Tite, trying to look through the thick, short line of trees that protected it, stopped a lecture that he was making on the subject of agricultural stupidity. The thought of the old evenings came swiftly back to him, evenings when he used to stand near the gate and a note written in a schoolgirl hand used to be passed through the branches with much elaboration of wholly unnecessary secrecy, to be answered that night by a sealed communication delivered with similar mystery.

"I think we'll turn," he said.

Rowlands went up to the gate and peered through curiously.

"Come away, Rowlands," said Andrew; "people don't care for that sort of thing here."

"Thought I saw a girl," remarked Rowlands. "Such things do grow in the country, I believe."

"Pray be careful," begged Andrew. "I know the people there."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm hanged," said Rowlands, astonished.

At the Unicorn, such a lunch as the Unicorn had never before dreamt of. Mrs. Hostess, caring nothing at all for literary lions, had found herself spurred to most excellent performance by the presence of a baronet. There was no menu, but Mrs. Hostess obligingly came in at the beginning of the lunch, and mentioned in the manner of a dioramic lecturer, with a respect that was concentrated exclusively on Rowlands, a few of the important features.

"Fried soles," said Mrs. Hostess. "Fried soles, Sir Henry; lamb and mint sauce, game pie, Sir Henry; roast fowl, blue mange, Sir Henry, and cheese and salad. And" —this is a kind of *bon voyage* wish—"I hope it'll be to your liking, Sir Henry; and of course you, sir, as well."

Lunch, after several times threatening to come to an end, and not coming to an end, did come to an end, and the two men sat out in the shade at the entrance of the Unicorn, and lighted their cigars. The smoke went up to the nostrils of the rampant, white Unicorn over the doorway, and gave to that rare animal an increased appearance of being about to sneeze. Mrs. Hostess, red with encouraging nimble-footed white-aproned maids, went back to her room, and fanned herself with an *Advertiser*.

"And, as I say," concluded Andrew Tite, "there is something in the dull monotony of country life which seems to destroy, for those who live in it, all sense of humour."

"I see your argument," remarked Rowlands. "I daresay there's something in it."

"There's a great deal," said Andrew. "You don't know anybody here, I suppose, Rowlands?"

Rowlands blew a gentle puff of smoke at an insect on a leaf of the creeper at the doorway, and intoxicated it into somnolence before he replied.

"Nobody to speak of," he answered. "Of course you know everybody?"

"Well, no. A good many folk have died since I left."

"Because you left, perhaps."

Andrew Tite did not smile. It is never wise to encourage badinage directed against oneself.

"Who is the doctor?" asked Rowlands casually.

"Dr. Parr," said Andrew. "He has a niece who keeps house for him. That house you were peering at just now in the village. Rather decent sort of girl, too. Some pretensions to good looks."

"That's gratifying," said Rowlands, with some interest, "for all parties. And is Miss Saxby old?"

"How did you know her name was Saxby?" asked Andrew quickly.

"My dear fellow, didn't you say so?"

"She's young," said Andrew. "Still young."

"So much the better!"

It was a little irritating to Andrew, despite the fact that he had relinquished all claim to be considered Florence Saxby's *fiancé* for quite a year, to find young Rowlands showing this interest in her. But Rowlands' next remark put him again at his ease.

"I didn't tell you, perhaps, before lunch, Tite, did I? I'm going to be married next month."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Andrew, with much heartiness. "Very glad to hear it. And look here, Rowlands. I'm going to call on this Miss Saxby this afternoon. If you like, I'll take you along and introduce you."

It had suddenly occurred to him that the meeting would be less awkward if a stranger were present.

"I shall be very glad," said Rowlands. "I'm ready now, if you are."

"There's no great hurry."

"Let's go now and get it over."

So they went at once.

Dr. Parr was out. "Out," said the neat maid, "and wouldn't be back perhaps for hours upon hours. Miss Saxby? Oh, yes, she was in." The neat maid beamed in the direction of young Rowlands, who stood discreetly at the back of Andrew Tite. Would they kindly step this way?

"I hope this is not an inconvenient time to call, Florence?" said Andrew, as a slim, tall girl entered. "The fact is——"

"I'm very pleased to see an old friend at any time, Andrew."

"This is Sir Henry Rowlands. Rowlands, this is Miss Saxby. I found Rowlands at the Unicorn and I ventured to bring him along."

Rowlands said gravely tht he was very glad, and Miss Saxby, in her merry way, almost laughed with pleasure as she turned to him. It was a relief to the literary lion to find that at any rate she was in no maudlin mood.

"Are you here for long, Sir Henry?" she asked, smilingly.

"I'm here for practice. I want to score if I can this year in more ways than one."

"I hope you will succeed."

"I'm afraid Rowlands does not make himself plain," interposed Andrew.

"No one can say that I'm pretty," said Rowlands.

"What Rowlands means is," explained Andrew carefully, "that he is here practising golf, and he also intends to be married shortly."

"Next month," corroborated Rowlands.

"So soon as that?" said Florence Saxby, opening her eyes widely.

"It seems to me a long time to wait," said Rowlands.

"And you are fond of cricket, Sir Henry?"

"No, no," corrected Andrew, "not cricket. Golf."

"Of course. How stupid of me. Golf, I mean."

"I am fond of it," said Rowlands, "but just now it has the second place in my affections. The first is——"

"Andrew," exclaimed Miss Saxby, hastily, "I am forgetting you. But that only serves you right, because you had distinctly forgotten us. If it hadn't been for your books which we have found in Mudie's box and the little paragraphs about you in the papers——"

"Mr. Andrew Tite is not a Prussian," murmured Rowlands.

"Why, I am afraid we should have been disturbed about you."

"It has been rather a busy time," said Andrew Tite, importantly. "We literary men have few opportunities for cultivating the—what shall I say?"

"The garden?" suggested Rowlands.

"No, no, no. Nothing like that. For cultivating the society of our old friends I mean."

"I understand," said Miss Saxby.

"The world," went on Mr. Andrew Tite, with the frown of conscious notoriety, "the world expects a good deal from those whom it decides to honour. Directly your name gets to be known you are invited here and invited there; women journalists call and interview you——"

"Interesting," remarked Rowlands.

"Publishers pester you, editors worry you, and you don't

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know, I assure you, what it is to have in your own rooms a quiet chop from one month's end to the other."

"A quiet chop," remarked Rowlands, "is really a very pleasant companion. What I can never stand is the noisy, rollicking, talkative chop that——"

"Go on, Andrew," said Miss Saxby, interrupting Rowlands.

"I can assure you," said Mr. Tite, "that over and over again I have longed, absolutely longed, for the old quiet life in this little country village, where life goes so leisurely. The sturm and drang of London life——"

"A foreign expression, Miss Saxby," explained the other.

"Begins to tell after a while even on the strongest brain. It is like the continual clank clank of the machinery on an Atlantic liner, that never stops, night or day, from port to port. One feels at certain times that one is becoming used to it, but as a matter of fact, one never becomes used to it. Its determined, relentless, insistent clank; clank becomes a part of your existence it is true but it is always the ogre of your life, the demon that by his presence makes you old, worn and fatigued before your time."

"I always enjoy lectures," remarked Rowlands, when Andrew paused, "but I think they ought to be accompanied by pictures on a white screen, and a piano."

"So that you have had no time to write," said Miss Saxby, "anything but books?"

"Absolutely no time."

"At any rate we have not forgotten you. We have often talked about you whenever we have seen your name in the papers."

"I am glad," said Andrew, "to think that my memory has been preserved by some means."

"Do you really mean that?" she said brightly.

The challenge seemed to leave no way out.

"I mean," he said, softly, "a great deal more than that."

She smoothed the white gown she was wearing gently over her knee, and for a moment she was thoughtful.

"You can form no idea, though, Miss—Miss——" began Rowlands.

"My name is Saxby, Sir Henry."

"Miss Saxby. You can form no idea what a very important man Mr. Tite is in town. I know one or two men at the club who swear by him."

"I think I can guess. I know that when I was in town last year he was so much engaged that we saw very little of him."

"By-the-bye, Tite, are you really engaged? There was a rumour to that effect. The club fellows told me."

He picked some mignonette, and she placed it, with her old smile, in her blouse.

"If a public man," said Andrew, with some acerbity, "were to contradict all the incorrect reports that are sent round about him he would bring himself to an early end by overwork. I always argue that the private life of a public man has nothing to do with anybody but himself. Upon my word, though, nowadays that seems to be impossible."

"Shows how careful you chaps ought to be," said Rowlands. "Of course the report must be very annoying too, to Miss Vanbury."

"Was that the lady——" began Florence Saxby.

"I particularly want you, Florence," interposed Andrew hastily, "to show me, the garden round your lawn. I want to freshen my recollection of it. Rowlands, you can stay here if you like. I believe you are no lover of flowers."

"I think I would like, if Miss Saxby will excuse me."

"You will find the *Times* there, Sir Henry. I shall not keep you long."

"I hope you will," he whispered.

Miss Saxby handed the paper to Rowlands, and Rowlands, instead of taking the paper, touched her hand, and the paper dropped to the floor. Andrew picked it up.

"You are a clumsy fellow," he said.

Really it was very soothing and consoling and altogether agreeable, to be once more strolling round the small, square

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clean-shaven lawn with the slim girl in white at his side. He picked some mignonette, and she placed it, with her old smile, in her blouse.

"Do you remember when I last did that?" he asked.

"I don't think I am likely to forget. There are so few romances in one's life that it is quite easy to remember every page."

"What do you think of Rowlands?"

"He seems a straightforward sort of young man," she said, judicially, "as far as I can judge."

"He's not quite my sort," said Andrew, "but he's got a certain manner with him that enables him to get on with people. Only, of course," he laughed, "no one would claim that he was a man of intellect."

They stopped and looked through the open window into the room. Rowlands had relinquished the *Times*, and had taken up an illustrated ladies' journal, and was studying, with much interest, portraits of the current bridegrooms.

"I suppose it is natural that you should say that, Andrew, of almost anybody. Do you still live in chambers?"

"Yes, I shall live there until I cease to be a bachelor."

She looked up. He put his arm under hers and she turned to the window nervously.

"Florence, dear, I'm sorry that I behaved rather meanly to you. I ought not to have dropped you without a word of explanation. If you think you can forgive me, give me back one sprig of mignonette."

She took a sprig from her blouse without any hesitation.

"And we are good friends again?" he asked anxiously.

"Excellent friends, I hope," she said.

"I can't tell you how happy that reply makes me. I came down here to-day with the full intention of only just calling and seeing you, and now——"

Andrew was on the point of stating the truth. He stopped himself just in time.

"I say," called Rowlands from the open window, "I say. Will someone kindly tell me how it is all bridegrooms frown?"

"It is done," explained Miss Saxby, "to hide their natural gratification. I wish you would touch that gong, Sir Henry. The maid shall bring tea."

If Florence Saxby had been delightful in the garden, some superlative word was required to describe her as she presided at the tiny tea-table. The figure of Miss Vanbury (a gaunt lady of much cleverness—who wore convex glasses) forced itself upon Andrew's mind. He could see quite clearly now the mistake he had made.

"Wonder whether it's too late to repair the blunder," murmured Andrew. And he took a second cup of tea.

"I think I liked your last novel best," remarked Florence Saxby. "I fancy it shows greater insight into actual things; and there is a very pleasant strain of humour. Don't you think so, Sir Henry?"

"I can't say," confessed Rowlands, "that I've read any of them very carefully. But I daresay it is as you say, Miss Saxby. Tite is a rare man for humour. He argues that the leading characteristic of the bucolic mind is its want of that particular quality. I tell him that he is rather sweeping in his charge."

"I suppose women share that trait," said the young lady.

"It is easy to see the failings of other people," remarked Andrew with an impartial air. "I daresay as a matter of fact we all have our weaknesses. Are you keeping up your painting, Florence?"

"As well as I can. Would you care to see some of my work? Sir Henry, will you come too?"

"I don't know much about art," said Rowlands.

"Then you will be able to play critic. This way."

With Rowlands looking closely at a small portrait at one end of the small studio, Andrew found a second opportunity of speaking words of confidence. Rowlands really seemed a youth with a commendable amount of tact. When he noticed that the two were in earnest conversation near the large easel he increased his attention to the portrait.

"Florence!"

"Andrew!"

"I suppose it is quite understood that our half-engagement is at an end?"

"Oh, quite at an end."

"And there is no sort of bond between us now?"

"Excepting that of friendship, Andrew."

"There is no reason why we should not be capital friends."

"Capital friends," she agreed, smiling.

"What a good, sensible girl you are, Florence." Andrew sighed and touched lightly a fold of her white sleeve. "Do you know I have often thought of the old days, the days just after I left school, when I used to send stuff to London editors—and such stuff, too—and you and I used to wait at the post-office for the big envelopes that always came back? You were in shortish dresses then."

"I'm rather glad, I think," she said brightly, "to find that you still remember those days. I shall never forget them."

"However successful a man may become," said Andrew Tite oracularly, "he always remembers his first sweetheart."

"Especially if he marries her," suggested Florence.

"That," said Mr. Tite, "that does not affect the matter. Is this crayon work yours? It seems very fair."

The scent from the trees at the back of the house came lazily through the open window and contested in a slow, dogged way with the smell of the paint tubes. Rowlands, with his back to the two, put down the portrait and looked about for another.

"Just one more word, Florence. You were always the best of girls, and I am so glad we have not quarrelled."

"I don't think I could have done so, Andrew."

"Shall we shake hands?"

"With all the pleasure possible."

It was a small hand with a rather good ring on one of the fingers. It was a soft, white hand, too, and it lay in Andrew's with such a gentle pressure that for one moment the canvases danced before his eyes an intricate gavotte. But this was no excuse for the immediate action of Andrew Tite. In view of the existing circumstances—existing circumstances including Miss Vanbury—nothing, I am bound to say, could excuse Andrew seizing the small white hand, pressing it hurriedly to his lips, and murmuring hastily two words:

"Dearest love!"

Rowlands was really very sorry that he had dropped the canvas. He did hope that no harm was done. Miss Saxby assured him, after careful inspection, that no harm whatever had been done.

"I think we had better go, Rowlands," said Andrew Tite, with a flushed face.

"I'm ready."

"And perhaps you will let us call to-morrow, Florence?"

"I hope you will. And you too, Sir Henry."

"You're very kind, Miss Saxby. I hope we shall see each other again."

"You must try to call, Sir Henry, when my uncle is in."

"Even if he were not in——" began Rowlands.

"Now, come along, Rowlands. Good-bye, dear. Good-bye."

Andrew Tite ran back to the gate after the two had proceeded a few steps.

"May I send you a note this evening?" he asked hurriedly.

"You are one of my favourite writers," said Florence Saxby demurely.

Andrew Tite went up to his room and Rowlands, being called for by the excellent Turley, went for an hour's practice. Andrew's writing work consisted of one communication, and he did not commence that until he had walked about the room and considered a great deal. The letter began:

"DEAR MISS VANBURY,—*I want to send you a few words on rather a serious matter. When you promised a few weeks since to be my wife, I*——"

There were two sheets of closely-written arguments. At the end was this:

"*Pray, therefore, consider that we are released from our engagement to each other. You are a woman of considerable*

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sense, and you will, I am sure, agree that all this is for the best.

"*My regards to your mother if she has returned from Nice. If I do not call on my return to town you will know that it is because pressure of work prevents me. With sincere regards, believe me, faithfully yours,*

"ANDREW TITE."

When he had folded this, he placed it in an envelope, addressed the envelope to—

"*The Hon. Miss Vanbury,*
"*117 Eaton Terrace,*
London, S.W.,"

and dispatched it by the postman who called at the moment for letters to take by tricycle to a post-office five miles distant, Andrew Tite felt that Volume III. of his life only remained to be penned. That evening he would write to Florence Saxby and renew his engagement with her, and——

Enter Rowlands. Rowlands, back from the links in the best of spirits, Rowlands, fanning himself with his cap, lounges on two chairs at the entrance and hails the literary man, descending the staircase in a loud, boyish way:

"Hullo, there!"

"Ah, Rowlands. Back from play?"

"Play, sir? It's hard work. Real hard work. That's what it is."

"I am rather anxious, Rowlands, to have your opinion. Can you spare a few minutes?"

"Hours."

"It won't take long. I want to know what you think of Miss Saxby."

"Miss Saxby!" said Rowlands wonderingly.

"You surely haven't forgotten the lady to whom I introduced you this afternoon?"

"Oh, that young person. You don't care for her, do you?"

"I'm surprised," said Andrew. "I should have thought she was just the kind to attract you. To me she seems the most delightful of women folk."

"Perhaps your experience has been limited, Tite."

"I don't know so much about that," answers Andrew Tite knowingly. "I know what they are pretty well. I was just wondering what most girls would say if they were proposed to by a man of position in the world."

"So far as I can judge," said Rowlands, "I should imagine that most girls would say 'Yes'."

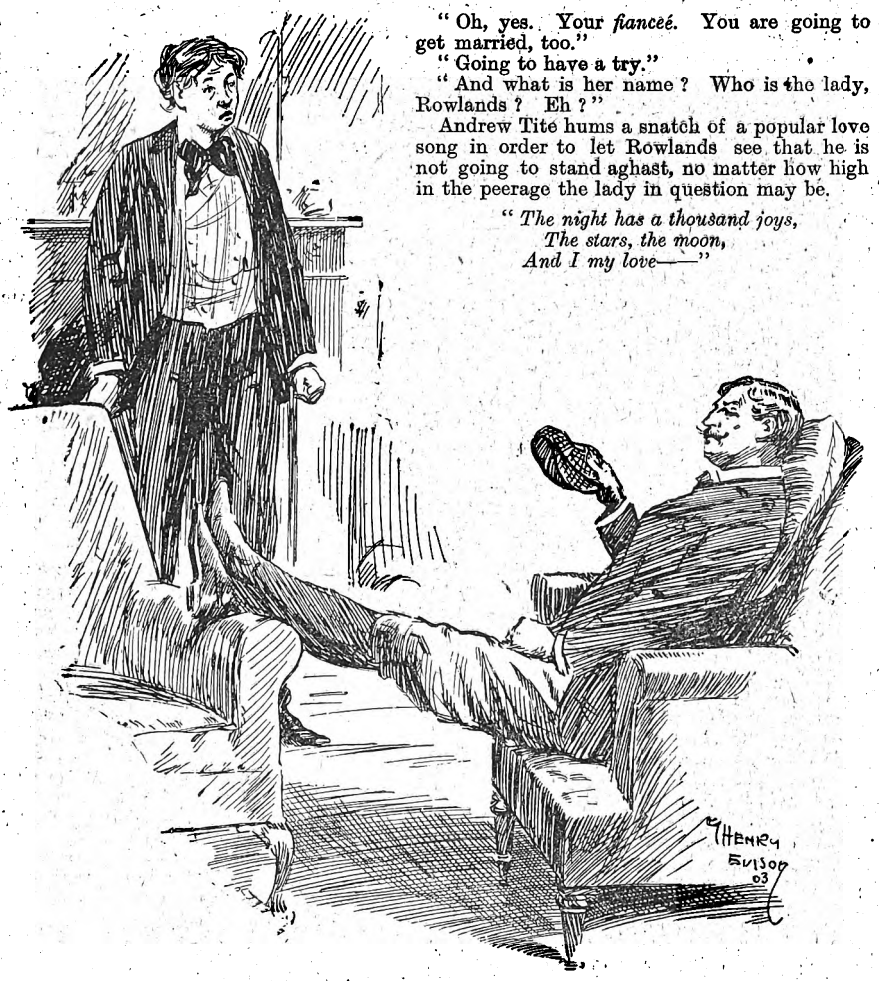
Andrew smiled.

"I don't think there's much doubt about that, Rowlands. It must be a great satisfaction for a girl to make a really good marriage. And, after all, Florence Saxby is a clever girl. Quite above the ordinary."

"I think so."

"Of course," goes on Andrew argumentatively, "all women have certain drawbacks. As I was pointing out this morning, in the case of the average provincial there is with them all that lack of a sense of humour which is so much to be deplored."

"But, Tite, I fancy there are exceptions. For instance, my *fiancée*."



"The name of the lady who is to be my dear wife," said Sir Henry, "is Florence Saxby."

"Oh, yes. Your *fiancée*. You are going to get married, too."

"Going to have a try."

"And what is her name? Who is the lady, Rowlands? Eh?"

Andrew Tite hums a snatch of a popular love song in order to let Rowlands see that he is not going to stand aghast, no matter how high in the peerage the lady in question may be.

"*The night has a thousand joys,*
The stars, the moon,
And I my love——"

"The name of the lady who is going to be my dear wife," mentions Rowlands deliberately, "and to whom I have been engaged for three months, is Miss Florence Saxby."

* * * * *

Mr. Andrew Tite caught the 5.50 p.m. back to town. The infant porter recognised him and his bag, and took charge of both with an air of extreme friendliness. The infant porter, after he had booked three passengers, and had rung a big brass bell, shouldered the bag, and as he stood on the platform by the side of Andrew Tite, waiting for the up-train, essayed to while away the time by amicable talk.

"'Ad enough of it, sir?"

Mr. Tite did not answer; being absorbed in his own thoughts.

"I say, sir." The infant porter tapped him on the arm with the familiarity of a youthful official and nodded towards the village. "I say. 'Ave y'ad enough of it?"

"I have had, my boy," said Andrew Tite gloomily, "just a little too much of it, thank you."

W. Pett Ridge.

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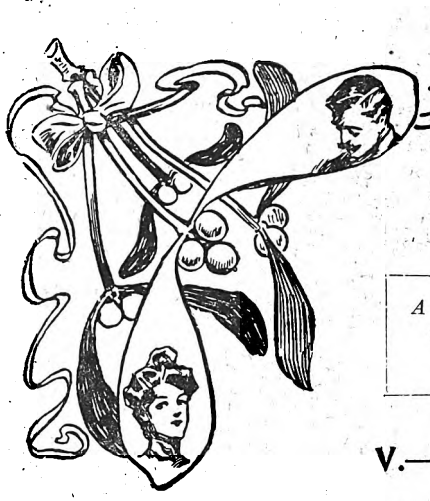

Unsolved Love Problems.

A Prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

V.—THE DUTY OF ROGER FORBES.

It was with a stern look on his handsome face that the young barrister, Roger Forbes, strode up the drive to Mansfield House.

An urgent telegram from his mother had brought him down from town. He knew only too well of late years what the trouble was likely to be, and he braced himself for feeble excuses from his father, and bitter words from his mother.

"Well, mother," he exclaimed, as she came slowly across the handsome drawing-room to meet him, "what is it *this* time?"

"The end," she replied. Mrs. Forbes had been a very handsome woman, but the havoc of mental and bodily suffering had long swept away all traces of beauty, and the hard expression of her face repelled all idea of love.

"What do you mean?" he asked with alarm in his voice.

"Your father, unable to meet his liabilities, has gone off to America or elsewhere, and like a true man and a gentleman, has left us to face what he could not," she said bitterly.

Roger, trained in his mother's school, showed no emotion at this announcement; he only asked:

"Is it *all* gone? Yours and Ellen's too?"

"All," she replied. "Oh, read his letter, and you will see his excuses, 'a sure thing, absolutely certain to succeed, and then he would get it all back and more'—only it didn't. Excuses, yes, plenty of excuses."

Roger took the letter and reading it in silence, handed it back to his mother, who, for once, let her stern self-control be broken down.

"Words—words," she cried fiercely, striking the letter on her open palm with her clenched fist, "all words!"

"Mother," said Roger, touching her gently with his hand, "you have always been just, can you not now be merciful also? Do not be too hard in your judgment of him."

She shook off his hand, she had never been a woman who cared for caresses, and she said in a hard, level voice:

"There is a man in possession now, and everything will have to be sold up by next week."

Roger let a groan escape him as he cried: "Poor Ellen!"

Poor Ellen, indeed! His invalid sister, who, in constant pain, only seemed able to live when surrounded by every comfort that money could buy, how would she bear to be uprooted from the corner where she had spent her life and go to a strange place to live with straitened means?

His mother, he knew, felt the shame the most. Deprivations she could bear and make no complaint, but to be unable to pay all they owed in full, he knew would break her heart.

"Well," he said, after a pause. "What do you propose as the best thing to be done?"

"I have thought it out last night," she replied. "How much have you saved?"

"£500," he replied, with a pang, as he remembered how joyfully he had put by each pound for his approaching marriage.

"Well, I suppose, to save your mother and sister from going to the workhouse, you will give half what you had intended to spend on that foolish child, Daisy Mitcham's comfort, to save the necessary furniture from this wreck, to furnish some rooms for us to live in. Then, I suppose, Ellen must 'take in' plain needle-work, and I must give music-lessons or whatever I can get employment in, to pay for our daily bread."

Roger was too much shocked at this picture, to object to the words in which she clothed it, and indeed he had long grown accustomed to her constant gibes at his *fiancée* and his engagement, for he knew only too well by now that she considered the girl he had chosen to be beneath him, and that she had besides taken a personal dislike to her own since she had seen her shudder at a toad, and heard her confess to being afraid of cows.

The woman, who being always ignored and unconsidered by her husband, had revenged herself by exacting implicit obedience from her children; and that the son of whom she was in her heart so proud, should have set her will at defiance in this important matter, and turned himself resolutely from the bride she had chosen for him, would have caused her to dislike anyone he might choose, and of all the world of women there were no two more likely to misunderstand one another than the girl who was to be his bride and his mother. This had naturally caused an estrangement between mother and son, but knowing what she had to bear, Roger had outwardly shown little sign of what he felt, and had always been willing to come to her assistance as much as he could. Now he said with genuine dismay:

"Oh, mother, you can't. and Ellen can't. Why, some days she is too bad to move a finger."

His mother nodded grimly, with some slight softening of her hard features at the thought of her child's sufferings, but she only quoted: "Needs must when the devil drives."

"Where did you think of living?" he asked thoughtfully.

"I have thought of that too," she replied. "There will be no money to spare for invalid carriages and such luxuries, and it will be too painful and dangerous for Ellen to travel far—we must take some rooms in the village."

"Oh!" he burst out, and then, with a compassionate look at his mother, "However will you bear it?"

"As I have borne other troubles, without a fuss, I hope. I do not think my pride has been indulged much in my married life."

Roger, who knew that the same fall that had stretched his sister on a bed of pain for life, had also given his mother a serious internal disorder, could no longer restrain himself, and he burst forth:

"I cannot allow it. I will spend every penny I have to make you comfortable, and you must both come and live with me, and I will work for all."

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His mother's face almost kindled into a smile, and she half-put out her hand, and then drew it back, saying:

"Think what that will mean before you decide. You could not keep us and a wife as well; your marriage would have to be indefinitely postponed."

Roger sank into a chair, and buried his face in his hands.

"I will say nothing," she continued in a calm, dispassionate voice, "it is entirely for you to decide. A part of your savings to make a shelter for your sister and myself, is all I ask. For the rest, I believe that between us we could make enough to live on. So it must be only of your own free will that your marriage be put off," and she left the room.

Poor Roger! on the one hand his mother and his helpless sister, and on the other, his dear little sweetheart Daisy, and the marriage that was to have taken place in three months.

The next day Roger sat in his chambers endeavouring to forget his troubles in the intricacies of one of the all too few briefs that came his way, when a gentle knock announced a visitor. Looking up, a glad light came into his eyes at the sight of the charming vision before him.

Daisy Mitcham, small, plump, dark, and lovable, with a broad, white forehead, wavy brown hair, exquisitely marked eyebrows, and most distracting dimples, stood smiling before him. "Why, Daisy, I was just going to write to you," he exclaimed, taking her into his eager arms.

"Never mind now," she cried, freeing herself at last and instinctively putting up her hands to straighten her hat. "Here I am in the flesh, and, moreover, I have come to be comforted."

"What! Are you in trouble too?" he cried in dismay.

"Yes, I am, but if you look so terribly downcast, I shall go right away and say nothing at all."

Roger smiled at her tenderly, and she continued:

"I may as well say it right out at once and have done with it. I have been turned out of the Fitzwilliams' at a moment's notice."

"You have? And why?" he cried, with ready indignation.

"Well—oh—well—you mustn't be angry—but—well—George Fitzwilliam is home just now from Woolwich, and he—he—tried to kiss me."

"The dickens he did, the young beast!" cried Roger, striding about the room.

"Now," said she, going to him and putting her arms round him, "don't be so angry, I knew it was coming, and—and—I didn't tell him."

"Yes, but my darling, this is dreadful, why did you not tell me before? And so you gave notice and left at once?"

"No, no," she said, a little sad look coming into her eyes. "We who have to earn our living cannot afford to resent insults. Mrs. Fitzwilliam saw him, and she was very rude to me and told me to go at once—and so here I am." And she ended with a little sob and her head on his shoulder.

With a furious epithet hurled at the whole family of Fitzwilliams, Roger strove to comfort the girl with caresses and promises of protection.

At last a sudden thought came to him, and he said:

"Has this ever happened before, in any family you have been in?"

Hiding her head still more, she murmured: "Yes."

"When? And how often?" he asked, trying to speak calmly.

"Pretty often," she said, sobbing. "It's generally the elder brothers, but its worse when its the—the—the—fathers."

There was a silence, and Daisy, frightened, lifted up her head, only to read such trouble in the eyes she loved, that she dried her pretty brown eyes and turned consoler, but as the thought of her friendless condition came to her again she could not help saying—

"If only I had some relation I could go to till we are married—if only your mother did not so dislike and despise me, and if I were not so afraid of her."

Poor Roger, here was his difficulty increased tenfold.

Should he allow his mother and sister to go into a miserable drudging poverty, or should he send this fair girl out again to earn her living amongst strangers, and be exposed to insult on all sides?

L. Hughes.

Your Editor Chats.

WELL, now you have our Christmas Number in your hands, and I trust that you are wholly satisfied with it. But I am in no trepidation as to that point, for I fancy that the most fastidious person must admit that the matter in this issue is splendid value for the money outlayed in buying it—twopence. For a few seconds glance through it, and see what is the result. There is a splendid new serial starting, hosts of good stories, plenty of pretty illustrations, two interesting competitions, another Unsolved Love Problem, a page of very funny jokes, and a further instalment of that engaging romance, "A Criminal Millionaire." Assuredly, I may say that it is an excellent twopennyworth!

A YEAR ago, in fact, in last year's Christmas number, I started the Love Problems that were so successful. In this number appears the fifth of a new series of Problems which have been even more appreciated by my readers; and, following my custom, I am offering a prize of one guinea to the person who sends in what I consider to be the best solution of the difficulty in which Roger Forbes is placed.

The number of words in your replies must not exceed one hundred, and must be written on one side of the paper only.

The latest day on which I can receive solutions is Monday, the 28th of this month, but replies may come in any time before then. None arriving after then will be considered.

My decision as to the winner will be final. Envelopes should be addressed to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.," and must have "Xmas Love Problem" plainly marked in the top left-hand corner.

IN CONNECTION with the Problem, "The Dilemma of Betty Carteret," I extend my heartiest congratulations to Mrs. Mabel M. Harvey, of 6 Harpers Lane, Guildford Road, Ash, Surrey, for her in every way excellent arguments bearing out her views that Betty Carteret should tell Geoffrey Hilton the state of her sister Kate's love. I have very much pleasure in awarding her the guinea that I offered for what was, in my opinion, the best solution.

I HOPE that you will all enter for the two competitions that are announced on pages 798 and 807.

The Statue Competition affords a splendid opportunity for testing your skill in artistic arrangement, and is of such a nature that it appeals to old and young alike.

I am sure that the Running Riddles Competition will also be one calculated to take your fancy. What more entertaining way to pass one of these long winter evenings could there be than puzzling out suitable answers to the conundrums given. I anticipate that my readers will show great ingenuity in this direction.

You will notice that I am offering as prizes, besides the money awards, cameras and complete camera outfits. These are very handy articles, and the best of results can be obtained from them. Do not miss these opportunities of becoming the fortunate possessor of one of them.

THAT you will all have a happy Christmas and a bright New Year is the last wish of

Your Editor.

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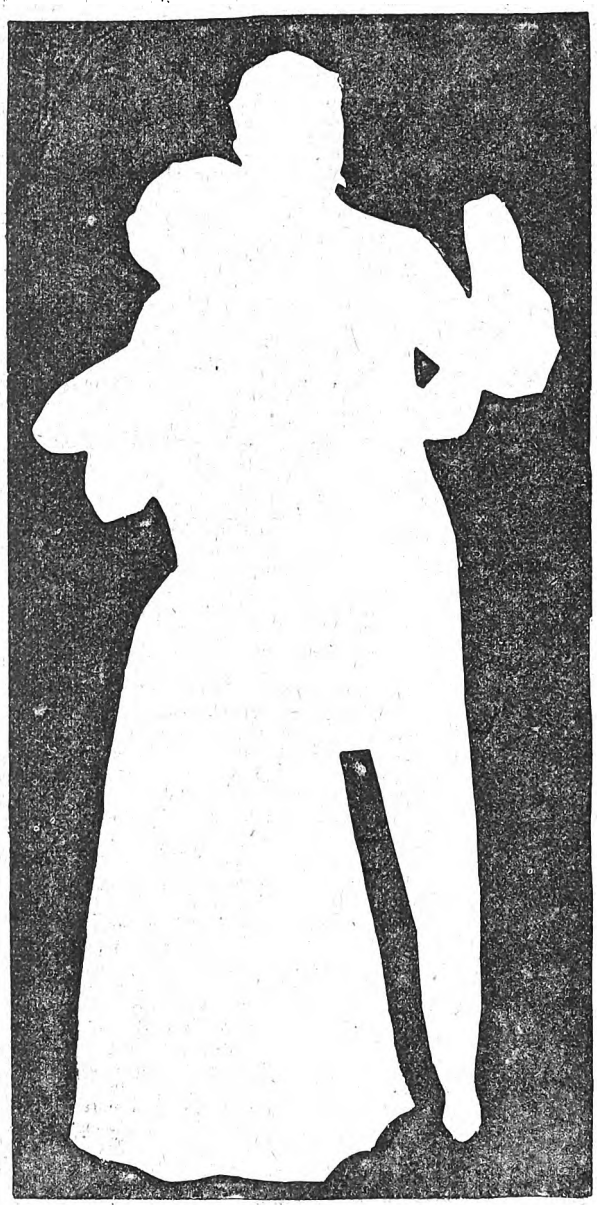
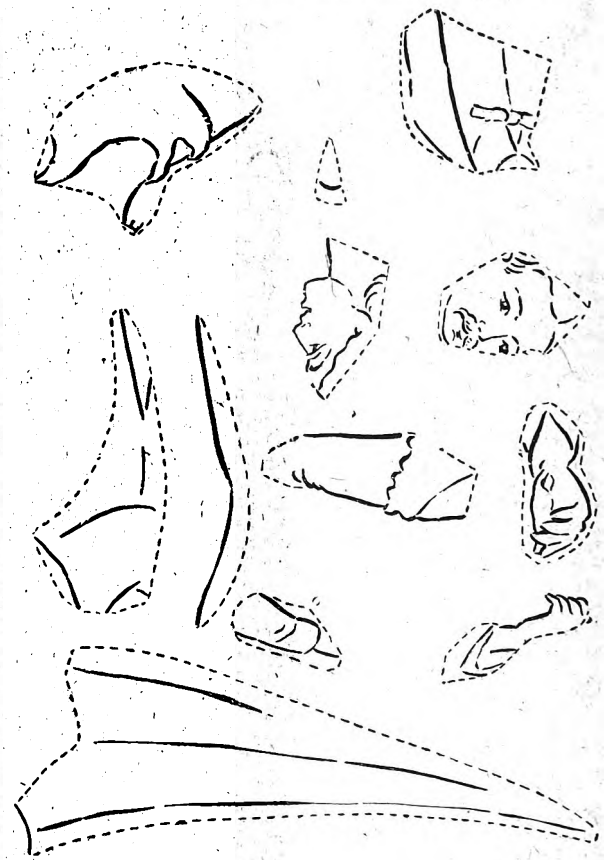
Statue Competition.

At the foot of this page will be found particulars of a very simple and entertaining competition. It will afford a very pleasant method of helping to pass away the time of a long winter evening, and readers should try to get all their friends to enter for it.

The prizes will be one of £2, and five splendid hand cameras, with complete photographic outfit.





WHAT TO DO.

Carefully cut out the twelve pieces above. Place them in the white silhouette so as to complete the picture.

To the readers who send in what the Editor considers to be the most correct and neatest pictures the prizes will be awarded.

The Editor's decision will be final, and competitor's entries will be taken as an acknowledgment of this condition. No correspondence will be entered into on the subject.

Readers may make as many attempts as they like.

All attempts must reach this office not later than Thursday, December 31st. None arriving after that date will be considered.

Address your envelopes: "Statue Competition," The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Name ... .

Address .....

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The Master of Swan Hall.

How a Gallant Gentleman Won His Christmas Bride.

"Who's that coming?"

"That little villain, Phil Dudley," said Pedro moodily. "Hang the fellow! Is he coming here? Can't he stay at home one day in the week, I'd like to know? He's got the old place, and can't he be content and stay there?"

The door dashed open, and his dark face—a spirited, olive-tinted face, which had gained him the nickname of Don Pedro—softened, the "winter of discontent" vanished, and he nodded a greeting to the charming little gentleman in the black frame of the old doorway—a slim youth, in a grey Norfolk suit; a slender aristocrat, with curled red lips, luminous grey eyes; a bold, delicate nose, and a close crop of waving hair, his head stately poised, and a wicked dimple in one rose-and-lily cheek.

"Hallo!" said Pedro, wiping his gun-stock lovingly with his handkerchief while he eyed his visitor.

"Hallo!" responded Mr. Dudley, airily. "Who's your chum, old man? Introduce a fellow, can't you?"

"You've heard of him, Phil," said Pedro, laughing. "It's Tom Burgoyne, lawyer and—ahem!—lover. Madge's fate, you know. Hallo! What's the matter with you? Where's your backbone gone?"

Phil gathered himself up from the door-post, and put out a slim hand to the brown-bearded, brown-eyed young man, with the pleasant smile, who rose from the edge of the table to greet him.

His face was white, and the hand the lawyer clasped icy and trembling.

"I have heard of you from Madge," he almost gasped. "I am delighted to see you, Mr. Burgoyne."

"Won't you stay and have a cigar, Phil?" asked Pedro.

"No; I—I—— Where's Madge, Pedro? I came over to see her."

"Well, you'll find her in the kitchen, preparing a sacrifice of baked meats in honour of Tom here," said Pedro kindly. "She'll be awfully glad to see you, I dare say."

"I dare say," said Mr. Dudley, with an attempt at airy nonchalance under the observant legal eyes smiling at him. "Madge generally is glad to see a fellow. Well, I'm off."

"How did you come over?"

"I came on my bike," said Mr. Dudley coolly. "The governor goes frantic when he sees me perched on it, so I tried how close to the edge of the cliffs I could keep it all the way from the Hall here. He could see me from his window, and I hope he liked it, that's all. Good-bye, gentlemen."

"It's 'Good-bye' to some purpose," said Pedro, as he vanished, leaving an odour of violets behind him. "He half lives here. Don't set up the Othello business, Tom, but he is up to his pink ears in love with Madge—poor little cub!"

Burgoyne laughed—a mellow laugh, with a ring of truth in its manly music.

"And Madge?"

"Madge is very fond of him," said Pedro, staring down his beloved gun-barrel, "and so am I. His governor is a polished old beast, a bloodless tyrant, with etiquette for a heart, and Phil's poor little neck is under his elegant foot. He's a small dare-devil is Phil, but I've seen him lie a long hour with his head rolled up in Madge's flounces and frills, crying like a baby, after some shindy with old Dudley. He's very reticent, though, about domestic affairs. I tell you, your sudden appearance has cut him up. Don't notice his ways, old fellow; he's only a boy—nineteen next Christmas."

"He may weep on Madge's muslins as long as he likes," said the lawyer, laughing. "I'm not given to jealousy. And so you don't like his father? Well, that's natural under the circumstances."

Pedro groaned, and then laughed.

"Yes, you see poor old Cousin Tom Dudley rather sold me. He had disowned his only child, Phil's governor, years ago for very excellent reasons, and he adopted and educated Madge and me as his co-heirs. That was lovely; but when he died a year ago, his will left all his great

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wealth to us, with this proviso—that if his son, Courtney Dudley, had a living son, that son was to be heir. Well, Courtney Dudley was advertised for and turned up nine months ago from somewhere in Spain, with a son, Phil, and Madge and I took thankful possession of our legal crumbs—this old cottage and twenty thousand pounds divided between us. Courtney Dudley reigns at Swan Hall until Phil's majority. Come, old chap, if we're to have a shot at anything, suppose we start?"

"Pedro bears his disappointment with lots of pluck," thought Burgoyne. "And so young Dudley is in love with my royal Madge—it looks rather that way, I must admit."

"His royal Madge" was dusting the dainty little drawing-room, assisted by Mr. Phil Dudley, who was very pale about the lips, and very large and dark and pathetic as to the grey eyes, and while Pedro went to call the dogs, Burgoyne stood looking at them curiously from the narrow hall.

"Royal Madge" was certainly a lovely girl, very like Pedro, dark, glowing, magnetic, with two kindly brown suns under her sweet broad brows, and a lithe, slim, soft, strong figure, pliable as a willow, and at present draped in soft, flowing, woollen drapery of a deep red.

"Phil," said the richest and most sympathetic of voices, "if you stand so close to my elbow, I'll end by smashing this vase and my heart with it. It's Tom's last present, you know."

Burgoyne's trained, observant eyes flashed, for, with an almost imperceptible gesture, the boy brushed against the lifted arm wielding the feather duster, and, with a crash, the gorgeous bit of china lay on the carpet in fifty fragments, and Burgoyne turned away without having been observed, his lips set, the thin upper one curled a little, lawyer-like.

* * * * *

The next day a groom brought an invitation to dinner from Swan Hall to the cottage.

These civilities were frequently exchanged, for Courtney Dudley found his brilliant, accomplished, young cousins very entertaining from many points of view, and for Phil's sake they were cordial to his father.

"Mr. Burgoyne, your friend, of whom I have heard so often," was included courteously in the informal invitation, and the crisp, golden September sunset, with its grand, patient moon waiting whitely to shine on her throne, and hints of stars in the sky, found them walking up the solemn avenue to the fine old stone house, with angels' heads on its spouts, oriel windows for the sunrise, bay windows for the sunset, mellow stained-glass windows for the cold north, and conservatory roofs glittering on the south—phalanxes of really ancient trees, like groups of kings in coronation robes of September glory, and what gave the place its name—a long, narrow artificial lake white with swans, lying close under the drawing-room windows.

"Prepare for a very dandified lord of Swan Hall," said Pedro to Burgoyne. "Phil looks splendid in evening dress. Ask Madge!"

"Phil is unlike other young men," said Madge, with a rather troubled look, "and if Tom watches him he will see what I mean. Poor Phil!"

"Rats in his garret, Tom," said Pedro concisely—"a decided crack in his noddle. I rather imagine that's the true inwardness of his governor not sending him to college."

"Hush, here he is!" said Madge hastily.

He bounded down the six stone steps in a flying leap, landing before Madge, a jewelled hand on each of her pretty shoulders, the last of the solemn sunset on his spirited, beautiful face, and Pedro winked at Tom with open amusement.

A figure stood before them as nearly as could be approached in a knickerbocker suit of pale-blue velvet, with collar and cuffs of white satin, brocaded with delicate pink roses. Lace adorned his bosom, and fell over his slim hands, diamond studs flashed from the lace, and his exceedingly elegant legs were dreams of beauty in pink silk stockings, while diamond buckles sparkled on his arched insteps. He was simply radiant, but a little penitential.

"Am I forgiven about the vase?" he asked, archly. "I did not venture down to-day in dread of a scolding. I say, Madge, kiss and be friends—won't you, dearest and loveliest? I'll be more careful of your china next time."

He darted a swift, piercing look at Burgoyne, who was staring in open astonishment at the picturesque young gentleman on whom Madge was bestowing a comfortable, sisterly kiss of pardon.

"Come in, boys," he said vivaciously, as he gave Madge his arm, "the governor is in the drawing-room. Madge will go and placate him—he's in a temper—and you fellows come to the billiard-room. The new table came to-day, Pedro, and I want you to see it. It's a beauty."

He whisked Madge's fleecy white wrap off in the hall, flung it to the footman, and led her—a lovely figure in shining, beautiful, pink silk—to the drawing-room door and pushed her in gently.

"Here's Madge, governor," he shouted. "Come out of the blues and entertain her. She's awfully stunning this evening."

He came back, whistling until the grand carved oak ceiling rang.

"He doesn't care for a woman unless she's a beauty or a wit," he said. "Now, I'm more catholic—I like them all, eh, Pedro?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Pedro, laughing. "Madge is the one woman I love at present. I suppose my time will come, however, monsieur."

"Stave it off," said Mr. Phil Dudley, with solemnity, "as I do. 'Merry and free is a bachelor's revelry' when a fellow can't get Madge, that is—— Beg pardon, Mr. Burgoyne. Don't look so serious; though you *are* my successful rival, you need fear no poisoned daggers or unwholesome *entrées* at Swan Hall, I assure you.

"Get out, you little scamp," said Pedro. "What a volley of folly! Don't mind him, Tom."

The moon was shining in at them through a solemn arched window as they crossed a corridor to the billiard-room.

A polished cuirass hung directly in its beams, and, mirror-like, caught Tom's eyes. He half-paused, and then swung square round in time to catch Mr. Phil Dudley, who was swaying like a slender tree, his face white as the moon outside.

He placed him on the cushioned window-sill.

"Get wine—water—anything! He has fainted," he said quickly, and Pedro rushed away like a whirlwind.

Phil's eyes opened. He sighed heavily, muttered something to himself in Spanish, and sprang to his feet with a sharp cry, changing to a laugh as he met Burgoyne's eyes. The lawyer stood looking at him in the moonlight with strange intentness.

"I'm subject to these attacks," said Phil, pluckily keeping on his feet. "A dickens of a bore, isn't it, for a fellow as fond of adventure by flood and field as I am? Come, let's go back to Madge; we can see the table afterwards, and christen it with champagne—the dad has got a brand fit for the gods. Where's Pedro? Ran for smelling-salts, I suppose. Hallo! Give me your arm, Burgoyne; I'm shaky yet."

The lawyer silently passed his arm round the lad, and Phil leant against the strong frame quietly for a moment, sighing heavily, evidently sick and faint almost to death. At Pedro's step, ringing along the corridor, he released himself and looked admiringly at Tom.

"I wish I had your stamina, old fellow," he said, sighing; "but any I had is vanishing into thin air. I'm not half the fellow I was six months ago. I'm getting done up. The dad's cantankerous, and there isn't a girl except Madge to flirt with in the neighbourhood. When I'm dead put 'Died of the blues' on my funereal urn. See here, you're not going to take Madge away directly, are you?"

"Next month—next week—if I can induce her to come then," said the lawyer, briefly and coldly.

Phil lifted his rival's sinewy hand, and pressed his lips on it.

"You and she will be very happy," he whispered, tremulously. "In the wide world there is not another like Madge."

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"Thank you," said the lawyer, not unkindly. "Shall we go to the drawing-room? Here's Pedro."

In the drawing-room Mr. Dudley welcomed them with admirable polish—a lean, elderly man, with a hooked chin and quiet eyes, like grey stones under drooping lids—whom Phil treated with an odd mixture of impertinence and terror.

The evening passed brilliantly, though more than once Madge wondered what made Burgoyne so very silent.

Phil was in wild spirits, and Pedro's brow was clouded as the three walked back to the cottage in the misty, midnight moonlight.

"I'm afraid Phil is ill in mind and body," he said sadly. "There's a screw loose about the boy. He's as cracked as rare old china. No one can fail to see it."

"I fail to see it," said the lawyer, rather curtly.

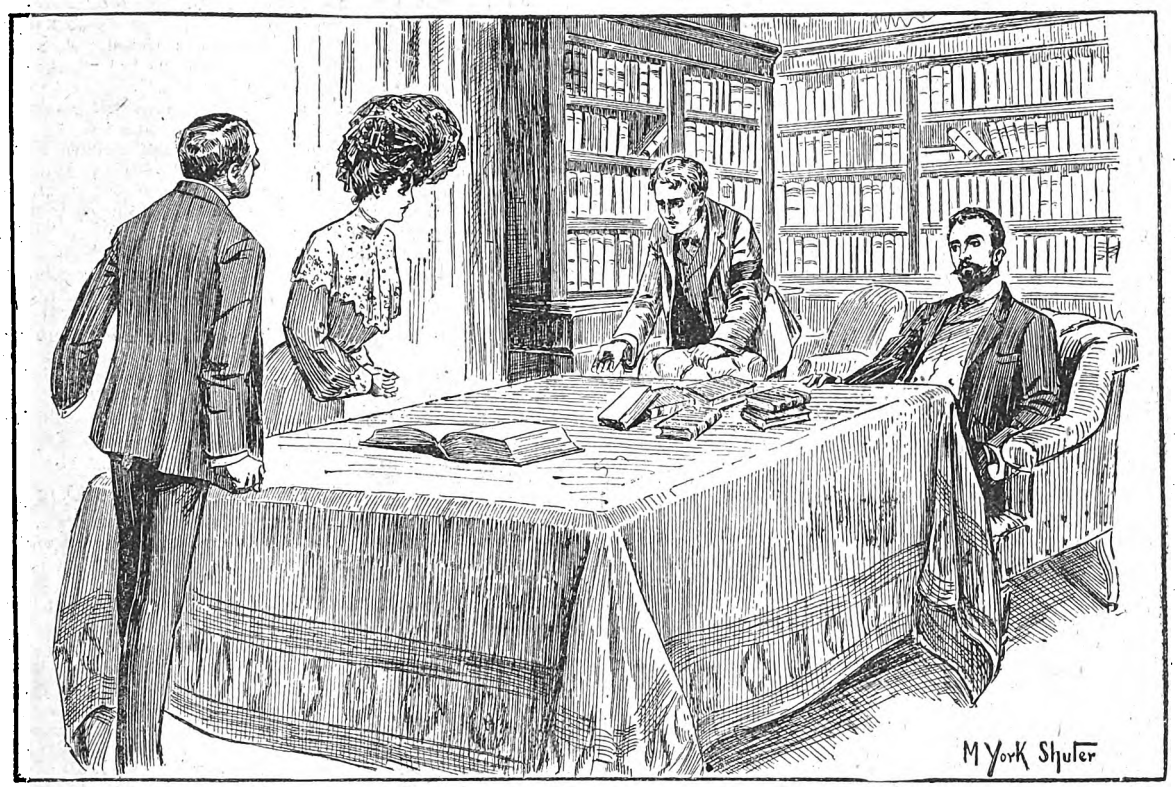
Burgoyne said no more; but early in the dawn he was still sitting in his vine-clad window, smoking and thinking.

At last he laid down his pipe and rose wearily.

"Two years to his majority," he said to himself, summing up the case finally. "There is not much lost by letting things alone until then. He may die in the interim, and Pedro and Madge get their own smoothly and without scandal; and if not—well, I shall know how to act when the time comes. Poor little Phil! poor little Phil!"

He gathered up a heap of documents which he had evidently been examining with great interest and care, replaced them in their envelopes and locked them into his bag, his face still dark and troubled.

"I wish I might confide in Madge," he thought. "But I can't—at least, until we are married. She shall decide the question then. My true woman! my royal Madge! Poor little Phil!"



"I sent for you and your sister," said Phil, "to say that I am *not* Dudley Courtney's son!"

"Oh, don't come medical jurisprudence over us!" said Pedro sourly. "I know him better than you do, and I say he's ill and cracked, by Jove!"

"His state seems to affect you profoundly, old boy," said Burgoyne, with a level look at Pedro's frank, handsome, dark face, bright in the moonlight.

"Pedro is as nervous about Phil as a hen with a solitary chicken," said Madge, with her soft, happy laugh; "and so am I. We love him dearly, Tom."

"Happy Phil!" said Burgoyne. "By-the-way, if he should die before his majority?"

"We are his heirs," said Pedro, "according to the will. I wish it were not so. To connect our gain with Phil's death seems unbearable. You don't know what a loving, generous, reckless, noble little scamp he is, Tom; but we—Madge and I—do."

But the question was decided before that.

* * * * *

"Apoplexy," was the verdict.

"A good riddance," thought Burgoyne, even as he and Pedro stood looking down at the hooked chin and mean, meagre head, still and heavy as a stone, on its satin pillow in the rosewood coffin.

Courtney Dudley had died alone in the night, even while Burgoyne had sat and smoked and read his documents in the moonlight; and now, after the funeral, Phil sent for them.

He had shut himself up since the death, refusing to see even Madge.

He had not appeared at the grave. He was ill, the servants reported, and Pedro and Madge were in despair, which, how-

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ever, lightened as they heard his light step crossing the stone floor of the hall to the library, where they and Burgoyne waited.

The door opened and the master of Swan Hall came in.

Pedro, nearest the door, strode to meet him. Burgoyne rose, and Madge sprang towards Phil, only to pause in amazement and utter dismay at the change in his appearance.

"Oh, Phil, Phil!" she said, in great compassion, and would have clasped his neck, but he recoiled sharply with a peculiar moan of intense agony, and dashing aside Pedro's strong brown hand, glided to the opposite side of the table, where he stood holding to a chair-back and trembling like a reed.

He was a mere ghastly shadow of the radiant little gentleman Burgoyne had first seen five days before. He was dressed in his usual dark grey Norfolk suit, with a crêpe badge on his arm; the dilated, luminous eyes were fixed and glaring, the oval cheeks hollow, the mouth set in fierce agony.

Burgoyne quietly took a chair so close to him that he could touch him without rising.

Madge again tried to approach him, but he waved her off. Pedro stood staring in blank amazement.

"Phil," he said, tremulously, "dear old fellow, what's this? Don't you know how Madge and I love you? And yet you repel us in this way, and, by Jove, I never thought you cared so much about your governor as all this."

Phil's hand went to his heart, and he dropped his stately golden head heavily on the back of the chair, then lifted it wildly, staring straight at Pedro.

"I sent for you and your sister," he gasped, "to say this to you—*I am not Dudley Courtney's son!* He had me in his power and forced me into the imposture. Phil Dudley died in Spain."

"Two years ago," added Burgoyne quietly, "in a village in the Spanish Pyrenees, and was buried there by the village priest, Father Antonio Baltro. I know all the details, Pedro. I have all my documents in this wallet. I stumbled against the truth in the tour of Spain from which I have just returned. You and Madge are the owners of Swan Hall. 'Phil,' as you call him, is——"

But with a cry, impossible to dscribe in its horror and intensity, the wretched lad fell at Burgoyne's feet, clasping his knees frantically.

"Oh, Heaven, not to Pedro and Madge! I have confessed all they need know. Oh, Mr. Burgoyne, I felt from the first that I must dread you. I am going away; they will never see me again. I have left a written confession with Pedro's lawyer—of all that is necessary. Let me go without telling them more."

Burgoyne turned his piercing eyes on Pedro, who, livid and breathless, was gazing at the figure writhing in anguish at the lawyer's feet.

"How shall it be, Pedro?" he asked. "It is for you to decide, and Madge."

He smiled. For Madge had already decided. White with horror and amazement, pity and love, she sprang forward and threw her soft, strong arms round the impostor's neck.

"Phil, Phil!" she cried. "I can't learn to unlove in a moment. Oh, my poor little Phil, I don't care what you may have been or done. I don't wish to hear. You shall be as dear as ever to me, indeed you shall, and to Pedro, and stay with us. Pedro, Pedro, tell him so."

Burgoyne drew back with a faint laugh. Pedro had taken Phil bodily from Madge, and was hugging the usurper of his rights cordially.

"You little scoundrel!" he said huskily. "So you were the tool of that courtly old ruffian, were you? And perhaps a pick-pocket beforehand? Well, never mind, old boy, you shall have a chance to be a credit to the name yet. Phil Dudley you are, and Phil Dudley you shall remain, that's fixed as fate. I'm like Madge. I can't learn to unlove, as she says, and now, Tom, when you've done grinning, put your legal brain to work, and help us out of the difficulty. I won't have Phil disgraced, not for twenty Swan Halls—by Jove, I won't! I don't care what he did to leave himself in Courtney Dudley's power. He's naturally an honest fellow and a true gentleman—as good a little rascal as ever breathed."

Pedro made a magnificent and knightly champion, his handsome dark eyes flashing, his chest well thrown out, and one large, long arm round the boyish culprit, but Phil burst from him and rushed to Burgoyne.

"Make them let me go," he whispered, "or I'll kill myself—I swear I will!"

Burgoyne put a heavy hand on the grey shoulder.

"And I swear," he whispered sternly, "to tell the truth on the spot, here to Pedro, in your presence, if you don't obey me. You will not be permitted to rush to ruin, Mr. Phil Dudley, allow me to assure you."

Phil's eyes flashed fire. The library window stood open, and tearing himself from Burgoyne's hand, he sprang on the sill.

Below glimmered the Swans' pool, and before either man could rush forward and prevent him, the light figure shot into the air and alighted magnificently on the opposite slope of green turf.

He reeled, recovered himself, and without one backward glance at the three white faces at the ivy-framed window, fled like the wind across lawn and slope, fled and vanished.

Late that night, as the train thundered into the station, Mr. Phil Dudley crept dejectedly out of the truck — a cattle-truck —in which he had stolen a trip to the city in the uncongenial society of a flock of sheep—and rubbing his dim eyes, looked up—into Burgoyne's face.

"You have had an agreeable trip, sir," said the lawyer grimly. "I trust you found your travelling companions entertaining. I *thought* I should find you on this train, Mr. Dudley."

Phil leant heavily against a hideous bale of rags awaiting shipment.

"Did—did you tell them—tell Pedro?" he gasped.

"No, sir, I did not. Come this way, if you please."

He led his captive to the telegraph-office and dispatched a curt message:

"*Have found Phil all right. Will write to-morrow.*"

"Now, sir," he remarked drily, "you will come home with me, if you are not afraid to trust yourself with your rival. I believe I have the honour of occupying that position towards you, Mr. Dudley. Much obliged for the honour you do Madge, I'm sure."

Phil hung his head, lifted it royally, and made a last spirited dash for liberty.

He wrenched himself from the kind, compelling hand, and fled into the very thick of the vehicles roaring down the gas-lit street.

Burgoyne plunged after him—a little fierce in the chase—and a policeman headed off the fugitive, who turned sideways, and the next moment was lying in the dust under the wheels of a passing vehicle.

He opened his eyes eagerly as Burgoyne bent over him, and smiled happily.

"It is all over," he whispered, gaily. "I'm smashed to atoms. Swear you'll never tell Pedro—swear, swear!"

"I swear I won't," said Burgoyne, hoarsely. "Poor little Phil!"

Phil smiled contentedly, settling into death.

"He said he loved me—give him my pearl ring—on my finger—and tell him I loved him. Good Heavens! so much!"

* * * * *

"As Phil declines to see me, I have nothing more to say," wrote Pedro, two months later. "I hope he will be more reasonable when I return from America. I am hurt and offended, by Jove! and can't see why I'm treated so scurvily in this affair.

"Tell him I won't mention his name again until he says he's ashamed of treating me in this style.

"I have made over half my share of the Swan Hall property to him. I don't know a little fellow worthier of good luck than Phil, and if he should remain crippled, he will need all the cash he can get to make life endurable.

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"You and Madge will do the best you can to make him happy, I know that; but I'm going away sad at the reflection that while Madge married you at two hours' notice in order to rush off and nurse his highness, I have been ignored, set aside, snubbed and sat upon. 'Don't come; Phil won't see you,' writes Madge in her last. Well, I won't, having a little spirit left; but tell my little Phil his place in my heart is as well aired as ever, and that his past is less than nothing to me, whatever it may have been. I am certain he was more sinned against than sinning. Be sure and tell him that!"

And so generous Pedro went his sunny way, to wander in the New World, and Phil's eyes grew greyer, larger, deeper, as they followed him in spirit from place to place.

* * * * *

"Hullo, Tim, Hullo!"

"'Tain't never! Well, this is good. So you're back, Pedro Dudley! Well, this *is* good."

"Yes, I'm back, Tim. I'm bound for Swan Hall to-night. Mr. and Mrs. Burgoyne are there; but they don't expect me till next week. How are all at Swanville?"

"All well," said Tim concisely; he was Pedro's foster-brother. "Want a ride on the engine, like old times, I s'pose. It's a nasty night, though, Pedro."

"Oh, it's all right. I've come back as tough as ever. So here we are, homeward bound."

"It'll be a terrible ride! We're overdue an hour, and the mail is tearing after us—best go as an ordinary passenger, Pedro. Well, if you won't, you won't; so jump on. I fancy she'll do sixty miles in the next hour. We've got a clear track ahead—Heaven be praised for it."

Pedro's quick blood boiled with excitement as the train thundered through the windy moonlight of the December night.

The engine fairly leapt along the track, and the noise was indescribable as its iron pulses beat, and its giant breast hurled itself against the wind.

Tim stood to his work silently, a little grim as he felt the monster bounding under him, but enjoying the danger he was able to control, and Pedro smoked and stared ahead through the glass of the "cab," and pictured Madge's joyous welcome, Tom's hearty handclasp, and Phil's shamefaced delight—poor little Phil, dear little Phil, who had felt his disgrace so keenly that he would not even write a line to him during the two long years of absence.

Pedro smiled at these pleasant visions of home, sweet home.

On one side rose fields white and ghastly in the moonlight; on the other, a wood, black and bare, the boughs clattering in the fierce gusts.

"Down grade!" roared Tim. "We're waltzin', that we are!"

The next moment they thundered round a curve.

The fierce shriek of the engine gave its alarm, and "Down brakes!" rang out, while the burnished giant fairly bounded, maddened by an attempt to control its headlong rush.

Ten seconds—a minute, two—of Titanic struggle between man and machinery, and the engine quivered into stillness, conquered, and lamenting its defeat with wild outcries from its brazen throat.

"So the darned old bridge is bust," said Tim, in an easy, conversational tone. "I say, Mr. Pedro, look ahead!"

Pedro *was* looking ahead, and so were the other six hundred passengers who had so nearly continued their journey by another route and to another destination.

There was a moment's dead silence in the crowd, which had flocked from the train, and then a vocal thunder beat the air into quick pulses, as cheer after cheer burst from six hundred throats.

The bridge had been swept out of existence, except one gaunt beam projecting from the opposite bank to about the middle of the stream.

On the extreme end of this timber, which shuddered as the water bellowed against it, stood a slight figure in mists of white drapery, which almost seemed a part of the flying foam nearly shrouding the airy form.

She held aloft a carriage-lamp, and its light smote actual flames from her neck and arms as it struck on the jewels binding them.

Her position was one of terrible danger; and on the bank behind was visible a brougham, its driver wringing his hands in terror as he strode up and down, watching her.

There was a sudden blank of silence. She had saved them! Would she perish in the teeth of that hungry torrent?

No. She retraced her steps in safety, and, just as her foot touched the earth, the beam parted, rose erect in the whirlpool, plunged and vanished.

She sprang into the brougham, and while renewed cheers followed her, the carriage dashed away, and the heroine who had saved six hundred disappeared.

* * * * *

"And now for Phil," said Pedro, an hour later, when he had related his adventures to Madge and Tom, and sung songs to the heroine of the bridge.

Madge looked at some distant satin and lace curtains over a bay-window.

"Phil is there—ran and hid when you came striding in so unexpectedly."

"Little donkey!" said Pedro, in high good humour.

"Phil, you rascal, come out; or must I pull you?" he said.

He put in a large, strong hand, groped for masculine broadcloth, and drew back with a very scared face, his fingers full of wet tulle, and in the wet tulle a slim, tall, crocus-haired young beauty, with a white, quivering face, and solemn violet eyes, who plucked herself from his limp grasp, and rushed into Madge's comfortable and beauteous arms.

"Tom," said Mrs. Burgoyne severely, "it is really enough for Phil to have lost her Christmas Eve party at the Blessington's, where she was going when she saw the disaster to the bridge, and to come home drenched to the skin without *your* heartless grins, Pedro. This is the heroine of the bridge, also Philla Dudley, twin-sister of the real Phil, who died three years ago in Spain. This is Philla, whom her father forced by threatening his life and his own to personate the dead boy.

"She put off telling you this, she was dreadfully ashamed of what was really no crime of hers, and made no promise to remain silent until you would come home. Phil Dudley is supposed to have died in London, and no one is mystified by our loving his twin-sister, who is supposed to have been at school in Spain, very, very dearly. Phil and Philla were never parted until he died, and all Phil knew, Philla, the little wild thing, was taught, from smoking mild cigarettes to playing billiards."

* * * * *

"But you *said* you loved me—Tom told me *that*," said Pedro, the very next evening, while Madge sang Christmas carols to her harp, and Tom discreetly turned over her music, ignoring the pair in the distant bay.

"That—that was when I was a—boy, and I thought I was killed and it couldn't matter," protested Philla; "and it was very unkind of Tom to tell you, when he knew I was going to live—very unkind."

But the silent eloquence of the tiny pearl ring in Pedro's brown palm, the peculiar, steady, ardent flame in his brown eyes as he looked at her in the moonlight, broke down her little bit of defence.

She shook her delicate, stately head shyly.

"Couldn't you wait, and ask me again next year, if you *really* continue to—to feel this way?" she asked tentatively. "I am afraid you may grow sorry—it's too sudden. Ask me next Christmas Day, Pedro."

This, of course, was surrender, and the next minute she was crying softly in his arms.

"Poor papa!" she said, "I hope he knows that his crime has not darkened my life. Pedro, it was not my fault, it was not. It nearly killed me, indeed it did."

"My precious Philla!" said Pedro, "I'm quite willing to hope, however faintly, that your admirable father is tolerably comfortably situated in the Elysian Fields, for, but for his rascality I never should have met my dear little Phil, nor won My Christmas Love!"

Isabella Crawford.

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That Would Cure Her.

"I suppose," remarked Miss Centimentle, "that since Mr. Bravely saved her life, she will think of him as her hero all the rest of her life?" "Oh, no," replied Mr. Practical, "she married him last week."

A Monotonous Pastime.

"Do you care for fairy stories, Angeline?" "No, Beatrice, no. I've been engaged six times."

Rather Unkind.

"What do you think of Charlie's proposing to me when he hasn't known me a week?" "I think that's the reason."

A Statement of Fact.

Mrs. Peckem: "I wonder if a man ever does get too old to marry." Peckem: "Of course not. Age doesn't always bring wisdom."

The Utterly Unutterable.

He: "I love you, darling, more than words can utter." She: "Utter them just the same, Harry. I like to hear as much as I can."

A Good Squeezer.

Mildred: "I believe Jack Scribley is a member of the Press Club." Millicent: "He must be, to judge by his actions with Mabel in the conservatory last evening."

She was not Giving Herself Away.

Nopurse: "I proposed to Miss Manymillions on Christmas Eve." Gotbills: "Shall I congratulate you?" Nopurse: "I don't know. She told me she wasn't Santa Claus; and that's all she said."

Very Nasty.

"I have such an indulgent husband," said little Mrs. Doll. "Yes, so George says," responded Mrs. Spiteful, quietly. "Sometimes he indulges too much, doesn't he?" They no longer speak to each other.

Can't Get at It.

Annie: "It's a dreadfully cold day, Claude, so you must put on your big coat. I suppose it is hanging where you put it last week?" Claude: "Yes, dear, it is all right and safe; but I have lost the ticket, so I can't get it."

He Was Disappointed.

She laid her cheek on the easy chair against his head, and murmured, "How I do love to rest my head against your head, Augustus!" "Do you?" said he. "Is it because you love me?" "No, because it is so nice and soft."

Did She Get Her Johnet?

Mrs. Phoxy: "I was helping Mrs. de Style to put her winter things away to-day. Oh, she has the loveliest seal johnet possible." Mr. Phoxy: "What? What do you mean by 'johnet,'?" Mrs. Phoxy: "Of course, how silly of me; but then, dear, I'm not familiar enough with one myself to call it a 'jacket.'"

The Little Games they Play.

Young Wife: "What are you going to give your husband for a Christmas present?" Old Matron: "A hundred cigars." Young Wife: "And may I ask what you paid for them?" Old Matron: "Oh, nothing! For the last few months I've taken one or two out of Henry's box every day. He hasn't noticed it, and he'll be so pleased with my little present and the fine quality of the cigars."

A Natural Question.

Mrs. Fowler: "How do you like my new hat?" Mr. Fowler: "What did it cost?"

Very Likely the Case.

She: "Did you say anything to papa about your being too young?" He: "Yes, but he said when I once began to pay your bills I should age rapidly enough."

Where the Rub Comes In.

Ethel: "I think I'd get married, too, if I could find a man I could live with." Carrie: "That isn't so hard, the trouble is to get a man you can't live without."

They're Awfully Good—Really!

Belle: "Would you allow a man to kiss you?" Maude: "Um—well, I think it is our duty to—er—make allowances for the weakness of mankind, you know."

The Way Women Have.

"I wonder why a woman never gives her husband the kind of Christmas present he wants?" "Because she doesn't try to! She gives him the present he ought to want."

And then She Kissed Him.

Wife: "Oh, John, I was shopping at Joblotz's to-day, and I saw the sweetest thing there." Husband: (diplomatically): "Yes, that's a great scheme of Joblotz's to have mirrors all over his shop."

It would be Costly.

Ethel: "I—er—suppose you know next week is Christmas—don't you, Charley?" Charley: "Why, of course I do! Why do you ask?" Ethel: "Why, you look so happy I thought you'd forgotten it!"

An Ambiguous Compliment.

Maud: "I wish I knew whether I ought to feel grateful to Mr. Gaboy or to be angry at him." Irene: "Why?" Maud: "He told me yesterday he didn't know which he most admired—my sparkling eye or my blooming cheek."

Mr. Jones was a Bit of a Flirt.

Blanche: "Did you make any conquests this summer?" Lilian: "Oh, yes, Mr. Jones proposed the day before we came away." Blanche: "Doesn't he pop the question in the most awkward manner imaginable?" They meet now as strangers.

Mistletoe not Necessary.

Doris: "Did you have a mistletoe bough in your house?" Phyllis: "No, I had one ready, but I forgot to put it up." Doris: "Of all things! Forgot it?" Phyllis: "Yes, you see Tom and I somehow or other became engaged the day before."

Would She Marry Him?

"I've thought of a capital *nom de plume*," said Henry, who sometimes writes for the newspapers. "What is it?" asked Henrietta. "'Will U. Marrimee.'" "Why, of course I will, you goose!" she answered. "Is that what you have been trying to say so long?"

How He Did It.

Old Gentleman (to a very rich old lady at a party): "Who is that handsome young man standing over there?" Old Lady: "That's my son-in-law. He's a very brilliant young man—made a large fortune by the law." Old Gentleman: "Indeed! How's that?" Old Lady: "The law made him my daughter's husband."

An Encouraging Sign.

"I'll tell you a great secret, but you must promise not to give it away." "Of course not." "I believe Miss Birdie M'Ginnis is gone on me. I've almost made up my mind to pop the question." "What did she say to you?" "She didn't say anything to me precisely, but on Tuesday she patted my dog on the head. Isn't that an encouraging sign?" "Yes, that's the next thing to patting you on the head. Your turn will come next."

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ROBINSON'S CHRISTMAS DINNER.

A Tale of a Wager.

"NONSENSE!" cried Jones. "If you made your face into a regular hedge-row of whiskers, I should recognise your voice at the first word you spoke It is only natural when I've known you so long."

"I don't think so," replied Robinson; "but, look here, to-day is the 21st. I'll come to eat my Christmas dinner in your dining-room on the 25th and you won't know me; I'll bet you a new hat you don't recognise me."

"Right! By the bye, we dine at 7.30 on Christmas Day."

"I don't promise to be there exactly at that time," said Robinson, "but somewhere between seven and ten o'clock."

* * * * *

Punctually at half-past seven, an assorted lot of Joneses—pa, ma, and six others—sat down to a good old English dinner of roast turkey and sausages, to be followed by wedges of plum pudding and mince pies *ad indigestib.* For five minutes pa Jones slashed and prodded the poor bird, thrust him in several places, and at last left him without "a wing to stand on or a leg to fly with," as the pathetic Irishman said.

Just as he was nearing the end of his task and his patience, there came a brisk rat-tat at the front door. A grim look appeared in the carver's eye as he absent-mindedly dropped a wing of the turkey into the potato dish.

"The Doctor and a gentlemen to see you, sir," said the cook—the housemaid, by the bye, was away on special leave.

"Ask 'em in here," said Jones cheerfully, and in they came accordingly. The Doctor was an intimate friend of the family. As for the other man, whom he introduced as his brother, just arrived from the Colonies, nobody required an introduction. Even the youngest Jones present—he wore a "pinny" over his clothes, so you can guess how young he was,—recognised him at once. Robinson was a clean-shaven man, as are most amateur actors, and the stranger's face was covered with whiskers, overdone, in fact. And then his gruff voice and shy manner—oh, it was too evident.

"I went to Liverpool this morning to meet my brother," said the Doctor, "and when we got home again an hour ago, I found the housekeeper had disappeared, leaving a note to say——"

"Bunkum!" murmured Jones.

The Doctor stared hard but thought his ears must have deceived him.

"To say she had been called away to London soon after my departure—her sister dangerously ill——"

"Awfully sorry," said Jones, trying in vain to chase a broad grin from his face.

"And knowing your kindness," continued the Doctor, "I have ventured to trespass on your hospitality for my brother and myself."

"You want some di-di-dinner?" gasped Jones, whose face was all red and purple like a fine sunset.

"That was my desire," said the Doctor wonderingly, and the next moment he received a tremendous dig in the ribs.

"It's no go," cried Jones with a wild explosion of laughter; "you really mustn't come with a tale like that."

"Sir!"

"I say, it's no go, Doctor. Fancy thinking you could take me in with such a barefaced invention."

"I beg your pardon, sir."

"Oh, *you're* all right, Doctor——"

"I wish I could say as much for you."

"You're heartily welcome. But I really cannot entertain your—ha! ha! your brother! Good evening, old man, don't wait," and then he suddenly sprang forward and gave a sharp wrench at the stranger's whiskers.

The next moment Jones was lying on his back in order to observe a wonderful constellation of stars that had suddenly appeared on the ceiling. His wife rushed to his assistance, and then with rare presence of mind fainted away at once. As for the little Joneses, they felt indeed that life had its glorious moments and began to clamber from their chairs preparatory to a general scrimmage. But the Doctor dragged his brother from the room and out of the house, and the little warriors trooped back into the dining-room.

"Was that Mr. Robinson, pa?" said one of the boys.

"Silence!" roared pa. "I will not have my friends discussed by you children."

"Will you carve some turkey for Jane, my dear," said his wife meekly.

The manner in which these quiet little women turn the current of a man's wrath is wonderful. Mr. Jones grabbed his carving utensils and made a frightful onslaught, seized the poor bird in several places at once and flung it violently head over heels, and then slashed and banged and battered it until the eyes of the children positively bulged with admiration.

"Now, then," he said at last, panting but happy, "if you will add the vegetables, my dear, Willie can take the plate to Jane. She is alone to-day, eh?"

"Yes, Sarah was sent for——"

"But she ain't alone, pa," murmured a twelve-year-old sentimentally; "she has her policeman there."

"*What!*" roared Jones.

"And he does love Jane, pa. He comes to supper reg'lar."

"And has she her—her usual policeman to-day?"

"No, pa. He had to go on duty in another district when he didn't expect, and he's sent a friend—another policeman."

"What sort of a man is the friend?"

"He's very tall and he's thin like Rob——"

"Eh?"

"Like Robinson Crusoe in my picture-book. And he's got lovely sideboard whiskers and a beard."

Pa Jones rose thoughtfully from his chair. "Our constables represent the laws of England," he said thoughtfully, "and I don't see why the laws of England should dine in the kitchen. I will take Jane's dinner to her and if the man is presentable, I'll ask him to join our own circle."

He hastily pencilled a few lines on a sheet of paper and, having folded it in triangular shape, propped it up on the mantelpiece.

Then he departed for the kitchen with the fire of ambition seething once more beneath his manly waistcoat. When he presently returned with the Laws of England, seven pairs of eyes threw themselves bodily upon the poor policeman, causing him to blush painfully.

"Will you serve our good friend with a little dinner, my dear," said Jones affably, leading him to a chair. "By the bye, Willie," he added, pointing to the triangular note, "if he doesn't come before ten o'clock, take this note to Mr. Robinson's house."

The policeman's helmet dropped from his nerveless hand. He stared sheepishly at his host, opened his mouth as though

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to speak, and then pulled himself stubbornly together and sat down to dinner.

"You haven't quite such a large family as this," said Jones genially.

"No, sir, I ain't married."

"What a remarkably hoarse voice you have, constable."

"Yessir, wants oiling."

"Boys, be quiet," shouted Jones, "I can scarcely hear myself speak."

"It's the pleeceman's helmet, pa."

"It'll take no harm, sir, don't mind."

"They're playing football with it, pa, under the table——"

"Noisy boys, but very smart at times," said Pa Jones presently. "In fact, that's my motto with boys. If they're not smart, make 'em smart—ha! ha!"

"P'raps the smartness is heredary, sir," said the policeman.

"Hereditary—h'm—did you ever throw a red herring across the road, constable?"

"No, sir, can't afford to play with wittles."

"Ha, ha, very good—by the bye, let me ask you a little riddle I heard the other day. Some mince pie? You know what a riddle is, of course?"

"Yessir, a sieve."

"No, no, I mean a conundrum."

"Oh, you mean whensadoornotadoor?"

"Exactly. Well, if a man robbed his father, what would you call him?"

"Shouldn't call him nothing, sir. The judge is paid to do that."

"But what surname would suit him best? Have a glass of wine? Allow me. What name would suit him best?"

"Dunno, sir."

"Well, I should recommend—*Robbin'son!*" Pa Jones literally bellowed the last word, thrusting his face suddenly towards that of the policeman, who drew back in alarm.

"You seem nervous, constable."

"Yessir, thought you wos a-going to bite me."

"But what do you think of the name I suggested?"

"Didn't hear it, sir"

"I suggested that a man who robbed his father should be called—*Robbin'son!*"

The policeman shrunk visibly when he heard the word, and then straightened himself with a homely dignity, in which, however, Pa Jones saw nothing but "red herrings."

"I dunno whether you've some game on, sir, 'cos you keep a-mentioning of Robinson at hevery moment, but, if you have, sir, I don't take it kind of you. O' course, you've a right to report me to the inspector for eating here when I'm supposed to be on duty outside."

"I'm not going to report you."

"Well, wodger keep a-mentioning of his name, sir?"

"Whose name?"

"Inspector Robinson!"

Pa Jones positively roared with laughter at this.

"Splendid!" he cried, "splendid! What a stock of red herrings you must have."

The poor policeman glowered at him in dull resentment. "Haven't got no 'errin's," he answered somewhat sulkily, "and don't want none while there's turkeys 'oppin' about."

The front door bell tinkled at this moment. They heard Jane, whose beauty, by the bye, was not of the Miss Miggs variety, amble massively along the hall and then open the street door.

"Can I see Mr. Jones, please?" said a very gruff voice.

"It's Robinson!" gasped the policeman in terror.

"Whose Robinson?"

"The Inspector! I'm done for now, sir."

Poor Pa Jones was torn by conflicting emotions. He couldn't make up his mind even yet whether the man who sat beside him was his friend in disguise. On the other hand, the man might be himself so to speak, and might have been bribed by the real Robinson to pretend to recognise the last-named as his Inspector. In that case the new arrival would not be himself, but somebody else, and—and—and—there was just a possibility after all that neither the policeman nor Inspector Robinson was Robinson—and——

"Well, who in thunder is he, anyhow?" yelled Jones, tearing his hair furiously.

"He's Robinson, sir."

Next moment the door was opened, and Jane ushered the new-comer into the room. At the noise made by the turning of the handle the policeman groaned feebly and then in a twinkling disappeared from sight beneath the table. The children forsook the helmet to stare open-mouthed at these developments.

"Good evening, sir."

"Good evening," said Jones absent-mindedly. "You're rather taller, I think, and not so good-looking."

"Beg pardon, sir."

"Oh, excuse me," said Jones dreamily, as he stared fixedly at the length of his visitor's legs and the breadth of his shoulders. If Jones' mind was full of red herrings, it is only fair to admit that the Inspector unconsciously found a counter-thought in the subject of straight-waistcoats.

They stared at one another with a strange intensity, whilst the poor policeman, lifting a corner of the tablecloth, stared at them both.

"Much taller and better built," murmured Jones thoughtfully.

"I've knowed all sorts and shapeses go that way," said the Inspector in a stage whisper.

"More whiskers," murmured Jones.

"But less patience," growled the Inspector, raising his voice a little.

"I've got so mixed up," said Jones pathetically.

"So I should imagine, sir."

"That I've almost forgotten what Robinson is like."

This was too much for the Inspector. He seized Pa Jones by the arm and shook him vigorously, in real or pretended indignation. "Wake up, sir, wake up," he cried. "*I'm* Robinson!'

"Yes, yes, I daresay you are," murmured poor Jones sadly. "They're all Robinsons to-night somehow."

"You've had one of my men to dinner with your cook," said the Inspector gruffly, "and you've taken him off his beat to provide him with the said dinner. It's agin the law to move the property of the Crown without permission——"

"Give him some turkey or he'll report me." These words floated in an agonised whisper from beneath the table. The Inspector stopped suddenly and began to mop his face with a young tablecloth. He had heard the whisper without distinguishing the words, and felt nervous.

"I've stood too near him," he murmured; "it must be catching."

"One of your men, do you say, Inspector? Had dinner here?"

"Yes, sir."

"H'm!—of course—er—is his name Robinson?"

"Give him some turkey," murmured the policeman again.

"Will you have some dinner?" said Jones miserably; "I don't know whether you're Robinson or not—and I don't care so much either. You're welcome to the victory——"

The Inspector, after accepting the invitation to dinner, listened to the rest of Pa Jones' speech in growing amazement. He was still more surprised when a long, blue-clad figure, whom he recognised at once as the very policeman he had mislaid, rose stealthily behind Pa Jones and presently threw an arm round the poor man's neck and then lifted him bodily from the ground.

The next moment poor pa was lying upon the hearthrug for the second time that evening, with a hard, bony knee to hold him down.

"Off his nut," said the policeman laconically. "He's been going wuss all the evening." Before any one could move to the rescue, there was a tap at the door and Jane entered with a telegram.

Mrs. Jones read it aloud to the assembled company:

"*Sorry cannot keep appointment to-night. Bet postponed.*—Robinson."

Wal Frank.

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RUNNING RIDDLES COMPETITION.

On this page you will find eight riddles; each riddle is described in the picture.

What you have to do is to find the answers to these riddles. Then write them on a piece of paper, using one side only, and send them in to me.

Address your envelopes The Competition Editor, SHORT STORIES, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., with "Running Riddles" plainly marked in the top, left-hand corner. All letters must reach this office by **Thursday, December 31st.** No attempts arriving after this date will be considered.

This page, signed in the allotted place, must accompany each list.

You can send in as many lists as you like, *but each list* must be accompanied by a separate page.

£2 will be awarded to the person who sends in what I considor to be the best list of answers to the riddles, and to each of the senders of what I consider to be the next best five attempts, I will award a splendid hand-camera, with complete photographic outfit. The Editor's decision will be final, and no correspondence can be entered into on the subject.

Name .....

Address .....

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A Sad Story of a Mother's Grief.

GREAT masses of roses covered the wall and grew in rank profusion along the roadside, and, when I left the pony-cart and climbed the bank, I could see that the yard was filled with them and the little cottage facing the sea almost hidden with their wealth of colour.

Thinking that the owner would not object to my gathering a small bunch from such an abundance I was proceeding to do so, when, from behind a bush, a little old lady appeared, her refined face delicately pink from her exertions, looking as sweet as one of the roses among which she was working.

"Please don't pick them," she said, coming forward a few steps. "Don't think I'm selfish, but they're Dedie's, and I can't let anyone else have them," and with implicit faith in my obedience to her request, she returned to her work.

For a few minutes I stood and watched her deftly loosening the earth around the roots of a young rose-bush, and then, with the guilt of a child discovered in some wrong-doing, I laid the few roses I had plucked upon the wall, and going back to the cart drove to my friend's house, where I was visiting.

A few days later, while we were passing the garden with its rose-covered wall, the sweet old lady appeared from among the bushes, her arms full of cut roses, which she pressed against her breast.

To my friend's greeting she replied with a pleased light of recognition in her eyes.

"Who is she?" I asked, when we had passed out of hearing; and I told the episode of yesterday.

My friend did not answer for a few moments.

"Hers is a sad story. Years ago she came here, a bride, to spend her honeymoon in the little cottage, which belonged to her husband. They were wealthy, and the weeks slipped by until the autumn, when they returned to their city home; but she loved the place so that every summer they returned here to spend a few weeks in the country, within sight of the sea. And here, one July morning, when the roses she had trained over her windows were hanging heavy with dew, a little girl came to bless the household. The husband, going to the open window, plucked a great spray of roses, and, placing them on a stand by the bedside, said, 'This shall be her lucky flower.' And he kissed the baby and the young mother. They named the child Edith, but she always called herself 'Dedie.'

"When the lady appeared among us the second summer after, she was accompanied only by her baby; and instead of the beautiful gowns that had been her husband's delight, she wore a widow's dress, and her dear face was haggard with grief.

"The child had grown into a little lisping tot, who followed her mother about the house and garden, which was the widow's great solace, and where she spent most of her time, only going each day to the high cliff, from which she and her husband used to watch the sun set across the ocean, and the beach where they had walked in the moonlight, two married lovers.

"The flowers that had graced the baby's entry into the world seemed to have possessed some occult charm, for never was anyone more fond of roses than this child. She always carried a bouquet in her chubby hand, or wore a spray-pinned on to her little pinafore, and if, by chance, she dropped one, she always stopped to pick it up.

"She was a strange child, too, with little unchildlike notions and fancies that oppressed one with a feeling of eeriness. The ocean fascinated her, and ofttimes at night, when it roared upon the rocky headland, she would awaken her mother and say, 'Mamma, why does the sea want me? Why does it keep calling to me?' Or she would sit for hours on the sand, laughing and talking to the little waves and ripples that ran up the beach.

"One evening her mother tied a little hood over the curls, and together they went down to the headland, as was their custom, the child carrying a big spray of flowers; a strong wind was blowing out to sea, and the mother shielded the child in front of her. They had stood thus for some minutes, when the roses slipped from the child's hands, and the wind caught and blew them towards the edge of the cliff. She darted forward to save them, and was stooping at the very edge to pick them up, when there came a sudden blast, she tottered on the brink for a moment, and then, grasping the spray of roses in her little hands, pitched forward into the sea.

"Her mother never returned to her city home. Winter and summer she has roses blooming in the cottage or garden, and every evening she goes to the cliff with an offering of flowers for 'Dedie's grave,' as she calls the ocean."

As we returned home that evening, my friend pointed out towards the sea. On a high point overlooking the water a lone figure was outlined against the setting sun. As we looked, she raised her arms and threw a great cluster of roses out into the water, and then sank upon her knees and with clasped hands watched them float out into the pathway of the sun.

So large a grave; so small a child.

George Barnes.

Are You Generous? Are You Clever?
Are You Mean? Are You Dull?

Whatever you are it is as well to know other things concerning yourself, so send a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope to RANEE, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. A reliable delineation of your character will reach you in return—this will give you the required information.

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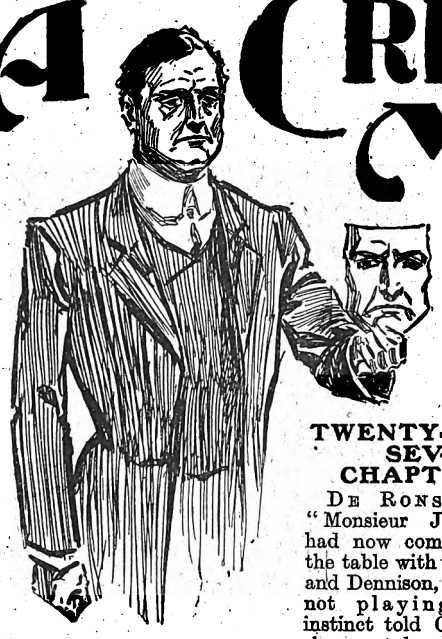
POWERFUL ROMANCE.

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE



By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.

De Ronski and "Monsieur Justin" had now come up to the table with the ladies and Dennison, who was not playing. Her instinct told Cora that she must have almost run her luck out. She was perfectly cool, and during the whole game no one had seen the flutter of an eyelid. It would have been difficult to know whether her father or her lover, each in his own way, admired her splendid nerve the more.

She began to experiment. A louis on red-black-red. Lost. Another on black-red-black. Also lost.

"That will do, Duke," she said, pushing the heap of notes and gold towards him. "I don't know how much I've won for you, but I can't play any more. The fire's gone out. You should never play when you find that sort of feeling coming across you."

"Ah, what a player you are!" he said with a look of frank adoration. "With your *sang froid* and daring you would go far with the bank, and you have learnt the best of all lessons—when to stop. I owe you a thousand thanks, Miss Cora."

He put the gold into his hip-pocket and rolled up the thick sheaf of notes. As they rose Kesteven leant over Darfield's shoulder and said in a low, angry tone:

"I reckon if I were you, I'd quit too. Just come out here. I want a word with you."

Darfield got up, his face pale and his eyes still burning with the frenzy of play. He was not affected by the loss of the money. He could replace that for the asking. It was only the fact of losing, of being beaten in a fight with Fortune, and watching a young girl apparently sway the fickle balance as she liked with every turn of her hand.

He followed Kesteven into the Gardens, whither, after they had received the congratulations of the others, Cora and the Grand Duke followed very shortly. Meanwhile, M. Justin excused himself and went away towards the offices of the Administration.

When the party assembled for supper at Ciro's, Mercedes looked hard at Cora for a moment and smiled. There was no mistaking the answering smile, and so she went beside her and murmured very softly:

"May I congratulate your Highness?"

She nodded and raised the back of her left hand for an instant. One of her rings, set with a single pearl, was gone, and in its place flashed and glowed a half-circlet of diamonds and rubies. Mercedes' right hand closed over it, and a gentle pressure told how happy she was in her friend's happiness.

When they got back to Nice they separated at the station.

Kesteven, the Grand Duke, and Darfield went with the two girls and Janet on board the yacht, where, late as it was, his Highness had a brief but entirely satisfactory conversation with Kesteven, and then, after a yet briefer but still more satisfactory interview with Cora, almost on the same spot on which Mercedes had given herself to her vanished lover, he went ashore to the Cercle, and finished the night at baccarat.

As he told her the next day, there must have been some magic in the money she had won for him, for, plunge as he would, it did not seem possible for him to lose, and when he strolled back to his house, puffing contentedly at a big cigar and glorying in the splendour of the sunrise, he left behind him a score or so of exasperated, and, in some cases, despairing, gamblers the poorer by nearly half a million francs.

Dennison and Justin accompanied the de Ronskis to Cimiez, for the night's work was not quite over for them yet.

The ladies retired as soon as they reached the hotel, and then the three men sat down to business.

"I think," said Mr. Smith, speaking in de Ronski's French for the benefit of his colleague, as he lit a cigar, "that the chain of evidence is now fairly complete. This Mr. Darfield, otherwise Culworth, will be invaluable, provided only that his wife is correct as to his courage and good faith."

"I think we can feel pretty safe as to that if she is prepared to answer for him," said Dennison, "she has enough strength of character herself for a couple of men."

"If my experience of men and women has taught me anything I am fully agreed with you," assented M. Justin. "And now, my friend," he continued, "now that we have got so far, perhaps a little revision would not be out of place. I should be glad to hear you recapitulate the points on which we have to rely."

"That would be useful," said Dennison, "we can't understand each other too completely."

"Very well, then," said Mr. Smith, getting up and standing with his back to the door. "To begin with, we have the fact that Mr. Wilfrid Ellerton did not fall overboard from the *Isola*. He simply disappeared somewhere into the interior of the yacht, and there we lose sight of him.

"Even Billaud cannot tell us whether he is alive or dead, and it remains to be seen whether Mr. Darfield, as we may call him for the present, can and will throw any more light on the subject. This much, however, is perfectly plain. He cannot have disappeared save by Staunton's orders, and Staunton would not have got rid of him without some very strong reason indeed.

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"In that reason, probably, lies the clue to the whole mystery.

"As we know Staunton to be a criminal not only of the most desperate type, but also of amazing resource and ability, and, moreover, with the most enormous interests at stake, it is necessary for us to face the conclusion, that, if he had reason to believe young Ellerton's existence dangerous to his own safety and that of his schemes, he would not hesitate for a moment to take his life.

"On the other hand, he may only have safely disposed of him until he has realised this dream of a South American Republic, and raised himself above the reach of the law.

"Now, I think you gentlemen will agree with me that this mysterious trip made by the yacht to the shores of Iceland, when she was ostensibly travelling from Leith to the Riviera, lends some colour to the latter supposition. He would hardly have sent the boat so very far out of her way merely to drop him overboard. He could have done that anywhere."

"To my mind," said Dennison, "that is the strangest part of the whole mysterious business. What did the yacht go there for? It can hardly have been to maroon poor Ellerton on one of those little islands up there. Staunton wouldn't have been such a fool as to run the risk of his being picked up by the first fishing boat that happened to pass. And yet she simply cannot have gone there for nothing. The thing's incredible."

"On the other hand," interposed Monsieur Justin, "since we have now assured ourselves that those counterfeit notes, of which Mr. Darfield passed no fewer than fifteen at the Casino to-night, have been imported by the yacht, may not this strange and secret visit to Iceland have some connection with the hidden manufactory of notes and coin for which the police of the world have beeu hunting in vain for the last five years?"

"It is possible," said Mr. Smith, "though scarcely probable. In that case we should have to look for Mr. Staunton's private mint somewhere among the volcanic caverns of Hekla. For my part I should be more inclined to seek them in some lonely gorge of the Andes. There are too many people in Iceland, and, besides, there are tourists.

"But to continue. Three days ago Staunton entertained a party of gentlemen at lunch on board the *Isola*. They were supposed to be his financial associates in those great operations in which we know he is the controlling power. So they are, but we know that they are something more. We know their histories, and everyone of them is intimately connected with South American politics. In other words, they are Staunton's political agents, and doubtless also channels through which his manufactured coin and notes get into circulation.

"Staunton went to Mentone this morning. One of our agents went with him. Three of these gentlemen met him there, and with them was a Signor Riccola, whose other name is Andrea Guardino, the head-centre of the Mafia in Southern Italy. What has Mr. Isolo Staunton, the millionaire financier, the friend and helper of statesmen and princes, to do with the Mafia?"

"That," said Dennison drily, "somehow seems to take one's mind back to the London murders. I hope our friend doesn't consider any of our party here inconvenient or superfluous. But surely he can hardly suspect anything queer about us."

"No one can tell with a man like that," said M. Justin gravely. "We have our spies, but depend upon it he has his watching them, and if he does suspect—well, after what our friend has told us, the atmosphere of Nice may soon get rather unhealthy. I should not wonder if there happened a murder or two in the Casino Gardens before long if that is the case.

"But, my dear de Ronski," he went on, suddenly changing his tone, "is not the chief question now what is to be done? Now that we know as much as we do and that we are sure of three good witnesses, I for my part am for immediate action. The French law will permit us to arrest him the moment he sets foot in Nice. Meanwhile, if we secure Billaud and Darfield and put them in safety, they will make statements on oath which will justify us in putting an embargo on the yacht, after which we can search her—and then who knows what we may find? What do you say?"

"I'm afraid I can't agree with you," replied Mr. Smith after a moment's thought. "In the first place, it is too much to do on the evidence we have got. You cannot arrest a man like Staunton as you would an ordinary swindler or thief. He is too big a fish for that net, and if he broke it away goes all our work and a good deal of reputation with it. In the second place some of us would probably die suddenly before the trial, if we got him as far as that, and that would be a waste of useful life.

"Thirdly, you will pardon me if I say that it would be the worst policy to lay Staunton by the heels until we have tracked him or some of his associates to this mysterious money-manufactory of his. If we did someone else would carry on the business just the same, only with greater precautions.

"Fourthly, such a course would destroy all hope of clearing up the fate of Wilfrid Ellerton, which something seems to tell me will somehow prove to be the key to the whole puzzle.

"Fifthly, we must not spoil the prospects of the concert. No, I am quite serious. As I will explain to you later, I hope for other than social and artistic results from that same function. Let us at least wait until that is over till we come to any decision."

"Oh, as to that, most certainly," assented the other, "there can be no harm in waiting that short time, and, besides, now that you have given your reasons, I am inclined to agree with you that caution is the best policy."

"And I am distinctly of the same opinion," added Dennison. "At any rate, for all the ladies' sakes, don't let us spoil the concert. Some of them will have trouble after that, and to spare."

It so chanced that just as this decision was come to, Staunton was saying to Don Ramiero, after a nearly all-night discussion in his room at the Hotel Colline St. Michel at Mentone:

"Very well. It is a desperate step to take, but if it really proves necessary, after the concert will be the time."

There was another man in the room with them. He was the servant who had ushered de Ronski and Dennison into the presence of "Monsieur Justin."

TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.
On the Yacht Again.

It is scarcely necessary to say that Lady Medcalf-Mears threw herself with all her zeal and energy into the congenial task of helping Mercedes to make the concert on board the *Isola* the great social event of the season. The original idea had expanded somewhat with consideration, and as it was unlikely that the yacht could get back to her anchorage before morning, it was decided to "make a night of it."

Hence all the guests were to be requested to bring a change of clothing with them, as they would sleep and breakfast on board, and return to Nice in time for lunch.

When the de Ronskis had definitely accepted the invitation, her Ladyship knew that the success of the function was absolutely assured. At least a hundred of the best people in the place were on her visiting list, and on the morning after Cora's triumph at the tables the three were assembled in her drawing-room engaged in the very pleasant occupation of selecting from these the most brilliant company possible—they had fixed the number of invited guests to fifty—when Mercedes received the following telegram from Mentone:

"*Keep concert party as far as possible to our own immediate circle. Not more than twenty guests, of whom I shall bring three. Spare no expense to do the thing well.*—Staunton."

"Well," exclaimed Mercedes, as she passed the telegram to Lady Medcalf-Mears, "I wonder what on earth papa means by that. We have plenty of room for fifty. What a mercy we had not sent the invitations out. What a lot of enemies we should have made."

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Yes, indeed it is," replied her ladyship with an undisguised look of disappointment on her handsome, aristocratic features. "Really, my dear, this papa of yours is rather annoying. He does not seem to see that when everyone who is anyone would almost go on their knees for a card, we shall make enemies for life of every man and woman—especially the women—whom we have to leave out, and here he vetoes thirty at one fell swoop. Really it is most difficult."

"I guess Mr. Staunton won't take much stock of that, though," laughed Cora somewhat unfeelingly, for there had already been a rumour that a favoured fifty were to be invited, and the fury of the disappointed ones had its comic side for her.

"It is, of course, a great pity from that point of view, and I quite see what you mean, Lady Medcalf-Mears," said Mercedes with a little chill in her tone. "At the same time I am quite sure that papa would not have told me to do this unless he had some very good reason for it. At any rate, no one can charge him with any lack of hospitality, so it can't be that."

"Oh, of course not, my dear!" exclaimed Lady Medcalf-Mears, who saw at once that she had expressed herself a little too freely, "no one would dream of that. He is the most hospitable and generous man in the world. You must forgive my little outburst. I didn't mean anything.

"But you know all my life I have studied entertaining as an art, and I have never had quite such an opportunity as this. A party of fifty on board that lovely great yacht of yours would have been just perfect. And I could have got *such* nice people, too. It is just the time."

"Yes, dear Lady Medcalf-Mears," said Mercedes with one of her sweetest smiles, "believe me, I can quite understand your feelings, and if papa cannot give me a very good excuse you can depend upon it that he shall have a thoroughly good scolding. And now let us decide who are to be the favoured twenty—or rather seventeen."

When Mercedes met her father at the station on the morning of the eventful Tuesday, he simply said in reply to her half-reproachful question:

"My dearest, I am sorry if I have disappointed you and the others, especially her Ladyship, as she has been so kind; but, well, in the first place, you know how I hate big parties, particularly on board the yacht, and I never really intended this to be anything more than a little treat to our immediate friends.

"It struck me afterwards that Lady Medcalf-Mears might think she had *carte blanche* and crowd the ship up as she does her own drawing-room. With ourselves there will be about twenty-five, and that, you must admit, is quite enough, especially if we are to have a little dance on deck afterwards."

Accustomed as she was to obey and trust him in everything, Mercedes at once acquiesced.

"Of course you are perfectly right, father, as you always are," she said, putting her arm through his as they left the station. "Twenty-five will make a perfect party, and we shall know them all well. I have made friends with the de Ronskis, and they are simply delightful—and Paula, she is so lovely that Cora and I are almost ashamed to look in our glasses. Oh, and Cora is engaged to the Grand Duke, and so, of course, he is to be one of the party. She won him nearly a hundred thousand francs at the Casino the other night, and he proposed 'right away,' as Cora would say. They will make a splendid couple, won't they?"

"Splendid," echoed her father somewhat absent-mindedly, for he was thinking many thoughts of far greater import to the world than even the marriage of a Grand Duke, "and from what you tell me he has shown sound financial judgment, as well as excellent taste."

Mercedes went with him on board the yacht to lunch so that she might have a final interview with Dinaud, the head steward, and to satisfy herself that everything was in order for the evening. Staunton went at once to the sanctum, where he found Don Ramiero, who had come on from the station direct, translating some code telegrams.

The Open Door.

A doctor recently received a written request for his professional services, worded thus: "My wife's mother is at death's door. Please come at once, and see if you can pull her through."

Now there are two sides to every door, as there are to every question, and it will be observed that the man with the sick mother-in-law neglected to state to which side of the door he wished the doctor to pull his suffering relative. But we will be charitable, and suppose that he desired to save the patient, though he expressed himself so awkwardly.

When Mrs. Cooper, of 17, York Road, The Hyde, Hendon, was ill about five years ago there was no question as to the anxiety of her friends to save her. Her second child was only a few weeks old, and her life was very essential to her husband and family. It was just then that she became subject to fainting fits, and betrayed great nervousness. The root of the trouble was indigestion—the complaint which only Mother Seigel's Syrup will cure.

"I was sometimes bent double with pain," said Mrs. Cooper on 24th March, 1903, "and was afraid to eat, knowing what the consequence would be. Besides, I had no appetite. Violent headaches, with floating specks before my eyes, assisted to make my life unendurable. Numbness of the hands and feet, and palpitation of the heart, were other bad signs. A doctor who attended me said mine was a case of severe indigestion and nervous debility. He appeared to understand my case, and sent me a great deal of medicine; but the only result of his attention was—*bills*. Instead of improving, I grew worse. At night I could get no proper sleep, being disturbed by dreams and in constant dread, as of some impending evil.

"It was last Christmas, when I was very ill, that my mother suggested that Seigel's Syrup might benefit me, having proved it to be a splendid thing in other cases. I accordingly tried it, and was greatly astonished at the result. Before I had quite taken one bottle, I felt better. The pain left me, and I improved rapidly. It gave me refreshing sleep, followed by an appetite for breakfast. Soon the headaches and dizziness ceased to trouble me, while my strength increased daily. It is four months since I began to take Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup, and now (thanks to it) I am as well as ever I was in my life."

Of late there has been much contention about the policy of the "open door;" but there can never be contention as to the value of what cured Mrs. Cooper. That was proved 35 years ago, and has been proved every day since.

A Novelist on Marriage.

Thackeray says: "To marry without a competence is dangerous, no doubt; but do not thousands of our fellow-beings commit the crime every year with no other trust but in Heaven, health, and their labour?" Alas, yes! and when (as often happens) the second of these three trusts fails, the third must fail also, and there is a social wreck. Mother Seigel's Syrup is a true friend to the poor and suffering.

Indigestion prevents a man or woman working properly. Its victims easily tire and are always drowsy. Business men cannot afford to employ them. Seigel's Syrup cures indigestion. It removes that load of oppression at the chest after eating, dispels headache, creates appetite, and brightens up the dull sufferer as nothing else will. Mrs. Mary Rogers, Fay Gate, Horsham, Sussex, writing on May 2nd, 1903, says: "I have pleasure in telling you of the benefit I derived from your Seigel's Syrup, when I was suffering from indigestion. My illness began with loss of appetite, and a general low and depressed feeling. I could not eat, and my strength failed rapidly.

"I suffered much from headaches, dizziness, and nervousness, and though I consulted doctors and took quantities of medicine, I got no better until, on the recommendation of a friend, I tried Mother Seigel's Syrup. After taking a few doses I felt myself getting better. My appetite returned, I was again able to sleep soundly, and soon lost the drowsiness, headaches, and dizziness, and was as well as ever. I think Seigel's Syrup is splendid, and shall always recommend it."

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"Ah," he said, taking one of them up from the table, "then they have replied. All of them?"

"Yes, all," was the reply, "and all say 'yes.' In a month, Señor, the new flag will go up, and we shall have the happiness of saluting you as first President of the United States of South America."

"I hope so, my friend and faithful ally," replied Staunton, flushing slightly, and speaking with a slight tremor of emotion which was not often heard in his voice. "But there is a good deal to be done, and many things may happen in that month. For my part I hold it as little less than a misfortune that our hands should be forced in this ridiculous way just when everything was going on in such perfect order. But some of them shall pay pretty dearly for their treason and their regrettable meddling with affairs which are infinitely above their conceptions."

"It will only be justice," said Don Ramiero, rubbing his hands gently together. "As you say, they have no idea of the great work with which they are interfering. But those who meddle with the machinery of Empire must not be surprised if they get crushed in the wheels. It is too soon to ask you, Señor, how you propose to dispose of—the more inconvenient? Will they become citizens of your other kingdom?"

"It would serve them right to make slaves of the lot," replied the Lord of the Underworld savagely. "As for Billaud, the lake would not be too bad for him, and I should like to make the others watch his last dive. That sham fiddler fellow, too, our old friend Mr. Smith. What an utter fool the idiots must take me for—I, who have the most perfect detective in the world, to be taken in by a childish device like that. Heavens! They shall learn something!"

"I shall be rather sorry for de Ronski, *alias* Smith," said Don Ramiero reflectively. "He has great genius, and it is a thousand pities that he ruined it by becoming also a policeman. His wife, too, is most charming—and his daughter; was there ever such a perfect union of genius and loveliness?"

"My dear Ramiero, you are getting quite romantic in your old age," said Staunton with a laugh that he would not have liked Mercedes to hear. "I'll tell you what," he went on, taking out a cigar and lighting it, "if it does become necessary to translate these good people to the Underworld, and to abolish friend Smith-de-Ronski, you shall have the reversion of the widow. As for the divine Paula, she will make a delightful diversion from those pale, soulless houris of my little paradise down yonder. How some of them will stare when they open their eyes for the first time after their drug-sleep—as I expect poor Ellerton did. I wonder how he is getting on. Well, I shall be able to pay him a visit, I suppose, before long."

"Ah, I like to see you in those rare moods," laughed Don Ramiero softly, as he rolled a little brown cigarette. "You are a great man, Señor, when you are conquering men by the might of that golden sceptre of yours, but you are most interesting when you let a little of the primeval savage be seen."

"Well, though it is necessary to keep him chained up pretty tightly, the best of us would be poor creatures without him," said Staunton, stretching out his powerful arms and clenching his fists. "But now, my friend," he continued in a changed voice, "let us leave these pleasant themes until we are able to turn them into still more pleasant practice, and get to business. We have a good deal to do before our guests arrive. I think you will find the Señores in the smoking-room. Oblige me by going and telling them that I am ready for them."

Don Ramiero opened the doors and presently returned with the delegates from Chili, Brazil, and the Argentine.

"Now, Señores," said Staunton, when Don Ramiero had closed the doors, "I think you will agree with me that, since we have been compelled to advance our plans so suddenly, there is much to be done and no time to lose, since everything must be in order before we start to-night. Do me the favour of making yourselves comfortable, and then we will get to work."

TWENTY-NINTH CHAPTER.
The Dinner Party.

"Good heavens, how perfectly lovely!" exclaimed Lady Medcalf-Mears as she reached the gangway platform of the *Isola* a few minutes after seven, the hour for which the guests had been invited. "You naughty girl," she continued, as she shook hands with Mercedes, who, robed and adorned in the very perfection of costly simplicity, was receiving her guests, "then this is why you wouldn't let me come and help you with the final arrangements? Well, if you wanted to give me a surprise, you have done it. I never saw anything so exquisite in my life. You might have had the fairies working for you."

Her ladyship's praises were certainly well merited. The whole stretch of the broad promenade deck from the navigating bridge to the stern had been transformed into such a garden as Eastern romancers never dreamt of. The side rails had disappeared, buried behind sloping banks of the most exquisite flowers that the gardens and hot-houses of Southern France could produce. The Council Chamber, the glass-domed entrance to the saloon, and the smoking-room had vanished also, transformed into mountains of blossom and greenery. An avenue of alternate palms and tree ferns ran down the middle of the main deck. The bridge had become a fairy bower glorious with blooms of every conceivable hue.

Against the after end of the smoking-room and facing a broad stretch of deck, fenced by a semi-circle of palms, was an embowered platform covered like the deck with pale green cloth. At one end of it stood a cream and gold Bechstein grand, and in front a silver, harp-shaped music stand, mute witnesses of pleasures to come.

No more perfect night could have been given even if the weather had been arranged to order. As the sun sank towards the Western horizon behind a veil of mingled amethyst, amber and gold, the full moon rising in the east changed from white to silver, and from silver to pale, burnished gold.

"Ah, how beautiful!" exclaimed Paula, as she came out on deck from the saloon with Mercedes, Cora, and Lady Maud. "Look; look," she continued, gazing from east to west and west to east again.

The dinner was an artistic triumph. Mercedes had taken her father at his word, and there was nothing, solid or liquid, placed on the long broad table in the *Isola's* saloon which was not of the choicest that taste and skill could select or money buy. Never, even under the blue skies of the Playground of Europe had such a well-pleased company sat down to such an entirely delightful feast.

Thanks mainly to Lady Medcalf-Mears' selective genius the guests harmonised not only with each other but each with all, a result which is admittedly the highest triumph in the gentle art of entertaining. Mercedes, with her youth and her beauty, and her piquante, half foreign manner, suited the circumstances to a marvel, and so she made a perfect hostess. Her father somewhat astonished those of his guests who only knew him as the coldly-calculating, ruthless despot of finance by playing the host with such a modestly genial courtesy that even Kesteven himself began to speculate as to his possible reasons for this new development of character.

Coffee was served on deck about fifteen minutes after the ladies left the table, and when the guests came up they found that yet another transformation had taken place. The little floating fairyland which they had left growing dim in the fading light of the sunset was now glowing in the diffused shimmer of hundreds of tiny electric lights. Chains and wreaths of them hung fore and aft from the great pole-masts and the shrouds. Hundreds more of them glowed half-hidden among the flowers and amidst the gently waving fans of the palm trees. Only about the stage there were no lights visible. It was lit up as though it possessed a luminous atmosphere of its own.

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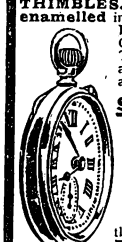

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The land was already fading away into a dim, blue-grey haze, for during dinner the engines had been started at "dead slow" and the *Isola* had been slipping away seaward for more than a couple of hours without any of the guests being in the least aware of it, so smoothly worked the mighty engines which, at need, were capable of driving her more than forty miles an hour through the water.

Conversation over the coffee and cigarettes was somewhat scrappy and desultory. The subtle spell of a perfect dinner and the magical influence of the almost unearthly surroundings combined against the spoken word and in favour of the unspoken thought.

"No, no," his Highness of Warschaua murmured when he could keep silence no longer, and leaning in his chair towards Cora, "you are right, my dear. This exquisite half hour has not been for talking, no, not even to you. This is not a time to say anything with the lips. It is for the eyes and the souls of men and women to come together in silence—is not that so?"

"Yes," she laughed softly, laying her cheek on her hand and looking into his eyes, "and yet you are talking—but so nicely that I suppose I'll have to forgive you. Ah, see. There's Mr. Staunton taking Madame de Ronski to the piano. We are going to begin. Shall we go and find our seats?"

The stewards had cleared the space in front of the stage and filled it again with low chairs of Russian wicker covered with costly furs and furnished with cushions. Mercedes, as hostess, took the centre chair of the first row. Cora and the Grand Duke sat on her right, and Lady Maud and Iddison on her left. Lady Medcalf-Mears sat between his Highness and Staunton, Kesteven had devoted himself for the time being to Mrs. Corton Vansuyler, a brilliant and wealthy widow hailing from Philadelphia, who would not have had any insuperable objection to joining her millions to his, and the rest of the company arranged themselves according to their convenience and their affinities.

There was, of course, no formal programme. Staunton had decided that it should be an entirely "go as you please" affair. Mercedes and Cora had got a list of promises to "do something" and the order of the doing was left entirely to the performers.

As soon as everyone was seated, Madame de Ronski's fingers rippled over the keys and the Intermezzo from "Cavalleria" instantly hushed the murmur of conversation. There was no applause, as the last chords died away into silence because all the performers had asked Mercedes to let it be understood that none was desired, but people looked at each other and whispered their approval of the perfect rendering.

The hush fell on the company again as de Ronski came out of the smoking-room with his violin and his wife struck the opening chords of the Kreutzer Sonata.

No man with a reputation to keep had ever played before a more cultured and critical audience, and never had an audience heard the diabolical melody made to sound so entirely devilish. Men held their breath and gripped the arms of their chairs hard. Some of the women sat up straight and stared wild-eyed at the magician who was waking such evil echoes in their souls. Others shrank back into the depths of their big chairs and covered their eyes with their hands.

Staunton, to one side of whose nature music spoke as no other form of speech could, listened rigid with clenched teeth, and when the spell was lifted and silence came, he said in his soul:

"I wonder if our friend suspects anything, and whether he means that as a warning. It sounded very like it."

There was then a little interlude. As a matter of fact the audience looked as if they wanted it, so intense had been the strain of following the marvellously interpreted theme.

Then Mercedes answered an inquiring look from Madame de Ronski, who was still seated at the piano, and went on to the stage. She stood in the centre facing the audience but looking up to the sky so that her eyes shone strangely in the moonlight. There came from the piano a sadly plaintive and yet exquisitively sweet melody which only her father and Madame de Ronski had ever heard before, and then she began to sing in Spanish the once famous and now almost forgotten "Lament of the Moor."

As the song drew near to its end, Staunton clenched his teeth tighter and said again in his soul:

"Why did she choose that to sing? It is almost as bad as the Sonata."

He got up from his chair and walked away forward under the bridge.

For the moment even his inflexible purpose seemed to waver and his iron will was almost on the point of melting in that liquid flood of melody which had welled up from the warm depths of his darling's soul.

If she could only have come to his side just then and spoken to him as she had sung, everything might have been changed, but she had gone back to her seat and he heard the opening chords of the Marseillaise ring out from the piano.

He knew what was coming and went back to his seat.

Paula was standing in the middle of the little stage.

She paused for a moment and then the triumphant rhythm of the Marseillaise crashed out from the piano and the soldier's soul spoke again from her lips as she sang, her voice rising clear and high above the exulting tumult of the notes.

As the last defiant notes rang out his melting mood had passed completely away. The magic of the melody which had rung in ears of thousands of dying heroes had hardened his resolve into steel again. He got up and held out his hand to Paula as she came down from the stage and said in French:

"A thousand thanks, mademoiselle. That was magnificent. It was not only music, it was more, if that is possible."

Those of the audience who knew him were rather surprised to see Iddison get up next and borrow Cora's banjo. No one in the company had credited the quiet-spoken, reserved engineer with anything approaching a gift for entertaining, saving only Sister Janet who had heard him tinkle his banjo and half sing, half recite Kipling's "Soldier Ballads" to his accompaniment on the far-away veld.

When he went back to his seat Lady Maud put her hand on his arm and whispered:

"You dear. I had no notion you could do anything of that sort, and you did it perfectly. How did you learn it?"

"Oh, it comes to one out there, you know," he said a little awkwardly. "One has to do something to help the fellows through their troubles, and I thought it might be a bit of a change for them here."

"It was splendid," she replied, getting up, "and now it's my turn."

There was another interlude and then de Ronski came back with his violin.

In a few moments Paula had taken her father's place. Her mother turned away from the keyboard and looked into Mercedes' eyes until as though by some magnetic influence she drew her glance to hers and Paula began singing with all the strength of her soul and the sweetness of her voice:

"*When other lips and other hearts*——"

As she went on the echoing voices spoke louder and louder, and with ever-increasing insistence until they filled the long vacant chamber in the dwelling-place of Mercedes' soul. She sat still as though the magic of the old-familiar song had turned her into stone, until as the sweet, long-drawn notes of the last refrain—

"*Then you'll remember me*,"

went soaring up into the silence from the singer's lips, she started to her feet, clasped her hands over her eyes, and cried with half a sob and half a laugh in her voice:

"Yes, yes, I do remember now. Wilfrid, dearest, where are you?"

And then she fell back on to her chair, covered her face with her hands, and began to sob as though some great sorrow had suddenly fallen upon her.

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

Beware of Friends!

THE old saying, "Don't introduce your donah to a pal," has again proved its truth in the case of "B. C." He was "keeping company" with a girl for nine months, when he introduced her to two of his supposed best friends. On the sly, at different times, they have both asked her to give him up, and go with them. As the young lady likes him, she said she would not. He doesn't know whether or not to pay them out in the old English fashion.

* * * * *

The best way to pay them out, "B. C.," is to let them see that you and the girl are not to be separated by evil speakers. The "old English" method is not to be advised in any case, unless it is provoked by deliberate insult or injury. The best guard against slander is to ignore it, and let facts speak for themselves.

A Hapless Colonial.

"T. A. C." is in a strange position. He is an Australian, and has been in England for two months. In his own Colony he always got on well with the girls, but here he does not seem so fortunate. All the nice girls, he says, seem to be booked. How, he asks, can he get on with British girls?

* * * * *

Your complaint is quite unusual, "T. A. C." My idea is that Colonial men usually attract British girls more than the home variety. Their manners are more open and frank, they are usually sportsmen and manly, and, in appearance, can give the home-bred man many points. If you fail with the girls, it must be very hard luck on your part, or perhaps sheer incapacity to make yourself understood by them. Try again, very hard, in the Colonial fashion, and if it doesn't succeed, well, I fear there must be something a bit wrong about you.

Dances with the Other Girl.

"JESSIE" writes: "A friend of mine is in love with a young fellow. Sometimes he is very attentive to her, but at others he is just the reverse. They meet twice a week at a dancing class, every Monday and Friday. On Tuesday nights he has every other dance with my friend, but on Fridays he does not come near her, but dances all the time with one other girl. What do you understand this to mean?"

* * * * *

I think there is very little doubt that he is more in love with the Friday girl than with your friend, or why should he give himself up entirely to her on that night, whereas he only spares half his dances for your friend on Tuesdays? There is, though, just the bare possibility that the Friday girl dances very well, and that the young man gives her the preference on that account. Off-hand, though, I certainly advise your friend not to give her heart to a young man who is evidently not very deeply in love with her.

Cousins' Love.

"I AM going out with a cousin," writes "A." "Our names are the same, but she is three years older than I My mother does not like my going with her. We have been together for two years. Is there any reason why we should not be lovers?"

* * * * *

Marriages between cousins are not, of course, always wise. But the exception proves the rule, when there is any very strong affection. However, be sure that you have a real love for her, and not merely a feeling of friendship. Companionships between cousins are often very delightful, but should not be mistaken for the affection of lovers.

An Awkward Vow.

"DORIS" writes: "I am eighteen, and a short time ago had two young men friends. I saw a lot of one of them, but he was jealous of the other and used to tease me about him. Once he made me so angry, that I made a vow never to speak to him again, but since then I have grown to like him much better, and he has asked me to walk out with him again. But I do not like to break my vow, so would you kindly tell me the best thing to do?"

* * * * *

Vows are very silly things to make, "DORIS," at eighteen. They are consoling enough at the time, but one regrets them afterwards—and rarely keeps them. If you really do like the young man—and I imagine you do—give him another chance, and go with him again. Perhaps he will have now learnt not to be too much of a tease.

A Quick Lover.

"A SHORT time ago," says "H. M. R.," "I met a widower who told me he wished to meet with a steady, respectable woman, with a view to marriage. A short time after he wrote to me saying he should like me, and wanted me to write to him. I did so, and in reply he said he wished me to become engaged to him. How would you answer the letter? I like him fairly well."

* * * * *

It seems rather sudden to ask a lady to become engaged after one meeting and two letters. He is evidently a man of little ceremony. Perhaps he is the better for that. Anyhow, "H. M. R.," I should not advise you to marry on such slender acquaintance. Tell him you wish to know him better before committing yourself, and then make up your mind after future meetings.

Jack's Predicament.

WHEN "JACK" was in the country during the summer, he met a girl who made herself very agreeable to him. Being of a gallant disposition, "JACK" thought it only right to return the sentiment, so took her out a lot and was generally very nice. But he did not feel anything else towards her than mere amiability. "JACK" however, rather fears she misunderstood his attentions, for she has now written asking him to meet her in London, evidently with a view to developing their friendship. Should "JACK" take any notice of the request, seeing that he does not himself care for her at all?

* * * * *

If "JACK" was amiable and friendly with the girl in the country, I see no reason why he should not be the same in London. I do not see why he need commit himself to seeming to be in love with her. Certainly let him meet the girl in London, and make himself as agreeable as before. She would be offended if he refused to do so.

Cynthia

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(A Dramatic, Thrilling Episode from the Story, "AT THE MERCY OF A MANIAC." See inside.)

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Week Ending December 26th, 1903.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

AT THE MERCY OF A MANIAC.

The Thrilling Story of how a Young Girl was Rescued.

"*Staysails, February* 22, 18—.

"Dearest Kate,—'*My Kate*' *you used to be in the old schooldays. You and I have seen too little of each other these last seven years. Whether the fault be mine or yours, let us retrieve ourselves. Come to me on the* 26*th and make a charming addition to my Lenten house party. I hear the most delightful things of your music, and that your two years in Leipsic did wonders for you. Come and verify this, as well as all the other nice things I hear said of you. You will if you are the same old Kate you used to be. Let me know your train, for which I enclose a ticket, and I will drive over to meet you at the station.—Yours, with love and the usual hurry,*

"Fanny Colgate-Rives."

"I want you to go, Kate," said my brother after I had finished reading this letter to him. "I want you to go and have the very best time of your life. Heaven knows you do not get any too much pleasure out of your studies and a lot of stupid pupils, confound them! It is a shame that a woman like you should be wasted on such a life."

"But, dear," I cried, with a quick rush from the piano stool over to the lounge on which he lay before the little open grate. "I am not wasted on you, and really and truly, Tom, I am happier with you than with anybody else in the world." Which was quite true, although Tom and I lived in a flat, six flights up, without a lift. The neighbourhood suited us admirably, unfashionable and inexpensive, bordering close upon the confines of Abingdon Square.

Ever since a crushing reversal of fortune had come upon us, Tom and I had tried to make the best of things, and, truth to tell, we had succeeded, he, as an illustrator of magazine stories, and I as a teacher of music. We both worked hard, and I think that the fact that we did so was the secret of our content, that, and not trying to keep up appearances, which is after all the surest way of letting down one's temper, unless it be to live for acquaintances. We dropped all ours. We had had them by hundreds. And, in their stead, we took up such friends as cared for us for ourselves.

With Mrs. Colgate-Rives' letter of invitation still in my hand, I sat down on the rug in front of Tom, and he began to play with my hair and to blow rings from his cigar through its curls.

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"Kate," he said, after a little, "I wonder if that last remark of yours is quite true?"

"It is quite true," I said, putting my cheek against his hand, "you are the best and dearest of all, and I am always happy with you."

"Oh, what a blarney stone it is!" answered Tom. "But, do you know, my girl, I only half believe you. I cannot help believing that—that——" and he hesitated, as people who are sensitive do when they are treading on delicate ground.

"That what, dear?" I asked very softly, knowing very well what was coming.

"Well, then, I have sometimes thought about Crawford." Seeing that I made no reply, he went on: "Crawford is just the best fellow I know, and it breaks me all up to think that anything should come between you and him."

"But nothing has," I said.

"Yes, something has," he said. "Something has, Kate, and, by Jove, it's an infernal shame, for if ever two mortals ought to be together, it's you and Doctor Dick Crawford."

No response coming from me he continued: "He doesn't come here any more, and he used to be here every day. And the last time he did come, you were cold to a degree. You barely looked at him; you treated him outrageously, really. And, Kate, now that I look back upon it, you were not attractive, sitting up like an iceberg on the piano-stool, playing classical tunes and boring us both to death. What did you do it for? What on earth did you do it for, Kate?" he repeated, putting his hand on my shoulder with something that came very near being a shake.

"Why I treated Dr. Crawford as I did, is a matter of very little consequence either to him or to me," I flung out with a sudden rising inflection to my voice. "But, since you take it so much to heart, I will tell you. It was," I cried, throwing back my head with a tilt, "it was because you and I have made a mistake. He is not at all the kind of man we thought he was, and," with a throb in my voice which I could not control, "he does not care for me, and I have been a fool, a fool," I continued, crushing back the tears, "and the sooner I am cured of my mistake the better."

But for once the sympathy I looked for was withheld.

"Rot—tommy-rot!" was all my brother said.

"It's like a man to take the part of another man."

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"But I don't take his part, he doesn't need it."

"Go on, go on!" I retorted, drawing away from him. "Next, I suppose, you'll be taking her part."

"What!" he cried. "Her part? Do you mean to say, Kate, there is a woman in it?"

I nodded my head in sorrowful triumph.

"Well, then, some meddling idiot has been lying to you, Kate. In all the years he has known you, Dick Crawford has never looked at another woman."

"But he has," I asserted sadly, "I've seen it."

"Go on, tell me about it, Kate."

Once more the kind hand was on my shoulder.

"Well," I said, "the first time I noticed it was at the last Military Tournament. It may have been going on before, but that was the first time he made his admiration for another woman apparent to me. You remember, we three went there together. You had left us, and he and I were laughing and talking together, when, all at once, he became silent, preoccupied. I made some trifling remark to him, to which he made no reply. I saw that he was looking away from me over to one of the boxes. In fact, his eyes were fastened upon a woman who sat there. She was a beautiful woman, exquisitely dressed. A crowd of men were about her, and, although she smiled upon them, yet I could see they bored her. Somehow her eyes never seemed to smile with her lips, but flashed with a cold glitter, as though the tenderness of tears was too little known to them. His gaze was so riveted upon this woman that I was obliged to speak twice to him before he heard me.

"'You seem to find her interesting,' I said.

"When he became aware of my existence, he replied: 'I do, overwhelmingly so, more than I thought she could be,' and, with his gaze still resting on her beautiful face, he went on:

"'I came here to-night because I hoped for this opportunity to see her.'

"His frankness made me indignant."

"Naturally so," said Tom.

"Murmuring something about her beauty, I tried not to betray my agitation. I need not have given myself any uneasiness on that score, for his looks, as well as his thoughts, were still on the mysterious stranger.

"'Who is she?' I said at last.

"This time, not because it was I who had asked the question, but because the woman had left the box, he answered me. He drew his hand wearily across his eyes, as though he had been undergoing a severe mental strain. And then he answered in the tone of one awakening from a dream, 'She is a Hungarian, the Countess Czarmay.'"

"What," said Tom, sitting bolt upright on the lounge, "not the woman they call the Countess Lara?"

"Yes, I remember that was her name. Do you know her, Tom?"

"Only by reputation, and that is quite enough. For if all that is said of her temper and her tantrums is true, wildcats are angelic animals in comparison with the Countess. She is as cruel as she is charming, and as shameless as she is wellbred. She is received at every court in Europe. But, to my mind, there is only one court where such ladies should be received, and that is the police court.

"But, Kate," he said, with a vicious dab at the fire with the poker, "it's preposterous that Dr. Dick," falling into our familiar name for him, "should have any other than a passing interest in such a creature. He is too earnest a fellow, too thoroughly a man of the world, and, above all, too much given over to his profession to go mooning about at a blue-eyed wildcat."

"But he does, all the same," I cried. "Why, he goes to the Opera every night she is there, although he gave us the impression that life was too short to spend his time away from his studies, anywhere but here. He goes to the Opera, and, from my seat in the dress circle, I have seen him, night after night, with that same absorbed, intent look with which he regarded her that night at the Tournament."

"So you might see me looking at every smartly dressed subject for my sketches. Why, hang it! I've followed a woman for miles, just to get the proper effect of her skirt."

"Yes, dear, but this is different. I am not fanciful about it. I tell you the Countess has cast her spell over Dr. Dick, and all that I can do is to cure myself of my folly, and so," I said, "I am going to accept Fanny Rives' invitation."

"Well," at last said Tom, "if it is true, but, mind you, Kate, I do not say it is true, Dick Crawford is the fool, not you, and I am glad matters have gone no further between you than they have."

"Tom is right," I said to myself, as I put my braided locks down on my pillow that night. "It certainly is fortunate that I did not commit myself to a formal engagement of marriage to Dr. Richard Crawford."

But just how fervent was my gratitude to Providence it would be hard to say.

"Kate," said Tom, before we were off to our work the next morning, "do you know that you are rather a good-looking girl, but"—looking me over with a critical eye—"yours is the beauty that needs adornment. Here, put this in your purse and buy yourself some swell togs, and you'll be the handsomest woman at Staysails, and, what's more, you will have all the men at your feet."

"Yes, and all the women at my head, pulling my hair. Oh, Tom! Tom!" I cried, with my arms about his neck, "you are the best and most generous, but listen to me, dear. Your money would be wasted. The women whom I shall meet at Fanny Rives' only care for clothes when they are on their own backs, and for a music teacher to approach a millionaire in the smartness of her attire would be put down against her as a crime. If they like me, it will be because they cut a much finer figure than I do. And as for the men, all that they need is appreciation, which costs nothing, poor dears! But you may give me something for tips to the servants. That is all I shall need."

Tom only half acquiesced in my views of the situation, and looked on somewhat disapprovingly the morning of my departure, at the sparse contents of my trunk. As he shut down its lid I said:

"There is one thing I wish I did have, Tom, a tea-gown. I have nothing in that way but that hideous, old, grey atrocity, which you detest so. 'Women at house parties are supposed to chatter in each other's rooms in lovely gowns. I can't chatter in mine with any satisfaction."

But that afternoon, when I unpacked my trunk in my pretty room at Staysails, lo, and behold! what should I come upon but a lovely tea-gown of Liberty silk, heavenly blue, with waves of white lace foaming all over it.

"It looks like that," said Fanny Rives, pointing to the sea outside my window, where the white caps rose and fell upon the blue waves. "What a dear your brother must be. It's very becoming," reverting to the wrapper. "Keep it on for five o'clock tea in the music-room. We dine at eight. You won't see the men till then. The women will be there. Let me see, we have had so much to talk about that I haven't told you who is here. There's Kittie Cruger, and Sallie Neilson, the Lawrence girls, and Belle Wetmore; Constance Cushman, Angelica Bayard, yourself, myself—that makes eleven," running them over on her fingers, "the twelfth is the most extraordinary creature," she said; "she is your next-door neighbour. The other women are all more or less pretty and agreeable, but they are no more like her than a bullet is like a globule of quicksilver. Whilst they are content to sit still, she is here, there, and everywhere. She goes in all directions, each one more charming than the other. She speaks every language, paints, models in clay, is a superb horsewoman, sings divinely. Hush, hear that!" she said, with upraised finger.

It was a woman's voice, singing to herself a melody in a minor key which sounded like a wail from an Irish wake. But I knew it, the air was not Celtic, but Hungarian, an old song of the Tzigane, which Brahms had transcribed for the piano. The voice, sweet and sensuous, fell on my soul with a prescience of evil to come. I looked at the pine trees where there were no birds, and beyond them across the snow to the

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sca, where there were no ships, and I thought of the friend I had lost, and life's emptiness swept over me, just as that beautiful voice swept over the twilight, and filled its dusk with sadness for things lost and remembered.

For a moment a nameless horror made me tremble from head to foot, and then the singer was in the room. I suppose that Fanny presented me to her in due form, but I really don't recollect. I only knew that the Countess Czarmay, a cloud of fluttering pink chiffon, a wealth of lovely fur, golden hair, piled high on the picturesque head, smiles and blue eyes, stood before me, and that both my hands were in hers, with the long, slender fingers, in their turquoise rings, twined about mine, and that, looking into the Madonna-like face, all the ugly tales I had heard about her were forgotten, and I was telling her how glad I was to meet her.

"Come," said Fanny, with a light laugh, "let us go down to the music-room," for I was talking to the Countess of my passion—music—as I had rarely spoken to anyone, "the others are there, and you," turning to me, "will be delighted to play the Countess' accompaniments."

Fanny's music-room was an apartment of so much beauty that I could not keep from commenting upon it. "Ah!" said the Countess, "that is because it is better to love music than to be a musician, for musicians have no sense of the æsthetic. They never feel discords of form, or colour. I sometimes think that all beauty, except that of tone, is wasted upon them."

The only light in the room, which was long and high, fell from tall stands of carved wood, on which were placed branches of silver, whose twisted arms held clusters of wax candles. These stood on either side of the piano. All the rest of the room was shadowy and dim, except when the great logs of wood on the open hearth sent up a flame more ruddy than usual. Then I could see that the faces of the women who reclined on low divans and cushioned chairs, grew soft and tender, as they listened to our music. Between songs I felt like one in a dream. But the Countess busied herself about the tea-table. She was like a child at its first party, making a pretty little comedy over heating the water in the samovar, and putting the tea to steep in its silver urn. That harmonious half hour was the prelude to the days that followed.

I was constantly in the companionship of the Countess.

"I am enthralled by her," as I wrote to Tom. "You ask me if I like her, this enchanting Countess? I can only answer, 'I am fascinated by her.' She leads me round by the nose, as she does all the others. Soon she will have me smoking cigarettes and drinking Sliwitz, a kind of Hungarian brandy distilled from bomb-shells. Her influence is not unlike these two pet indulgences of hers. It stimulates, but does not revivify; so that after I leave her a sort of collapse comes on, where I was buoyant I am depressed. In fact, I go to pieces. But, all the same, I am anxious to get back to her."

I might have added, with truth, that it flattered my vanity that the doctor should have left me to pay court to a being of such incomparable charm as the Countess. But I did not say this, in fact, the doctor's name never passed either my pen, nor my lips, and in the pleasurable ease of my life at Staysails, I was cheating myself into the consolation that he was forgotten.

It was the last day of my visit, but the Countess had been persuaded to stay on a week longer.

She and I were sitting in her room after luncheon, indulging in a "little chat," before her open wood fire.

"Here's a pretty to do," cried Fanny, putting her head in at the door, "Ned" (her husband), "has just had a telegram from an old college friend of his, saying that he will run down to-night on the 9.45 train from town. Ned won't put him off, and I think it's too provoking, when he knows the house is full, and there isn't a place for the man to lay his head."

The Countess took a puff at her cigarette before she spoke. "Let him come, my dear Fanny, it is the unexpected in life that makes it worth living. See!" pointing to a curtained alcove where her maid slept—"there is Ilma's bed. Send her to the servant's quarters, and let Miss Robertson come in here with me, if she will," she said, with a smile to me.

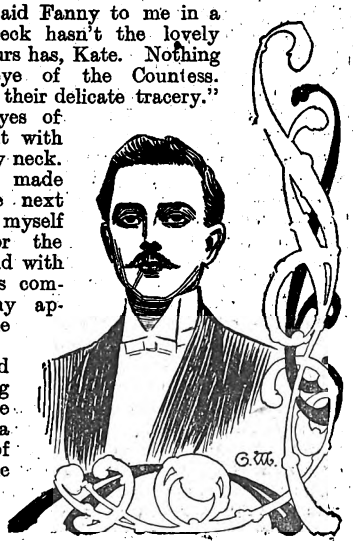
And so matters were settled to Fanny's satisfaction, as well as my own.

A snowstorm had set in that morning, and I gave a commiserating thought to the traveller, who would have to brave the drifts which, by this, were making the roads almost impassable. Fanny had persuaded me to put aside, for our last dinner at Staysails, the high-necked bodice which I usually wore, and, in its stead, to wear a low corsage of jet and lace which she gave me.

"How well you look in it, Kate," she said, when we met just before dinner. "I wish this man whom Ned is precipitating upon me could see you. And that reminds me that I never even asked his name, I was so provoked at Ned."

Here a little stir among Fanny's guests told that the Countess Czarmay was in the room. She was as lovely and fresh as the Spring-time, in a gown of green gossamer, the tint of the earliest buds on the trees. Embroidered on its delicate fabric were garlands of oak leaves and acorns, in glossy shades of brown and green. Bands of Russian sable bordered the low corsage, and set off the creamy tint of her neck and the firm swell of her bust. A court train of green velvet, edged with the fur of the sable, fell in graceful lines from her waist. Her jewels were emeralds. The necklace about her throat was fashioned in the form of a serpent, so flexibly wrought that it moved with every breath its wearer drew. Through the wonderful gold of her glorious hair gleamed the green radiance of still more emeralds, wrought by a cunning artificer, in smaller forms to match the serpent around her throat. The long gloves of Suede that wrinkled over her restless arms, were of a soft wood colour, and at her breast she wore an immense bunch of Parma violets.

"She is a dream," said Fanny to me in a half-tone, "but her neck hasn't the lovely blue veins in it that yours has, Kate. Nothing escapes the artistic eye of the Countess. See how she is admiring their delicate tracery."



True enough, the eyes of the Countess were bent with a peculiar look upon my neck. Something in her gaze made me shudder, but the next moment I called myself morbidly fanciful, for the Countess, in French, and with her sweetest smile, was complimenting me on my appearance, as she led the way in to dinner.

She was the life and soul of that last evening at Staysails. As the storm rose with a mighty crescendo of wind and snow, the recklessness of her mood grew wilder and wilder.

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The songs she sang were all in praise of wine, and love, and death. "Tokay! Tokay!" She flung the words from between her clenched teeth, as she would defy the gale. "Tokay! Tokay!" she screamed in the face of each fresh blast. Her excitement was infectious, and soon she had all the men and women lifting their glasses high in the air, and shouting the refrain. "Tokay! Tokay!" And then, the fever of her spirits rising still higher, she asked me to play her a Hungarian dance—a gipsy dance.

Whilst the others were clearing a circle on the polished floor of the music-room, she was freeing herself, with impatient hands, from her long train of velvet and sable. At the first bar of the music, she tore it from her, as if glad to be free from its restraining dignity, and flung it roughly aside. Her face was no longer that of a Madonna. She had tossed that off, as a woman does a mask at a revel's height. The whirling figure, with the glittering green serpents writhing about her head, was like a gipsy. I doubt if any of the women, I cannot speak for the men—knew what abandon meant before they saw this dance, as danced that night by the Countess Czarmay. Beholding the lawless grace of her supple body, I could well believe one of the tales I had heard of her—that she was gipsy born. No one but a gipsy could have danced as she did. So fleet were the circles of her flying feet that her skirts curled about her in spiral lines of green. She seemed like a flame licked into life from unholy fires, and had she suddenly darted up the chimney, to disappear into the forces of the storm, which was now at its height, it would have seemed only a fitting fulfilment of Nature's law of restoration.

But nothing of this sort happened. Panting and quivering, with white face and dishevelled hair, the dancer finally flung herself down among the cushions of the divan. Here the men gathered about her, but the women stood aloof in shocked little groups, whispering among themselves.

It was now close upon midnight. The storm had somewhat subsided. Fanny went to the window, and drawing its curtains aside, we saw how white the world was with snow.

"I am looking to see," she said, "if there is a sign of Ned's man. He sent the brougham over to meet the 9.45 train, but I doubt if it gets back to-night. The storm is frightful."

Nobody seemed to care very much whether it did or not, and after a few commonplaces the party broke up, the women going to their rooms, and the men following their host to the smoking-room, to await, over their pipes and toddy, the arrival of his friend.

The Countess and I were at last alone. It became manifest to me that an unusual silence possessed her. But I put this down to a reaction from the gaiety of the evening. As I made my preparations for the night, I could see, from my little room in the alcove, that she had got herself into a loose gown of scarlet silk, in which she sat, with her back turned to me, before the fire.

Her head was bent forward, and her hair fell on either side of her face in great sweeps of gold. She was intent upon something which she held upon her knees. So absorbed was she in this object, whatever it may have been, that she sat like one turned to stone. The rigidity of her attitude made me apprehensive of—I knew not what.

I turned to go to her, but just then, I saw that the long right arm of the Countess was moving back and forth with the mechanical regularity with which one sets out to accomplish some well-defined task. She had once told me that she was an expert maker of lace.

I tried to reassure myself that this was what she was now doing, or, perhaps, polishing the long, shell-like nails of her beautiful hands. But in the motion of that arm, in its hanging red sleeve, there was nothing feminine. The storm had sunk into a stillness as profound as that of the Countess. I am not naturally nervous, but I now felt myself possessed by an unaccountable feeling of terror.

It was with a sensation of security that I heard, far in the distance, the air stirred by the sound of carriage-wheels. I was glad to know that the next room would not be empty, and that its occupant would soon be within reach of my voice. The carriage was slowly approaching the house, but the Countess, still crouching over her task, paid no attention to it. Unable to longer sustain the suspense of a situation which was fast throwing me into a panic, I suddenly cried out:

"What are you doing there, dear Countess Lara?"

"Come here," she said, without turning her head. "Come here, and see for yourself what I am doing."

In my nightdress, and with bare feet, I lightly crossed the room to where she sat. Bending over her, I saw that in her left hand she held a slab of some hard, greyish substance, and in her right hand, the hand which never stayed its motion, she held a long, thin knife. There was something so unlooked for, and, at the same time, so sinister, in the aspect of that blade with the cruel edge, in the delicate, muscular hand, moving backwards and forwards, with diabolical monotony, that, involuntarily, I exclaimed:

"Good Heavens! What are you going to do with that horrible thing?"

"I am going to cut your throat from ear to ear."

The voice in which these words were spoken, more than the words themselves, froze my blood with horror, for it was the voice of the insane. I am gifted with what musicians call the acute ear, and voices to me are character. The voice of the Countess Czarmay, as I now heard it, conveyed to me the intelligence that she was a maniac. The words were nothing. Had she merely wished me a pleasant evening I would have known that the voice which enunciated the words was that of a being from whom reason had fled. I made no reply, trying to think what I could do to save myself. She had locked the door, I remembered, after we had entered the room, and a hurried glance showed me that the key was not in the keyhole.

Meanwhile the carriage had come to a standstill. The men were out on the front steps, giving the belated traveller welcome.

My frenzied thought was to rush to the window beneath which they were laughing and talking, and to cry out to them for help. But to do this would be folly, for before they could have reached me, the knife would have done its work. I realised that my only hope lay in being able to outwit the Countess, and to temporise with her until I could find means to escape. At all events, until the man should be established in the next room. Not that I knew how he could save me, but, somehow, I felt that in him lay the one chance of saving my life.

But he must come swiftly, for I saw certain signs of restlessness that told me the Countess was growing impatient.

Good Heavens! What if he should join the men in the smoking-room? A cold sweat broke out over me. Ten minutes there might be fatal. I could hear the voices growing fainter as the door closed on the men. Fortunately, the Countess was so completely dominated by her mad desire, that none of these sounds had made themselves audible to her. There was but one object in the world of which she was cognisant, the object on which her eyes were fixed with a raving glare, the little blue spot on my neck, where the vein lay under the flesh. With her eyes still fastened there, I saw that she was trying to speak, but she was so rocked by a horrible transport that the words came from her in clotted incoherence.

"Temptress, temptress!" she hissed out. "It's your fault that I am going to do this. I like you, I don't want to kill you, but I have to do it. I never thought of it until I saw that—that—that," she said, pointing with the knife at my neck. "It arouses a craving which nothing can satisfy but blood. I cannot resist it. Once before," and her voice died down to a whisper, "I was tempted in Buda Pesth. She was a pretty creature, and the blood in her veins was young, and when it streamed on my hands," and she softly rubbed her palms together in diabolical reminiscence, "it made me warm, too. Oh, so warm!" and a low laugh gurgled in her throat and was drowned there, with a torrent of words which came from her like a hemorrhage. "They tried to lock me up. They watched me for days—days—days! But I fooled them all. Doctors! Bah! I had money to buy them, and beauty to beguile them. They called me mad, but there was

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more reason in my madness than in their sanity. Besides, I am not mad. By nature I am gentle, tender, loving, until I see that—that, and the craving comes to make me cruel. When I sung and danced this evening I was a demon and it was you who made me so. You made me so with that. Do you hear, with that?"

I did hear the sickening words, but notwithstanding the terror they inspired, I moved nearer to the Countess, for lying, not two steps from me, I saw, half hidden in the long, white fur rug, where she must have dropped it in her preoccupation, the key to the door. I slid my bare foot along very stealthily until it was in such a position as made it easy for me to slip my toe through the handle of the key. If fitted like a ring to a finger, and the folds of my long nightdress fell about it and hid it from view.

My courage rose from the contact of the metal on my instep. Besides, I heard the door of the smoking-room open, and the voices of the men in the hall, bidding good-night to the man who was to be in the next room, and I knew that in a few more moments he would be there. But, until he should get there, it behoved me to successfully divert the Countess. However, before I could speak, she had bounded from her chair, to throw herself roughly in front of me and to hold the knife up to my throat. Had I flinched, that moment would have been my last. By a superhuman effort of my will, I kept under control the overcharged battery of my nerves, and managed, for the first time, to catch and to hold the shifting eyes of the Countess.

"You are too calm—too calm!" she muttered. "Are you trying to fool me? Do you know what I am going to do?"

My words had to pass over the steel of that awful knife when they left my throat, but I kept the tremors from my voice, and my eyes looked straight into the eyes that were trying to get away from mine.

"Yes, I know what you are going to do, dear Countess, but I am not ready yet to die. Let me have a few moments in which to prepare to meet my Maker."

With bursting eardrums I could hear the man's footsteps mounting the long flight of stairs. The conviction that he was coming, this stranger, not alone augmented my courage, but filled me with a mysterious sense of security. As the steps came nearer and nearer my brain grew clearer. I took a rapid reconnoitre of the room. In a flash my course was decided upon. The walls were high, fully sixteen feet, and near the ceiling a transom window was cut, and standing directly under it was an old-fashioned piece of furniture. Its four bowed legs supported drawers which rose, tier upon tier, till they were ten all told, each drawer having at either end a hanging handle of brass. As if to favour my plan, standing in close proximity to this was a *prie dieu*, of carved ebony and purple velvet.

"Do you want to pray?" she spat out the word as if it were venom.

"Yes," I answered, "I want to pray," pointing as I spoke to the *prie dieu*, which stood, luckily, behind the tall back of her chair. Slowly, and as if loth to leave my flesh, the knife was withdrawn from my throat. I must gain time, for the steps halted on the top of the stairs. The man was talking in muffled tones to his host. "Are you sure your knife is quite sharp enough, dear Countess? I am a coward, I confess, and I want it over quickly. Look, does it not seem a little blunt? There, near the point. And while I am praying, why will you not take the time to make it sharper?"

To this she agreed, saying: "I will give you five minutes, but if you raise your voice, if you whisper even, if, in any way, you try to call out for help, I shall not wait for you to finish your prayers. Do you promise me?"

"As I hope to save my soul, I promise you. Not a word shall pass my lips."

Just then the little clock on the mantel struck one. "Go! I will leave you to yourself on the conditions I have named. When the time is up I shall come to you." She watched me as a cat does a mouse, as I sank upon my knees upon the *prie dieu*. My clasped hands, and my eyes raised to Heaven fooled her, as I meant they should. Fooled her so completely that she once more resumed her seat in the great arm-chair, to become absorbed, as I knew she would, in the work of sharpening her knife. I shall for ever believe that the God whose religion she compelled me to travesty that night, heard the prayer I had no time to offer. For, as if to help me in my extremity, a great wind arose and struck the house with a mighty roar which set all the shutters banging and the windows rattling. And in the din, the mad woman, making ready her knife, did not hear, as I did, the door of the next room open and shut. Nor did she hear me when I sprang from my knees to the head rest of the *prie dieu*. From there to scale the rungs of a ladder which I made by pulling out such of the drawers as I needed for ledges on which to set my feet. With the key between my teeth, I climbed till my hands grasped the fluted woodwork about the front of the piece of furniture. Stealthily I drew myself up over this, to crawl along its dusty top, till I could get a good look through the transom.

When I did so, my promise to the Countess came near to being broken, for my voice well-nigh rang out in the gladness that possessed me, for the man in the next room was Dr. Dick Crawford! Then it was, to the shame of my human woman heart, that this joy receded, leaving in its place a jealousy so fierce and so desolating that it might well have been a question which was the more insane, the Countess or I. He was there, not because of me, but because of the woman for whose madness I would, in all probability, have to die. In the face of that death which was pressing close upon me, the strongest of all human passions had come to rack me, and to usurp all wiser and gentler thoughts.

This aberration was of such duration as is a flash of lightning, gone by the time my eyes, anguished and wild with terror, drew his eyes to mine, looking down upon him from my transomed height. In that one look I saw—but this is not a love story, never mind what I saw. Let it suffice that it made life a thousand times more precious to me than it had ever seemed before. And, if death must be, remembering that look, I could die almost content.

There was no time to lose. I dropped the key from my hand to his. Once more his eyes rested on mine, and then he was gone. The thought that perhaps I should never see him again smote me with despair. If he came in time to save me it must be quickly, for I saw that the mad creature, with the knife in her hand, had risen from her chair and was moving towards the *prie dieu*. For reasons best known to herself she had not turned up the gas in the room, and the fire had burnt low by this, leaving us in semi-darkness. But the figure gliding towards me in the long, red robe seemed, in my distempered fancy,

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by her passing through it to turn the air red. When she reached the place of prayer and found me gone she burst into oaths and cries horrible to hear.

Crouching down, flat on my face behind the woodwork which only half concealed me, I could feel the piece of furniture rock and tremble beneath the blows she struck it with the knife. She jabbed down deep into its wood, ripping and tearing it in her frenzy. A wild shriek of laughter told me that she had caught sight of me. I heard the brass handles rattling as she clutched them in her maddened hands. She was climbing up after me.

Her breath came in quick gasps, I could hear it. Suddenly she shot a long arm over the railing, and twisted her fingers in my hair until she tore it from my head. But I kept my face pressed close down to the woodwork, knowing it was the little blue spot in my neck she was trying to get at. My strength was no match for hers. With a sudden wrench of the hair, which was bleeding at the roots, she jerked my head back, leaving my throat exposed to the knife which hovered above it.

And then I thought the end had come. But before the blade could descend from where she held it high in air, her arms were seized and pinioned in a grip as strong as that death from which he had saved me. And the Countess Czarmay, snapping, snarling, foaming at the mouth, was powerless in the grasp of Dr. Crawford.

I saw the knife drop from her hand. I saw the others, brought by her shrieks, rushing in at the door. And then, I let myself think of the one being on earth whom I had kept all through that terrible hour from my thoughts, knowing that to think of him would unnerve me—my brother Tom. And thinking of Tom, I burst into a tempest of tears, which ended in a dead faint. How they got me down I never knew. When I opened my eyes it was on the lounge, in Fanny's room, it was now an hour later, and she was with me.

"Only think, dear, I never dreamt that Ned's man was the distinguished Dr. Crawford, the eminent authority on diseases of the brain. It seems that he had imposed secrecy upon Ned, because he wished to come down here *incog.*, so that he might study from personal observation the case of the Countess. All his previous diagnoses had been made simply from watching her at a distance. He has noted every gesture, every expression, every movement; no detail has been too trifling to escape his notice.

"And, do you know, Kate, that the very first time he set eyes on her at the Tournament, he knew that she was possessed by the homicidal mania? Just think what a great diagnostician he must be! Her case has baffled all the specialists of Europe, and such a dance as she has led her poor husband, Count Fedor Czarmay, who, by the way, is an old Heidelberg friend of Dr. Crawford's. And it was only out of sympathy with him that he has devoted himself so untiringly to her case. Poor Countess! How sad it is. So long as she lives, she will have to be caged, like a wild beast! And, only to think, that this is the very first time that Dr. Crawford has met her! How fortunate it was for you, dear, that he came just when he did!" she said, with a smile, for at that moment Dr. Crawford entered the room.

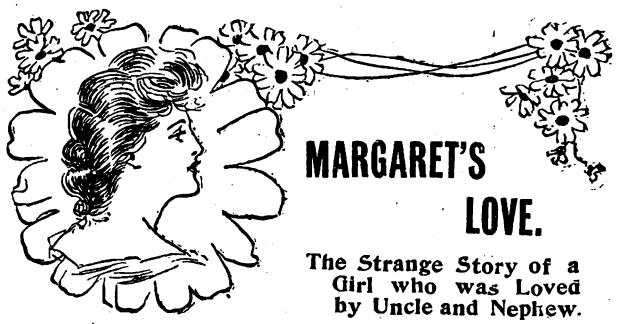
"You were saying something, Mrs. Rives, which I did not quite catch; may I trouble you to repeat it?" he said, coming over to where I lay, and standing quite close to me.

"I was telling Miss Robertson how fortunate it was for her that you came just when you did. It certainly was a night of events in the household of the Colgate-Rives."

Before he answered her, Dr. Crawford stooped down and kissed me on my lips. "More fortunate for me, Mrs. Rives," he said, "than for her."

Harley Gwynn.

"You'll be sorry some day that you didn't get married, if you don't." "Well, I'd rather not be married and be sorry I wasn't, than be married and sorry I was."



MARGARET'S LOVE.

The Strange Story of a Girl who was Loved by Uncle and Nephew.

It was a strange story, though a simple one; but then most of the stories of real life are strange. Margaret Griffiths had loved her husband; that was the one thing in the whole world of which she was sure. When she read stories and poems about love, as she did read them often—for she was a young creature, even in her widowhood—she always felt a little sympathetic thrill at her heart, and said to herself:

"That is how *I* loved my husband."

Yet the fact that she had loved him at all was a puzzle to the Ryefield people, who speculated about the matter, as country neighbours will. When they were married, Llewelyn Griffiths, as everybody called him, was already forty years old, and Margaret was only seventeen. Her father had left her to "the trusty guardianship of his good friend, Llewelyn Griffiths," as he said in his will.

Mr. Griffiths settled the estate, looked into the girl's affairs a little, as in duty bound, and then rather suddenly asked her to marry him. She had grown up, admiring her guardian. He was tall, handsome, full of strength and power—just the man for a romantic girl to make a hero of; and Margaret Fay was romantic to her very finger-tips. Moreover, she had been brought up by her father since her mother's death, when she was too young to remember; and naturally she shared all his likes and dislikes, and the strongest feeling he had in the world, next to his love for his daughter, was his attachment to his lifelong friend, Llewelyn Griffiths.

Llewelyn had certainly not wooed his bride in any story-book fashion; but then she had felt that she could not expect that—he was so much older and wiser and better than she in every way. He had talked to her very gently about her loneliness, and then he had said that *he* was lonely too; and if such a thing were possible as that she could make up her mind to come home with him and be his child-wife, and live with him always, he would be very, very good to her. And then he added, with something that would have been shyness had he not been such a self-possessed man:

"You know, Margaret, that I am only two years younger than your father."

"As if that mattered!" she cried, with her brown eyes shining and her cheeks glowing softly. "As if that mattered! You are *you!*"

"That means that you will come to me?" he said, and then he took the little fluttering hands she held out to him into his own, and gave her a kiss so like the one which her father used to give her at night and morning, that it brought the quick tears of memory into her gentle eyes. And so Margaret believed that she was in love, and that this tall, handsome man, who had been her admiration ever since she could remember, was her heart's lord, her knight, her hero, and a dozen other high-sounding titles, which she had taken out of the story-books.

Her lover had said nothing to her about money, and she did not know whether she had much or little. She supposed it must be a good deal, however, since in her father's time they had always lived freely, and none of her wishes had ever been denied her.

They were married on a lovely morning in early June; and it was past midsummer when they came home from their

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wedding tour. It was just at twilight when they arrived; and I think there is no hour so full of mystic solemnity as a midsummer twilight in the country. Pretty Margaret felt the strange spell of it as she stepped into the shadow of the elm drive, as the broad path was called which led up to her future home. Her very heart stood still. It seemed to her that her destiny had taken ghostly shape, and stood in front of her; and involuntarily she moved to one side, that she might not brush the phantom with her garments.

"This is home, little wife," said the kind, cheery voice of her husband; and the spell was broken. She went on then cheerfully enough into the stately old house, where one Llewelyn Griffiths after another had lived and ruled for generations.

They lived there for one peaceful year—a very happy year to Margaret, though so quiet. She went on dreaming her own dreams, investing her rather silent, yet always tender lord, with all the qualities of the heroes of her books, and honestly believing herself to be the very happiest little wife that the sun shone on. She half wondered sometimes that her happiness was so quiet; there were always tumults of one sort and another in the story-books, but that must be because the course of her true love had run so smoothly, and Llewelyn had none of the faults of temper which the other heroes had.

It was midsummer again when the horse upon which her husband had ridden away came home riderless; and Llewelyn Griffiths was brought in afterwards, by some neighbours, who had found him lying placidly upon the grass, with no sign of injury about him, but a smile upon his face so full of light and joy that at first they thought he must be alive, and then were frightened, as if such a smile on the face of the dead were unseemly.

The doctor came—the old village doctor, whose patients were to him almost like his children; and then it came out that both he and Llewelyn Griffiths himself had known for some years that just this end was sure to come.

The family lawyer came, too—but that was after the funeral—and made Margaret understand that she was a rich young widow, since all her husband's estates were hers, unreservedly; and then she found out for the first time that her father had left no fortune at all behind him—absolutely not enough money to pay his debts.

"What should I have done?" thought the poor little widow, "but for Llewelyn?"

She was scarcely more than eighteen then; and she shivered as if she had felt a cold blast when she asked herself the question—for she had never known a want or a care in her life, and the thought of struggling with the world for her daily bread came to her with a sort of horror. If anything could have made her hero's memory more dear, it was the knowledge that his love had saved her for ever from such a fate.

Her grief for him was not at all passionate, but it was very deep. She felt an intolerable aching want of him in her heart; or was it really the want, not so much of *him*, as of the love, and tenderness to which he had accustomed her? Sometimes she felt like a little child whom its mother had left in a great desert. The child would stretch out imploring arms for its mother to come back; but those arms would welcome any kindly comer who would take it out of the awful loneliness.

If a thought like that ever crossed Margaret's mind, she rejected it with hot indignation at herself. She always would mourn for Llewelyn—always—always; Llewelyn who had married her when she was utterly poor, utterly alone, and had made her life henceforth like that of a sheltered flower in a perpetual summer. She would be Llewelyn's, and Llewelyn's only, till she died; and then Heaven would *be* Heaven partly because she would so certainly find Llewelyn there waiting for her.

One day, when her husband had been dead six months, she beguiled the dreariness of a winter afternoon by looking through the contents of an old desk that had been his. She found some things that surprised her—one drawer in which was such a book as she did not know that Llewelyn cared about, an actual novel; and there were passages marked in this book, sometimes heavily, sometimes lightly, as if two people had read it together. And there was a deep, vivid, red rose of long ago, which crumbled when she touched it; and its ghost seemed to come out and fill the room with a passionate, despairing fragrance.

She wondered a little over this rose and this book, which had a drawer all to themselves; but she did not think much about them, because in another drawer she found a letter, and this, too, had a drawer to itself. On the outside of it was written:

"*For my child-wife to read on the day when she is twenty-one, if before that time I am dead, as I think will be the case.*"

Margaret took up the letter, and a strange thrill shook her, and she grew a little cold. It was as if her husband had put forth his hand out of his grave, and touched her. She was so very lonely, that she longed to read this message from him, and she questioned awhile with herself whether she might not do so. But she had an almost superstitious dread of disobeying him in anything; and she shut the drawer hurriedly lest she

Llyn was always over bold—he bent down his head and kissed her.

should be tempted, and went away and sat down in the firelight.

She began to think how very young she was—only eighteen and a half now, and it would be two years and a half more before she could even read that letter. Oh, how many, many weary years, if she lived as long as most people do, before she could go to Llewelyn! She *must* read his words after all; but, no—ten thousand times no! she would do his will now that he was gone even more sacredly than if he were alive.

She got up and went back to the desk. She took one look at the drawer where lay the crumbled red-rose petals, with their dying, despairing scent; and then she looked at the letter—the very last words her husband could speak to her until she, too, was dead. Then resolutely she locked the desk, as one who would hold no further parley with temptation; and, bringing the key away with her, threw it into the very heart of the glowing fire.

When Llewelyn Griffiths had been dead two years, one of his nephews came home from the medical studies he had been completing in French and German hospitals. It was Llewelyn's money that had sent him abroad; but Margaret

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did not know that until afterwards; and Llewelyn had arranged for him, when his foreign studies were completed, to come home to Ryefield and begin his medical career as partner of the old doctor who had killed and cured so many generations of the Ryefield people, that it seemed almost time he should enter into his rest.

The young fellow was another Llewelyn Griffiths, though everyone called him Llyn; and it had been the uncle's dream that this younger Llewelyn Griffiths should live after him in the old place, and keep up the old name there. That dream came to its end, however, when he himself married Margaret, and bequeathed to her all his possessions, as I have said, leaving her absolutely unfettered as to their future disposition.

Naturally, when the young doctor came to Ryefield, he went to see his uncle's widow. She was twenty years old then, and a daintier, sweeter little lady had never been mistress of the stately old house, in all the generations of Griffithses, who had lived and died there.

Dr. Llyn found it impossible to regard her as his uncle's widow, though she still wore her unmitigated widow's mourning.

He looked into her soft, brown eyes, and watched the blush-roses come and go in her fair young face, and he fell, at once and altogether, in love at first sight. He hardly realised just what his own symptoms meant; but he presently "diagnosed" the case, as he said, and he knew it was a mortal wound which his heart had received.

He tried to be very discreet, and not to shock his "rare, pale Margaret" by any too hasty demonstrations; but he actually haunted her in spite of himself. And she rather liked it, and began to think it was very nice to be an aunt by marriage to somebody.

He thought that, in waiting from midsummer until the middle of winter before he asked her to marry him, he had shown himself a model of discretion. He was not prepared for the look of shocked surprise that dilated those soft eyes of hers, when suddenly, one winter evening, he told her that he loved her, and asked her to be his wife. She just looked into his face, with sudden amazement in her own, and said, with an air she tried to make very dignified indeed:

"It seems to me you forget yourself strangely. I have some regard for your uncle's memory, if you have none. I shall be Mrs. Llewelyn Griffiths until I die."

"That is just what I have been hoping," cried wicked Llyn; and then, suddenly, his meaning, and the quiet humour of his cool answer, touched that chord in her that quivers between smiles and tears in all women, and she burst into a laugh that made her, a moment after, hate herself and him.

"I am not laughing because I am pleased," she cried hotly, almost beginning to weep.

"No, I understand," said imperturbable Llyn; "you are laughing because you are displeased."

"Yes, I *am* displeased, and shocked, and grieved; and I thought you were a real friend and a relative, and now I know——"

"That I love you," put in Llyn, "as *I know* nobody ever did before, and I don't believe anyone ever will again; and I want you for my wife, to have and to hold, to love and to cherish, until death us do part."

"We will not wait for death to part us," she said, with a quiet strength that astonished Llyn more than any of her charms had ever done; and she rose and walked steadily out of the room, her long black robes trailing behind her.

Llyn stood still for a while in front of the fire. I believe he whistled. Perhaps he thought she would come back again; but, if so, he reckoned without his hostess. She waited quietly in her own room until she heard the front door shut. Then she knelt down, and leant her head against her husband's desk. She longed desperately to open it and read her letter. She thought that to read that letter would be as if her dead love should take her into his arms, and thank and bless her for being true to him when she had been tempted—yes, she owned to herself that she *had* been tempted just a little. But she had thrown away the key; and, after all, there were only six months to wait, and she must do Llewelyn's will.

The next morning she sent Dr. Llyn a very dignified little letter. It said:

"Dear Llyn,—*You will please not come here again until you are ready to forget what you said last night, and to respect your uncle's memory as you should.—Your well-wishing aunt,*

"Margaret Griffiths."

His well-wishing aunt! This time Llyn whistled; there was no mistake about it. He put the little letter in his pocket as if it had been a love-token, and went off to make a round of medical visits.

Really it was very lonely for Mistress Margaret all the rest of that winter. But she never had more than a moment's temptation to recall Dr. Llyn.

And somehow the Winter wore away, and Spring went by; and then Summer burst upon the world, all bloom, and pomp, and radiance. And with the June came Margaret's twenty-first birthday.

She dressed swiftly, and then she sent for a locksmith, and in five minutes more Llewelyn's letter was in her hand.

She barred the door of her room. She sat down, and broke the seal, and then she put her hand over her eyes, and said a silent little prayer before she began so read. This was the letter:

"My Little Margaret,—*Other husbands have put out a grasp, from the very grave, to draw yet closer the chain by which they held a beloved woman in bondage; I stretch forth mine to set my child-wife wholly free. You have never loved me, my Margaret, with your uttermost love; and perhaps you yourself will have found that out before this letter reaches you. Nor have I ever loved you as those lovers love of whom your girl's heart has dreamt. I did love once, with all the passionate young heart of me; and she whom I loved died.*

"*I never meant to marry anyone else; but when your father—my best friend—left you in my charge, I knew no other way to care for you so well as to bring you home, my wife. I should not have dared to take this responsibility; but I knew well, as Dr. Leland could tell you, that my life must needs be brief—a matter of months, perhaps—of two or three years at the very most—and so I ventured to take you, and care for you tenderly, knowing that before your girl's heart was ready for the deep love of womanhood, I should have set you free.*

"*When you read this, you will be twenty-one, young, beautiful, prosperous, with all the world before you where to choose. You have a nature unusually capable of happiness, and I predict for you very great happiness some day. When that day comes, be sure, my little Margaret, that if the happy dead can know the joys and sorrows of those they leave behind them here, we shall look down from our far place, and bless you—she and I.*

"Llewelyn Griffiths."

Do you think Margaret's first thought a strange one. It broke from her lips in a happy little cry:

"Thank Heaven, he never really—*really* loved me!"

I suppose *she* knew why she thanked Heaven for that.

That afternoon she dressed herself in a soft, simple, white gown, that made her look more lovely and more girlish than ever. Her eyes were bright with some new, dear brightness, and the fitful blush-roses came and went in her cheeks more fitfully than ever. It was no wonder that the maid who answered her summons when she rang the bell, looked at her in surprise when she said:

"I wish you would fetch the doctor. I don't mean the old doctor; bring Dr. Llyn. Say I don't feel very well."

"What is it, dear aunt?" said Llyn, half-an-hour later, pretending to look at her anxiously. "Is it your head?"

"No, Llyn, I think it's my heart. It's—it's this letter."

And, as she spoke, she put his uncle's letter into his hand.

And Llyn read, and then he smiled; and then—for Llyn was always over-bold—he bent down his head, and kissed her.

"Yes," he said quietly, "I see how it is. You will be Mrs. Llewelyn Griffiths until you die.

Marion Montague.

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SPLENDID NEW SERIAL YOU CAN START TO-DAY.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Eardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

PROLOGUE.

A YOUTH is in the private room of Messrs. Samuel Sharpe and Quirke, solicitors, awaiting the head of the firm's announcement as to whether he is the heir to the baronetcy of the late Sir Basil Wingate or not.

Mr. Sharpe says:

"You will remember, Mr. Rust, at the reading of the will, the title, which by special remainder he had power to dispose of, and the money were left by Sir Basil Wingate to the elder son of his run-away only daughter, Helen Jerningham, *should* she have one; and failing a son being born to her, the title and the money *with* the estate, should go to you, his nephew; afterwards to *your* son—should you marry, or to the *son* of your daughter; no child of the feminine sex directly inheriting it."

He then tells Cyprian Rust that, hearing Helen Jerningham went to Australia, he has extensively advertised for her in Australian papers, but with no effect. Therefore he congratulates his listener on becoming Sir Cyprian Rust.

The solicitor is called out of the room, and Cyprian Rust sees on the table an unopened letter with an Australian stamp. The address he recognises as being in the handwriting of his cousin Helen Jerningham!

Is it written to announce the birth of a son and heir? If so it would rob him of the legacy at the eleventh hour!

A step sounds outside the door. Quickly Cyprian Rust thrusts the letter into his pocket. He hurriedly says good-bye to Mr. Sharpe, and when he reaches his hotel he reads the missive. It tells how Helen Jerningham has left Australia, so that the future heir—if a boy—may be born in England!

Sir Cyprian Rust carefully burns the letter that might have dealt the death blow to his ambitions, and mentally resolves to go to any extremes to retain the title.

Meanwhile Helen Jerningham is dying on board an ocean liner in giving birth to twin sons.

From incoherent remarks that she makes, the physician who attends her is led to believe that a secret is attached to the boys' history. But she dies ere she reveals her name or the boys' identity!

Many years later.

MARCELLA RUST, daughter of Sir Cyprian, finds a spade guinea which a mysterious man has hidden underneath the mat outside a certain room which she has been forbidden to enter in their home, Wingate Court, Crawley. Her curiosity is naturally aroused, and she tells her father of the occurrence. He seems annoyed at her alertness.

Sir Cyprian learns, through the Rev. Philip Nullius, that a dying woman wishes to see him.

He goes to see her, and she shows him a later will of Sir Basil Wingate, by which all his property is left to the descendant of Helen Jerningham unconditionally. Sir Cyprian snatches this will from her, and she dies before she can inform anyone else.

Sir Cyprian visits Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox, where he meets Mr. Caleb J. Johnson, millionaire and city magnate, who is in love with the hostess.

The baronet, speaking in private to Lady Violet, and referring to Johnson, says:

"The house of that millionaire chap contains a valuable lot of plate, and you have the *entrée* to it. When next you visit it there are certain details I wish you to note, and——"

"Not *that* house!" she gasps. "I cannot, even to you! He will be here to-night, as my guest."

He looked at her curiously. "You either do this for me, or Marcella will know that for a certain sum her—aunt—sold her!"

For one brief moment the woman hesitated, then her answer came, slowly:

"I will do it; for my task-master is a hard one!"

Late in the evening Johnson proposes to Lady Violet. Knowing her position, she, of course, refuses him.

"Why," replies he, "is there any just cause or impediment?"

As he speaks the palms in front of the window part and a man lurches heavily into the room.

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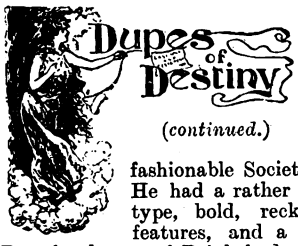

(*continued.*)

SIXTH CHAPTER.

An Unbidden Guest.

He was not an ordinary ruffian the man who had so unceremoniously interrupted a prospective engagement between the fashionable Society beauty and a millionaire. He had a rather handsome face of a dissolute type, bold, reckless, blue eyes, well-shaped features, and a dare-devil, sneering mouth. But the demon of Drink had marked him down as its own, and in bloodshot eyes, discoloured skin, and loose lips of a bluish tint there waved the black flag of the fatal vice

His coat was shabby, and his linen not of that hue usually connected with the attire of a gentleman; but he wore his clothes with a certain careless swagger that only a man who has originally been within the magic circle of the "smart set" ever retains through the many vicissitudes that his degradation takes him.

He gazed with an amused smile upon the silent woman in her beauty, who, grasping her fan with one white hand, rested the other on a marble statue of the goddess Pallas Athene.

The financier, Caleb J. Johnson, was the first to break the strange stillness.

"Look here, my fine buccaneer," he said in his curiously-crisp tone, "this kind of entrance into a lady's drawing-room may look very well from the front of a theatre, when you expect a little applause for it, but just now it has fallen sort of flat. Only the presence of this lady prevents me from introducing my foot to you in a way not always agreeable but sometimes effective. And if you retain any sense in your head you will just put those words in your pipe and smoke 'em. D'you hear?" he went on in a slightly-louder key. "You had better get out of this, or I'll call for the police!"

The intruder smiled slowly, his eyes glinting narrowly as he gazed from the face of the speaker back to that of the woman, whose dark eyes seemed to burn like living coals of fire as they met his.

He took a cigarette from his pocket, and poised it jauntily in his mouth.

"Thanks, awfully, for the advice," he said carelessly. "As to going out of the house, much as I dislike appearing disagreeable in interrupting an amorous *tête-à-tête*, I am afraid I must regretfully decline to leave you to make your proposal again to Lady Violet."

The millionaire flushed darkly, and took a step forward.

"You drunken hound," he said thickly, "you will pay for this insolence dearly!" Then, turning to the white-faced woman at his side, he said: "Forgive me, Lady Violet, but I think it will be better for you to leave the room while I deal with this fellow as he deserves."

A slow smile parted the lips of the stranger as he looked leisurely at the silent woman whose eyes had never left his face.

"I think it will be wiser if you restrain your—friend's martial spirit, Vi. I don't wish to be disagreeable, but if I am forced to assert myself I may surprise him."

As one roused from a dream, she woke to life at his words. With a light touch on the millionaire's arm, she said, with an effort:

"Don't touch him. He is not what you imagine; he has a right to be here."

"A right!" muttered Caleb J. Johnson sarcastically. "Yes, as much as a lackey or a 'boots'! Let me kick him out, Lady Violet; even old servants have not the monopoly to be insolent."

Her face flushed warmly, and she flashed a warning glance at the debonair intruder, who still regarded them with a cynical smile.

"One moment; I want to speak with you alone." She murmured. Then, drawing him aside, she said slowly:

"Mr. Johnson, as a man of the world, you know that there is a skeleton in every family. That man is the skeleton of mine. He is a disgraceful member of it—a creature we would be glad to hear the last of; but, still, when he appears in our midst we are forced to acknowledge him."

She spoke bitterly; but the eyes of the financier were scanning her face keenly, and he noted the ebb and flow of colour on her pale cheeks.

"Who is the fellow?" he said abruptly. "Anyway, relationship is no reason why he should behave like a low-down bounder."

"No," she answered bitterly; "but it is sometimes an excuse." Then she went on rapidly: "I want you to leave me now, Mr. Johnson. If I don't return to him he will only make a scene among my other guests, whom I do not regard in the same light as I do you."

"But I thought Sir Cyprian Rust was your brother-in-law?" said the financier slowly.

"That is no reason why I should make him the recipient of my confidences, Mr. Johnson," Lady Violet answered briefly. "My brother-in-law and myself are quite friends; but there we stop. I do not put my trust in princes."

"No," he replied with an arrogant touch; "but you will in financiers—won't you? Remember, when you have done with that oaf of a hanger-on I shall return for my answer. You nearly gave it me, and I am almost certain what it will be."

She flung a nervous glance behind her, where, standing with his elbow against the statue of the Pallas Athene, was the shabby man who had interrupted their *tête-à-tête*, waiting with imperturbable patience for her to join him.

"Not to-night" she said hastily, "another time. I—I am not in a mood to be acquiescent, Mr. Johnson. Perhaps I may say what you will not like, through sheer *ennui*."

"You can never say what I will not like, Lady Violet" he retorted gallantly, "least of all to-night, when your answer will, I am certain, be the one I intend to have, notwithstanding all the undesirable relatives in the world. I have fought and won hard battles in my life, and will not admit of defeat in the most important of all my undertakings."

A sense of being in the grip of a stronger will than her own made Lady Violet wish for a moment that she had not asked the "Gold King" to dine with her that night. His voice was so quiet, his glance so serene, that she feared to come in contact with the iron hand beneath the velvet glove lest she should be bent to his might, even as she was to that of her brother-in-law, Sir Cyprian Rust.

"As you are strong, be merciful!" she smiled faintly. "At present I cannot even consider the question you made to me, let alone decide upon my answer. Now go, please, and let me hear the unfortunate creature who stepped so inopportunely into our conversation."

"I will do your bidding now," said Caleb J. Johnson suavely; "and shall wait near, in case that ruffian grows unpleasant. But before I leave your house, Lady Violet, it will be with the right to protect you from further insult at the hands of ne'er-do-well cousins."

As his enormous figure strolled towards the conservatory she sent a glance of wonder after him. He was so assured of her answer that she felt it would be useless to go contrary to his wishes. If it were not for that—— She bit her lip, and turned back into the drawing-room. She knew she had some moments to herself, as her guests were nearly all visitors in the house and accustomed to being left to their own devices, while Marcella was in the conservatory with Edward Day.

"Well?" she said, in a low, even tone, addressing the languid figure of the man who had prevented her from sending the announcement of her engagement to the *Morning Post*. "As it is more than eight years since you honoured me with any correspondence or requests for money I naturally deduced that you were dead, since all your allowances during that time were returned to my solicitors."

He stretched himself lazily, and chewed the end of his cigarette.

"Sorry to disappoint you, Vi, old girl, especially as you

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seemed to be on the verge of forming new ties with that man of opulence and bulk. I suppose you would call me the 'little rift within the lute' of your expectation, eh?" and he laughed softly.

She looked at him with quiet contempt.

"It is not my desire to discuss my friends with you. They believe me to be a widow, which I am, God knows, in every sense of the word!" she flashed passionately.

"Except the practical one," he sneered. "And I don't fancy, my Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox, that you will gain your practical widowhood for some time."

"Why have you come here?" she said in a hard voice, ignoring his remark altogether. She was calm again, and nearly as white as the statue against which the man was leaning. "Remember, the conditions upon which I allowed you £300 a year were that you should never return to England or attempt to annoy me in any way. You have after twenty years—during twelve of which you received the money through my solicitors—broken both parts of your compact. Why do you come here, when for eight years you have not applied for the money that was the means of providing you with drink?"

She spoke bitterly, but the shabby intruder only smiled gently as he replied:

"My dear Vi, do keep your temper. I found that it was not so difficult to make money, after all. There were many more ways open to a scamp addicted to drink than to a major in the Army with a reputation to hold together. When I discarded the Army—or, rather, when I was cashiered from it—I was content to make shift on your pittance of £300 while I did nothing——"

"Except drink," she said coldly.

He smiled pleasantly. "Precisely; but I had sufficient sense left to keep drink *my* slave, than to be the slave myself. Then I suddenly found that there was a good chance of making money at—other things"—and a curious expression crossed his bloated face. "So that explains my reason for letting you revel in the luxury of imagining yourself my widow for eight years."

She turned on him sharply.

"Spare me any more details, please. All I wish to know is what you want here? My solicitors could have dealt with you without you forcing yourself on me. I have no money here—at least, not the amount you would require."

He looked at her narrowly. Her dark, passionate face, alive with bitter contempt, only served to amuse him. He was dead to all other feeling.

"I don't particularly want money, Vi," he answered insolently; "though when I do I shall not hesitate to ask for it. But you seem to have forgotten, my precious wife, that scamp and social pariah as I am, I am still your husband; and Major Richard Frayne-Lennox intends to live with his wife once more, and so scare off would-be suitors to her lily-white hand. That is a masterstroke of policy, isn't it?"

"You would not dare!" she panted, her face flushing hotly. "Even my brother-in-law, Sir Cyprian Rust, believes me a widow; and all my friends think that Major Richard Frayne-Lennox went to South Africa when he was cashiered from the Army, and, enlisting in some Yeomanry company, was killed in action. You won't be such a madman as to dare to do the thing you suggest—to rake up, by your presence in Society, the story of your disgrace?"

He laughed quietly, and stroked the ends of his moustache with long, white fingers.

"Why not? I am not the only Society blackleg that faces the music. And," he sneered, "with the support of my lovely wife, who receives me back, the Society sheep will follow her example and forget the past."

"Never!" she said in a low, tense voice. "You shall never receive any support from me! I will never acknowledge you again!"

"How will you prevent my coming here, then?" he retorted. "What force will you bring to bear upon me?"

"We are joined together by holy matrimony, and only death can break our tie!"

SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Sir Cyprian is Startled.

She leant forward, her dark eyes flashing with suppressed excitement, and her breath coming and going in quick gasps.

"A force you do not think I possess! I have only to furnish a certain person with the knowledge that you are in England again, alive, and you will be arrested on the charge of doctoring the figures on a cheque that was trusted to you! I knew of it, and was always prepared to use this threat should you ever attempt to see me again or annoy me. Now you know that unless within twenty-four hours I receive a tele-

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gram to say you have left England I shall acquaint the proper person with the fact that you are still living and in London."

While she had been speaking the man's dissolute face had turned to a livid colour and his eyes had sent a furtive glance round the room in case she had been overheard.

"So you knew of that," he muttered. "You would fling your husband into gaol?"

She laughed a chilly laugh. "I have long since ceased to regard you in that light. To me you are a blot on the escutcheon of my happiness, and unless you swear to go away from me I shall do as I have said—and you know best whether you can prove your innocence."

A low imprecation escaped the lips of the man who had once been a major in His Majesty's Army. Then he said sullenly:

"All right, I'll go. You've got the whip-hand this time; but you needn't fancy," he continued, with a savage snarl, "that I shall allow you to receive further proposals of marriage. The moment I hear of your name being coupled with that of any other man I shall return and chance everything. You can't get rid of me, my lady! We are joined together by 'holy matrimony,' and only death can break our tie."

She shivered, and her face grew very pale and icy as she said contemptuously:

"To me you are dead already. But I still retain my self-respect, notwithstanding the fact that I am your wife and, keeping it, I am not likely to commit the crime of bigamy; since I see that I am linked by a chain of hate to the effigy of a husband. Now leave me," she went on; "the window through which you came may be your exit."

He laughed coarsely.

"Then I'm hanged if I don't go through the hall door, as any of your other guests, my lady! Should your well-bred acquaintances question you as to the identity of the shabby loafer who came out of your drawing-room you may acknowledge me as your husband, Major Richard Frayne-Lennox. I shall not object."

With a supercilious gesture towards the silent woman, whose dark eyes sparkled with suppressed loathing, he moved in the direction of the door, and, passing through it, found himself at the top of a wide staircase opening into an alcove, flanked on either side by tall palms, and in the centre was a fairy fountain, half hidden by foliage and tobacco-plants, only the soft sprinkle of the water revealing the fact that there was anything behind them.

As the eyes of the outcast dwelt with a cynical smile at the luxury round him, a man's voice making some laughing remark sent a strange expression into his eyes, and he drew, back with a sudden glide behind a velvet portière.

Three figures had come out of an adjoining room—that of a girl, radiant in white, and two men. They paused with their backs to the portière to gaze at a picture to which the girl had referred.

"Yes," said one of the men—and the listener behind the arras recognised the voice of the man who had threatened a few moments ago to kick him out of his own wife's drawing-room—"it is a very fine picture, Miss Rust, but I fancy that I could show you a better one of the same subject on my own walls. You must come and see it one day with your aunt, if Sir Cyprian will allow you."

The man pressed against the wall strained his ears to catch, not the reply of the girl, but that of the man who had spoken first and had been silent since the three paused before the picture.

"I will be very pleased for Marcella to accompany her aunt," said the suave, aristocratic tones of Sir Cyprian Rust. "I am sorely tempted to plead for an invitation also, Mr. Johnson. I am a collector myself of originals and rare prints, and were I not obliged to return to my hermitage shortly I would love nothing better than to criticise your old master."

"I shall be pleased to submit it to the judgment of so keen a critic," said the financier drily.

He was inwardly amused at the meeting with the wealthy art-collector, who had been a seedy young artist in the days when his cousin had made her unfortunate marriage. He wondered cynically how the baronet would have fared had that cousin put a son in his shoes.

He turned to his companions suddenly. "While you are admiring the beauty of Leonardo di Vinci's masterpiece, Miss Rust, I will go in search of Lady Violet, whom I left in the drawing-room."

Marcella smiled an assent, and as the ponderous figure of Caleb J. Johnson strolled away the eyes of the baronet sparkled with satisfaction.

Inside the drawing-room the financier paused. It was empty save for a motionless figure in a robe of shimmering sequins.

"Now the family scapegoat has departed," he said softly, "we will pick up the thread of our conversation, Lady Violet."

She flung out her hand, with a hard little laugh.

"Ah, Mr. Johnson, a thread once broken can never be cemented together again. We must let the loose strand go now and consider new ones."

"You mean——" he said quietly.

"That I must forget that there was a question to answer," she went on gently. "And you, Mr. Johnson, must forget that there was an answer to your question."

The financier laughed shortly. He had not expected this resistance from the aristocrat whom he had decided would make a fitting mistress of his wealth—like a jewel in a setting of gold. And her sudden change of front piqued him, making her ten thousand times more desirable in his eyes.

"If you go down into the City, Lady Violet," he said quietly, "you will learn that Caleb J. Johnson always sticks to his guns and never gives up what he has set his mind on. And opposition only strengthens his determination to gain his ends. He has conquered where most men have gone under, and—he's going to conquer now. Do you know why?"

She shook her head wearily. His strength was beginning to frighten her.

"Because he has not only thrown his mind into this deal but his heart as well, Lady Violet. And the game must be to him."

"Stop, Mr. Johnson!" she cried. "You don't understand. I can never say 'Yes' to your question. There is a barrier that even your brain and will cannot overlook."

He took a step towards her, and the twinkling, star-like eyes shone with the light of conquest.

"A barrier, eh, Lady Violet? One that concerns that scamp of a—relation, eh? Oh, don't start," he said blandly. "I am quite able to understand that there are wheels within wheels; but a clever man may sometimes stop those wheels from going round, Lady Violet."

She looked at him with startled eyes. "What—what do you mean, Mr. Johnson?"

The financier leant forward, smiling with that exultant expression well known in Wall Street and Capel Court when a crisis had loomed perilously near the impregnable position of the "Gold King."

"I mean that within a very short time, Lady Violet, you will be sending a notice to the *Morning Post* announcing your engagement to the millionaire, Caleb J. Johnson, of New York City."

* * * * *

In the meantime Marcella and her father, Sir Cyprian Rust, were admiring the pictures in the hall, while the figure behind the portière waited impatiently for them to move.

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"Marcella," said Sir Cyprian's soft voice, "come here, child; I wish to speak to you."

He drew the girl away from the fountain to a portion of the alcove away from the curtain.

The man seized his chance. Creeping softly from his hiding-place, he quickly concealed himself behind the palms and foliage that hung over the fountain, and peered furtively at the man and his daughter who now faced him.

"Yes, father," said Marcella obediently; "what is it?"

Sir Cyprian turned his head sharply. "What was that noise, child?" he said suddenly. "It sounded as though someone had pushed past the palms."

Marcella laughed. "It's only the wind, father; I heard it too."

"I wish you to observe minutely," continued Sir Cyprian, "the difference between the copy of the 'Mona Lisa' here and the one that Mr. Johnson says he possesses. I am unable to stay in town myself, so wish my little girl to be eyes for me and to learn to discern between the real and the unreal. Besides, Mr. Johnson's Park Lane residence teems with priceless gems in art and jewels."

Marcella looked interested. "I will be so glad to help you, father," she said softly, "and will specially notice all that you point out to me in the future. You are sure I can help you, father?"

Sir Cyprian smiled slowly. "More than you think, my dear. I shall be pleased if my little girl can assist me. You know my weakness for such collections."

The figure behind the palms stifled a chuckle by waving the branches of one of the palms violently to and fro.

"This is a wretchedly draughty place," Sir Cyprian muttered; "you had better join your aunt, my dear."

As the girl obeyed him he looked after her with a curious smile on his blonde, handsome face, unconscious of a pair of keen, blue eyes peering at him through the leaves not far away.

"That is rather a neat idea to use *her!* Besides, I am not sure that I can rely on the other. She knows too much to be trustworthy."

He drew out a cigar-case, and fingered a cigar with thoughtful fingers, a slow smile still curving his well-cut mouth.

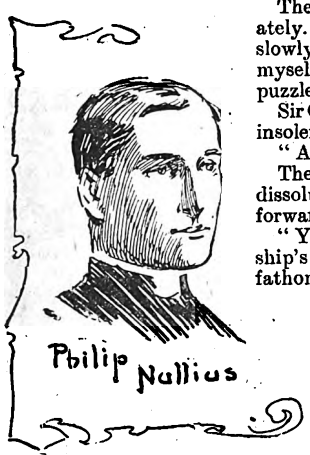
"A very good idea" he muttered—"a very good idea!"

Suddenly the anxious gaze of the man who had once been a gentleman flashed with a strange expression. The cluster of charms that hung from Sir Cyprian's broad gold albert came under the sudden glint of light which danced in particular upon a tiny bright coin, something like a sovereign, hanging among the rest of the baronet's trinkets.

The man drew in his breath with a sibilant sound and made a sudden rush forward.

Quick as lightning the baronet sprang forward and clutched the stranger's collar.

"So, you rascal!" he exclaimed, "that was your little game—was it?"



The man looked at him desperately. "I am no thief," he said slowly; "I only wished to assure myself of a certain thing that had puzzled me."

Sir Cyprian laughed: the fellow's insolence amused him.

"And what was that?"

The shabby outcast with the dissolute, reprobate face leant forward and whispered hoarsely:

"You cannot summon her ladyship's lackeys, Sir Cyprian; I have fathomed something that has baffled and worried me for some very long time. I recognised the sign of one of the secret leaders of a certain society of which I know a little. It is the Sign of the Spade among your other charms, Sir Cyprian. The order is honoured by such a noble member, whose face has been withheld for so long, but whose brain has done such good work for it."

Slowly, and with a curious tightening of his blonde skin, the baronet let go the man's collar.

"You had better make yourself scarce, my good fellow!" he said slowly after a pause. "Others may not look upon you as the harmless crank that I do."

As the man, with a mocking laugh, ran swiftly past the astonished servants out into the street Sir Cyprian fell back into his chair, looking strangely old, and the hand that swept his brow trembled slightly.

"A very awkward meeting," he muttered; "but I shall not allow it to go further! That fellow must not recognise me again. He may become dangerous, and—on the other hand, he may not!"

A gentle sigh fluttered to his lips, and a steel-like gleam flickered in his seraphic eyes as he repeated softly:

"On the other hand, he may not. I must see Debenham to-morrow. There is no time to be lost"

EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Marcella Makes an Enemy.

THE following day Sir Cyprian Rust returned from Crawley, and after spending the whole of the morning in the City, he appeared at lunch looking as though everything had gone well with him, for his smile was gentle, and his voice softly sympathetic as he asked his lovely sister-in-law whether a drive would not do both her headache and Marcella good.

Lady Violet looked at him sharply. "How do you know that I have a headache?" she said wonderingly.

Sir Cyprian smiled deprecatingly. "It does not tax my ingenuity to suppose that the dinner of last night has had the morning effect of making you feel just a little fagged," he answered suavely. "Most women would feel the strain of entertaining a millionaire like Mr. Caleb J. Johnson!"

A faint colour stained Lady Violet's creamy skin, which the baronet's smiling blue eyes were keen to note.

"Mr. Johnson," she said, slowly, "is not so objectionable as his wealth suggests. And as for entertaining him," she smiled slightly, "I think he did that for himself."

"I am glad you constitute yourself such a champion of the Gold King," laughed Sir Cyprian genially, "for he has invited you and Marcella to tea, I believe, one day this week. I trust you will accept it," he went on, gazing steadily at the white, set face. "I particularly desire Marcella to see that original of Leonardo da Vinci's he claims to possess, so take her with you, Violet."

Lady Violet's eyes rested for a moment on the fresh beauty of the girl, who was looking particularly happy and radiant in a gown of simply-made, blue serge that fitted the lithe young figure to perfection, and her lips trembled with a momentary weakness.

"I shall most certainly take Marcella with me," she answered slowly, "but she must curb her impatience until Mr. Johnson invites us, though," she added, her mouth breaking into a sudden smile, "I must warn Marcella that the original 'Mona Lisa' of Leonardo da Vinci hangs in the Louvre! And it would be difficult for even Mr. Johnson's money to buy that! However, his copy may be a very good one!"

Marcella laughed brightly. "I am afraid, Aunt Violet," she said, "that I have not inherited father's taste for originals, and am quite happy with a copy! I have not the artistic temperament. I suppose I am like my mother. Father tells me she was no artist."

Lady Violet did not answer, but under her breath she murmured: "Thank God for it!" Then she raised her eyes

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Dupes of Destiny

(continued.)

to her brother-in-law's face, and after a quick, half-questioning, half-appealing glance into his boyish blue eyes that told her nothing, averted her head.

"By the way," said Edward Day languidly, turning his fair, insipidly handsome face towards Lady Violet, "are you aware, Aunt Vi, that you had a most undesirable guest last night?"

Sir Cyprian, who had entered into a conversation with Marcella, suddenly paused, and watched his sister-in-law's face intently. He had puzzled greatly over the presence of the shabby, swaggering man who had appeared so suddenly from behind the foliage round the fountain, and a brief suspicion had taken root in his mind that perhaps his lovely sister-in-law could throw some light on it.

Lady Violet raised her brows with a puzzled expression.

"An undesirable guest, Edward?" she repeated. "Surely not! We were almost a family party last night."

"Anyway," Edward Day said, with a laugh, "I saw a beggarly-looking chap running down the stairs and out into the hall! It occurred to me at the time that he was discovered in some pilfering in one of the rooms, but as he was allowed to go scot-free, I concluded he must have been admitted in the ordinary way."

"Really, Edward, I am afraid I am not informed of the coming and going of all the inmates or visitors in the house!" Lady Violet laughed. "Possibly it was one of the tradesmen leaving something!"

When Sir Cyprian was saying "good-bye," his sister-in-law drew him aside.

"Is it any use my asking you to let me off taking her with me? Can you not release me from that pain?"

He looked at her with mild reproof.

"My dear Violet, it is my wish that my daughter should accompany you to the house of Mr. Johnson, or to any other friend whom you may be visiting. She is a clever girl, with a marvellous gift of description and assimilation. I shall make her a most useful companion in time!" and a mocking smile curved his fine mouth.

Lady Violet's pale cheeks grew even paler, and her dark eyes flashed with suppressed emotion, as she said pleadingly:

"Don't sully that spotless nature with your diabolical genius! Let her at least keep outside the mire and the gutter that our feet are embedded in! Have you no mercy—no sense of humanity that will deter you from making a tool of that most precious creature?"

Sir Cyprian smiled satirically. "Surely, Violet," he murmured gently, "you are labouring under some mistaken idea? How should I want to do anything that would hurt my own child? I only wish to cultivate in her a love of the beautiful in art! Do you blame me for that?"

With a spurt of sudden courage she replied in the same low voice. "You need not keep up that pretence with me, Cyprian! I know you through and through, and I warn you that if I notice one single change in Marcella that your evil influence may work, I shall brave everything, be hated even, and put her on her guard! Tell her *who* and *what* you are! Don't drive me too far; a worm will turn, you know, and I am a desperate woman!"

Sir Cyprian looked at her without replying. She had for so long been passive that he was secretly taken aback by her new attitude. It suggested a stronger influence in her life than his had been, one that undermined the power he had wielded for so many years.

Was it the influence of another man? he wondered, or an even deeper one—the love of a woman of the world for an innocent girl? He was inclined to think it the latter; the one he could stem in its course, but the former would take her for ever out of his reach.

"It rests with yourself entirely, my dear Violet," he answered in a kind tone, "whether Marcella remains a happy girl, ignorant of those things of which you would inform her, or in a very much worse position in life.

"Think," he went on, "how would you improve her prospects by telling her what you threaten? Would she thank you for the information? I think not. Marcella is a proud girl, with a hatred of anything underhand or mercenary. You would lose her altogether then!"

A change passed over the mobile face of the listening woman. She could not but admit the truth of his statement.

"One thing more!" she murmured. "Suppose I were in a position to repay you all the money you had given me—since—since then, would you let me have her? She could come without knowing the worst! I would tell her nothing of the past. I would be so glad to keep her with me on any terms."

The baronet's handsome face hardened. "On no conditions will I ever allow Marcella to remain with you longer than a week—or so long as I desire," he replied curtly. "And, as to repayment, I shall never consent to receive such a thing at your hands! So, my dear sister-in-law, you must consider the subject closed from now! Neither of us can afford to go back! If you play your cards properly you may enjoy Marcella's society as often as you like—with reservation—but so much as hint to her one little thing, and she will be dead to you!"

When the waiting carriage had driven off with Sir Cyprian to the station, Lady Violet went slowly in search of Marcella. She was thinking of the last speech of her task-master, and her expression was a curious one.

As she left the library the butler met her with a telegram on a salver.

She took it up idly, and opening it, read:

"*Have left England as promised, shall not worry you again.*"

With a sense of relief she crushed the orange-tinted envelope into a ball. That episode was finished then. She need no longer live in dread of a scandal. The other portion of the skeleton in her cupboard had kept his word. She began to think kindly of this man she had once married—how many years ago she hardly liked to think. Nothing remained to bring him back to her thoughts—nothing.

A sound fell upon her ear with a sinister mockery. It was the light, sudden laugh of Marcella, ringing and bell-like, innocent of the effect of her mirth.

Lady Violet bit her lip sharply. She realised for the first time that she could never quite forget the man in the shabby clothes.

At the door of her boudoir she paused. Marcella was talking to Edward Day, her nephew, who was also her secretary, and for whom she entertained a kindly pity rather than love.

"Please don't ask me again, Mr. Day," Marcella was saying in her honest, straightforward way. "I could never marry you, because I do not love you! Please let this be final between us! I know you very slightly, and don't think I could ever be anything more than I am to you now—a good friend!"

"But I love you, Marcella!" Edward answered eagerly. "And will teach you to love me! Besides, it is my aunt's dearest wish that we should marry; she has told me so, and I know you love her!"

The girl's voice softened. "Yes, I love Aunt Violet, but I know she would not wish me to sacrifice myself in marrying a man I did not love! It would be unlike her!"

The young man's fair face clouded. He had calculated that with the daughter of the rich Sir Cyprian Rust as his wife he would be able to settle his most pressing debts without letting his aunt know of them. And the knowledge that Marcella was not so pliable as he thought was an awkward awakening.

"Come!" he said, forcing a smile to his lips, "you are naturally startled, as all girls are at their first proposal, and don't know your own mind. But you will think this over, won't you, and see if you can give me any hope?"

Marcella shook her head. She was sorry to hurt him, but her mind was made up for all time

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"I can never say anything else, Edward," she answered sadly. "I do not love you, and I will not marry you! Please drop the subject."

An ugly look stole into the weak, dissipated face of the man.

"I suppose you have met your future husband already?" he sneered, "among the classic population of the village of Crawley! What is he? The village doctor, or the village curate?"

A sudden wave of colour stained the girl's pale face. "You are impertinent!" she said quietly. "Surely such manners are a drawback to success! Will you kindly leave the room, or shall I?"

"Oh, don't get on the high horse!" he said sullenly. "I suppose I am a fool to speak as I do, but, in spite of my manners, I really love you, Marcella. And considering all I know about you, you ought to be glad that any decent chap should wish to make you his wife. Money's not everything, you know!"

Marcella caught her breath with a sudden gasp, and the silent woman at the door imitated her unconsciously.

"I don't understand," Marcella said haughtily. "Were you not my aunt's nephew I should be inclined to think that her footman was in the room. Explain yourself at once!"

"Will you marry me, Marcella?" said Edward Day. "Will you be my wife?"

An uneasy laugh broke from Edward Day, the craven coward. He had expected tears, not hauteur.

"I mean that you can't have everything," he retorted. "And in spite of being an heiress, you would find most men fight shy of you if they knew what I do, although you are handsome and unlike other girls!"

Marcella eyed him contemptuously. "Say what you have to say, don't suggest. I am quite able to bear it, I can assure you!"

He flushed darkly. "Are you? Then all I will say now is, ask your father, Sir Cyprian, where your mother died, and why there is no headstone to her memory in the churchyard at Crawley! There is something strange about the different reports of her supposed death!" he added maliciously.

There was a silence alive with signs of a coming storm, then Marcella spoke.

"When you asked me to marry you, I was sorry I could not say 'yes,' because I considered that you had done me the greatest honour a man can do a woman, but now that I see you can stoop in your jealous spite to insult not only myself but"—and her voice quivered slightly—"the memory of a dead mother, I have only the most bitter contempt for you."

"And I also!" added another voice in tones of deep indignation, and Lady Violet came forward slowly, gazing with blazing eyes at the crestfallen young bully. Then she said slowly:

"I will speak with you later. I need only mention now that your conduct is the most pitiful and disgraceful exhibition I have ever witnessed. I am only glad that after all you have no blood-tie with myself!"

Muttering an excuse, and with a sullen expression on his weak face, Edward Day left the room, but when he got outside he shook his hand at the door and whispered hoarsely:

"All right, score as much as you like now, I shall have my innings soon, and pay back the snub I have received, my haughty Miss Marcella! I'm not good enough for you, eh? We'll see! I shall never rest now until I find out *something* that will give me a hold over you. And then," he laughed vindictively, "you will be glad to come off your pedestal when I choose to ask you!"

NINTH CHAPTER.
Fortune's Wheel.

When they were alone, Marcella went up to her aunt with a tremulous laugh.

"You must think me very foolish, dear aunt Violet, to have been so easily annoyed with Edward," she said timidly, "but I do not mind him abusing me, though that was very uncalled-for, but when he suggested fearful things about—about that dear mother whom I do not remember, but whom I love and honour with all my heart, I—I—could not restrain my temper!"

Lady Violet clasped the girl to her tenderly. "Dearest," she said in a low, earnest voice; "I love to see that the memory of the mother you have lost is still fresh and dear to you. I am sure that—that——" her voice faltered, "could she see you now, as I do, and hold you in her arms as I am holding you, she would rejoice in the love of a daughter like you."

"And you are not vexed because I could not give Edward any other answer?" Marcella queried after a pause.

Lady Violet shuddered. "No, darling; I am glad you gave the answer you did. In every respect Edward is no fit husband for you. He is weak, and without any sense of honour or principle. I am sadly disappointed in him, but he shall not annoy you again!"

"And you don't think," Marcella continued in a low voice, "that he meant anything by what he said about my mother and there being no headstone or plate to her memory in the church at Crawley, or even her grave there?"

Lady Violet frowned and her eyes did not meet those of the girl as she answered soothingly:

"Edward was in such a rage, dear child, that you must not heed anything he said. Your dear mother died abroad, so that accounts for her grave not being in Crawley churchyard. It was her wish, I believe, to be buried in the place where she died, and you know how absent-minded Sir Cyprian, your father, is! It would not occur to him that he should put a plate in the church."

Before Marcella could make any comment, Lady Violet continued quickly: "I want you, Marcella, to promise me that you will let me know at once should you ever need a friend in any great trouble, or write to me should you notice anything that puzzles you at the 'Court.' Promise me this, dear, because I shall know then that I may consider myself bound to you in any trouble that should befall you! I can only see you so rarely, dear, that I would be very happy with such an assurance from you!"

Marcella laughed softly. "Dear aunt Violet, why, of course, you are the first person to whom I should fly in any trouble or worry! In fact, I sometimes wish you were always with me," she added impulsively; "you are just the best substitute for the mother I have lost!"

Lady Violet winced, then smiled through sudden tears.

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(continued.)

"Then that is a bargain, dear," she said gently; "I am your mother by proxy! That will be a secret between us!"

"Why don't you return to the 'Court' with me, aunt Violet?" Marcella asked, with a bewitching smile.

The eyes of the woman of fashion, whose name was being linked with that of a millionaire, contracted suddenly:

"I am a town product, dear," she said lightly, "the country bores me unutterably. But my heart will be with you, and sometimes your father will allow you to come and stay with me."

"I love the 'Court'!" said Marcella thoughtfully; "though it is fearfully dull at times! Even father grew morbid one day," she laughed. "He made his will, leaving everything he had to me, and I made mine making him my heir and sole executor! What I don't know, but it amused us!"

Lady Violet caught her arm suddenly.

"What—what—made him do that?" she stammered; "you have nothing, Marcella, to leave! By Sir Basil Wingate's will that made your father his heir, the money and the title at his death have been willed to an elder son of yours, should you marry—but—but you have no right to make a will, dear! Sir Basil hated women, since his only daughter ran away from him and so left everything that would only benefit male heirs. Had your father had a *son* he would have been that heir—but as it is, the estate and title with the money will revert to *your* son!"

Marcella laughed. "What a stupid idea! But I don't want money! I shall be perfectly happy, just having you, aunt Violet!"

The older woman smiled wistfully, as she moved towards the door.

"One day you will marry, dear, a man you love, I hope; and then I shall take a back seat, naturally!"

A slight flush stained the girl's clear skin as the vision of a dark, earnest face with steadfast, grey eyes rose before her—the face of the village curate, Philip Nullius.

Lady Violet noticed the blush, and woman-like, knew that there was a rival already in the field for the love she had so long been deprived of. But when she was alone her thoughts went back to the sentence in which Marcella had said that she and her father had "made their wills in each other's favour!"

What did it mean? she wondered anxiously. That there was an undercurrent of danger she could not but think, knowing the nature of the man who never did the most simple action without one or two powerful motives as the outcome of his simplicity.

"The life of poor Laura was insured!" she murmured, "for twenty thousand pounds, and the child's also! But that was nearly twenty-one years ago! Had he wished to benefit by it surely such a thing would have happened—earlier! It cannot be now—that some diabolical plot has occurred to him!

"No—no—how foolish I am," she muttered with white lips; "that cannot be; it would be too dangerous, and so far he has avoided that measure! No, something fresh has happened to cause him to think of making wills. I must watch carefully without letting him suspect that I am doing so, or I shall only hasten the plan he has in his mind, and be prevented from seeing her."

Still thinking deeply she rang the bell and requested that Mr. Day should be sent to her if he were still in the house.

When, after a few minutes, Edward Day presented himself before the woman who had been his best friend for so many years, he knew that he had lost his one chance of making anything out of the future generosity of Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox.

She looked at him coldly. "I wish to come to the point at once," she said distantly; "I will not touch on the subject of your insult to my niece, Miss Rust, but will inform you that I no longer desire your presence in my house! You are utterly unworthy the name of gentleman, and honour has no place in your vocabulary."

"Aunt Vi," the young man exclaimed incredulously; "don't kick me out like a cur because I fell in love with Marcella like any ordinary man!"

A sneer played about the mouth of Lady Violet.

"Unfortunately, like 'any ordinary man' you could not take your dismissal like a gentleman! But I am serious in telling you that I wish you to leave my house."

"Surely, aunt——" began the fair-faced young coward, "you are just a little hard on a chap!"

"I am not hard," she answered, "and now that you are leaving my house, I wish to tell you something that, had I seen you grow up as a gentleman and man of honour, I would always have kept from you, but your conduct and many extravagances have so disappointed me, that your final insult to Marcella Rust decided me in acquainting you with a fact that may perhaps be the means of making a man of you, though it may lower your vanity to the dust!"

"Tell me," he said hoarsely, "aunt Vi, don't bait me! I am in agony! What can you know about me?"

"To begin with," she went on slowly, "I am not your aunt! I took you out of pity from a fate for which you were probably intended. I was a first-class passenger on board a ship coming home from Australia, and a poor woman among the steerage passengers gave birth to two children. Out of pity I adopted one. That child—intended for a foundling, was yourself! Had you conducted yourself with the slightest sign of gratitude towards me," she finished coldly, "I would have spared you this!"

"And—and—I am a beggar?" he said painfully.

"No! I will allow you £250 a year because you grew up with extravagant ideas, for which I was to blame, and I am also giving you a chance of making a living for yourself. I have here a letter of introduction to Mr. Caleb J. Johnson, the financier. He may find you a post, and if you are steady, there is a good chance of your still doing well."

Unsteadily, and with a livid face, Edward Day found himself in his bedroom, with the letter of introduction to the man whose fellow guest he had been the night before. The change in his fortunes was so great that he could hardly feel it yet. He was only conscious of a deep hatred for the girl who had sent his prospects tottering, and a loathing for the woman who had opened his eyes to his real status! He drew out the letter and read:

DEAR MR. JOHNSON—*I am introducing to your kind notice my secretary, Mr. Edward Day, in the hope that you may be able to find him something to do. He is clever, and under an influence like yours, may be a credit to his sex yet, though he is still young and impulsive. Trusting you may oblige me in this, as I am now dispensing with his services, and do not like to throw him aside—I am, very sincerely yours,*

VIOLET FRAYNE-LENNOX.

For a few moments the secretary's face was not pleasant to look upon. It was vicious and vindictive.

He put the letter on the table and read it several times, carefully tracing the words with a dry pen over and over again. At last he seemed satisfied, and smiling grimly, he pulled a sheet of paper towards him, stamped with the address of the town house Lady Violet was occupying; and after spoiling several sheets of the paper, he turned out something that appeared to satisfy him.

"A pauper, am I? A nameless brat! All right, my dear 'aunt'! You have kindly turned me adrift, and it will be your letter of 'introduction' that will set me on my feet far above my expectations!"

Then, pulling the blotter towards him again, he began to write carefully a letter that seemed to require a great deal of care and thought.

At last he flung the pen on the table with a satisfied sigh, and laughed softly:

"Here begins my new life! I am armed *cap-à-pie!*"

(Another long instalment of this splendid serial next week.)

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The Hidden Rift.

Showing How the Matrimonial Lute Played Out of Tune.

"'Tis ever two persons were destined to be happy together, they are!" was the comment of old Mrs. Wilford, a distant connection of the Marchmont family, as she watched young Leslie Marchmont and his charming bride drive off in the carriage, followed by showers of rice and old slippers, on the way to the railway station, where they were to take tickets for Bournemouth to spend their honeymoon.

The sentiment was echoed very sincerely by the three or four people who chanced to overhear Mrs. Wilford's remark, and if the question had been addressed to all the other guests, "What chance do you think those newly-married people have of being supremely happy?" the answer would most probably have been to the effect that there was no possibility of their being otherwise than gloriously happy.

Leslie Marchmont and his young bride, Myra, had been devoted lovers for two years. Leslie was a fine fellow, with a splendid position as joint partner with his cousin—a much older man—in a firm that did a largo export business and made a lot of money, to say nothing of the very solid private account with which his name was credited at the bank. Myra Lawrence was a charming girl with a sweet face and a lovable disposition. Everyone admired her, and, rare as such a thing is, she had no enemies. Her frank nature disarmed envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness on the part of others, and she was a general favourite.

Leslie looked down at his bride as they rolled along, and he was filled with tenderness and the pride of possession.

"I will take care of you, little girl!" he whispered softly, his voice quivering with love. "You are not afraid to trust yourself to me?"

"Why should I be, Leslie?" she answered in a sweet, low tone, looking up at him with an air of implicit trustfulness. Her long lashes were just tipped with suspicious moisture, but that was due to a combination of joy and sadness, the latter at the thought of leaving home. "I *know* that I shall be perfectly happy with you, dear!"

"My one thought will be to fill your life with contentment!" he whispered, and, taking advantage of the momentary seclusion, he bent still lower and kissed her.

Who could have supposed that there would be a rift in the lute, making the music of married life lose some of its tunefulness, within the course of a few months? Yet it was so, for Leslie Marchmont made a mistake so often made by young men; he had not sufficiently judged the character of the girl to whom he was so devoted. He was full of love, he imagined that he knew her disposition thoroughly, and could make her life glad, yet he had, in the exuberance of his passion, overlooked one important trait.

Myra looked back with considerable pride over the last five years of her life. She had always been fond of drawing, and at the age of seventeen she had begun to earn a reputation as a black and white artist, making sketches for the illustrated papers and weekly home journals. Her first accepted sketch was published in a ladies' journal, and from that time she went on steadily. It was not necessary for her to work with her pencil in order to maintain herself, for her parents were well-to-do, but it pleased her to devote some of her leisure to this work, and by so doing she earned enough money to keep herself, and to spend in doing good to others. She insisted on paying a certain sum for her board and lodging, and it gratified her to think that she was independent. It was not an obtrusive kind of independence; it was a feeling of dignity, and the parents encouraged it.

To Leslie, when he appeared on the scene and captured her young heart, she was the more attractive on that account, as he knew that she would be the kind of woman to encourage him by her bravery in moments when misfortune threatened, as it might do, however remote it appeared at that moment. Myra looked up to him as a prospective wife should, and thought only of making life pleasant for him. She knew that she would give up her work, but that was not a matter of importance. Her occupations would naturally be different. As to the money earned thereby, why, Leslie would be able to supply all that she needed quite easily.

It was just that spirit of dignified independence which Leslie failed to understand properly, and the result of this failure made itself apparent within the first nine months of their married life.

An attentive observer would have detected a difference in the bearing of these young people towards one another, yet it would have been difficult for him to have defined in what this difference consisted. There seemed to be an invisible barrier raising itself between them. Myra occasionally looked at Leslie as if she were waiting for him to say something, *hoping* that he would say something, and an expression of disappointment would cross her sweet face as she turned away. He had not uttered the words which she wanted to hear.

It gradually dawned on Leslie that something was amiss, and he could not understand it. Myra had all she wanted, he paid all the bills for the household, almost all their supplies being from firms with whom he ran an account, and settled that account by a monthly cheque, he purchased for her anything she desired in the way of dress, and he gave her money without hesitation when she asked him for some. He had often told her that she could have all she wanted in the way of cash, that she had only to mention the fact and he would write out a cheque or bring the gold home for her. What was it that was ailing her? She was not ill; in fact, he had never seen her in better health!

He resolved to question her on the point, but she was before him.

"Leslie," she said one morning, "I have a request to make."

He gazed at her in some surprise; the tone was just a trifle stiff, and not like that in which she usually made her requests, nor was the style of making the request in any way similar to her usual manner.

It was generally: "Leslie, dear, I want so-and-so; do you really think that you really have enough in the bank to meet

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such lavish expenditure?" And then would be a bright laugh, he would kiss the charming face, and the money would be transferred from his pocket to hers. Yet, as he heard this formal little speech, it occurred to him that those very informal expressions of their early married life had not been repeated lately.

"Certainly, dearest!" he exclaimed. "You know that I am only too pleased to let you have anything you desire!"

"I wish you to give me a separate allowance for my own personal use, Leslie," she said quietly, and if she had raised her hand to strike him he could not have been more surprised.

"I am at a loss to understand the reason of that request, Myra," he said, his own tones becoming rather stiff. "I grudge you nothing, you can have as much money as you desire. To ask me to let you have a private purse is to make a beginning of a system of divided interests which is not at all conducive to our happiness. What I have is yours, you can have it whenever you mention the fact; what more can you ask?"

"I think I ought to have a private purse to which I can go just as I please," she replied coldly. "It is humiliating to compel me to *ask* for everything I require or desire."

Leslie's mouth grew hard.

"It is entirely against my ideas of mutual confidence," he asserted doggedly. "You can have no need for a separate purse; all the bills are paid, you can have all you desire, I give you all the cash you wish for. Your request presents itself to me as the beginning of a division between us which I will not tolerate! I am willing to do most things for you, but not that! I believe you will see that you have been wrong when you reflect calmly on the subject!"

"I wish it!" she said, looking straight at him.

"And I do not!" he returned, meeting her gaze boldly.

For a few seconds they held one another's eyes; it was like the crossing of two blades, preparatory to a duel. Then Myra turned and passed out of the room.

"H'm!" muttered Leslie, flinging himself down into an easy chair. "What has come over Myra? I would have sworn by all that is good, at one time, that her temper was as sweet as honey, as smooth as oil, yet I have noticed lately, although I couldn't fathom the thing, that her temper was changing. She has been just a little irritable at times, and—— Well, perhaps not irritable," he corrected "but certainly less loving. What nonsense is this about a separate allowance? What can she want with money? Anything she likes to mention ——"

He stopped; after a pause, he added, slowly:

"She cannot want money for something which she is not willing to let me know about? No, it cannot be more than a fad; it will vanish, and she will be sorry!"

However, he looked in vain for any expression of regret from Myra, either in word or manner. He felt awkward when he returned to dinner that evening; he had a sentiment of sheepishness as he opened his front door and let himself into his own house. How would Myra meet him? He told himself that he was quite right to refuse, yet he had a uneasy feeling within him.

He found Myra as usual waiting for him at the table, ready to ring for the dinner to be brought in. She was just the same as ever, and the dinner was perfect. He felt half-ashamed of the thought that had crossed his mind, namely, that she would show her resentment by not ministering to him as in the past, and by neglecting the care of the house which had so materially contributed to their happiness. And by the time the meal was concluded, he was wholly ashamed of the thought.

The days glided past; Myra never mentioned the episode of her formal request. She was the same Myra, he told himself illogically, only—only different!

"Do you want any money, dearest?" he asked her pleasantly, nearly a week later. His geniality was partly assumed for the purpose of hiding his perplexity.

"No, Leslie, thank you!" she replied in the same tone.

"Oh, all right!" he answered, feeling uncomfortable, without exactly understanding why. "I'll write you out a cheque whenever you like, you know!"

"Yes, I know, dear!" she replied, as she raised her face for the parting kiss.

"She is still a little sore about it, I fear," he murmured in a disappointed tone. "She doesn't like to ask me just for a while. I know what I'll do, and that will make it all smooth again."

That evening, after dinner, he stole up to her special room and placed a roll of ten bank notes in the drawer among her gloves and other feminine accessories, as he had smilingly described them.

"She is sure to find them, and then she will be all smiles, and she will come behind my chair, put both hands on my cheeks, draw my head back, and kiss me as she used to do. Ah!" And the memory of those blissful moments raised him to the zenith of delight.

He waited for Myra to speak about that roll of notes; his eyes began to twinkle with pleasure whenever he came home during the next week, but Myra said never a word. Nevertheless, she did not ask for money, and he concluded that she had seen the notes and made use of them.

"She couldn't miss them," he said to himself. "As soon as she put her hand in the drawer she would feel the crisp roll. I expect ——" He meditated for a minute. "Yes, that's it. She is a wee bit awkward about mentioning it, although she has used the money and is glad that I have been so——"

He was at a loss for the proper word; "kind" did not seem to be appropriate, and while he was trying to find the correct adjective, the word "inconsistent" flashed across his brain, and it made him warm.

"No, I don't think it is inconsistency on my part," he objected. "If I place a roll of notes in her drawer to do as she likes with, that is different from a separate allowance. Of course I don't want her to tell me about every penny she spends, but that divided interest notion is—it isn't pleasant!"

He paced the room for a few seconds.

"I'll ask her for a kiss," he muttered. "She only wants a good opportunity for reconciliation, and when I look into her sweet eyes as I see her face raised to mine—why, that will settle it, and we shall be happy again."

"Do you want any cash, Myra?" he asked with assumed innocence, as he was preparing to depart on the following morning.

"No, thank you, dear!"

Leslie repressed a smile.

"You are very economical, dearest!" he remarked meaningly. Then, relapsing into a smile that was intended to be a sign of reconciliation, he said: "Do I not deserve a kiss?"

He bent and kissed her, expecting a warm salute; he had almost felt her arms round his neck, in imagination; but he had the greatest of all disappointments in love—that of a kiss accepted, but not returned. Myra's lips were not responsive, only receptive.

Leslie succeeded in concealing his mortification and went off; when near the front door he pretended to have thought of something upstairs. His real object was to peep into that drawer. He shivered as he did so; the roll of notes lay there untouched.

He was in a moody frame of mind when he entered his

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private office, where his partner was reclining in an office chair.

"Good morning, old chap!" was Harrison's greeting. "Glad to see your wife has not lost her skill as a result of marriage." He pointed to an open copy of the *Illustrated Times*. "That's a capital sketch."

Like one in a dream, Leslie glanced at the illustration indicated and saw his wife's monogram in the corner. It was fortunate that Harrison was indulging in an extensive yawn and did not pull himself round till Marchmont had regained his wonted coolness.

"Glad you think it's good," replied Leslie, with assumed modesty. "Many letters this morning?"

They then fell to about business and the incident passed. This, then, was his wife's answer to his refusal. In the first flush of vexation, his worse self tried to find some fault with Myra's conduct during the past few days, since that scene; but he was bound to admit that she had been the most careful, the most attentive of wives. And, slowly, he admitted that he had made a mistake.

His better self now conquered. It demands a good deal of courage and nobility of character to confess fully that one is in fault, but Leslie reached that stage before the luncheon hour, and he resolved to leave business for the rest of the day, go home, and take Myra out somewhere. They would have a drive in an open carriage in the rural lanes that were not far from their home; Myra always liked that, and then he would yield and ask for forgiveness.

"I say, dearest," he said, as she looked up in surprise at his return, "things are flat to-day, so I have come home to take you for a drive. I have ordered the fly. It won't take you long to get ready, will it?"

"I am sorry I cannot go this afternoon, Leslie," she replied, paling a little. "I have—something to do."

"Oh, the *Illustrated Times* can wait," he remarked, with an attempt at gaiety. "I have——"

"I am not doing work for the *Times* this afternoon," she said, her face flushing slightly. "I have some menu cards to paint for Mrs. Gascoyne's dinner-party, and they must be finished to-day!"

"Myra! You are not working for our friends?" He shrank back in dismay.

"Why not? She would pay someone else to do them, so I may as well take the money from her. What does it matter whether I receive pay from her or from a journal for work done?"

"Why do you do it?" he groaned.

"I grew tired of being compelled to *ask* whenever I wanted some pocket money," she responded quietly. "As I told you, it was humiliating. I thought that a husband would prefer that his wife should be spared *that*, and I was surprised that you made no arrangement. Then I asked you to do it, and you declined. I could not humiliate myself further, so I turned to my old work, to create what you ought to have allowed but refused to do."

"Then I ask that, at least, you will not lower my pride by working for friends, as though I kept you without funds," he cried.

Once again their eyes met, and they held one another's gaze for what seemed quite a long time. As they gazed into each other's eyes, the defiant look changed, the hardness died away, and an expression of yearning and repentance took its place.

"I was wrong. I came home to confess it and ask for forgiveness, Myra," cried Leslie, holding out his arms. "I failed to understand."

"I was wrong, too," she cried, a little catch in her voice. "I forgot that I might be humiliating you by working for Mrs. Gascoyne. And I ought to have explained differently when I required a separate allowance. Perhaps I have been *too* independent!"

"No, no!" he almost shouted, as he took her in his arms. "Oh, Myra, I am so glad that this miserable trouble is ended."

Myra finished the menu cards, according to promise, but she did no more work of that kind, and even for that she requested Mrs. Gascoyne to give the remuneration to a local charity. She did an occasional sketch for the journals, just for amusement, but she always devoted the proceeds to charitable purposes, for her husband allowed her more than enough.

The rift in the matrimonial lute was sealed, and the old tunefulness returned.

G. E. Lingen.

Your Editor Chats.

This is the last number of another volume. In a few days you will be hearing the bells "Ring out the old, ring in the new," and at the same time they will be heralding the first number of our new volume.

On glancing rapidly through the volume which this issue brings to an end, I am struck with the number of improvements that have been made in it over the previous ones, and I feel now that the excellent fiction matter of which it is composed is served up in a very tasty manner. Yet I do not intend to let *Short Stories* rest on its laurels, but I am going to make a big effort (and it will need it, too!) to bring this little paper a few more rungs up the ladder of Perfection, and some totally new and original features will be introduced.

I often receive cheery and encouraging missives from my readers, and these show that my attempts to please you have not been in vain. I sincerely trust that I shall number all my readers of 1903 amongst the increased *clientèle* of 1904. You have at this juncture of *Short Stories'* history a fine opportunity to introduce the paper to your friends, both male and female, as the new serial by Blanche Eardley, that commenced last week, is likely to be very popular. "Dupes of Destiny" is destined to be one of the most popular serials we have ever had. Remind your friends that they can start reading to-day, as the synopsis will give them the complete thread of the story.

"A Criminal Millionaire" is drawing to a conclusion, thrilling and effective. This serial, which has excited great interest among my readers, will be followed by a very powerful series of revelations, told by the chief figure in the series herself. These amazing episodes will be entitled, "Decoyed!" and the heroine will tell of the adventures that befell her at the hands of those who laid their schemes to entrap her. I will tell you more about this coming series next week.

Bolton carries off the guinea that I offered for what I considered the best solution of the Unsolved Love Problem, "The Doubt of Mildred Dalrymple."

The fortunate gentleman is Mr. S. Chorlton, of 227 Spa Road, Bolton, and he expressed his arguments in a very terse but conclusive form.

By the number of solutions received from readers I should judge this problem to be one of the most interesting of the series.

Do not forget that next Monday, December 28th, is the very last day on which I can receive letters in reply to "The Duty of Roger Forbes." Full particulars of this problem appeared in our Christmas number.

December 31st is the closing day for the Statue Competition and the Running Riddles Competition announced in our Christmas number.

Your Editor.

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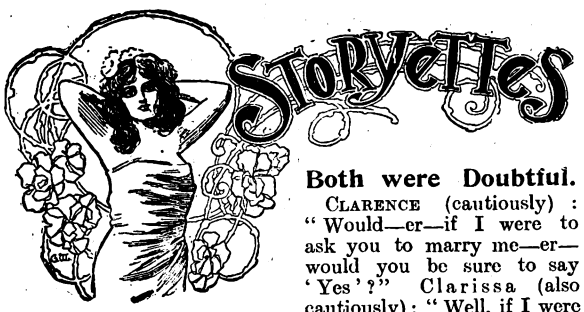

Both were Doubtful.

Clarence (cautiously) : "Would—er—if I were to ask you to marry me—er—would you be sure to say 'Yes'?" Clarissa (also cautiously): "Well, if I were to say 'Yes'—er—would you be sure to ask me—er—to marry you? I'd like to be sure on that point."

Radium *v.* Gold.

He: "Darling, you are worth your weight in gold!" She: "No, John—I cannot marry any man who doesn't think me worth my weight in radium!"

The Only One Appreciated.

"Madge," said her father, "William asked me for your hand last night, and I consented." "Well, papa, that's the first bill of mine you haven't objected to."

Quite True.

"Don't talk to me," said the lettuce to the turnip; "I have a heart, and you haven't." "I don't see how that can be," replied the turnip, "you never get mashed, and I do."

He Blamed the Cook.

Young Wife (at dinner): "I didn't tell you, Adolphus, I cooked the dinner to-day myself." Husband: "Indeed! Then in my thoughts I have been doing poor Mary Ann a great injustice!"

He was Not so Backward as He Looked.

Ethel (who thinks her country cousin bashful): "Can't you find anything better to squeeze than a felt hat?" Country Cousin: "Wait a bit. I'm only reducin' my energy for fear I might hurt you."

Like Father Like Son.

Stern Father: "What an unearthly hour that fellow stops till every night, Dora! What does your mother say about it?" Daughter: "She says men haven't altered a bit since she was young, pa."

How Comforting!

She: "And you don't find it tiresome, dear, with me? You are sure you don't want to go back to your bachelor life again?" He: "Quite, my darling; indeed, married life is so awfully jolly that if you were to die to-night, I'd get married again to-morrow!"

They're Always at It.

Mrs. Widgers: "Indeed! If you knew half as much as you *think* you know, you'd know half as much again as you do know." Mr. Widgers: "Thank you! And if you knew twice as much as you *don't* know, you'd know three times as much as there is to know!"

He Still Keeps His Opinion.

Young Wife (sobbing): "I will not keep still! Before we were married you said I had a charming flow of language." Young Husband: "And so you have, dear. It not only flows, but dashes, leaps, bounds, roars, goes over cataracts and mill-sluices and there is an occasional water-spout as well."

They are Supposed to be Perfect.

He: "So the engagement is broken off?" She: "Yes. He told her he thought she should stop reading novels and read something more substantial, something that would improve her mind." He: "Well?" She: "Well, the idea of a man intimating to his *fiancée* that she could be improved in any way!"

She was Shocked.

Angelina: "What does the motto on the ring you gave me mean?" Edwin: "'Faithful to the last.'" Angelina: "Monstrous! I thought I was the first!"

Very Much Better.

Gladys: "I was so happy over Fred's letter. I fairly hugged myself." May: "Well, I was happier than you. Reggie called on me, and he did the hugging."

The Hint Direct.

"Would you mind pinning a flower in my coat when I go?" asked young De Borem. "Certainly not," replied Miss Wearyun. "It will afford me pleasure to do it at once."

Both Had Their Hopes.

Malcolm: "After we are married, Marie, you must never hesitate to ask me when you want money." Marie: "No, indeed, Malcolm; and I hope you will never hesitate about giving it to me."

A Successful Wooing.

"How many stars can you see?" she asked. "Two more than you," said he. "How do you make that out?" she asked. "*I* can see your eyes," said he. And that was the beginning of it all.

A Pleasant Outlook.

Newly-Made Bride: "Mamma says she does not think we will ever quarrel as she and papa do." Groom: "Never, dearest?" Newly-Made Bride: "No; she says you will be much easier to manage than papa was."

Jack Would Like the Favours.

Mabel: "Don't you think Fido is awfully clever?" Jack: "No, I do not." Mabel: "You horrid thing! Why don't you think so?" Jack: "Because he tries to get away when you kiss him. No intelligent being would do that. Just try it on me once."

Overheard at Brighton.

Harry: "Did you notice that lovely girl? What glorious eyes, with an expression like that of a startled fawn." Old Hand (calmly): "If she has that look she's from London." Harry: "Why?" Old Hand: "You see, all the girls there are that way. Dodging 'buses and cabs, you know!"

A Handy Name.

"I hear you are engaged again. What is the name of the fortunate young lady?" "Her name is Lucinda. That's one reason why I engaged myself to her." "Because her name is Lucinda?" "Just so. You see, that's the name of two former sweethearts of mine, and I can use on this present Lucinda the sonnets I used to my previous Lucindas. She is the most convenient *fiancée* I've had in the last ten years."

A Well-Merited Retort.

Monocle Cadsby (doing his celebrated act of fascination, and speaking to a young lady unescorted): "I think—ah——I have met you before, ah. Glad to see you; might I have the pleasure of accompanying you in your walk?" Young Lady (looking the thing in men's clothes up and down): "I think so, provided you walk about fifteen paces behind, in livery; that is, of course, if the character from your last place is satisfactory."

Verdict of Not Guilty.

"Do you mean to swear," said the foreman of the jury to the witness, "that at the time of the quarrel that constitutes the cause of this action, you saw the prisoner with a coal-scuttle in his hands, making ready to heave it at his wife?" "Not exactly," said the witness, with considerable hesitation. "I mean to swear that I saw the prisoner with a coal-scuttle in his hands." "In what attitude was he then?" asked the presiding judge. "Well, now, since your lordship has asked, I'll tell the truth. The prisoner was lying down with the coal-scuttle over his head, and his wife on the top of it."

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Reunited at Last.

A Touching Story of Poverty and Kindness.

It was Christmas Eve; dark, cold, and wet, the rain driving in torrents round the corners of the streets, where people ran against each other and scowled under their dripping umbrellas as they received the by no means welcome drops from those of their neighbours.

But in Chancery Lane there was not a creature to be seen, save a slight, thinly-clad girl, who was unprotected both against cold and wet, for she had neither cloak nor umbrella—a pale girl with great eyes which had an appealing, wistful expression in them which made the passer-by turn and look at her again, if he were of an artistic mind, recognising the wonderful possibilities which lay in them.

She crept under an archway presently, and stood looking up and down the long, narrow street with its line of tall, grey, grim buildings, wondering what she was to do. There was not a hansom or four-wheeler to be seen, even if she had had the means with which to pay one to take her home; but that was an extravagance of which she hardly thought, for the shillings which lay in her small, well-worn leather purse were few and painfully earned.

Two gentlemen passed her, comfortable-looking City men, with their great-coats well buttoned up to their ears, and sheltered by capacious umbrellas. They were men of middle-age, prosperous, and self-satisfied, hastening home to good dinners, and they had not a thought to give to the poor girl standing under the archway.

"Dear me!" said one, "that young woman will get very wet." And the thought of ill-clad young women in the street, without umbrellas or cloaks, being unpleasant, he hastened onwards.

She must make an effort to reach the Waterloo Bridge Road, the girl resolved mentally, and from there take the omnibus to Kennington, where she lived. So she began to walk forward as bravely as she could.

Suddenly a pleasant voice in her ear made her start.

"May I offer you the shelter of my umbrella?" it said; "you are getting dreadfully wet."

The London girl who works for her living, if she be respectable, has a horror of being accosted in the streets, and regards gentlemen somewhat in the light of natural enemies.

The colour rushed into the girl's pale cheeks, and she glanced up hastily and proudly enough, but the face which met her gaze was so youthful, frank, and kindly in appearance that her suspicions were disarmed.

The owner of this merry, boyish face and pleasant voice was a gentleman undoubtedly. Why had he thought of offering her such a civility?

Looking down at her dress with a sigh, she accepted his offer, not without some embarrassment, and they walked along side by side for a little way, the young man talking pleasantly and courteously, without any approach to that familiarity which she dreaded.

He learnt that she lived in Kennington with a sister, who was very ill, and almost unable to work; while as for herself, she was not so clever, and had less schooling; but she managed to earn a pound a week as a typine, being engaged from nine in the morning till seven at night.

Her companion regarded her with genuine pity and astonishment.

"What!" he said in a horrified tone, "you work ten hours daily for three shillings and fourpence. It seems very little."

The girl stared.

"Some only get from twelve to fifteen shillings a week for the same hours," she said simply. "So that, you see, I am well off."

Their ways now parted.

"How will you get home?" he asked concernedly, looking up and down the wet, dismal street. "I say, you won't get the 'bus just directly, and it does not put you down at your door, you said, so won't you let me lend you my umbrella? We fellows don't mind a little wetting, but you have no cloak or anything, and will get soaked through. Do permit me. It won't inconvenience me in the least."

She paused and hesitated.

It was certainly very wet, and she would be drenched, she knew, but still she could not make up her mind to take it. She declined the proffered loan, and moved away, but the rain beat upon her so fiercely that she paused for a second and looked back.

He saw it, and was at her side in a minute. This time she did not refuse, though she felt half ashamed of herself for yielding; but, after all, creature comforts are very dear to us, and we naturally hate unpleasant or hard things, and accept the smooth when we can get it.

"Here is my card," said the young man, fumbling in his pocket. "But you have not told me your name; would you mind doing so?"

"My name is Frances Montgomery," she answered, looking at him quickly. "Are you not afraid to lend me your umbrella? You do not know who I am. I might not return it to you, you know."

He looked at her and smiled.

"I am not afraid of that," he answered pleasantly, and, raising his hat, walked quickly away.

The girl looked after him with a strange feeling stirring at her heart. She was not accustomed to meet with consideration or kindness in her daily walk; there were few who stopped to think of her. It surprised her that anyone should do so.

But the young man who had stopped to pity and consider her was very young, very impulsive, and very generous. If he had lived a few more years in the world he would probably have passed on like the rest, but youth is strangely indiscreet, strangely warm-hearted sometimes, and he had not learnt caution or discretion yet. Moreover, the girl was young and pleasing to look upon, and he was young likewise, therefore open to impressions.

If she had been old, ugly, and wrinkled, we cannot venture to assert that he would have done precisely the same thing.

When the girl had reached the narrow, dingy street in Kennington where she and her sister lived, she rang the bell quickly, and ran up the steps with more alacrity than she was wont to do.

The tall, thin, sharp-featured woman who opened the door and took the umbrella from her hand eyed it somewhat sharply. It was a large silk one of excellent quality, and the handle was handsomely mounted with silver.

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"Lawk-a-day, Miss Frances!" she remarked with a grim smile. "Where did this 'ere fine piece o' goods come from, I'd like to know?"

"It was lent me," the girl answered, blushing guiltily.

The woman shook her head gravely.

"Look here, miss," she said, catching hold of Frances' arm. "Don't go for to take up with any smooth-spoken gentleman as wants to keep company with you in the streets. There's no good as ever comes of it, my dear, and for the sake of the darling upstairs I wouldn't have no harm come to you."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hogg," Frances answered somewhat coldly. "I think I can take care of myself."

"There now, I didn't want to offend you," the landlady said kindly. "But, you see, you're pretty, my love; and it's always the pretty ones as gets tempted; and this is a wicked, cruel world, as you'll find to your sorrow when you've lived a few years more in it."

"Are you very wet, Frances?" asked a faint voice, as the girl opened the door of a small room which served its occupants both as bed and sitting room. "I have been so anxious about you, my dear."'

The speaker was a thin, wasted-looking girl, with hollow cheeks and big eyes, with that dull, patient look in them peculiar to those who suffer continually. She sat up in bed working at a gay, plush smoking-cap, which she was bordering with forget-me-nots in silk, and her fingers were so slender that their appearance was almost skeleton-like.

"How are you, Maggie?" Frances asked, bending to kiss her.

"Not much better, I am afraid," sighed the invalid, working on. "You don't know how tired I am, and perhaps, after all, they may not take this."

She held up her work as she spoke, and surveyed it with mournful regret.

"What will they give you for it?" demanded her sister abruptly, hanging up her hat on a peg behind the door.

"Five shillings if they take it," Maggie replied slowly. "And I have been four days working at it. I can't work as well as I used to, I am so easily tired, you know."

Frances sighed heavily, and made no answer.

"Were the shops very gay for Christmas?" asked the invalid presently. "Did you see many pretty things, Frances?"

They talked on quietly while they ate the meal which was both tea and supper, and consisted of toast and weak tea. The elder girl went back to earlier and happier days of which she had still some vague remembrance, and told of Christmas as she had known it long ago.

"I wonder," she said, looking somewhat dreamily into the fire, "if our brother is dead. You know we had a brother when dear papa was alive, Frances—a step-brother, I mean, who went away to America when you were a baby. I don't remember very clearly, because I was only a little girl at the time, but I think someone told me—it may have been Aunt Mary—that papa had to pay away a great deal of money for him, and so became quite poor. It may not be true, though."

"If he did," responded Frances hotly, "our brother, if he were alive, ought to find us out and try to help us. But perhaps he is dead, or rich, and has forgotten all about us. You see we are only his half-sisters, and rich people hate their poor relations."

She laughed half-scornfully, half defiantly.

"My dear," said her sister gently, "you must not say so. They do not know how much the poor suffer. They have so much that they cannot understand our sufferings and struggles—that is all."

"We won't say any more about it," cried Frances. "Tell me about the Select Academy."

This was their favourite theme of conversation, and one on which the invalid was never tired of discoursing.

For five years during her father's lifetime, she had attended daily a select academy for young ladies in St. John's Wood, and the remembrance of that faded gentility had never left her.

There she had learnt to paint flowers, draw unnatural heads and fanciful landscapes, play the piano, sing, and dance, and had picked up some superficial smattering of French, German, and Italian. It was a poor enough school, but she had been abundantly satisfied with it; and the oily-headed professors, with their shabby coats, tall hats, and sweeping bows, filled her soul with delight. It is wonderful to think that five years of such schooling had only enabled the possessor of such unexceptional advantages to go out as a daily governness in a like academy of indisputable selectness, for the large sum of thirty pounds a year. She had a younger sister to care for; and a pinching struggle with narrow means, together with false economy in essentials, had broken down the poor girl's health, so that she was reduced to earn what trifle she could by fancy-work and sewing, badly-enough paid. The aunt who had taken them after their father's death had been poor herself, and had now been dead several years, leaving them entirely dependent on their own exertions.

They had scarcely finished their meal when the door opened, and in bounced the landlady, flourishing the umbrella.

"I wouldn't be worrying you for nothing, Miss Montgomery, bless your heart!" she cried indignantly. "But when a young woman comes home with the likes of this," surveying the silver-mounted handle with contempt, "given to her or lent by goodness knows who, it's time someone should speak. P'raps Miss Frances has told you about it herself, though."

The invalid turned a sad, reproachful glance upon her sister, who sank down at her bedside, crying:

"Don't look like that, Maggie. I'll tell you all about it, dear. Don't you believe me?"

She poured out her story breathlessly and incoherently enough, and drew out the card the gentleman had given her as a corroboration.

Maggie took it in her hand and read it slowly: "Frederic Delany, 18 Cavendish Square, W." Then she took the umbrella into her hand and looked at it doubtfully.

"My dear," she said gently, laying her thin hand on her sister's, "this is a gentleman—a grand gentleman, perhaps. You ought not to speak to gentlemen in the streets. Promise me you will never do it again, for when I am gone I want you to remember always that if you are only a typine and work for your living, you are also a lady—that our father was a gentleman, and you must do nothing he would be ashamed to think of his daughter doing."

She could say no more, for Frances burst out sobbing, and clung round her neck in a passion of tears.

* * * *

In the large and handsomely-furnished dining-room at No. 18 Cavendish Square, Frederick Delany sat at dinner.

Extremely youthful in appearance and even boyish in manner, he presented a striking contrast to his *vis-à-vis*, a tall, dark man of marked appearance, whose face was unusually serious, and his hair slightly silvered. No one knew very much about him, but he had a curious charm of manner underlying a certain reservedness and austerity, which made him a favourite in Society, and he was reputed to be enormously rich—a fact which, after all, was probably the more attractive of the two. He was unmarried—another reason for his popularity—and rented a small but elegantly-furnished house in Green Street, bordering on Park Lane. Some nine or ten years ago he had suddenly appeared in London—come home from America, he said—and had settled down quietly. He appeared to have no relations, and what he had done in America nobody inquired, since, probably, nobody very greatly cared. Some people, whom Society believed in, took him up, and the rest obediently followed their example. Report said he was secretly in love with the eldest Miss Delany. Be that as it may, he was frequently to be found at their pleasant house in Cavendish Square.

"You surely did not go out without your umbrella to-day, Fred?" said Miss Delany during dinner, turning to her brother. "I saw you come in without it, did I not?"

"No," he answered, blushing. "I did not forget it, but I—I lent it."

"Indeed!" said his father, smiling at the young man's embarrassment. "And to whom did you lend it?"

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"To—to a young lady," he replied, stammering, and looking slightly confused. "At least, she looked and spoke like one, though she said she was a typine, and worked ten hours a day for a pound a week."

"Dear me!" murmured his mother, in tones of geniune pity. "How does she manage to live? What was her name? Did you ask?"

"Curiously enough," Frederick replied, looking at his friend across the table, "her name was the same as Will's—Montgomery—Frances Montgomery. She has an invalid sister—Maggie, I think her name is—who is almost unable to work, and they live at Kennington."

A long, silent chord in Will Montgomery's memory was evidently touched by this statement. The expression of his face was painfully, intensely eager as he leant across the table, and, looking the younger man straight in the face, gasped out:

"Tell me about this girl—tell me again."

Briefly Frederick related what he knew of her, speaking with much pity of her poor and inadequate clothing, and dwelling upon her refinement of manner and bearing.

"Listen," said Mr. Montgomery, in a low voice of suppressed emotion, when he had finished. "I have something to tell you. Years ago there was a young man who was both wicked and extravagant. He ran into many excesses, and incurred heavy liabilities which he was utterly unable to meet. His father, who could not bear that his name should be disgraced, paid those liabilities to the amount of ten thousand pounds, and, thereby, from having been a comparatively rich man, became a poor one. The young man then went abroad to begin his life over again in a new world, leaving his father and two little half-sisters behind. He worked early and late to amass money and redeem the past. During those years of engrossing toil he learnt that his father was dead. He also heard that his half-sisters had been taken by an aunt, but of them he thought little, and gradually almost forgot their existence. When he returned to England, a young man no longer, he made one or two inquiries after the aunt with whom they had gone to live, but could hear nothing of her. He then, in the pleasures and cares of his daily life, thought no more of his sisters, and gave himself up to the enjoyment of the wealth which he had so hardly won. What do you think such a man deserves?"

There was a silence.

Then Miss Delany spoke.

"He ought," she said, leaning forward, and looking gravely at Mr. Montgomery, "to go to his sisters, and not be ashamed to confess how grievously he has sinned in neglecting them, and beg their forgiveness if they have suffered through his so doing."

"I am the man," he said solemnly. "This poor girl whom your brother met to-day is my half sister—my father's child. Her name, I remember, was Frances. Frances was the younger, and Maggie the elder. God only knows the cruel want these poor girls have suffered all these years while I have lived in ease and luxury. I ought to have made every effort to find them out, for the sake of their father and mine. But it is not too late to repair my fault. I will do as you say, and they shall never know want any more."

When he left Cavendish Square, Mr. Delany, senior, remarked:

"I never liked the fellow so well as I did to-night, wife. He has good stuff in him."

Christmas morning dawned bright and clear, and at an early hour Mr. Montgomery hastened to Kennington to the address which Frederick Delany had given him, to find his long-lost sisters.

As he stood at the door of the small and dingy lodging-house they inhabited, and knocked, a burning blush mounted his brow as he thought of the want and poverty which he could so easily have relieved had he known it.

The landlady eyed him questioningly, and on his inquiry for Miss Montgomery, replied tartly:

"You ain't a-goin' to see her, sir. She've been took very bad in the night, and lies dyin' upstairs as anyone may see must have been the end of her sufferings, poor dear thing, as come on all along o'wearing bad boots as didn't ought to have been on a young lady's feet, but there weren't the money to buy a new pair with, bless her! And who may be you as comes axin' after Miss Montgomery, and what right have you to come intrudin' at a time like this?" she demanded somewhat fiercely.

"The best of rights," he answered quietly. "I am her brother."

Mrs. Hogg stared, ejaculated, and murmuring profuse apologies, conducted him upstairs.

The sight of the wretched room, with its miserable furniture, so shabby and so poor, cut him to the heart.

Maggie lay back in bed, her face as white as death, her eyes half-closed, while her breath came gaspingly as if she were in pain. By her side knelt Frances, her arms clasped round her sister in the very attitude of despair. A tiny fire flickered in the grate; there was nothing in the room save the bare necessities of life, and a few worn volumes on a shelf above the dying girl's bed; everything proclaimed the children of poverty.

A lump rose in Mr. Montgomery's throat, and he could not speak for a moment.

Frances turned her head, and, seeing a stranger, an exclamation of surprise broke from her lips.

The dying girl opened her eyes.

Mr. Montgomery stepped forward, and took her hand.

"I am your brother," he said slowly and distinctly, bending over the bed that she might catch every word; "I have cruelly neglected you. Can you ever forgive me for having left you in want so long?"

She seemed scarcely surprised, and a little wandering in her mind.

"We *had* a brother," she murmured. "Did I not tell you so, Frances? Aunt Mary told me a long time ago. We were very little when he went away, and so he forgot us—that is all."

She sighed.

"When he comes back—if he is alive and remembers—he will take care of you, Frances, my dear; but—— It is very cold."

She shivered, sighed, and, turning her head, went out for ever from the world's coldness and pain.

Frances, in an abandonment of grief, threw herself face downwards on the bed, but she could not weep, her sorrow was too great.

"Little sister," said her brother, gently raising her, "I have only you, and you have only me now. God helping me, I will do my best to make up to you for what you have lost; and I would give half of what I have to bring her back to life and health if I could."

He looked sadly at the dead girl as he spoke.

"Poor Maggie!" murmured Frances, and fell sobbing on his breast.

A year later, Fred Delany, the good Samaritan, and Frances Montgomery, the lady typine, were quietly married.

W. Hills.

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SYLVIA.

Telling How a Girl was Misjudged.

It was a calm summer evening, but a faint breeze was blowing; very pleasant after the great heat of the day. So thought two young men as they sauntered to and fro on the promenade of a fashionable watering-place. In the distance they heard the not unmusical strain of the town band.

"That is rather a pretty thing they are playing," remarked one of the men, Frank Leslie, referring to the band; "what is it called?"

"I believe it is a gavotte, called 'Sylvia,'" replied Stuart Harcourt, his companion.

What a host of bitter, sweet memories surged through Frank's mind at the mention of that name. He saw a winsome, merry face, framed in glorious masses of bright, brown hair; soft, violet eyes that had so often gazed at him with a tender lovelight shining in them. A long sigh broke from him, which caused his friend to turn to him and say:

"What is it, Leslie, old chap? Anything the matter? By-the-by, Sylvia is the name you were always shouting out when you had brain fever so badly in India. Is there anything connected with it?"

A pause ensued, during which time Frank Leslie seemed to be engaged in a mental struggle. At last he exclaimed:

"You have been a good friend to me, Stuart, and nursed me like a brother when I had the fever, so I will tell you what I would impart to no other person living, that is, my love story. Light a cigarette, old fellow, let us sit down on this bench, and here goes:

"When I was quartered at Marford, a horrid little country town, I made the acquaintance of Mr. Barns, vicar of the country parish of Wartham. He was very kind, and invited me to his house. I went, and met his daughter, Sylvia Barns. Oh, Stuart! I can never tell you how I loved that girl, and fully did I believe she loved me in return. I was always looking for opportunities to go to Wartham Vicarage, until Mark Barns, her brother, came home from Oxford, and it was comparatively easy, for he and I became inseparable companions. At last the day came when I received my orders for India. I went straight to Wartham, saw Sylvia, told her of my love, and asked if there was any hope for me?

"'I have never cared for anyone save you, Frank, and never shall.'"

"Those were her very words, Harcourt, but how false they proved! I then went to Mr. Barns, to tell him of what had taken place between his daughter and myself.

"'You are both too poor to be married,' he replied. 'I don't approve of long engagements, but if you both think the same when you come home, Leslie, I will give my sanction to the marriage. If in the meantime either of you should change your mind, write and apprise the other of the fact, but no other correspondence will I allow; in this I trust to your honour.'

"Not being able to make better terms than this, I consented.

"I had been in India about a year, when I received a note in Sylvia's handwriting, which ran as follows:

"'I have changed my name to Durnford;' and by the same mail a newspaper arrived, on opening which, my eye caught a paragraph commencing thus:

"'*The little village of Wartham was en fête on Tuesday, on the occasion of the marriage of Mr. Durnford with Miss Barns.*'

"I read no further. It was indeed insult added to injury. Not only had Sylvia proved false in the little space of time, but she had also sent me a newspaper account of her baseness. You know the rest. How I got brain fever, and how on my recovery we both obtained leave and came home."

* * * * *

A few evenings after Frank's confession, he and Stuart attended the Infirmary ball. Whilst walking round the room criticising different belles, Stuart's attention was suddenly attracted by an exceedingly pretty girl, who was gazing at his friend with earnest attention. He saw Frank glance at her with a look of sudden scorn, then the fair face paled, and she shrank behind a lady who was standing near. Later in the evening, Frank, who had not danced many times, was accosted by one of the stewards whom he knew slightly.

"There is a lady friend of mine here who hardly knows anybody, so do come and dance with her."

So saying, he took Frank's arm, led him up to a group near the door, murmured a few indistinct words of introduction, and hurried away to another non-dancing man, leaving Frank face to face with his false love, Sylvia Barns.

"Why have you not spoken to me all the evening?" she asked in an appealing voice. "What have I done to offend you?"

"Need you ask," replied Frank sternly; "when you think of your treachery and baseness."

"Treachery and baseness!" Sylvia faltered. "Frank, I I don't understand you."

"This is no place for a discussion; come into the conservatory," said Frank.

The conservatory was empty. On arriving there Frank turned to Sylvia, and said in a scornful tone:

"You don't understand, Mrs. Durnford, what I mean by treachery? Do you not call promising to marry one man and then jilting him for another, base?"

"Yes, Frank, I should call it so; but what has it to do with me? And why do you call me Mrs. Durnford? I am Miss Durnford!"

"Miss Durnford!" ejaculated Frank, in amazement. "How so?"

"Why, poor old Aunt Durnford died when you had been away a year, leaving us her money, providing we should take her surname. Did you not receive the paper with an account of Mark's wedding in it, which beautifully explained it all? My father said I wasn't to write a letter. I wrote a note, though, letting you know of my change of name."

A light flashed across Frank's mind.

"Then it was Mark who was married, and of course, I remember, he always was in love with his cousin, Bessie Barns. Oh, my darling, my darling, can you ever forgive me for doubting you?" murmured Frank passionately, when he had explained his fears.

What Sylvia answered I know not; suffice it to say that the little village of Wartham was again *en fête* shortly afterwards, on the occasion of Miss Durnford's marriage with Captain Leslie of the Royal Heavies.

May Harvey.

HANDWRITING DENOTES YOUR CHARACTER,
And if you wish to learn what this is send a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope to Ranee, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. A reliable delineation of your character will be sent in return.

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POWERFUL ROMANCE.

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

THIRTIETH CHAPTER.

The Doom of a Traitor.

"Look here, Staunton, what sort of a game is this you are playing on us? I'm talking business, strict business understand, and there's my pile on the table. Don't let us misunderstand one another."

"Yes, and there's mine, and now what have you got to say?"

It was four o'clock of the morning after the concert, and Derrick Kesteven and Isolo Staunton stood facing each other from opposite sides of the table in the Council Chamber. Kesteven had taken a five-chambered .38 Smith and Wesson out of his hip-pocket and laid it on the table in front of him, and Staunton had answered the challenge by doing the same.

As though by tacit consent they put their hands behind their backs and looked at each other eye to eye across the table. Each knew perfectly well that if he put a hand out towards his weapon he would be shot the next moment.

"Can't you see what it means? Surely you know enough of what you and I have been working through together for the last fifteen years or so——

"Look here, Staunton, you just remember what I told you after your talk here with those Spaniards. This is no funeral of mine. I resigned right then and I want to know how it happens that we started out from the Bay of Nice last evening for a sort of *al fresco* sea-concert-picnic business, and some of us who didn't want to go to sleep after what happened, find ourselves out of sight of land on board this craft of yours ripping through the water faster than a destroyer. Where are we?"

Staunton took out his watch and looked at it for about half a minute.

"I should say that we cleared the Straits of Gibraltar about an hour ago, and we are now heading about South-West—well, we will say, across the Atlantic."

"And our destination?"

"Is at present undecided."

"In other words, you've somehow fixed the thing up so that you've enticed the whole lot of us on board this infernal craft of yours to dine and have a concert and so on, and you think that you've got the whole lot of us, not only our own personal friends, but your guests as well, absolutely at your mercy. That's so, isn't it?"

"My dear Kesteven," replied Staunton, pulling a chair up to the table and sitting down well within reach of his revolver, "you have hit off the situation to perfection. Just take up your gun and put it in your pocket, and let us talk like reasonable beings. Put yours away first. Shoot me if you like, and if you want everybody on board to find trouble. As it is I am standing right on the sharp edge of eternity, and one way or another it doesn't, after all, matter very much. Just a few years more or less, that's all."

"You're grit, Solly. Grit right through, darn you," replied Kesteven, in just the same voice in which he had spoken; nearly fifteen years before, on the verandah of the house in San Francisco, when they had shaken hands over their partnership.

He took up his pistol and balanced it for a moment in his hand. Staunton, sitting back in his chair, with his hands in his trousers pockets, looked at him eye to eye, and said:

"Well, if you mean business, why don't you shoot?"

"No!" said Kesteven, putting his pistol back in his pocket and sitting down. "Let it go at that. I know a stronger man than myself when I see him, and we've both got daughters on board this hooker of yours. Now, suppose you shoot."

"Not much," laughed Staunton, throwing his own revolver across the table. "This isn't a sort of time for dog to eat dog anyhow."

It was curious how these two men, multi-millionaires both of them, with the world at their feet like a football, reverted, in this supreme hour of conflict, to the old poker language of the days when they were both adventurers, with only a few thousand dollars between themselves and poverty—or prison.

"O. K.," said Kesteven, throwing Staunton's revolver back across the table. "We'll play the cards face up. And now I suppose I can call the game. What is it?"

"It's a longish story," said Staunton. "You see, it's this way. We'll count you out of the business, as you wanted to be, but I'm in it right up to the ears. I made a bad mistake getting here so quickly—not myself, I mean, but the yacht, after leaving Leith and going to the anchorage."

"Yes," interrupted Kesteven, "but who in thunder could have known that except yourself and the skipper?"

"My dear Derrick, it seems to me as if you'd been seeing nothing since you shut down on the partnership. You were talking to me the other day about our friend Mr. Dennison and his colleague Mr. Smith. Well, do you happen to know who Mr. Smith is?"

"Eh, Smith, well I guess he's just Mr. Smith, chief of the International Police in London. Anything more?"

"Yes," replied Staunton, taking a sip at his whisky and soda, "Mr. Smith is also the Monsieur de Ronski, who——"

"What do you say!" exclaimed Kesteven, jumping to his feet. "What, that man and his wife and his daughter, that lovely girl, that incomparable singer? Look here, Solly, are you really sure of this?"

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"We've been through a few pretty tight places, Derrick, since you and I started to work together," replied Staunton, also getting up, "but this is about the tightest that I ever tried to get through, and if you'll sit down for a minute I'll just show you how I mean to do it if the Fates won't look sideways on me. You'd hardly think that we had a traitor on board this boat would you, a man that we both trusted rather too much or too little, maybe too little perhaps?"

"What, not Valdez?" exclaimed Kesteven.

"No, no," replied Staunton, "he has his limitations, and he makes his mistakes, as he did with young Ellerton, and made all this trouble with poor Mercedes, but there's nothing of the traitor about him. I'll introduce you to the traitor in a minute or two, and then you shall see."

'Yes," said Kesteven, as he emptied his glass. "Of course, if it's a case of treason, I don't want you to tell me what's necessary. Heave ahead! I'm with you there. You won't hurt my feelings."

"I thought not," laughed Staunton, going to the telephone and taking the transmitter down.

"Have you got him there? Yes. Very well. Send him here at once. Put him in the sleeping bag, and don't let anyone see him. Have you got everything arranged below? Very well. That will do. Send him aft."

Staunton hung up the transmitter and opened the double door.

"Say, what in thunder are you doing, Staunton? Is there going to be any murder and sudden death about this business?"

"Murder? No!" replied Staunton quietly. "Sudden death? Probably. In short, if you wish to see it, you can assist at an execution, but anyhow it's going to take place within the next ten minutes."

"Well," replied Kesteven, "taking your word for it that it is a traitor, I reckon I'm with you. Bring him right along."

The telephone bell tinkled again, and the next moment a couple of stalwart quarter-masters came in, carrying a long, shapeless bundle between them.

"Put it down," said Staunton, "and go forward and tell Mr. Darfield that I should be glad if he would come here."

The men laid their burden on the floor, touched their caps, and went out without a word. Staunton closed the doors and came back and touched the bundle, inside which something was moving, with his foot, and said:

"This is it. What do you think it is?"

"It looks something like a man," said Kesteven slowly, and then suddenly he continued more anxiously, "look here, Solly, don't prolong the agony, it isn't a woman, is it?"

A smothered groan came from within the sleeping bag. Staunton leant down and unbuttoned the flap. "Take hold of that end, Derrick."

Kesteven took hold of the bottom of the bag with both hands. There was another shuddering movement inside it and he heard another gasping moan. Then Staunton put his hand in, and, with a wrench, dragged out Doctor Billaud, grey-white with fear, his eyes rolling in their sockets. His lower jaw was working convulsively, rattling his teeth together, his hands were clenched, and his legs were trembling and knocking against each other.

"Stand up, you dirty traitor, stand up and tell us what you think of yourself. Confound you!"

It was not often that Isolo Staunton let the savage that was in him loose, but it was loose now. He took Billaud by the jaw and the back of his head and lifted him up as though he had been a child. Then he let him go, and Billaud dropped into a huddled heap on the floor, gasping out between his sobs:

"What? Mercy for a thing like you," laughed Staunton, rolling him over with his foot, "look at it, Derrick. That's the sort of thing that thought it could give us away. What do you think of it?"

"Looks very mean, anyhow," said Kesteven, somewhat uneasily, for he had never seen anything quite so terrible as his late partner was now, vibrating in every nerve with strongly suppressed passion.

"What are you going to do with it?"

"You'll see soon," said Staunton shortly, and then the telephone bell tinkled twice. He opened the doors again and the first officer came in, pale, but quite steady and self-possessed. He knew already the part that he was going to be called upon to play. Billaud's life was nothing to him in comparison with the work which he had set himself to do. He had had a long talk with Janet in her own room after the concert and she had given him enough of her strength to enable him to bear himself like a man.

"Mr. Darfield," said Staunton, touching Billaud's shuddering body with his foot again, "it seems that our friend the doctor has been foolish enough to feel jealous because he has not been allowed to learn quite all about the inner workings of the *Isola*, and so he has thought fit to take a stupid, womanish sort of revenge by trying to betray me and therefore, of course, all of those who work with me to the police.

"Therefore, I have decided to reward his zeal in the cause of law and order by admitting him to a full knowledge of the secrets which he seems to have been so anxious to learn. Is everything ready below?"

"Yes, sir," replied Darfield, "everything."

"Very well, then," said Staunton, "then we can initiate our friend at once."

Billaud moaned again inarticulately, dragged himself to his knees, clasped his hands, and then rolled forward at Staunton's feet and tried to put his arms round his legs, sobbing again:

"Mercy, mercy, sir; have pity, have pity. I have sinned but I will atone. Do not kill me now, I am not fit to die; pity, pity!"

Staunton lifted his foot and kicked him away.

"Pity for a thing like you," he laughed; "a thing that doesn't even think itself fit to die. Really, my dear doctor, that is nothing whatever to do with me. You should have thought of that before. As it is, I am afraid you will have to arrange that little difficulty as best you can in the next world. You won't have time to do it in this one."

Billaud uttered another gasping moan and dropped prone, his forehead hitting the carpet with a soft sound, which to Kesteven's ears had something sickening in it.

"The man's fainted," he said roughly. "Say, I don't see any particular sport in this. I know you can't let him live, but don't play with the poor fellow like that. You're a man, not a cat."

His tone of disgust rather than his words cooled Staunton's frenzy of revenge. He shrugged his shoulders and said half apologetically:

"Well, perhaps you're right; the thing isn't worth playing with."

He took the brandy decanter and poured out half a glass, straightened Billaud out, lifted his head, and poured some into his mouth. He shuddered and gasped and opened his eyes.

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"Ah, where am I? What has happened? Ah, yes, yes, I remember. God help me! I am lost!"

"Not quite, my friend, but you soon will be," laughed Staunton, picking him up by the shoulders and dropping him on to a chair. "Just oblige me by tieing him up, Mr. Darfield, in case he falls down again and hurts himself. You will find a bit of line there on the sofa. I thought we might want it."

Darfield picked up a little coil of thin rope from the sofa, and in a couple of minutes had fastened the shrinking, trembling form of the doomed man to the chair. Meanwhile Staunton had pulled the corner of the carpet aside and tapped four times on the floor with the toe of his boot. Three taps answered him from below. He went to the chair and said to Darfield:

"Give me a hand."

They lifted the chair and placed it on the square in the corner, and as they did so Billaud recovered sense enough from his paralysis of fear to remember how he had helped to put Wilfrid Ellerton in the same position after he had administered the drug to him.

"Come along, Kesteven," said Staunton, "and you, too, Mr. Darfield."

He went and stood behind the huge chair. Two others took their places on either side. Billaud's head dropped forward and a gasping sob gurgled in his throat. Staunton tapped with his toe again and the platform sank. It came to rest on the floor of the lower chamber.

"Come, now, rouse up, doctor," said Staunton, with a savage laugh, as he caught his chin and turned his face up. "If you want to have just another look about you, this is the time to do it."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake put the man out of his misery and be done with it," exclaimed Kesteven, with a gesture of disgust. "I didn't think you were as mean as that, Solly. Get it over. Just think what Mer——"

The next instant he was looking into the muzzle of Staunton's revolver.

"Another syllable and by all that's holy you'll go down with him."

"Then I guess Mr. Darfield might as well put us away together," replied Kesteven quietly.

Staunton looked down and saw the barrel of his partner's pistol pointing straight at his heart.

"I've seen you, Solly, and I guess the hands are about even. I've got fours and one over and so have you. All the same I was wrong and I apologise."

"Good enough," said Staunton, putting his revolver back into his pocket, "but you ought to know better than risk sudden death like that twice in half an hour." Then he turned to his first officer and said:

"Mr. Darfield, you will be good enough to forget this little incident. I have no reason for losing a good officer and a faithful servant—you see what I mean, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," replied Darfield, "I understand you."

"Ah, pity, pity on me, monsieur; pity for the love of Heaven. I will be faithful again, truly I will. I will tell you everything, and then I will be silent, indeed I will."

Billaud had come to himself again and straightened his head up, the only part of his body he could move, and as he gasped the words out he looked at him with a glance which even Staunton did not wish to see again.

He turned away without making any reply and touched the button in the end wall of the chamber. The steel panel fell back, disclosing the sloping passage down which Ellerton had been carried on his way to the Underworld. At the end was the diving chamber with the electric bulb shining in the roof.

"Lend a hand, Mr. Darfield," said Staunton, taking hold of the back of the chair. "This is part of the secret the doctor wanted to learn, and he'll learn a bigger one very soon."

They lifted the chair and carried Billaud whimpering hopeless, half-inarticulate pleas for mercy, down the passage and planted the chair in the middle of the diving chamber.

"Thank you, Mr. Darfield, that will do; I don't want you to have any more share in this business than you've got to have. I'll do the rest."

"Thank you, sir," replied the first officer, with a very evident note of relief in his voice. He went out into the passage and Staunton, apparently deaf to the hardly human cries which came sobbing and gasping from his victim's lips, took up a coil of rope lying on the floor of the chamber beside a couple of fifty kilogramme weights, and lashed it round his body and framework of the chair. Then he laughed again:

"Good-bye, doctor, see you in the next world perhaps," and followed Darfield into the passage.

He took hold of one of the levers on the wall.

A hoarse scream of despairing agony burst from Billaud's white and trembling lips, and the next moment the sheet of steel slid down and quenched it into silence.

Staunton pulled the second lever.

There was a faint gurgling sound of inrushing water. He pulled out his watch and counted a hundred and twenty seconds, then he pushed back the second lever and then a minute later the first. The sheet of steel rose again, and Kesteven, who had come half way down the sloping passage, looked into the chamber. It was drenched with water and empty.

THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Plans for the Future.

Kesteven had seen as much as most men have done but when he and Staunton and Darfield found themselves back in the Council Chamber, and Staunton had kicked the corner of the carpet over the sinking platform, he went to the table and took hold of the brandy decanter.

Darfield's face was grey-white and his eyes were beginning to wander. They moved from Kesteven's face to Staunton's, and back again aimlessly. He caught hold of the back of a chair, swayed to and fro for a moment, and then dropped into it.

"I thought so," said Staunton, "and it's just as well."

He went to the little cabinet on the left-hand side of the doors and unlocked it. Kesteven saw a row of little bottles, with blue labels on them. Staunton took one of them out and let ten drops fall into a minim glass, which he had taken up with his left hand. He jumped to his feet, and said:

"Look here, Solly. I'm full of this. If you're going to fix up another funeral this morning I'm going to bed."

"My dear Derrick, it's nothing of the sort," replied Staunton, taking a hypodermic syringe out of its case and filling it from the glass. "Mr. Darfield wants a sedative tonic as he has just said, and if he likes I will give it to him."

"No, sir, I thank you,"

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exclaimed Darfield, getting up. "If you will allow me—if I have done all that you require, I will only ask that you will give me a couple of hours' sleep. Really, sir, that is all I want."

"Are you frightened, Mr. Darfield?" said Staunton, going towards him with the syringe balanced between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand. "Surely you don't think that I want to do you any harm—you—look here!"—he went on pulling up his sleeve and running the needle under the skin of his arm. "I want a sedative as you do, and I am not going to commit suicide."

He pressed the piston and the skin puffed up above the puncture. "There is half of it," he said, "will you have the other? I think it will do you good."

"Thank you, sir," said Darfield, pulling up his sleeve. "I would give a good deal for three hours' sleep just now."

"And you shall have it, because you have earned it," said Staunton, gripping him by the wrist and thrusting the needle into the flesh of his forearm. He pressed the piston until the last drop of the drug had gone in. He took the needle out, opened the doors, and said:

"Now, the sooner you get to bed the better, and it will be as well for you to forget everything that has happened to-night."

"Yes, sir, I will forget everything except what you have just said," replied Darfield, as he stepped haltingly over the combing of the doorway and disappeared into the grey mingling of the dying night and the dawning day.

Staunton closed the doors, went to the cabinet, opened a drawer, and took out a lancet, he bared his arm again, and ripped the flesh open where the swelling was still visible. A stream of blood, mingled with a whitish fluid, ran down towards his wrist. He took out his pocket handkerchief and pressed it over the wound.

"Just go to that cabinet, Derrick, will you, and get me the collodion and a bandage. The collodion is on the second shelf to the left hand, and the bandages are in the bottom drawer to the right."

"You are pretty hard shell, Solly. Grit all through," said Kesteven, "and if I could only sympathise with you in that South American scheme of yours, I'd like to help you to be Emperor and make myself your Prime Minister or Chancellor or whatever it is."

"You can do it now, Derrick, if you like," replied Staunton, as Kesteven poured the collodion over the wound and then wrapped the bandage over it.

"Not me, Solly," he replied, shaking his head as he finished the bandage and pinned the end. "I've got Cora to think about, to say nothing about the Grand Duke, and I reckon I should feel pretty mean if she didn't become a Grand Duchess in due course, and, incidentally, I might ask what you might intend doing with the lot of us on board here. I suppose you haven't forgotten you have about forty people on board this boat who will be pretty well astonished when they wake up later on this morning and find themselves skimming over the wide Atlantic at thirty or forty miles an hour, instead of running into moorings in the Bay of Nice. What are you going to do about them?"

"Well," said Staunton, pulling his coat sleeves down, "that is a matter that wants thinking about, isn't it? If you don't mind being partners again for a few hours, Derrick, I think you can help me out of one of the tightest places I have been in for some time, and at the same time go home with all your feathers flying."

"As regards the superfluous guests, I reckon. Is that it?" asked Kesteven, looking at him from under his half-lowered eyelids.

"You've got it in once, as we used to say out West," said Staunton. "You see it's this way, I've got this crowd of people on board, I've had to bring them away, but I don't want them, and I don't wish any evil to them."

"With exceptions, I suppose?" said Kesteven, sitting up and looking hard at him.

"Yes, naturally there are certain exceptions. If there hadn't been the yacht wouldn't be where she is now. A man with all I have to risk doesn't get outside the four corners of the law for nothing."

"And the exceptions?" asked Kesteven.

"Well," said Staunton, poising himself on the edge of the table, "to begin with, there's our mutual friend, Smith—de Ronski. I can't let him go, and his wife and daughter—no, no, don't worry about your gun. I see what you're thinking, and I quite appreciate——"

"Rats, Solly, don't give me any of that stuff. Put it in plain figures, and let's be done with it."

"Exactly what I was going to do, if you hadn't weighed in with that chivalrous interruption," said Staunton, with a sneering laugh running through his words. "It comes to this. For my safety, to say nothing about Mercedes and you and Cora, these people have got to stop on board for the present. You don't want me to tell you what would happen if I landed them at the end of the cable——"

"Do they all know?" Kesteven interrupted, sitting straight up in his chair. In his eyes was a strange gleam.

"If my information is worth anything, my dear Derrick," said Staunton, flicking the ash off his cigar—"his women-folk, charming and all as they are, are rather more dangerous to our interests than Mr. Smith himself. I know pretty well what he knows and what he wants to do, but when you get women taking a hand in a game like this you don't know what to play."

"That's so," said Kesteven. "Quite right. If they're in it with Smith, well charming and all as they are I suppose they've got to take their chance with him. Anyone else? Dennison, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Staunton slowly, "I think I'll have to prolong his holiday for a few weeks, but if you'll just do what I am going to ask you to do, Derrick, I'll give you my word as one white man to another, that no harm shall come to any of them unless it's absolutely necessary. By that, of course, I mean that none of them shall find trouble unless he or she goes and deliberately looks for it."

"Good enough," replied Kesteven. "I'll take it at that; and now what do you want me to do?"

"Just this," said Staunton, taking out his watch. "If we have been keeping our speed, we shall be within twenty miles of Madeira about an hour after breakfast. The de Ronskis and Mr. Dennison will not appear at breakfast. They will have it in their own rooms if they want it. When breakfast is over the two steam pinnaces will be at your service. You will explain to our guests that it has become impossible for me to take them back to Nice, and they will take a trip with you in the two pinnaces to Funchal, where you will be able to get back to Europe by the first South African liner that comes along. I shall not appear myself, because I hate explanations. When they get back to Southampton they can talk as much as they please. The *Isola* will take a good deal of finding by then."

"And Mercedes and Cora?"

"They will of course go with you, and so will Miss Yuill. I'll have a talk with Mercedes before breakfast. Under all the circumstances it will be for you to hand her, and, of course, Miss Yuill, over to the care of my old friend, José Martinez at Funchal. I'll explain the matter to Miss Yuill.

"She will see that after the shock the poor girl has had with this sudden return of memory, the best thing that could happen to her would be a few weeks of perfect rest and quiet

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in that little paradise which Martinez has up in the mountains.

"I shall tell Miss Yuill that for the present, at least, no disturbing news of any sort must be allowed to reach Mercedes, and I'll give you a letter to Martinez to the same effect. Cora will, of course, go with you and the Grand Duke wherever you like to take her. How does that fit in?"

"Couldn't be better as far as I can see," replied Kesteven, "although it doesn't look as if you'd given me any too little to do. The sort of circus that I'm going to have with Lady Medcalf-Mears and the rest of them, promises to be a bit more exciting than amusing, still I reckon I shall be able to worry through somehow, and as long as I can depend on that promise you've given about Madame de Ronski and Miss Paula, you can depend on me to help you all I can inside the four-square of the law, but you mustn't expect anything outside of it. I have resigned, and you know my reasons for doing it."

"Yes," replied Staunton. "that's so, old man. I'm quite satisfied. I should have done just the same in your place, and if I hadn't set myself to make something more than a few millions—well, well, we won't argue that old question out again. You can trust me anyhow, if it's only for Mercedes' sake. She's my hostage to fortune and to you."

"That's so," said Kesteven, getting up and holding out his hand. "Whatever happens you can trust me to look after her just as if she was Cora's sister."

"Then we'll let it go at that, Derrick, and if I do go under as, of course, may happen, you'll go to my lawyers in London, and they'll hand you over on proof of my death or disappearance a million pounds, which is as clean money as a Quaker might want to handle."

"Good enough, Solly," said Kesteven, and the hands which twice within the last hour had held the threat of sudden death grasped each other, it might be for the last time, in honest faith and friendship.

THIRTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

Proclaimed as President.

It would be impossible to attempt to describe the feelings of the guests of the *Isola* when, after Kesteven had made the necessary explanations at breakfast, they found themselves with their baggage loaded up into two big steam pinnaces running into the Bay of Funchal, watching the white-painted, graceful shape of the *Isola* fading rapidly away into the grey distance to the south-westward, until in an incredibly short space of time it became a white spot of sunlight on the surface of the shimmering sea, and then vanished.

A week later the Union-Castle liner *Saxon* dropped anchor in the bay and picked up the forty astounded and more or less angry passengers.

Three days later the *Saxon* tied up at Ocean Quay, Southampton. On the other side of the Customs' shed there was a special train standing in front of the ordinary boat train. Kesteven had cabled for it from Madeira. It consisted of an engine, two saloon carriages, the baggage waggon, and the guard's van. The late guests of the *Isola*, in common with a good many of their fellow passengers on the *Saxon*, were still of the belief that some serious outrage was in course of perpetration against themselves, but Kesteven, who had taken the Grand Duke and Iddison into his confidence as far as was necessary, managed everything with such infinite tact that they were easily persuaded to take the advantage of the other passengers and get up to London an hour or so before them.

As the big engine, hissing and panting after its seventy-miles spin, pulled up at Waterloo, half-a-dozen newsboys came running along, screaming out:

"United States of South America proclaimed this morning. President Staunton's letter to the Powers. War expected. Here you are, sir. *St. James's, Globe*, or *Westminster?*"

"Well," laughed Kesteven, as he took a handful of papers through the window and threw the boy a shilling, "I reckon that's pretty quick. Our late host hasn't lost much time getting out there and having himself made President, but, anyhow, that will keep for the present. And now, ladies and gentlemen," he went on, taking his hat down from the rack, "you will find the omnibuses ready for your servants and your baggage and carriages for yourselves. Let us dine at the Carlton."

What all London was discussing with wonder was tersely but sufficiently described in the following cable in the *St. James's Gazette*, which Kesteven read aloud to Cora and the Grand Duke and Lady Medcalf-Mears, as they drove along York Road on their way to the Carlton:

"A NEW WORLD POWER.

"The United States of South America."

(From our own Correspondent.)

"Buenos Aires, Tuesday, 12.50 p.m.

"An amazing occurrence has happened. Soon after six o'clock this morning the yacht *Isola*, belonging to the well-known financier and millionaire, Mr. Isolo Staunton, who is the son of Mr. Staunton Zuarez, the late President of Peru, entered the harbour flying the flag of the newly-created United States of South America.

"Cables have come to hand during the morning which inform us that from Panama to Cape Horn and from Caracas to Monte Video, the same flag has been hoisted in every capital of the Continent.

"It is reported that there are hundreds of thousands of men under arms, and that no fewer than seven fleets of warships, the most up-to-date products of European shipyards, are already patrolling the entrances to every river and harbour which gives access to the New World Power which has so suddenly and so mysteriously sprung into being.

"From the best information that I have been able to gather here, I feel that I am justified in saying that this miracle of empire-making has been the work of one man."

"Well, upon my word," said Lady Medcalf-Mears. "What an extraordinary character the man must be, although, of course, no one could be surprised at anything he has done, or may do, after the amazing way in which he behaved to us. It was as extraordinary as it was scandalous."

"Certainly," said the Grand Duke, who had taken the paper from Kesteven and run his eye over the momentous paragraph.

"It is distinctly a dangerous situation, and from what I have been able to see of the character of our late host, he would be a desperate man if he found himself in a desperate position."

"There's not much doubt about that," laughed Cora, leaning back on the soft, springy cushions. "I reckon that if trouble has to be made, he would make it about as thoroughly as any man on earth."

"But surely," exclaimed Lady Medcalf-Mears, almost angrily, "it would be a perfectly disgraceful thing, a scandal to humanity as well as a disaster to the whole world, if this man's wicked ambitions led to war. The Great Powers ought to combine and crush him and his new Republic at once before he has time to do any mischief," she added somewhat inconsistently.

"But my dear lady," replied the Grand Duke, smiling at her fervour, "surely you do not see anything wicked in forming a new State, if it be done by lawful means. If that were so you would condemn every State and Empire on earth, and especially your own British Empire. For my part I confess that I have not a small admiration for the man who could make so great a *coup d'état* as that so secretly and so suddenly. No doubt he will behave himself peacefully, so that the Powers shall recognise him and the Constitution of his Republic. If he does not, then his quarrel with the world will be settled by war."

Here the carriage drew up at the Carlton, and the discussion perforce ended for the present.

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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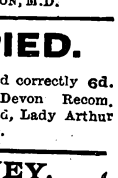

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

Writing on Photos.

"Is it correct, on a gentleman presenting his photo to a young lady to whom he is engaged, for him to put his inscription on it? In the event of writing on the photo, would it be permissible to put 'with fondest love'?"—"LOVESICK."

* * * * *

I do not know that it is correct to write on a photo. It is a matter of taste. Many people insist that all their photos should be signed—it is a little fad—while others prefer the photo without writing. Ask your sweetheart if she would like you to write on the photo, and if she agrees, you might use the words you mention. Above all, don't be too keen on being "correct." Be natural, that is the important point.

Nine Years, and Not Engaged.

DEAR, dear, "DOROTHY"! You have been going out with a young man for nine years and he has never uttered a word about marriage. Well, though nine-year friendships are very nice, certainly you have a right to expect him to say one way or the other if he has serious intentions. You say he is always affectionate and kind, that you have spent holidays together, and that everybody thinks you are properly engaged, and that he is quite in a position to marry. Well, one of these days, I certainly should gently point out to him that your friends are making inquiries about the matter, and leave him to say the needed word. A nine-years' engagement is bad enough, but nine years and no engagement is a bit too much of a good thing.

Sweethearts Who Are Not In Love.

"WHAT is a girl to do when she feels that she no longer loves her *fiancé*, but has a decided preference for somebody else?" Several correspondents lately have put me this question, so I will answer them together. They will not, I am sure, be offended if I do not deal with each one separately, and thus cover the same ground several times over.

* * * * *

If a girl no longer loves the man to whom she is engaged, it is her duty to tell him so. To enter into marriage, knowing well all the time that your affection lies elsewhere, is almost as serious an offence as being untrue to your husband after marriage—and it often means the same thing. Remember that one of the marriage vows is "love." This reminds me of a very charming play I saw recently. An engaged young couple both discovered that they no longer cared for each other but preferred others. But because they were engaged, they solemnly kept up the pretence of continued love, all the time hoping for some reason for a breach. Fortunately for their happiness the breach took place, and instead of either of them being broken-hearted, both were exceedingly pleased. In the case of my correspondents, who knows but that the young men they are engaged to are not every bit as anxious to end the affair as they themselves? Certainly nothing would be lost by telling the plain truth.

Whereabouts Wanted.

"E. S." asks if I know of a lady who used to write under the name of "Cynthia" in 1899, and who used to often go to South Africa. No, I do not, but if I should hear of her, I will place a paragraph on this page against your initials. If she should see this, she might communicate with me, and I will notify you of her whereabouts, if she wishes to disclose them.

Should She Receive Letters?

YOU got friendly with a young man while on your summer holiday, did you, "RAB"? Since his return he has been sending little remembrances. But you are now "keeping company" with somebody else, and want to know if you should still receive letters from the other.

* * * * *

You can receive letters from anybody if you are on friendly terms with them. But if he writes love letters to you, I think you had better just tell him that you are "keeping company" with another. That would be only fair to him, would it not. For if you continued to receive letters and presents he might very rightly think that he was the only one.

Secret Marriages.

"I AM privately engaged to a girl of eighteen, but her parents are against our marriage," writes "BOB." "We are determined to marry in a year's time. How can this be done?"

* * * * *

I never advise young couples to marry against the wishes of either parents. Instead of conspiring for a runaway match, it would be far better for you to spend the next year in convincing her parents of your fitness to become her husband. Runaway matches are, no doubt, very romantic, but somebody suffers from them after the rapture is over. So I am sorry, "BOB," that I cannot help you with any suggestion.

Unanswered Letters.

SOME troubled lovers seek my advice on very slende grounds, but I suppose they are seriously worried, or they would not write. For instance, "A. E. W." got very friendly with a certain young lady a month ago, and they went for long walks together, after which she went away to her home. She promised to write to "A. E. W." if he wrote first. Three days after "A. E. W." wrote, but received no reply. Three weeks have now elapsed, but nothing has come from her.

* * * * *

Write again, "A. E. W." If she doesn't write back then, it will be very rude indeed of her, and I should consider the affair closed. But give her one more chance. Every young man in love should persevere.

Engaged to Another Fellow.

"KRUGER" (South Africa), writes: "A young lady I am very fond of writes to me weekly. I know she is engaged to another fellow, but she tells me in her letters from England that she is also very fond of me. I should much like to become engaged to her, although I don't want to injure the other man."

* * * * *

Of course you cannot suggest any engagement to her, so long as she belongs to another. She ought not to worry you by writing in the way she does. That kind of girl seems to be playing a double game. Cannot you find out from other people whether or not she is likely to continue engaged to the other man? Perhaps there has been a breach, and she is writing to you in this strain because she anticipates that she will soon be in need of a new lover. I would find out definitely before even thinking about an engagement.

Cynthia

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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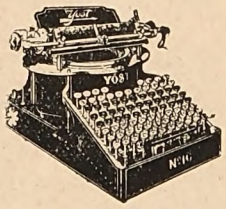

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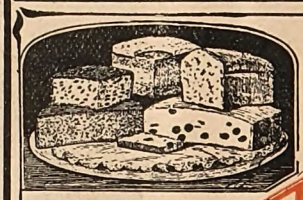

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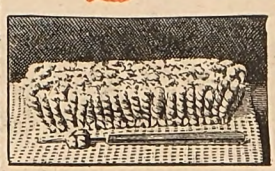

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SHORT STORIES

No. 783.] Week Ending January 2nd, 1904. [Price One Penny.

"She was to marry the one who reached her first!
Would it be the man she loved or the man she hated!"

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The purest and most efficient Remedy procurable for
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The 5 MINUTES PAIN CURE FREE.

THE WIFE OF THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF writes: "Countess Roberts will thank the Lineel Co. to send her another bottle of Lineel Liniment, which is most excellent. She encloses 2/9."

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Sold at all Branches of Boots' Cash Chemists, and by all Chemists, &c., at 1/1½ and 2/9 per bottle.

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SHORT STORIES

No. 783.] Week Ending January 2nd, 1904. [One Penny.

A SPORT OF THE GODS.

The Strange Story of a Girl, her Two Lovers, and an Eccentric Will.

"It comes to this, Kendrick, that I will give you a thousand pounds if you promise to discontinue your love-making with Dolly Meredith."

The other leapt to his feet. In his eyes was a strange glitter, his right hand was clenched.

"The words could only have been uttered by an incorrigible cad," he cried. "Please remember, Martin Walbrook, that whatever your standard of honour may be, mine is unimpeachable. I do not care to discuss this matter any further, for your very offer tells me that you consider your suit with Miss Meredith likely to be doomed to failure."

A sneer played round Walbrook's lips. He rose, took up his hat, and said:

"The deductions of a briefless barrister are likely to be correct! Anyway, I have no fear. Though the affections of the lady upon whom you have set your heart may not be directed towards me, still, I think that I stand better with her father than do you, Mr. Rupert Kendrick. He is more likely to encourage the suit of Martin Walbrook, gentleman and well-to-do, than that of a barrister struggling hopelessly for fame. You have missed a very good chance of making a thou., and I wish you a very 'Good-day'!"

The door slammed behind him, and the other was left alone with his thoughts.

They were not very pleasant ones, it may be presumed. Here he was, young, handsome, clean-shaven, a veritable Apollo, fairly optimistic of his future in life, but with a present that was sickening.

Strive as he would, he could not convert the tide of briefs into his channel. His sole income consisted of two hundred pounds a year left him by his father, and he had fallen hopelessly in love.

Before he had met Dolly Meredith, life with him had been the reverse of serious. At his club everyone had deemed him a jolly good fellow. Athletically inclined, he had joined the Harriers. There he met Martin Walbrook, and an acquaintanceship had sprung up between them, though this had not ripened into anything very much deeper. Through him he had been introduced to Miss Meredith. He came, he saw, and was conquered.

For the course that he took he had every excuse.

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Dolly Meredith was a girl to whom any mortal man might have lost his heart. Tall, fair, with a face like an angel's, she combined her outward beauty with a heavenly grace. Sympathetic to a degree, she was the very opposite of the usual Society girl.

The only child of Maurice Meredith, successful City financier, whose wife had died when Dolly was but a child, she had been petted to a degree. Her smallest whim was satisfied, yet her nature was not spoilt. Between daughter and father there reigned a bond of the purest love, and she returned his little acts of kindness and thoughtfulness by obeying his every wish.

Lucky the man who won her for a wife!

There was but one flaw in the character of Mr. Meredith, her father. That flaw was a love of Mammon. Money was his idol, he could never make enough. If ever anyone suggested that it was time he should retire from business, his answer was a scowl. To all he made the same reply:

"It is for the sake of Dorothy!"

He could not see the beam in his eye; he could not see that the fortune he had amassed was twenty times as ample as the most ambitious girl could expect.

And so the glitter of Martin Walbrook's gold had attracted him. Whenever Walbrook had visited his house, he had always been the acme of studied politeness, and Mr. Meredith had always looked upon him as the ideal husband for his darling daughter.

But man proposes, the Fates dispose, and Cupid is an agent upon whom there is no reckoning.

As soon as Rupert Kendrick had been introduced to Miss Meredith, his visits to "The Berries" became more and more frequent. He could spare the time well enough—he only wished he could not.

Gradually Dolly Meredith became entangled in Love's cunningly-spread net. Who could resist the charms, the little courtesies that showed debonair Rupert Kendrick to be an inborn gentleman?

She realised this fact and tried to resist it. She had good reason for doing so. Her father, she knew, had set his heart on her marrying Walbrook, and her training forbade her going against her parent's wishes. And yet—she loved another! What should she do—what could she do?

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Martin Walbrook fully understood the state of affairs. He hated the day he had ever met Kendrick; he blamed himself for ever introducing a possible rival.

He loved Dolly with all the love of which he was capable. Her father's thousands, possibly millions, afforded a fitting background to her own accomplishments.

And he was being cut out by a well-nigh penniless barrister. Ah! there was the key to the difficulty. He would buy Rupert's love. The bait of a thousand pounds dangled before his rival's eyes would be sure to be effective. A thousand to him was little—especially if with it he could buy Meredith's inheritance.

He called on Kendrick at his chambers, made the offer, and obtained the answer you have read at the beginning of this story.

When Walbrook had left, a strange, restless feeling came over the young barrister. He tried to study, but failed miserably. His thoughts were such a curious jumble of Dolly, money, Walbrook, law, and love that he could not work.

A sense of uneasiness prevailed in him; something that he could not understand kept whispering: "Go and propose to Dolly; now or never. He who hesitates is lost."

"Confound it all, I *will*," he cried; then added gloomily: "May as well get knocked out of the running as soon as possible, I suppose."

The Merediths lived in Holland Park. In none too happy a frame of mind, Kendrick walked briskly up Chancery Lane on this sharp, cold, January afternoon and then took the Tube to the neighbourhood of his destination.

When he arrived at "The Berries" he rang the bell and inquired of the servant who answered it if Miss Meredith were at home.

"She is, sir," the domestic replied, "but she is engaged."

"Engaged?" echoed Rupert. "May I ask with whom?"

"Oh, yes, sir. It's only Mr. Martin Walbrook."

Only Mr. Martin Walbrook! Ye gods, *only* Mr. Martin Walbrook! Kendrick had to decide swiftly what to do. Should he go boldly in and interrupt their *tête-à-tête*, taking the bull by the horns, or should he await a more favourable opportunity to see his beloved one?

He decided on the former course.

"Will you please take this card in to Miss Meredith and ask her if I may see her?" said he to the servant.

In a few minutes the maid returned with the message that her mistress would be delighted to see him.

He was ushered into the drawing-room.

With a sweet smile Dolly rose to greet him.

"How do you do, Mr. Kendrick?" she exclaimed. "I am so pleased to see you. Mr. Walbrook and I were just talking about you."

"Yes," put in Martin. "Speak of the—gentleman—and he appears. Whatever brings you here this time of day, Kendrick?"

Rupert did not reply. He was thinking—thinking hard. Why was that radiant look on Dolly's face? Had Walbrook proposed—had he been accepted?

"Can she possibly love this—thing?" muttered Rupert between his teeth.

Suddenly he returned to his senses. His hostess was speaking to him.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

"Really, Mr. Kendrick, you seem strangely preoccupied," pouted Dolly. "You've scarcely spoken to me yet. And, by the way, won't you sit down?"

Rupert mumbled an apology, and took the proffered seat.

The clock on the mantelpiece chimed four.

"Mr. Walbrook was just saying 'Good-bye' when you came in. He says he has a most important engagement at half-past four," said Dolly.

"Really," hastily interposed Walbrook, "I do not think that it is quite so important after all. If you will allow me——"

"Oh, no! Mr. Walbrook, I cannot allow you to break your appointments for me. I am sure that your friend will excuse you."

Rupert could not suppress a triumphant smile at the discomfiture of his rival. Surely the Fates were propitious; the other could not get round this very broad hint for his departure.

He rose, not too graciously, and said:

"If that's the case, all well and good. Certainly, I should—that is, it would be inconvenient for me to miss my engagement. So, *au revoir* for the present, Miss Meredith." Then, with a quick glance at Rupert, he added, "I shall call in and see your father to-morrow. I trust that he will do as I wish."

Kendrick paled. *So he had proposed!*

The other held out his hand to him. With a slight gesture as if of accident, Rupert knocked over a small pile of papers that were on the table by his side. He stooped to pick them up, and, purposely fumbling in the action took some time in doing so. Meanwhile the maid had appeared to show Walbrook out, and so he had avoided shaking hands.

As soon as Walbrook had gone, Rupert spoke, practically for the first time.

"Am I to congratulate you?" he said.

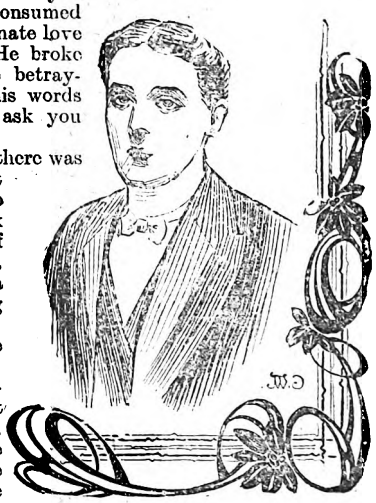
Dolly's face was a study—it blanched and flushed alternately.

"Sir," she stammered, "your question is capable of only one meaning. It is rather impertinent, and I refuse to answer you."

Rupert noticed that in the girl's beautiful blue eyes there was something akin to tears and he made haste to apologise.

"I beg your pardon. As a matter of fact, I came here this afternoon to ask you a very important question. I feared that Walbrook had forestalled me.

"Miss Meredith, let us come to the point at once. Ever since I saw you, now nearly a year ago, I have been consumed with a burning, passionate love for you and——" He broke off suddenly, his voice betraying the eagerness of his words—"Dolly, I came to ask you if you'd be my wife."



For a few seconds there was silence—a silence that was purgatory to both. Kendrick gripped the arms of his chair ferociously, in his eyes was a look of convincing appeal.

At last she spoke falteringly:

"Mr. Meredith-Rupert. I—you must not be disappointed. I thank you for the honour you have done me, but——" She stopped.

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"But," he cried, "say, he *did* propose?"

"Yes, he did. And——"

"You accepted him?"

"No!" she cried, "because I do not love him. Rupert, do you not see, *can* you not see; the position I am placed in? Martin proposed and I could not refuse! Could not, because of my father's wishes; but I did not accept him, because I loved—*you!* I prevaricated, I——"

But Rupert had sprung up and had caught her in his arms, and was raining kisses on her upturned, unresisting face. When he released her, she continued:

"I refused to give a decision and referred him to my father."

"Dolly, Dolly, won't you marry me? I know I am not rich, but I can work, work like a demon. Things will turn out all right. Dolly, give me your answer, now, do."

"I cannot decide!" she urged, almost startled. "I cannot decide!"

"Promise me then you will not marry Walbrook. Nobody can say that I am fond of telling tales out of school, but a little interview I had with him early this afternoon gave me an insight into his character. He visited me to offer me £1,000 to cease from seeing you again!"

Dolly Meredith jumped to her feet, her eyes blazing with anger. Her bosom heaved, and she was quivering with emotion.

"Did he stoop so low as that?" she asked. "Rupert, I can scarcely believe you. I have never liked the man. I have tolerated him solely for my father's sake, but I did not think he was quite such a scoundrel! How I hate him, how I loathe him, if that is true!"

"It is true, I am sorry to say it is true," said Rupert. "I did not intend to tell you yet, but in my anxiety the truth came out. Tell me—is your father prejudiced against me?"

He sat by her side on the couch and softly stole his arm round her waist.

"No," she said gently, "he likes you, I know he does. He admires you for your manliness, as I admire you. But he knows that you——"

"Poverty is no disgrace," interpolated Kendrick.

"You cannot convince father of that. Rupert, I love you dearly, as much as, nay, more than, I hate Martin. But I must abide by my father's decision; I will do anything he wishes."

Just then the maid brought in afternoon tea. Having had a cup, Rupert prepared to go.

"Do not go yet," said Dolly, "my father will be back from the City in a few minutes. Why not stay and ask him if—if he will consent to our engagement?"

"Darling," he replied, as once more he took her in his arms, "you are right. There is no time like the present."

The minutes that elapsed between then and the time when they heard the latch-key inserted in the front door was occupied in a manner of which only lovers know.

However, when Mr. Meredith entered the room, the sight he saw was nothing unusual. Like wise young people, they had discreetly separated. Mr. Meredith was a gentleman of some sixty years of age. He was forty when he fell in love with little Kitty MacMahon, and married her. He was forty-eight when the great grief of his life overtook him—the death of his wife.

Dolly went up to him, and, putting two soft hands round his neck, kissed him. An unwarrantable pang of jealousy smote Rupert. "Father," said Dolly, almost in a whisper, "Mr. Kendrick has something very, very important to say to you. I will run upstairs for a few minutes."

When she reached the door, she flashed a reassuring smile of hope to Rupert. Then she fled, and left him to his fate.

"Well, my boy," said the kindly tones of Mr. Meredith, "what is it you want?"

Kendrick replied, in a well-controlled voice:

"I have had the great fortune, sir, to win your daughter's love. I remained here this evening to ask your consent to our engagement. I trust that you see no material obstacles in the way, or have any personal object ion to me as a son-in-law?"

The elder man's face hardened. He did not speak for a few minutes. When he did, he said in grave, stern tones:

"Kendrick, I have expected this. You place me in an awkward position, for though I believe my daughter has an affectionate regard for you, yet I think she could make a better marriage. You are a shrewd enough man, Kendrick, to know that there is another Douglas in the field. Putting aside altogether the question of means—I do not for an instant believe that you are courting my daughter for her dowry—I owe Martin Walbrook a debt of gratitude. Seven years ago he assisted me financially when I was hard pressed. The great name of Meredith was in imminent danger of being dishonoured, on account of a great reversal I then sustained. Thanks to your rival, I came out of the fray successfully. Maurice Meredith, as they say in the City, is the man who never forgets. Do you follow me, Kendrick?" he added with a quick glance.

The other nodded. There was a despondent look on his face.

"Well," continued the old man, "the time has come when I can repay. I know Martin loves my daughter dearly. She may love you, but I firmly believe she would learn to love Martin. Yet I do not wish to have Dolly lose her happiness. I must have time to decide. In a week or two you will know whether I will sanction your engagement or not. Dolly will, in any case, I am certain, do as I wish. That is all. Good-night!"

Thus abruptly ending, Mr. Meredith escorted Rupert to the door. He was denied the pleasure of seeing Dolly again that night.

* * * * *

As Rupert was leaving his chambers the next evening he received a telegram.

This is what it said:

"*Come at once. Father dying.*—DOLLY."

"Heavens!" cried Rupert. "What can have happened?" Post-haste he hurried to "The Berries." When he reached there all the blinds were drawn. Mr. Meredith was dead!

He went in to console Dolly. Tearfully she told him what had happened.

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"In the morning my father felt unwell, so remained in bed. About noon he felt pains in the region of his heart. I sent for the doctor, and when he came his news was appalling.

"He can live but for a few hours," was the verdict.

"Father bore up strongly when he heard the statement.

"'Send for my solicitors,' were his first words.

"As quickly as possible Mr. Drudge, of Messrs. Giddy and Drudge, arrived.

"While he made his will he was alone with the solicitor.

"The last words he said to me were:

"'Dolly, promise—me—that—you—will—abide—by—the—dictates—of—my—will?'

"Of course I gave him my promise, and, as he died, he muttered: 'May the gods decide for the best.'

"What could he mean? What could he mean?"

Presently Martin Walbrook called and was unfeignedly shocked to learn of Mr. Meredith's death.

As soon as possible they both left together.

When outside, Martin sneered:

"I suppose you consider Mr. Meredith's death a stroke of luck for you, eh?"

"You insufferable cad!" was Rupert's only comment.

* * * * *

The day on which Mr. Meredith's sudden death took place was a Friday.

He was buried on the following Tuesday.

After the funeral, those interested in the will returned to "The Berries" to hear it read.

There were only six persons present.

They were Mr. Drudge, the solicitor, Mr. Richmond and Mr. Weston, the two gentlemen who had been appointed executors, and Dolly, Martin, and Rupert.

"I am about to read," began the solicitor, "a will that is the essence of eccentricity. I hope that you will all give your closest attention to it."

And then he read this most strange and curious of wills. It set forth how he had been unable to decide which of the two, Rupert Kendrick and Martin Walbrook, should become the husband of Dolly. Therefore he had left it for the gods to decide. His whole fortune, with the exception of £1,000 each for his executors, was left to the one who married Dolly. The fortunate man was to be decided upon in a remarkable manner! A special marriage licence was to be obtained, and, a month from the date of the reading of the will, she was to proceed to the little village of Smalldeane, a hamlet five miles midway between the stations of Tongberry and Hazelwood, in Sussex.

She was to wait, in bridal robes, at the door of the church there, until her husband-to-be appeared.

Rupert and Martin were to depart from the Central Station, Brighton, by the 11.30 train that called at Tongberry and Hazelwood, accompanied by the executors.

One was to get out at Tongberry, the first station, and the other at Hazelwood. They were to draw lots to decide which shall have the five-minute advantage this entails.

The will stated that the competitors must travel the whole distance to Smalldeane on their feet. They were at liberty either to run or walk, but when they reached the church they must be immaculately clad, and not in a slovenly state.

The one who reached Dolly first was to marry her!

When they heard the provisions of the will the audience was thunderstruck.

"Are you," gasped Walbrook to Dolly, "are you going to offer yourself as a prize in this manner? If you do not, the money will come to you in the ordinary way, and you can marry whom you will."

"I promised," replied the brave girl, in measured tones—"I promised my father to abide by his will!"

* * * * *

The weeks slipped by. Dolly prepared for the eventful day. She knew the locality well, and so did the others. The little village of Smalldeane was Mr. Meredith's favourite country place, and every year they used to spend a month there. Last summer both Walbrook and Kendrick had visited them, so the conditions were equal.

She refused to meet either of her lovers till she was married! But every day, and every hour of the day, she prayed to the God Almighty to give wings to Rupert's feet.

Tuesday, February 19th, came round at last. The day before Dolly had gone to the little inn at Smalldeane in order to be ready. There was a heavy fall of snow during the night, and in the morning the ground was covered.

In a first-class carriage there sat, as the 11.30 train steamed out of the Brighton Central Station, Rupert and Walbrook, with the two executors.

"We had better decide," said Mr. Weston, "who is to get out at Tongberry."

As he spoke he folded up two pieces of paper; on each of them was written the name of a station.

He put them in his silk hat, shook them up and held it out to Walbrook. He drew; it was marked Tongberry.

"Your luck has begun early," remarked Rupert bitterly.

Soon the train stopped at Tongberry, and Walbrook got out, accompanied by Mr. Weston. A set look was on his face, and he pulled his moustache vindictively.

To Rupert the train seemed hours going to Hazelwood. When it did reach the platform, he was out ere it stopped.

Turning his trousers well up to avoid the splash of the thick mud he covered with long strides the road that lay beween him and his love. He soon left Mr. Richmond far behind.

How slow his progress seemed! Where, he wondered, had Martin got to? Would he win or would he lose? Every thought to him was an agony.

Smalldeane lies in a valley midst the Sussex Downs. At last he reached the hill that overlooks the village. Straight in front of him was the opposite hill down which Martin Walbrook must come.

He was not in sight. Could he have already reached the goal! Surely not. In Heaven's name, no!

Rupert stopped to turn down his trousers and to flick off one or two specks of mud on his clothes.

He looked up and suddenly saw a figure tearing down the opposite hill at full speed. Something told him it was his rival!

Madly he started racing down the incline. Kind Providence directed his steps in the clean places. The church lay at the very foot of both the hills. Blindly he ran on, rushing heedlessly past the amazed villagers.

Thirty yards more to go! Walbrook was coming at lightning speed. Ten yards more to the lych-gate. The same difference separated it from Walbrook.

Now they were through.

Side by side they raced up the path; their hats had been discarded long before.

In front of them was their prize—Dolly, and nigh on a million pounds!

She stood there in an agony of suspense. Which would reach her first—the man she loved or the man she hated?

Now they were almost on her, Rupert, thank God an inch ahead. The other, in a frenzied moment, put forth his hand to push aside his rival.

In doing so he lost his footing, slipped, and fell ignominiously in the slush of the snow.

With a faint cry, Dolly sank fainting in her lover's arms. When she recovered, Rupert Kendrick's name was filled in the blank space of the marriage license, and they were wed.

Of Martin Walbrook, nothing need be said.

P. Reeves Shaw.

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SPLENDID NEW SERIAL YOU CAN START TO-DAY.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Eardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

PROLOGUE.

A YOUTH is in the private room of Messrs. Samuel Sharpe and Quirke, solicitors, awaiting the head of the firm's announcement as to whether he is the heir to the baronetcy of the late Sir Basil Wingate or not.

Mr. Sharpe says:

"You will remember, Mr. Rust, at the reading of the will, the title, which by special remainder he had power to dispose of, and the money were left by Sir Basil Wingate to the elder son of his run-away only daughter, Helen Jerningham, *should* she have one; and failing a son being born to her, the title and the money *with* the estate, should go to you, his nephew; afterwards to *your* son—should you marry, or to the *son* of your daughter; no child of the feminine sex directly inheriting it."

He then tells Cyprian Rust that, hearing Helen Jerningham went to Australia, he has extensively advertised for her in Australian papers, but with no effect. Therefore he congratulates his listener on becoming Sir Cyprian Rust.

The solicitor is called out of the room, and Cyprian Rust sees on the table an unopened letter with an Australian stamp. The address he recognises as being in the handwriting of his cousin, Helen Jerningham!

Is it written to announce the birth of a son and heir? If so it would rob him of the legacy at the eleventh hour!

A step sounds outside the door. Quickly Cyprian Rust thrusts the letter into his pocket. He hurriedly says good-bye to Mr. Sharpe, and when he reaches his hotel he reads the missive. It tells how Helen Jerningham has left Australia, so that the future heir—if a boy—may be born in England!

Sir Cyprian Rust carefully burns the letter that might have dealt the death blow to his ambitions, and mentally resolves to go to any extremes to retain the title.

Meanwhile Helen Jerningham is dying on board an ocean liner in giving birth to twin sons.

From incoherent remarks that she makes, the physician who attends her is led to believe that a secret is attached to the boys' history. But she dies ere she reveals her name or the boys' identity!

Many years later.

MARCELLA RUST, daughter of Sir Cyprian, finds a spade guinea which a mysterious man has hidden underneath the mat outside a certain room which she has been forbidden to enter in their home, Wingate Court, Crawley. Her curiosity is naturally aroused, and she tells her father of the occurrence. He seems annoyed at her alertness.

Sir Cyprian learns, through the Rev. Philip Nullius, that a dying woman wishes to see him.

He goes to see her, and she shows him a later will of Sir Basil Wingate, by which all his property is left to the descendant of Helen Jerningham unconditionally. Sir Cyprian snatches this will from her, and she dies before she can inform anyone else.

Sir Cyprian visits Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox, where he meets Mr. Caleb J. Johnson, millionaire and City magnate, who is in love with the hostess. The baronet, who has Lady Violet in his coils, forces her to swear to take particulars of the millionaire's house and property.

Late in the evening Johnson proposes to Lady Violet. Knowing her position, she, of course, refuses him. As she does so, the palms in front of the window part and a man lurches heavily into the room.

Lady Violet recognises him as her husband—a former Major in the Army, who has been separated from her for many years. Hastily she requests Johnson to leave; then turning on her unwelcome visitor, she by threats prevails upon him to go.

In the corridor this Society ruffian encounters Sir Cyprian, and sees upon his watch-chain the Sign of the Spade.

Edward Day proposes to Marcella. Being refused, he angrily lets fall an allusion to Marcella's dead mother.

Lady Violet overhears this, and, with blazing eyes, dismisses Day, who acts as her secretary, from her service.

She makes him an allowance of £250 a year, and gives him a letter of introduction to the millionaire, Caleb J. Johnson.

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TENTH CHAPTER.

"The Ruby Duncoran Company."

"A THREAD once broken can never be cemented together again! We must let the loose strands go now and consider new ones."

The words of Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox reiterated in the brain of the millionaire Caleb J. Johnson, as he strolled to and fro in the room he had set apart as an office in the suite he occupied at the Dovermarle Hotel in Piccadilly.

It was a few days after the dinner party at Lady Violet's, and the financier's strangely impassive countenance grew exultant as he murmured softly:

"There is no thread on earth, my lady, that Caleb J. Johnson cannot pick up and fix as he wants! I have put you before me as the one possession desirable to complete my success socially, and I mean to have you—in spite of your fears, and the unfortunate *contretemps* of undesirable male relatives cropping up to intervene. Fate intended you to be mine, my beauty, and had I met you earlier in my life—well, the hands of Caleb J. Johnson may have been a little cleaner, his life a little less seared by mistakes."

Something like a sigh escaped the millionaire's lips as he opened a drawer in his desk and took out a faded photograph, at which he gazed intently.

"You were my millstone!" he muttered. "I tied you round my neck and you pulled me down, until I took the plunge that rid me of you. Your romantic ideas bored me, and your houri-like beauty was a constant reminder of the folly I had committed in marrying you before I made myself the master of your father's will!

"A rich woman would have been my saving, or even a clever one—but a beautiful doll was less than useless! I only congratulate myself that our ill-fated marriage had no aftermath of revengeful children to rise up and slay me! You are dead—at least I hope so—and I am free to woo my lady with the proud eyes and the shabby relative!"

He replaced the photo, and closed the drawer, then turned suddenly to see that there was someone standing in the doorway. It was a man with a dark, livid face of an uncommon type, and he was dressed in the garb of a clergyman.

Caleb J. Johnson looked at him angrily. "You have made a mistake, sir," he said curtly; "this suite of rooms belongs to me! Who allowed you to enter them?"

The stranger bowed apologetically.

"Forgive my intrusion," he began, in a rich, resonant voice, "but I told the servant I would come and see you without the formality of being announced. You will remember, Mr. Johnson, that I wrote you about the rebuilding of some almshouses in my parish at Crawley. They are sadly needed, and I thought you might be able to help me, since I saw that you had never refused a donation for the poor; and passing through town on my way back I dared to personally attempt to see you!"

A dry smile flickered across the lips of the financier. The terse, straightforward speech of the impecunious curate tickled his sense of humour.

"Ah!" he said slowly, "I recollect now; you are that parson who wrote to me from Crawley—Philipsomething or other."

"Philip Nullius," replied the younger man gravely.

The financier laughed. "Nullius signifies 'no one,' if I recollect my school-days. An ominous title for a man who wants to get money out of people. They don't like throwing it away, you know! By the way, can't the Squire of your parish help you?"

"Sir Cyprian Rust has been good in the past," said the curate, with a slight flush. "We cannot always be asking him; but I won't trespass upon your time any longer, sir. I will bid you good-day."

"Stop!" And Caleb J. Johnson's large white hand arrested the departure of the curate. "Before I help you I have a right to ask questions. Is Sir Cyprian popular in the parish? I have known of him some years, and would like to hear something about his home life."

The curate hesitated.

"I think he is," he said slowly. "But not so much as his daughter, Miss Marcella Rust."

"Ah!" murmured the financier, with twinkling eyes. "She is Sir Cyprian's heiress, is she not?"

Philip Nullius drew himself up stiffly.

"I am afraid I am not in a position to discuss Miss Rust's affairs," he said coldly.

The financier looked at him oddly. "I am interested, not curious," he replied drily. "I knew the daughter of Sir Basil Wingate, the former owner of the Court, rather well in bygone years, the present owner interests me also."

"I am sorry I spoke hastily," explained the curate. "But I know very little about the Court; I am only a recent comer to Crawley, and have only heard that Sir Cyprian is a great collector of rare pictures and curios, and Miss Rust is our Lady Bountiful."

Then, after receiving a substantial cheque for the almshouses from the blunt millionaire, Philip Nullius took his leave. Outside the hotel he passed a hansom, ignorant that the face of the girl seated beside an older woman lit with a sudden flush as he walked past.

"Who was that, Marcella?" said Lady Violet quickly, noting the blush and drawing her own conclusions.

"Mr. Nullius, the curate at Crawley," the girl answered. "I wonder what he is doing in town?"

Lady Violet sighed. The curate was handsome certainly, but hardly the sort of man about whom Marcella should blush, and she wondered in what view Sir Cyprian would regard it.

In the meantime Caleb J. Johnson was thinking in his office at the Dovermarle Hotel.

The face of the obscure young curate attracted him strangely. It reminded him vaguely of one of those shadowy memories that he kept on a back shelf in his mind.

"A great collector of rare pictures," he murmured thoughtfully. "I should like to see those pictures—they must be worth viewing since Sir Cyprian retires from the vanities of the world to collect them!" He laughed suddenly. "So the curate, Mr. Nullius, seems to be attracted by the winsome Marcella, who is the nearest approach to her aunt in beauty I have ever seen."

Then moving to his desk he picked up a paper, and cast his eyes over it.

"The best names in the kingdom," he mused thoughtfully. "We will send this through with a swing. Bailey has prospected the mine, and the name of a mining engineer like Bailey stands to insure confidence at once. Within ten days we will float it, and I prophesy that the rise of the shares in the Ruby Duncoran Company will send a flutter through the heart of both shareholders and brokers alike." He laughed softly. "Then, when I have seen it fairly launched, I shall take a well-earned holiday and marry Lady Violet."

As he seated himself in an armchair there was a knock at the door, followed by the appearance of a hotel servant.

"A gentleman to see, you, sir."

Caleb J. Johnson looked at the card in the man's hand, then turned to the papers on the desk.

"Show him in," he said curtly; "and I am engaged while this gentleman is with me."

The servant bowed and left the room, to re-enter again followed by a quiet-looking man, well dressed, almost too carefully so, with an alert expression in his eyes that suggested a journalist on the look-out for "copy." His manner was deferential, but not obsequious, and there was no trace in his appearance of that flurried nervousness common to most

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people in the presence of a multi-millionaire, probably for the first time in their lives.

"Ah," said Caleb J. Johnson, slowly, "you have news for me, Mr. Hewett?"

Mr. Hewett, of the firm of Hewett and Hewett, Private Inquiry Agents, bowed.

"Yes, Mr. Johnson," he answered. "I think I have traced your man."

The financier twisted a piece of paper in his hand with an absent look.

"Ah, that's well," he murmured; "you must understand, of course, that I wish the man no harm, personally; but I wish to prevent his doing any to my friends; and his manner of entering a lady's drawing-room was not exactly one warranted to inspire unbounded confidence in him. I am merely obtaining this knowledge so that I may frighten him and assist the lady he annoyed. Women can never manage these things. They are a prey to every disreputable relation that comes along."

Mr. Hewett bowed. Being a man with a very fair knowledge of human nature, he understood the index that prefaced this prologue of the financier.

"I quite see, sir," he answered politely. "Of course my inquiry naturally began with the lady herself; for we always learn what we can about the friends or relations of a person we wish to trace. And as you could only describe him without giving me his name, I had to make a careful note of her ladyship's friends during the last few years. And at last I discovered the identity of the man in whom you are interested."

"Yes," queried Caleb J. Johnson, carelessly, "and who is he?"

"Her ladyship made an unfortunate marriage when a girl." Mr. Hewett continued; "the man was by birth and education a gentleman, but by inclination a scoundrel. He drank to such an extent that he was cashiered from the Army, and went abroad, her ladyship pensioning him off on the condition that he never returned. His allowance was paid regularly by the solicitors of her ladyship until about eight years ago, when the man ceased to apply for it, common report getting about that he had been killed in some skirmish out in South Africa."

The financier carefully unrolled the piece of paper he had twisted, then looked at the man opposite to him.

"I see," he murmured, "the fellow I have deputed you to discover, Mr. Hewett, is the 'late' husband of Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox?"

"Yes; Major Frayne-Lennox is the gentleman you saw coming through her ladyship's window."

The financier slowly folded up the scrap of paper in his hand once more. It seemed to require a great deal of thought, for it was some time before he spoke. When he did his voice was a trifle more conciliatory in tone.

"And that is all you found out, Mr. Hewett? I would be prepared to pay well for any detail regarding that gentleman's life."

Mr. Hewett smiled. "I think I can oblige you, Mr. Johnson," he said. "I discovered that just before he left the Army he had altered the figures of a cheque given to him to pay some expenses of his brother officers. It had been a private cheque belonging to the Colonel, and when the crash came the matter was not brought forward, entirely on Lady Violet's account, as everyone sympathised with her."

Yet again the financier's fingers played with the piece of paper.

"Did you hear the name of the officer who had given the cheque?"

"Yes. It was Colonel Lyster—now a General, retired. He lives in chambers in Pall Mall."

Caleb J. Johnson drew his cheque book towards him deliberately, then jotted down a few figures on a blank cheque.

"For the information you have given me, Mr. Hewett, I will double your fee," he said slowly. "I suppose you did not find out whether Major Frayne-Lennox had left England?"

"He is still in London," replied the inquiry agent. "I could not discover his address, though; but I will try if you like. I will do so with pleasure."

The financier rose and handed the cheque to him.

"Oh, it really is not important," he said carelessly; "but you might call round here between eleven and twelve in the morning, should you have fresh news. I am quite content with what you have told me."

When the well-dressed agent had disappeared, the financier sat down and wrote a letter. It was to a man to whom he had often given good tips, and who was under some obligation to him. His name was Corbett—the Honourable Jim Corbett, and he knew everyone in Society worth knowing.

The financier began his letter by mentioning that he had a few private shares to dispose of in the new company he was promoting—the Ruby Duncoran Mine—and suggested that the Honourable Jim should buy some; then he went on to say:

"*I shall be dining at the Carlton on Thursday; can you join me? Oh, by the way, there is a chap I want to meet, rather. I suppose you know him—General Lyster. You might mention that you are dining with me, and suggest that if he wished to know a good thing, he might accompany you. Anyway, get him to come along with you. I am interested in someone he knows very well.*"

The following day a telegram was sent to the financier's suite of apartments. He was out, but when he returned later, the contents of the telegram appeared to please him. They were:

"*Thanks dinner. Delighted. Lyster coming.*—CORBETT."

On Thursday evening the table the millionaire had had reserved for him was to be seen occupied, about half-past eight. The figure of Caleb J. Johnson was as well-known as Nelson's column, and many were the envious glances sent after him.

His guests were two men of entirely different types. One was the Society moth, the Honourable Jim Corbett, languid, aristocratic, and with a will like pulp. The other was a tall, military-looking man, with white hair and an aggressive moustache. His eyes were fierce, and his chin receded.

Caleb J. Johnson knew how to entertain, and his wonderful tact and natural magnetism drew out the latent powers of conversation in the old General.

He led him into a money market discussion, and concealed a covert smile at the old soldier's ignorance of the City jargon.

"I can arrange to let you have those shares, General," he said slowly; "they are a few private ones I am not throwing on the market, but letting my friends have a look in. The 'Ruby Duncorans' will make a 'corner' in rubies soon. This is your chance. It's a slap-up concern."

"I shall be most happy to avail myself of your offer, Mr. Johnson," said the courtly old soldier; "I am not too richly endowed with this world's goods to refuse such a chance."

"That will be all right," the financier said carelessly; then added: "Do you ever remember to have heard of a friend of mine, General—Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox?"

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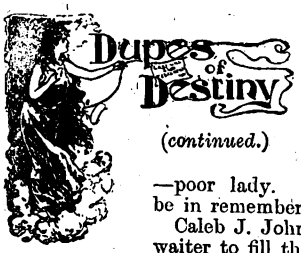


(*continued.*)

The eyes of the old man sparkled with a sudden fire.

"Remember? I should think it impossible to do otherwise. That scamp of a husband made it impossible to ever forget her—poor lady. Her only happiness must be in remembering he is dead."

Caleb J. Johnson made a gesture to the waiter to fill the liquor glasses again.

"Yes; it was very sad," he said slowly. "By-the-way, didn't you suffer at the scoundrel's hands?"

General Lyster started, then laughed bitterly.

"Yes; I did. I gave into his care a cheque for the amount of fifty pounds for some sports a few of us were getting up, and the beggar added two 'noughts,' making it five thousand. Certainly the cheque was carelessly filled in; in fact we were all in a state of hilarity bordering on horseplay, and to my shame I could never swear that I had filled in the amount in writing. Anyway, I was the loser."

The financier leant forward; the Honourable Jim had gone to chat with a friend; they were alone.

"I say, General," he began, "you will think me an odd fellow, but I want you to sell me that cheque. You can't use it now the poor wretch is dead, and as I am shortly announcing my engagement to Lady Violet, it would please her that I should destroy it. I am prepared to pay you the amount it is forged for—five thousand pounds; that's a fair offer."

"But—but," murmured the General, dubiously, "it hardly seems a right thing to do, Mr. Johnson. I swore to hand the cheque over to the police should that scoundrel put his foot in London. But when I heard he was dead, I forgot the incident."

The financier took his cheque-book from his pocket.

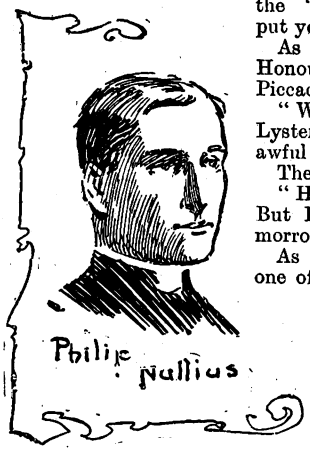
"Here is the cheque for the five thousand," he said slowly. "You will be a wise man, General, to close with the bargain. I can afford it, and Lady Violet—my future wife—will be pleased. May I expect the cheque by return?"

The lean, old hand closed on the piece of coloured paper. The money was a much-needed item in his household, and the fear of offending the financier even a worse terror than the debt.

"Yes," he said slowly; "I will send the cheque by return. I would hesitate to do it, only I am sure it is all right, since you are to marry Lady Violet, Mr. Johnson. As her future husband you have the right to receive the dishonoured cheque and to destroy it in her presence."

Caleb J. Johnson laughed softly.

"It shall be destroyed in her ladyship's presence, General. She wishes it. Don't forget those three hundred shares in the 'Ruby Duncoran.' I will put your name down for them."



As the financier and the Honourable Jim were strolling up Piccadilly, the latter said curiously:

"What did you want with old Lyster, Johnson? He is an awful old bore."

The financier smiled.

"He did not bore me to-night. But I can't answer for him to-morrow."

As he was giving directions to one of his clerks the next morning an express letter was brought in to him. He opened it, and smiled quietly as he saw the cheque that some years ago had been dishonoured through the conduct of Lady Violet's husband.

"Now I hold the trump card!" he laughed. "The rest will be easy; Lady Violet shall begin to order her trousseau."

When, during lunch—which he took alone—an interruption came in the shape of another card, Caleb J. Johnson was not annoyed.

He looked at it and smiled slightly. "Ask the gentleman to wait," he said, and then went on with his lunch thoughtfully.

The name of the man on the card was that of Edward Day, the nephew of the woman whom Mr. Johnson intended to marry.

ELEVENTH CHAPTER.
Married in Haste.

HALF an hour later Edward Day left the Dovermarle Hotel with a pleased expression on his face. His interview with the great financier had been more successful than he had anticipated, and the letter of introduction which he had presented from Lady Violet had sent his ship straight into port.

He had been treated with interest and an almost personal kindliness by the millionaire that had flattered his wounded self-esteem.

After a few leading questions the financier had held out a promise of seeing his way to giving Lady Violet's nephew the post of confidential secretary, and he would hear definitely in a day or two.

As he turned into Bond Street, Edward hailed a hansom, and telling the driver to go to No. 19 Guilford street, Bloomsbury, settled himself back with a sigh of relief.

"That's pretty nearly certain, anyway!" he muttered; "and the screw will be a good one. A man like old Johnson won't dream of giving less than at least a thousand a year. Lady Violet's letter seemed to strike him. Let me read it again. It's just as well to keep copies of letters—especially some that may be useful."

He took out his pocket-book, and, unfolding a piece of paper, read the duplicate of the letter he had given to the financier:

"DEAR MR. JOHNSON,—*Will you do me a great favour? My dear nephew, Edward Day, wishes for a post of some kind, and I wondered whether you could help him to one. He is brilliantly clever, and not without expectations. As I am particularly fond of him—he being the child of a dear younger sister who died, I will be greatly indebted to you if you can help him. I would ask no one else this favour but yourself, for I feel that I may rely on you to do what you can for him. I have told him that I am speaking for him to you, but have not told him the contents of this letter, so please do not let him know all I have said to you. I shall know, if you assist him, that you have given my letter the only answer I wish for.*—*Always yours sincerely*,—VIOLET FRAYNE-LENNOX."

"That was a jolly improvement on the original!" the young man laughed. "I fancy dear aunt Violet's eyes would open if she could know how successfully it went down! And if I play my cards well, I shall get back a little of what I have lost. Then that haughty young Marcella shall learn that it is not always wise to kick those at your feet!"

His face grew savage, and he swore softly under his breath, as the scene of a few days ago came back to him.

"Yes; the ship's foundling shall get his own back one day, and then I shall be in a position to make them smart. But I must pacify Lottie, and not let her guess anything, except that I have quarrelled with Lady Violet; that will be enough for her to know."

As he got out of the hansom, a fair, anxious face pressed against the window of the house it had stopped at, lit up with an expression of relief and joy, then vanished into the room.

He rang the bell, and after an instant's pause, it was opened by the owner of the face at the window. The door closed behind him, then two clinging young arms were flung round his neck, and a high clear voice, cautiously lowered, cried gladly:

"At last, dear old boy! I was afraid something had

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happened to you, and was imagining all sorts of awful things about inquests and mortuaries! It is just lovely to know that you are safe and well, though a naughty, late boy!"

"For goodness' sake, Lottie!" he whispered pettishy, "don't let the whole house know the depth and breadth of your feelings. If you have no respect for the common conventionalities, you might at least refrain from making me look ridiculous. And," he continued, "I wish you would let the servant come and open the door; I am always telling you about these little things. I hate exhibitions of this kind! And you will persist in doing what you know I hate!"

By this time they had reached the drawing-room on the first floor, and the girl, whose exuberance had suddenly evaporated, shut the door, then turned a coaxing, roguish face to him.

"I'm always offending you now somehow, Edward!" she said wistfully, "but it is because I love you, old boy, that I must rush down to meet you. You have come so seldom lately that the time drags from day to day. Then, when I got your letter saying you would be here this afternoon, a whirlwind seemed to get into my heart, and I longed to see you and tell you that I did not care how poor you got, or what poverty we had to face, so long as we faced it together, darling. For you are all I have now, Edward, and my love has grown stronger with each heart beat!"

The young man submitted with a perfunctory air to the warm, loving caresses of the girl, whose brilliant loveliness was touched by a deep emotion. Yet she was not of the type from whom most men would turn.

She was of medium height, slenderly made, but her face lacked depth of expression by reason of its extreme prettiness. Her blue eyes of a deep sapphire hue were as easily turned to mirth as tears, and the full, red lips lacked decision, although the wealth of tenderness in the generous curves repaid any lingering regrets for the wanted strength of character.

"There," he said, disengaging himself from her arms. "I am very glad to see you, dear, of course, but I wish you would learn a little more repose of manner. You are too exuberant, too loud. If only you could see the perfect self-possession of my cousin, Marcella Rust!"

A change crept into the weak, lovable face, a certain metallic hardness into the tone of her voice when she spoke, that made Edward Day deplore the slip he had made in mentioning his cousin, for his vanity caused him still to claim kinship with the proud girl who had repulsed his advances.

"Your cousin, Marcella Rust," she repeated slowly. "You have often said that I was the most perfect creature in the world. That was when you wished to please me for the furthering of your own ends. Now you hold up your cousin, Marcella Rust, to me—me," she exclaimed in a louder key, "the woman whom, in spite of her want of manners, you made your lawful, legal wife; and now you are ashamed of me!

"Oh, Edward," she exclaimed passionately, "don't be so cruel to me! I have submitted to a great deal—to a secret marriage until you had come into the money you were expecting on your twenty-fifth birthday. You promised to take me to your aunt, to make me known to your people, to acknowledge me as your wife."

Edward Day bit his lip savagely. In a moment of quixotic chivalry he had married the fascinating chorus girl some months ago, binding her to secrecy.

And now the tie was beginning to jar on him, as he realised that he, a future man of wealth, was married to a woman of whose doll-like prettiness he was already tired. But he saw the expediency of pacifying the slumbering jealousy he had carelessly kindled in her towards Marcella Rust.

"Don't be a little goose," he said, drawing her to him with a careless gesture. "You are my wife, so why be jealous of Marcella Rust? It was on your account that I quarrelled with my aunt, and was in turn ordered out of her house for ever."

"I am your wife!" she cried passionately. "I should come first with you, as you do with me."

"On my account?" murmured the girl, her face lighting with a gleam of happiness. "Oh, darling, did—did you tell her you had a wife?"

He pressed her head on his shoulder, so that she should not see the sneer on his mouth, as he answered glibly:

"Not exactly, sweetheart. But she wished—nay, ordered me, to propose to Marcella Rust, and when I refused—because I already had the dearest little wife in the world—she disowned me, and told me to leave her house for ever."

"But why did you not explain, darling?" murmured

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Lottie timidly. "If your aunt had known that you were already married, she would have understood?"

"Yes," he said with a short laugh, "and immediately have cut off the pittance she is allowing me now. She would never have forgiven me if she had learnt that I had contracted a marriage with an actress. She is awfully proud of our family name—and all that rot!" he finished airily.

Lottie slowly withdrew herself from his arms, and faced him with a curiously-strained expression on her delicate face.

"So you were ashamed of me," she said in a lower voice, "Is it possible for a man to be ashamed of the woman who is his wife, and who has proved her love for him by leaving the profession she was happy in in order to fit herself for the position she would occupy as his wife? You can't mean me to understand such a cruelty, Edward?" she cried passionately.

"I am your wife, and should come first with you, as you do with me! As you have left your aunt's house, then you intend that we shall take a flat together and live openly as husband and wife. Oh, my dear, I shall be so careful of your money, and our home will be a nest of peace and joy!"

"For goodness' sake, Lottie," he exclaimed angrily, "don't romance! I don't intend anything of the sort—at least, not for some time," he added quickly, seeing a white look on her face. "We can't possibly live together on £250 a year, and I don't mean to try.

"What I suggest is that you return to the stage, it will be quite easy as you are pretty well known, and I try to get a post that will help me to make a decent income before we join forces. Now, don't begin to howl!" he said wearily. "When I am thinking out the best way for us both, you hinder me by weeping! Why can't you look at things in the same light as I do?"

A forced smile fluttered across her mouth. "Because I am still in love with you, I suppose," she said simply, "and commonsense and love never walked hand in hand. I will try to understand that you wish me still to keep up the farce of being a single woman; to wear my wedding-ring hung around my neck instead of on my finger. To laugh and act as though I had nothing to worry me, or any regrets in my life."

"Well, yes," he said uneasily. "I want you to help me by keeping our marriage a secret until I get the money that will be mine soon, and make an income that will insure a beautiful home for you, my darling. It would kill me to see you working about a house like a servant. Come, smile, and say you understand I am doing all for the best—for us both!"

Her face softened. "It is hard to have always to live a lie, Edward, but of course you know best, and it is only because I love you so that I resent being kept away from you. I have lost all interest in the stage since we married, but will soon get back into it, and will save all I can, so that I can help, you when we get into our own home, dearest.

"But," and she flashed a sudden glance into the careless handsome face looking down into her own, "you will not let that cousin with the perfect repose of manner come between us? I hate her! I feel that I should be conscious of her presence near me in a crowd, if Marcella Rust were there."

He laughed lightly, his vanity pleased at the show of jealousy.

"Silly girl! Marcella is older than you, and dark and stately. She has not the pretty ways of my fluffy kitten. So you must not be a little goose. I am going out of town for some days, so you must not expect to see me until I stand before you. You had better get out of these rooms into cheaper ones, and see at once about an engagement

"I will leave ten pounds with you now, and send more soon. Address me at 20A Northumberland Avenue, if you want to write, and I will write you care of the *Era*. Now," he continued quickly, "I must be off, dear. Don't mope, I will do all I can to get a good billet, so that you can come to me."

He took her in his arms and kissed the yellow hair and red mouth carelessly. He did not notice her strange chilliness as she responded mechanically to his caresses.

He released her gently, and put an envelope in her hands.

"That will help you, dear. I will send more soon. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye," she said quietly, gazing at him with tearless eyes. "I shall be all right, don't worry about me, Edward. Write when you can."

As he whistled up a hansom he looked back to wave a last farewell to the girl whose heart he had wounded. But the window was vacant, and he laughed uneasily as he muttered:

"Perhaps it will be just as well if she does forget me. I have a career to carve into which I want no woman to intrude now that Marcella has failed me, and this girl is only a dead weight. Fool that I was to have put such a noose round my neck! I mean to cut off the old life from the new! Poor Lottie will feel it at first, but she will soon buck up when she is back on the stage."

He lit a cigarette and smiled at his reflection in the mirror on the side of the hansom. As he turned his head he did not notice another hansom passing his with a man in it, who looked at him curiously, then at the house he had just left.

"Well," muttered the man with a slight Yankee accent, "what is Lady Violet's nephew doing at a house like that? He has some little secret in that shanty, I saw it in his face. I shall keep my optic on that particularly smart young man. Knowledge is power—to financiers!" And with a chuckle he relapsed into other thoughts as he went on his journey to Euston, *en route* to spend a week-end at the house of a certain peer whose name he was eager to place as a director on the board of the Ruby Duncoran Company.

In the meantime the girl Edward Day had said "good-bye" to was standing in the middle of the room with a pale, set face and gleaming eyes.

"He has gone," she muttered. "I felt that he was deserting me—leaving me a wife, and no wife! And the reason of his strange conduct is not so much the desire to make a home for me as to shake me off like an old glove." She laughed hysterically. "Me! Lottie Haste! Who threw up good chances on the stage to marry him secretly. And now he has deserted me!

"I felt it. All the time he was speaking I knew he was lying to me! His eyes, his voice, all told me that I was listening to a liar, and that liar was my husband!" She clenched her hands passionately. "The cause of his cruelty to me is another woman—the woman he held up to me as a paragon of perfection—his beautiful, stately cousin, Marcella Rust! She has changed him, won his love; and now I am nothing to him!"

She flung herself down by a chair and buried her head with its confusion of corn-coloured hair in a cushion.

"And I loved him so!" she sobbed. "I loved him so!"

TWELFTH CHAPTER.

"Danger Point."

MARCELLA was back at the Court. Her brief visit to London had been all too swiftly spent; the days with Lady Violet had whirled by in a succession of breathless sunrises and sunsets, a panorama of vivid life pictures had held her fresh imagination captive; and from that restless, buoyant existence her father's word of command had drawn her back to the white patch of monotony at the Court.

Life at the Court meant what? The daily, common round of country duties, a drive or walk into the village, a ramble in the woods on a cold day when the wind nipped her face into a tender red; a dull dinner at houses where she had no possible sympathy for or with the tedious guests, and afterwards tea,

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where she met the same commonplace faces that she saw week in, week out. And on Sundays the stroll to the village parish church, where she listened to the lessons and sermons preached by the Rev. Philip Nullius, the curate.

Those Sundays compensated for a lot with Marcella. Unconsciously she looked forward to them, and counted the days, and as the end of the week drew nearer, her eyes would glow more deeply with anticipation, and her mouth become softly dimpled with the knowledge that after the service the handsome curate would, by some strange, wonderful accident happen to catch her up, and then, for a brief, flashing moment, she would live in another world—a world made up of radiant, glowing colours, ranging from deep sapphire to a rich, gorgeous purple and sea green, a medley of tints that seemed to make a rainbow in her heart when the curate's dark, wistful eyes met hers in a sudden glance. So life at the Court was not all drab.

"Marcella," said Sir Cyprian one morning at breakfast, "I have a friend coming to see me this evening, an old college chum, now a doctor. His name is Slade—Dr. William Slade, of Harley Street. He will be here for a few days."

"That will be nice for you, father," Marcella answered absently. "I often wonder why you have so few friends down here; you must feel fearfully bored at times."

Sir Cyprian smiled. "A man with a hobby like mine, that of art collecting, and finding old, rare pictures in the world of art, has little or no time for boredom, my dear."

"Oh, that reminds me father!" she said quickly. "I read in yesterday's *Telegraph*, that the house of the financier, Mr. Caleb J. Johnson, has been broken into by thieves, and among other beautiful things stolen was the wonderful double of the picture, 'Mona Lisa,' of Leonardo da Vinci's. The one like Aunt Violet's copy, and you told me to tell you all about it! You remember? I saw it in the second hall; it just faced the dining-room.

"At first you would hardly know it was there, because of a heavy portière that was nearly always drawn to prevent it attracting thieves, at least, that was Mr. Johnson's idea. He said he made an exception in revealing to me the secret place of his precious picture.

"He valued it more than all the other things in his house so he told me. And I had the distinction of being shown the hiding-place! Only he and a devoted man-servant knew where it hung. Mr. Johnson told me all about it, and said he would not trust it alone in a drawing-room full of friends unless he or his servant were on guard. And now it has gone! I am so sorry! I trust the thief will be caught."

Sir Cyprian laughed. "That is one of the penalites of being a great man—everyone wants to rob you! I recollect you telling me all about the 'Mona Lisa,' my dear, and was interested at the time. I wonder whether they have caught the thief! It must be difficult to dispose of the picture."

Marcella rose from the table. "Wermen," she said, "bring me this morning's *Telegraph*, there is sure to be an account of it."

The old servant hesitated, and sent an anxious look in the direction of the master of the Court.

"Yes, yes, bring the paper, Wermen," smiled the baronet. "Miss Marcella is interested in the subject, having been the last person privileged to see it. Besides, the thief may have been caught."

Marcella's eyes sparkled. She was not a cruel girl, her heart was very tender, but she loved to see wrong vindicated, and having a personal knowledge of the affair made her especially eager.

"How sorry Aunt Violet must be to hear of it!" she said, while they waited for the paper. "She was almost angry with Mr. Johnson for showing it to me! In fact, she was quite upset when he said he always kept his word, and had promised to show it to me. She refused to go with us, although he begged her to."

Sir Cyprian's eyes gleamed with a strange expression as

Suddenly an exclamation made them turn quickly. The butler, Wermen, was leaning against the sideboard with a livid face and quivering lips.

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(continued.)

they glanced over the girl's head at the old servitor who re-entered the room with a paper in his hand.

"Your aunt is foolish," he said slowly, "she is almost quixotic in her sense of duty; one would imagine that she feared to be mistaken for the thief!"

Marcella laughed. "Aunt Violet is a darling! I love everything she does. Ah, here's the paper! I will read the account, father."

Before Wermen could reach the baronet, Marcella had taken the paper from his hand. The eyes of the old man met those of his master with a frightened expression.

"Miss Marcella is old enough now to read even such cases as robberies, Wermen," said Sir Cyprian softly, and Wermen fell back silently.

"Here it is!" cried Marcella excitedly. "The police, after due investigation of the robbery at the house of the financier, Mr. Caleb J. Johnson, have come to the conclusion that the work is that of no novice, and in several details they strongly suspect that the subtle cleverness of the whole thing is due to the master mind of a notorious criminal, whose deep, uncommon method in planning out each separate 'crib' is not unknown to Scotland Yard; though the man's personality is yet unknown to them, they have strong reason to suspect that it is the work of a master-brain in the high art of robbery, who does credit to the sobriquet bestowed upon him by the police—that of the "Spade"—a very apt name for so brilliant a thief, who digs for his lesser brethren in the art to work upon the plans he lays. One thing puzzles the police—that is, that owing to the secrecy regarding the picture, only an inmate of the house, or a particular friend could have betrayed the hiding-place!"

Marcella laid down the paper thoughtfully. "No friend could be such a worm," she said heatedly. "I hope they will catch that horrid man they call the 'Spade.' I shall follow this up with great interest, because of Mr. Johnson."

Suddenly an exclamation made them turn quickly. The butler, Wermen, was leaning against the sideboard with a livid face and quivering lips.

"Father!" Marcella cried. "What's the matter with Wermen?"

Sir Cyprian rose and took the old man by the arm.

"Don't be anxious, child," he said slowly. "Wermen is sometimes taken like this. He suffers from fits."

Gently, and with great care, Sir Cyprian led the butler into the hall, and closed the door behind them.

"What's the meaning of this piece of folly?" he said sharply. "Can a girl frighten you now? Good Heavens, man! I've a great mind to send you off, and let you go to the dogs! You are ceasing to be a help, and becoming a nuisance!"

The old face quivered; then Wermen said painfully, "I'm very sorry, sir, but—but something strange came over me, and the young mistress' words sounded prophetic-like, and I could not keep back the feeling that our luck was at an end!"

Sir Cyprian shook him roughly. "You old idiot! I wonder that any luck stays while I keep on such a doddering old idiot as yourself! Let me warn you again, that if I see any more nonsense, you shall go—bag and baggage! I want *men* round me, not old women! You understand?"

Wermen nodded. "Yes, sir, I'll try, but the pain in my 'eart gets bad sometimes and I can't 'elp giving way; but don't turn me off, sir; I—I—couldn't stand that!"

"Couldn't you? Well, it rests with yourself whether you go or stay! If you are sensible you may keep on in a good house till you die, but if you go on rousing curiosity, and finally suspicion by your rotten conduct, I shall chuck you out once and for ever!"

A curious look stole into the old man's face.

"If you send me down, sir, you come too!"

Sir Cyprian's face hardened. "I fancy you will find it hard to pull me down, my good fellow; I am no fool, I warn you, and you had better remember that. Don't let me hear such language again—or you will be sorry!"

As the bent figure shuffled off, Sir Cyprian went back into the breakfast-room.

"Wermen had a heart attack," he said slowly, "I told him to go and lie down."

Marcella was standing near the window, and the baronet's eyes flashed suddenly as they rested upon the coils of dark brown hair and the slender shaped figure of his daughter.

"By-the-way, my dear," he said slowly, "have you been that walk to Danger Point yet? The view is particularly lovely—especially at this time of the year, when the bay is nearly always caught in a hurricane of wind and storm. They say there are no women left in Crawley who will go there because of the strength of the gales, but it is worth risking one's comfort for to stand on Danger Point during this weather."

"I've heard of it," she said brightly, "and will prove that there is one woman left in Crawley who is not afraid of the elements nor of the lonely Danger Point. I will be a credit to you, father, dear! Will you come too?"

Sir Cyprian shook his handsome, fair head. "No, my dear; I am an old man nearly. I would be crippled with rheumatism if I climbed Danger Point."

She laughed lightly. "Why, you are quite handsome, father, in spite of having a grown-up daughter! I wonder," she went on softly, "whether your love for mother was so deep that you could never marry again?"

A paleness crept into the rich colouring of the baronet's face. "Don't talk to me about your mother, my child. It is a subject I cannot bear, even now!"

"Dear father!" she whispered tenderly, holding her face up to his; "I will try by love and care to fill the void in your heart! I sometimes want mother as much as you do!"

When she had left the room, a curious expression stole into Sir Cyprian's eyes. "You're a clever, nice girl, my dear; but I am afraid that Fate may rob me of you! You are too good and sweet for this world, and it is truly said that, 'whom the gods love die young.' I am glad I let that insurance go!" he muttered. "What is £20,000 compared with two country seats, a town-house and £15,000 a year? No! It was just as well that Destiny took matters out of my hands just then.

"She is a gold mine to me—now. Violet dare not speak; and no one but myself knows of the later will the woman wanted to give the curate, in charge for the children of my dear cousin Helen! Marcella is *my* daughter—none can dispute that; and—Marcella has made her will in her father's favour! Should anything—happen at any time to Marcella—the other document can be found in some casual way—afterwards, and then my child's will can prove that I was innocent of such knowledge before!"

He smiled as he gazed out of the window. The sky looked lowering and a storm hung about the atmosphere, and the wind howled dismally through the trees.

"Danger Point is unpleasant at any time!" he murmured thoughtfully, "and to-day, of all days, Danger Point may prove fatal to anyone risky enough to climb it in the gale! I wonder how Violet would feel if she were here! I owe her one for her disobedience which my daughter innocently frustrated! She would not like her niece to be out on Danger Point to-day!"

Then, with a silent laugh, he went to the door of the forbidden corridor, and opening it, disappeared into the darkness, while the door closed noiselessly behind him.

THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

In the Heart of the Storm.

"WELL, Rust—this is a change from the old college days of economy and anxiety about ways and means, eh?" laughed the genial man of medicine, Sir William Slade, of Harley Street fame.

He had a good face, shrewd and full of kindly humour that

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had won him more patients than he knew how to manage. He had long promised to pay a visit to his old friend, Cyprian Rust, and, after many years, he had torn himself away from London and foregone a Continental visit to please the fascinating friend of his youth.

They eyed each other curiously. Twenty odd years had wrought a change in the doctor, one that tinted his hair with grey and lined his face with a network of wrinkles. But Sir Cyprian had retained his fair, boyish curls and laughing blue eyes; only in the expression of his mouth did the doctor note the ravages of Time.

"Yes," said Sir Cyprian, "we have both improved our prospects, Slade; you are a useful member of Society, I only a drone, living on the fat of the land!"

"But where is your daughter? I have heard a lot about her!"

"Oh, Marcella has gone out for a walk. She is fond of outdoor rambling," answered his host carelessly; "she will be in to lunch."

But at lunch Miss Marcella had not arrived, and after a short time spent in waiting for her, Sir Cyprian and his guest sat down without her.

"There's going to be a storm!" remarked the doctor, "I hope Miss Rust will not suffer!"

Sir Cyprian smiled. "Oh, no; she is accustomed to the weather signs here, and will seek some shelter."

"I am rather fond of a storm at sea," said Dr. Slade. "In the early days of my career, after I had left the hospital, I was a ship's doctor on a liner running between England and Australia—one of the *P.* and *O.* vessels—a very fine one, too, And I shall always remember my last voyage home, because a very pathetic incident happened that had a dramatic finish."

Sir Cyprian looked interested. He was in high spirits; as the storm rose so did his good humour.

"Tell me," he said pleasantly; "I wish Marcella were here to listen to it also; your yarns are bound to be worth hearing."

"Oh, its only merit is its truth," replied the other. "It is a human story, and I always remembered it. A poor soul among the third-class passengers died giving birth to two boys. Before she went she tried to say something that would affect the after-life of the boys. But in the middle of the sentence, in giving the surname, she died. I always guessed that those two children were concerned in some family mystery, but there was no clue to anything, so they went the way of all unknown waifs. And at the time of their birth a similar storm to this one was raging. It's odd that I should think of it now!"

A fine champagne glass in Sir Cyprian's hand snapped sharply, and the sparkling, foamy liquor made a patch on the cloth.

"What became of them?" he asked.

"Oh, the woman was buried at sea, and the boys flourished; one was taken up by a philanthropic lady on board, the other no one wanted, so I believe he was sent to the workhouse. Anyway, it was a strange thing, and was the talk of everyone on board at the time."

The baronet tilted his chair back and looked at his old friend through lazily closed eyes.

"And you never heard any more about her? No one inquired?"

The doctor shook his head. "No; the whole thing was speedily forgotten—a nine days' wonder, no more. But the poor creature had a beautiful face! It's a strange world!"

Sir Cyprian rose quickly and faced the window, without speaking. His mind was made up. Those waifs must be found! He must ascertain how and where they were living, or whether Fate had removed them from their inheritance by death. He had considered the story of the woman who had sent for him to Digges Row to be the fantasy of imagination; but the cool, unemotional Harley Street doctor would not have related a romance for the sake of creating an effect.

It was the first time that he was forced to acknowledge the possibilities of the sea story being true, and if true, then dangerous to himself, and—and Marcella! Yes, he must know where to lay his hands upon those sons of the dead woman whose name he fancied he could tell. He did not like to imagine that a surprise might lurk in the shadowy future, putting him out of court and robbing him of that title and honour dear to him through years of association.

He turned from the window just as a flash of lightning played among the silver on the table.

"The storm is beginning," the doctor said; "I'm sorry for anyone out in the open. Are you sure there is no cause for alarm about Miss Marcella?"

Sir Cyprian smiled. "No," he answered; "she knows her way about blindfold, and rain has no terror for Marcella; her hair curls naturally!"

A low, fierce rumble followed by a crash that reverberated among the hills lying close round, shook the room.

The baronet lit a cigar and puffed silently at it. In the rings of smoke that rose after a while, he saw a bleak promontory, storm-beaten on either side. Sir Cyprian knew that it was as much as a *man* could do to keep his feet on that rock in the gale.

He laughed suddenly. "Come, Slade! Let us go to the library. Marcella is beyond our care! We can just hope!"

* * * * *

When, after breakfast, Marcella started for the walk her father had mentioned, the sky was clear and there was a pleasant freshness in the air. After a sharp walk of about an hour's duration, she came upon the gaunt rock on the coast-line known locally as "Danger Point." Even in the brightness of a wintry sun it had a sinister look, and, gazing down from the heights she had climbed, Marcella shivered.

"I did not think I had reached such a giddy eminence!" she thought; "but now I am here, I will make a tour of this rocky headland; the name is suggestive of weird possibilities! And to make my visit more uncomfortable, I see a storm breaking. The gulls are flying very low!"

She struggled and panted with the exertion of battling with fallen pieces of rock and the rising wind. Finally, she reached the furthermost extremity of Danger Point, and for a moment stood wrapped in involuntary wonder and admiration at the scene that lay below her.

The sea, like an angry giant roused from slumber, showed its white-crested waves in snarling contempt, and dashed with heavy booms against the massive rock.

After a while Marcella turned to retrace her steps. She felt awed and curiously afraid. The wind had risen suddenly, and shrieked a chorus of mocking laughter in her ears.

The descent was more difficult than she had imagined. Three times she fell, spraining her wrist against a piece of boulder and grazing her ankle.

For a time she was forced to rest; her hat had gone, and the wind had torn the hairpins from her head.

She staggered to her feet and brushed the wisp of wet hair from her eyes. A sudden flash of lightning, followed by a roar of thunder, made her cower in fear of her life. "Father! He will think I am lost!" she cried aloud. "It will break his heart! And Aunt Violet's! Oh, I must not die! I will cling to this piece of rock until the storm has passed. I dare not stand again; I shall be swept off my feet over the Point!"

Suddenly, while she lay in a partial stupor, a sound like a faint echo reached her. She dragged herself into a sitting posture and listened. Again she heard it, and this time her heart bounded with relief.

"There is someone below; perhaps father has sent a servant or come himself!"

With an effort she gave one loud, piercing shriek, that seemed to be carried seawards, then turned her face towards the steep, rocky way she had traversed earlier. After a time, a low sob burst from her lips. The voice had not answered!

As she flung herself down again, to save herself from another gust of furious wind, a man's face rose above the lower rock.

Their eyes met; the man smiled, and scrambling over the rock, made his way to her side.

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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THE NARROW ESCAPE OF J. STONE, BACHELOR.

It lacked five minutes of the time for the departure of the 6.30 express from Euston station, and the carriages were rapidly filling up. Jared Stone, a well-dressed, meek-looking little gentleman, had just got comfortably settled down in a corner of a first class compartment, when he heard a familiar voice addressing him.

"Why, hello, Stone; how are you? I'm right in luck to-day. I was just looking for someone to take charge of Aunt Martha's bundles and assist her out of the train with them when she reaches Manchester. You're going through, of course?"

"Y—yes," answered Stone, faintly, as he glanced up and recognised his friend Raemond, with his arms full of bundles of all shapes and sizes, and "Aunt Martha" grimly looking up behind him like one of Napoleon's Grenadiers.

Now Jared Stone was of a decidedly shy and retiring disposition, besides being a fossil of an old bachelor (Stone was fifty, still single, and not only willing, but anxious to remain so), and if he could have had his choice he would sooner lead a bayonet charge, face a gang of mutineers or a midnight burglar, or encounter almost any other trifle in that line rather than take charge of a woman and her luggage during a railway journey. Therefore the reader will kindly imagine the remarks (they will hardly do for print) that Stone made under his breath as he got up and, with forced politeness, bowed the waiting female to the seat next to the window.

"Thank you," said Raemond, as he began piling bundles on Stone's feet and into his lap, which ever came the handiest; "I knew you'd just as soon do me the favour to take charge of Aunt Martha as not, and I'm glad I happened to run across you. She is a trifle hard of hearing, and—er—a little eccentric in some respects, but you'll find her first-rate company when you get acquainted with her. By the way, I came near forgetting to introduce you to each other. Mr. Stone, this is my aunt, Miss Martha Eakins." Then, raising his voice, he shouted: "Aunt Martha, allow me to present my bachelor friend, Mr. Stone, who will look after you and see you safely off the train with your luggage when you reach Manchester."

"So good of him, I'm sure. Happy to meet you, Mr. Stone," responded Miss Eakins, with what was meant to be a winsome smile in Stone's direction.

At this moment the starter's bell rang, the train began slowly moving out of the station, and with a hurried "good-bye," Raemond dashed out of the compartment, leaving Stone alone to face the responsibility of delivering Miss Eakins and her collection of luggage safely at Manchester station—a responsibility which even the bravest of Stone's sex might well have hesitated to face.

Now, Stone, as I have previously intimated, was not cast in a heroic mould. He was a timid little gentleman, measuring probably five feet two in his patent leathers, and his great aim in life, so far as the so-called gentler sex was concerned, was to leave them severely alone and quietly flock by himself, as Lord Dundreary used to express it.

Miss Martha Eakins, on the contrary, though she had chiefly flocked by herself through five-and-forty simmering summers and the same number of dreary winters, had done so unwillingly and under protest, as it were.

For a full quarter of a century the tall and stately Miss Eakins (who loomed nearly a foot above Stone, and looked every inch a Grenadier, as I believe I have before hinted) had been on the matrimonial bargain counter—she had a snug little fortune in her own right—waiting patiently for some enterprising and appreciative gentleman to appear on the scene and take possession of her willing heart and other personal property. But, alas! Thus far her waiting had been in vain. Among her list of acquaintances other maidens, young and old, attractive or otherwise, some with fortunes and some without, had been taken, and she alone had been left to mourn over the perverseness of mankind.

Much brooding on the subject, coupled with her infirmity of hearing, had at last resulted in the harmless delusion that every man who treated her at all politely was desperately in love with her, and as Stone had not been warned of this fact, it can readily be surmised that his present position was one of extreme peril—that is, so far as his peace of mind was concerned, at least.

After several tunnels had been passed and the train had emerged once more into daylight, Stone transferred most of the bundles from his lap to the rack overhead, and presently ventured upon the remark that it was a fine day.

"Beg pardon, sir!" said the female Grenadier, suddenly straightening up and glancing inquiringly at Stone.

"I said it's a fine day," explained Stone, raising his voice to a shout.

"Gay? Oh, well I try to be, but it's rather hard sometimes for a lonely female to keep up her spir——"

A clammy perspiration broke out on Stone. "Excuse me," he interrupted, hastily, "I said a fine day; not gay, but day; d-a-y, day!"

"Say? Let them say what they've a mind to. I fancy Martha Eakins has got money enough, so she doesn't ask any odds of anybody—present company excepted. Of course it is different with you. The minute my nephew introduced us to each other I felt that we were going to be friends—intimate friends, as I may say."

Stone's face was now the colour of an Italian sunset, and he was earnestly longing for the bottom to drop out of the carriage and let him through, or for some other catastrophe to come to his rescue, but as usual in such cases his longings were in vain.

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"Yes, Mr. Scone, the very instant I set my eyes on you I said to myself, here is a congenial soul, a man that I can trust; and I hope we shall have no secrets from each other. I am rich, but wealth is not all that is worth living for. You may be poor, Mr. Scone——"

"My name is Stone, madam, not Scone," shouted the embarrassed bachelor, "and if you will change the subject to something less personal I shall be greatly obliged to you."

"Obliged to me? Not at all, Mr. Spone. No obligation whatever. I am only too happy——"

"Great Heavens!" groaned Stone; "what on earth is the old lady driving at, I wonder?" And then raising his voice, he fairly howled: "Madam, your nephew expects me to see you safely out of the train at Manchester, and I'll do it, but in the meantime I propose——"

"To read my papers in quiet until we reach your station," Stone was about to say, but Miss Eakins was too quick for him. Her ear caught the word propose, and that was enough for her. The supreme moment of her life had arrived at last—or at least she thought it had—and with a cry of joy she flopped over on Stone's shoulder, knocking his hat off and sending it spinning on to the floor, and nearly smashing in his ribs against the side of the carriage.

"Oh, you dear, good man, I felt sure right from the start that you were going to propose! I knew the symptoms well, and—— What's the matter, lovey? Haven't been taken ill all of a sudden, have you?"

But Stone, who had wriggled out of her embrace, leapt to the other side of the compartment, and, fortunately for him, the train was just slowing up at the first stop. He tore open the door, and slammed it to. Then dashed down the platform to the guard's compartment. The stop was brief, and as the guard signalled the driver to go ahead and turned to enter the train, he noticed Stone for the first time. There was no time for explanations, and both leapt into the carriage.

"Great Scott!" cried Stone, puffing hard to get his breath. "That was a narrow escape. If I hadn't got away when I did I should have found myself a married man before we arrive at our destination. Do you want to earn a five-pound note?"

The guard was not quite sure of the man's sanity, but keeping a sharp eye on him, he intimated that a bank-note of that denomination had its charms.

Then Stone told his story.

"If you'll go to about the fifth carriage when we make another stop, you'll find in one of the compartments a six-foot female, all alone. You might tell her that I am dead, and that the remains would like their hat."

"Yes, sir."

"And then, when you have done that, if you will see that she doesn't find where I am and keep her from coming here to slobber over me, and help her out at Manchester with all her goods and chattels, and get her away from the station so that I may go on my way in safety, I'll put another note on top of the first one."

"All right, sir; leave it to me," responded the guard with a smile.

And all the rest of that journey Jared Stone rode in the guard's van. And fearfully he peered from the window and watched every movement of the dangerous and gigantic female when at last the station was reached and the passengers poured out upon the platform.

Not until he saw the cab into which she had been deposited with all her luggage disappear out of the station, did he emerge from the train, and then only to leap into a closed carriage, which the guard had secured for him.

He vowed to himself that that ten pounds was the best investment he had ever made in his life.

M. Williams.

MOTHER: "I am surprised that you would suffer a man to kiss you." Daughter: "But, mamma, I wasn't suffering."

Your Editor Chats.

THIS is the first number of a volume in which I intend to surpass all my previous efforts to keep *Short Stories* at the head of all papers of its class, and to maintain the position it has ever held—that of first and foremost. None of my contemporaries can boast of such an array of renowned contributors as I can. Blanche Eardley, R. Norman Silver, Louis Tracy, George Griffith, to mention but a quartette of favourite authors, all write regularly for the paper. The illustrations are drawn by well-known and gifted artists. My staff are always on the look-out for new and original features, and readers can testify to the result of their vigilance. Week by week the popularity and circulation of *Short Stories* are increasing, and I enter upon this new volume with a light heart, because I know that I carry with me the confidence and esteem of all those that regularly subscribe to this journal.

I HAVE an excellent programme for the new volume already mapped out. I have serials ready for you by your most-admired authors, and an abundance of splendid short stories. Next week will commence our new series, and in the same issue "A Criminal Millionaire" will conclude.

"Decoyed!" is the title of the new series.

"Decoyed?" you will naturally exclaim. "Who were decoyed, and by whom were they decoyed?" This you will learn by reading the instalments, each one of which is thrilling to a degree. It would be unfair to let you into the secret beforehand, so I will simply say that additional interest is lent to the series by the fact that they are written by the decoy herself, *who actually underwent the experiences she relates.*

Don't forget that "Decoyed!" commences next week. Let your newsagent know that you want a copy of *Short Stories*, and ask him to reserve you one. Otherwise you may have great difficulty in obtaining one.

ON page 19 there appears the sixth Unsolved Love Problem. Gerald Dacre is in imminent danger of forfeiting his honour, so I am offering a prize of one guinea to go to the reader who sends in what I consider to be the best course for him to pursue.

Your arguments should not exceed one hundred words, and should be written on one side of the paper only. State as clearly as possible the reasons why you consider the course you advocate is the right and honourable thing for him to do, and send in your replies to reach these offices not later than Friday, January 10th. None arriving after this date will be considered, and my decision as to the winner will be final.

Mark your envelopes "Sixth Love Problem" in the top left-hand corner, and address them to "The Editor," *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

MY heartiest thanks are due to all those readers who sent me Christmas greetings and congratulations on the Christmas number.

Your Editor.

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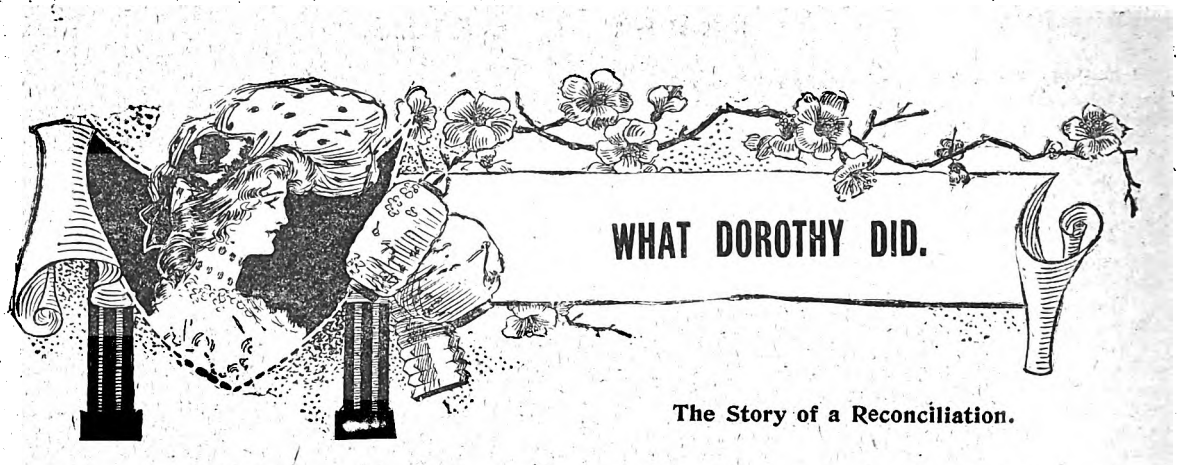

WHAT DOROTHY DID.

The Story of a Reconciliation.

"WHAT are we to do?"

It was Lily the practical who put the question. Barbara the beautiful only heaved a portentous sigh, and said nothing.

"Let apartments!" Dorothy said bluntly.

"Oh!" exclaimed Barbara.

"Dorothy!" chimed in Lily.

"Well, and why not? We've this big barn of a house on our hands, and half of it we never use. Why not turn part of it into profit? Luckily, it's our own. The only sensible thing the dad did was to buy it. You are lucky, Lil, you earn a little money. Poor Barbara, I am afraid you never will! Between us we can just manage to exist in decent comfort. If we could find a nice elderly gentleman, or a married couple to take the drawing-room floor, we could afford ourselves occasional luxuries, new songs, a theatre sometimes."

"How," said the beauty of the family, "will you set about it?"

"Advertise, of course, or reply to an advertisement."

"It seems so dreadful!"

"Nonsense! Besides, it won't affect you. Anna Maria will wait on them, and I can do the cooking. Lily will be away all day, and you, Barbara, can sit in the morning-room just as you do now, and forget that there are lodgers in the house."

"Lodgers!" murmured Barbara.

"Yes, lodgers," said Dorothy. "May as well call a spade a spade while you are about it! I'm going to get a newspaper and answer some advertisements."

As Dorothy West had said, it was indeed very lucky that their father had invested his money in the house he lived in. For when he died, it was found that little, if anything, was left for his widow and three daughters.

Dorothy, the eldest, had a small annuity left her by a godmother; Lily, who was the youngest of the trio, promptly obtained a situation, and avowed her intention to earn her own living. But Barbara—beautiful Barbara—remained to ornament the home, while Lily toiled, and Dorothy found some music pupils.

Six months previous to the conversation here chronicled, their mother had gently faded out of life, her one regret being that she was leaving her dear ones to fight the battle of life alone.

They were far more fitted to do so than she, poor, pretty, fragile little thing, had ever been! And now the question was, what were the three girls to do?

Dorothy's determined attitude, while it paralysed Barbara, was backed up enthusiastically by the practical Lily. For the next few days the pages of advertisements were eagerly scanned in the hope of discovering a pleasant and elderly couple, who required two charming furnished rooms with every attendance (Anna Maria, in a smart cap and apron—Anna Maria, who, if small and cockney of tongue, would have worked her fingers to the bone for the sake of her three mistresses) and good cooking! Many letters were written in answer to such as seemed suitable.

"We can afford to pick and choose," said Barbara.

But a fortnight elapsed, and only one applicant had responded, and he proved to be a young man of rather too prepossessing appearance who was not willing to pay the week in advance that Dorothy the businesslike demanded.

But one September afternoon a treble knock and ring startled the door of the big house in the Camden Road, and, all in a flutter, Anna Maria, arrayed in snowy cap and apron, fled to open it.

The callers were a young man of thirty and a pretty, fragile-looking girl of ten years younger, and Anna Maria ushered them into the drawing-room with some trepidation.

"Oh, she is pretty, miss!" whispered she to Dorothy. "But, oh, so sad-looking! And he's—oh, he's a gentleman, I know! Why, he actually took off his hat, and he wiped his feet on the mat, and we ain't had any rain for a week!"

Dorothy West put on her most businesslike manner and went to the drawing-room. Anna Maria was right, she was very pretty, the fragile-looking wife. Dorothy noticed she had drawn off her glove, and was wearing a wedding-ring that had not been long on the finger.

Ten minutes later all was settled, and even the first week's rent had been paid. Dorothy noticed how pleasant the husband's voice was, and how tenderly he spoke to the girl beside him.

"Name?" he remarked, in reply to Dorothy's question. "Oh, yes!" But he hesitated slightly and turned to his wife in a manner that Dorothy afterwards remembered. "Oh, yes, Chesterton, please! And we will come in in an hour's time. Dearest, I think you will be happy here."

"With you, Walter," murmured the wife, in so low a voice that Dorothy only just caught the words.

"Lily, we're let!" was her greeting to the youngest sister on her return home that evening.

"And Dorothy is as excited as—as I don't know what!" said Barbara, looking up from her book.

"Oh, nothing ever excites you!" said Dorothy with a laugh.

"Are they nice?" asked Lily, pausing in the act of taking off her hat. "Old or young? Pair of old frumps, I suppose."

"She is the prettiest woman, except Barbara, I have ever seen, and he looks like a nobleman in disguise."

"Thanks!" said Barbara.

"Good gracious!" was Lily's comment.

"There they are," exclaimed Dorothy, "coming in at the gate."

Lily peeped cautiously from behind the curtain.

"Now, wasn't I right? Isn't she lovely?"

"And they paid a week in advance!" cried Barbara, quite animatedly for her.

"That's satisfactory!" said practical Lily.

A fortnight later the entire household in the Camden Road were metaphorically in love with Mr. and Mrs. Chesterton. Anna Maria vowed that it was a delight and a joy to wait upon her, she was so gentle and so thoughtful. Dorothy had

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succumbed completely to her charm. In fact, the three girls were enchanted with Eunice Chesterton. And the husband was so essentially a gentleman that Barbara at once suggested that there was quite a mystery about them.

"Rubbish!" cried Dorothy, using her pet expression. But all the same she felt that Barbara, who had the happy knack of hitting the right nail on the head, was not altogether wrong in her surmise. Why was the girl-wife in the drawing-room so pale, and why did Dorothy more than once or twice catch her in tears? Mr. Chesterton went out but little, and his devotion to his pretty, pale wife was unbounded, but Dorothy noticed that she never allowed him to see or know of those times when her white face was buried in sofa cushion or pillow, and Dorothy, passing upstairs, caught the sound of sobs and tears.

Another strange thing was that no letters ever came for husband or wife. The former appeared to have plenty of money, for he lavished hats, and gowns, and trinkets, on the wife he so plainly and manifestly adored. The rent was forthcoming to the moment.

"It is most curious," said Dorothy, when the Chestertons had been there about two months, "and I must confess it puzzles me."

"What matters it?" said practical Lily. "It's no affair of ours."

"Yes, but it makes me miserable to see her miserable face. And she ought to be the happiest woman in London."

The very next day, hearing Eunice Chesterton weeping, Dorothy took the bull by the horns, and boldly walked into the room.

"My dear!" she cried. "This will never do!"

Mrs. Chesterton sat up with a look of deep trouble on her white face.

"Don't tell Walter!" she exclaimed.

"Of course I shall not, but I think you are making yourself ill. Let me help you, dear," and Dorothy put her girlish arms round the slight figure and drew it close to her own.

"Tell me the trouble," she said.

Dorothy took the bull by the horns, and boldly walked into the room.

"No, I cannot—I cannot. I am weak and foolish, and I have dragged him down in the world, ruined his life for ever! Oh, why did I do it?"

"Rubbish!" exclaimed Dorothy with emphasis. "Why, you couldn't do such a thing if you tried, you poor pale, pretty child!"

"But I have!"

Dorothy West, moved by an irresistible impulse, kissed her tenderly.

"Nonsense!" she said, as Eunice Chesterton clung to her broken-heartedly. "Dry your eyes and come and have tea with Barbara and me. I shall have to be very angry with you. You are alone up here. Now, don't say no, I won't let you. You must come—Eunice."

"Oh, I knew how good and kind you were," said the unhappy little woman, "the first moment I saw you. Please call me that. Except Walter, I haven't a friend in the world."

"Oh, yes you have—four, in this very house. Come along with me!"

And the masterful Dorothy carried her off, tearful cheeks and all, downstairs.

"Promise me," said Eunice at the door, "you will not tell Walter!"

And Dorothy promised. Tea and toast, a bright fire, and Dorothy's chatter brought a smile and even a touch of colour to the pale face before long. When her husband returned, she ran out to meet him with a bright laugh.

"How good of you, Miss West," he said brightly. "Why, little woman, you look a different girl. I am so glad."

She clung to him like a child, and slipped her arm through his in a tender manner.

"It was Dorothy," she said shyly, but looking up lovingly into his handsome face.

After that day Dorothy and Eunice became firm friends. But, do what she would, the former could not penetrate the evident mystery that surrounded the Chestertons. That there was a mystery was perfectly plain.

"I feel sure," said Barbara, "that it is a romance of some kind," when she heard what Eunice Chesterton had said. "He has married beneath him, and she——"

"Rubbish! Why she is a lady from head to foot."

"What does that matter? He may be the heir to a title, and she—well—a poor nobody."

"Reading too much fiction," said Dorothy bluntly, "has turned your brain, Bab."

"Truth is stranger than fiction," said Barbara, oracularly. "And this is not fiction, it's a copy of *Tittle Tattle*."

"More fictitious than some novels, my dear," said Dorothy. "Let me see it," and she took up the paper.

"Listen to this!" she cried.

"'Strange rumours are current in Society concerning the mysterious disappearance of Lord Walter Chesterton, the only son of Viscount Chesterton, who has not been heard of for some weeks. Family disagreement is hinted at in some quarters, in others a *mésalliance*. Whatever the reason, Society is discussing the topic with much——'"

"Dorothy!" exclaimed Barbara.

"Bab!" cried Dorothy.

The two sisters faced each other in silent amazement.

"Can it be?" said Bab at last.

"Impossible!"

"He is handsome enough to be a lord."

Dorothy laughed.

"My dear, good looks are not essentially the qualification to be a peer, or own a title!"

"I know that," said Barbara, "but——"

And it was "but," and a very big "but," too. Bab was certain, Dorothy was doubtful, Lily laughed in scorn.

"If I thought it were true," said Dorothy, "I should dearly love to bring about a reconciliation between them. I wish I could find out."

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"Ask Eunice."
"No, I daren't do that."
"Ask him."
"Worse still!"
"Then it seems to me you are in a *cul de sac*."
"Oh, no, I'm not! Not yet. I have an idea."
"What is it?"
"Wait and see," said Dorothy.

The next morning, leaving Anna Maria in charge, with Barbara as a refuge in the event of anything going wrong, Dorothy put on her hat and jacket and wended her way to a bookseller's. Here she asked for and obtained permission to refer to "Who's Who."

There it was, staring her in the face in plain print: "Walter, Lord Chesterton, only son of Viscount Chesterton," &c., &c. Turning up Viscount Chesterton, Dorothy found that his town house was 30 De Vere Square, and his country house Upton Grange, Bucks. Then she trudged through the rain back to Camden Road.

"I'm going to make that dear little girl a happy woman," she said to herself with determination, and added as an afterthought, "if I can."

"Where are you going in all this rain?" asked Barbara early that afternoon.

"Tell you when I come home," said Dorothy.

"You've got some mischief in your head."

"Oh, no! Wait a while, and you shall know everything!"

With which Dorothy went out. But when she knocked at the big front door of No. 30 De Vere Square, there was a certain amount of trepidation in her heart. You see, she had never faced a real live viscount before, nor had she ever gone on such a strange errand. But she pulled all her pluck to her assistance, and faced the gorgeous flunkey who opened the door with as much assurance as she could muster.

"His lordship is in," said the footman. "What name?"

Dorothy had provided herself with a card, and handed it to the man.

"Please say it is on particular business concerning his son."

This was quite at a venture, but our little curly-headed heroine was quite desperate by now. In a few moments the footman returned and somewhat contemptuously ushered her into a morning room, with the air of a man who disdained to wait upon anyone less than a duchess. Presently a little elderly man, looking, thought Dorothy, more like a tradesman than a peer of the realm, entered.

"I am Lord Chesterton," he said quietly. "What can I do for you?"

Dorothy trembled. Now she was actually face to face with her task, she could recognise its difficulty. And what would she do if Lord Chesterton thought it impertinence? However, she made a plunge.

"I wanted to speak to you," she said, "of your son."

The old man frowned.

"Do you know him?" Then he drew a step or two nearer to her. "Are you," he demanded sternly, "his wife?"

Try as she would, Dorothy could not resist a smile.

"Oh, no!"

"Then——"

"But I have met her, and, oh, she is the sweetest and prettiest woman in the world! I have come to plead to you to forgive your son."

"Did he send you?"

"No, no!" said Dorothy in haste.

"You are interested in them, then?"

"We are great friends, and she is fretting herself ill because she feels she has dragged the man she loves down in the world."

"So she has."

"You would not say that if you knew her," said Dorothy.

"You're a very enthusiastic advocate, young lady."

"I want you to see her," continued Dorothy, "and you will forgive her and him at once."

"You appear to know all about it."

"I know nothing but that she is in great misery. There is nothing about her for you to be ashamed of, Lord Chesterton. She is beautiful enough to grace a palace."

"She was a governess!" interrupted the old man, with half a sneer.

"What of that? Whatever she was, she is a lady in every sense of the word."

"Pooh!"

"Judge for yourself," said Dorothy, showing him a photograph which before coming out she had calmly abstracted from the drawing-room. Lord Chesterton took it from her hand, and studied it gravely.

"She is very lovely," he said at last.

"She is very unhappy! Lord Chesterton, make them both happy with your forgiveness. You must miss your son very much!"

"I do."

Dorothy felt that she had touched the right chord at last.

"Then take him back! What has he done that is so unforgivable? Married a good and beautiful woman—that is all his crime."

"I do miss him. But I am a proud man, young lady."

"Pride can be carried too far, Lord Chesterton."

"Where are they?"

Dorothy gave the address.

"Tell him to come and see me."

"No, you should come and see *her*. You will forgive him then."

"You plead very earnestly."

"My lord, I love her, and have done this to make her happy." Dorothy paused with clasped hands. The old man looked long and steadily at her eager, flushed face. Then he spoke.

"You are a very pretty and charming girl yourself," he said, "and will make a man very happy some day."

Dorothy's cheeks went rosy at this. She thought of a certain someone to whom a little word from her would mean bliss indeed. But that was another story.

"Supposing I do as you wish, what reward will you get?"

"None," said Dorothy. "You will come?"

"This afternoon, at four."

"I don't know how to thank you!" cried Dorothy, tremblingly, yet exultant that her mission had succeeded. The old man stooped over her hand and kissed it with old-fashioned courtesy.

* * * * *

"Whatever are you so excited about, Dorothy? What have you done, and what is going to happen?"

"Wait and see, Bab, wait and see," was all Dorothy said. On her return from De Vere Square she had almost frightened Eunice by throwing her arms round her with unwonted vehemence. Barbara was alternately annoyed and perplexed at her excitement.

Punctually at four o'clock Lord Chesterton arrived. Dorothy, who had been on the look-out, admitted him herself, and preceded him to the drawing-room. Throwing open the door with a beating heart, she announced him. Then running downstairs she startled Barbara by putting her head on her shoulder and breaking into a flood of tears.

"Father!" exclaimed Walter Chesterton.

Eunice, pale and frightened, rose unsteadily from the chair she sat in.

"My son!" said the old man, advancing into the room, "and—my daughter!"

The next moment Eunice was crying in his arms.

"Hush!" he said. "I have been wrong. Forgive me."

"But how did you come, and——" began his son, gripping the old man's hand in his own.

"You had better ask Miss Dorothy!" he said.

"Dorothy!" exclaimed the two in a breath. Then Eunice, with the quicker wit of a woman, guessed it all, and, slipping from her father-in-law's arms, fled downstairs to find Dorothy.

Clifton Bingham.

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Unsolved Love Problems.

A Prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

VI.—THE HONOUR OF GERALD DACRE.

UNDER the yellowing chestnuts and ruddy beeches a slight, fair-haired girl, looking scarcely more than a child, lay sobbing in a man's arms.

"I cannot, I dare not, meet you again, Gerald. Father has forbidden it, and next week I am to go to Aunt Helen's to stay for two months."

A spasm of pain contracted the brow of the man who held her so tenderly in his arms: he knew she was being sent away to separate her from him.

"God knows how hard it is for me to say it," he replied, "but your father is quite right. I am not worthy of love—you must try to forget me."

"Oh," she cried, lifting her head and looking at him with childish, trusting blue eyes, "I shall always love you, whatever happens! Father said dreadful things about you yesterday; but I shall not believe them. I can and ought to obey him; but I shall always love you, and know you for an upright and honourable——"

"Hush!" said Gerald, putting his hand lightly on her lips. "You will hear worse things said of me soon. Men will mock at the idea of Gerald Dacre being 'honourable.'"

"Oh, Gerald!" she cried, her eyes opening wide with horror. "What have you done?"

"Sit down, Eva, and I will tell you all about it."

The girl obediently sat down on a fallen tree, raising her eyes to the face of the tall man before her.

He was dark and very handsome; but there were lines on his face that should not have been there at his age, and a haggard look in his eyes that told of sleepless nights, and a care that would not be gainsaid.

"I suppose your father told you I had been gambling"—she nodded—"and that, knowing how my father and grandfather had got rid of all their property by that means, he did not intend to give you into the hands of an hereditary gambler?"

She cast down her eyes, and a blush of shame that such things should be said of her chosen lover flooded her delicate skin. He saw that she had heard strongly-expressed opinions about him, and he continued in a hard tone:

"Well, all that is true. I have been in the company of notorious gamblers, and I have played, and—I have lost—a large sum."

"Oh, Gerald!" she cried, starting up, and throwing her arms round his neck, "But you do love me—don't you?"

Poor child! Overwhelmed with shame and horror at this confession of—to her mind—deadly sin, she clung desperately to her sheet-anchor of faith in this man's truth.

"Love you?" he cried passionately—"more than my life—more than anything on earth. Oh, Eva, if you knew what your pure, trusting love has saved me from—what utter despair and sin! Listen. I must excuse myself to you, though I had intended honestly to put it all in its worst before you that I might alienate your heart from me. It would be best for you, dear, but," he added with a groan, "I can't go through with it."

Eva put up a gentle hand, and caressed his face. She knew not what to say—all this was beyond her ken and her experience of life.

Brought up with the greatest love and care in a country rectory, she was, at the age of eighteen, singularly childlike and simple. Life had hitherto presented no problems; all had been open and uneventful till the wondrous thing happened and she became engaged to Gerald Dacre—clever and of good family, but earning only a precarious livelihood as a journalist.

"Before God," he said solemnly, taking her hands in his, "I am no gambler! Cards and speculation have no fascination for me. The evil has arisen in that I thought I could touch pitch and not be defiled. Sir Noel Paton, though a gambler of not a good reputation, is the owner of one of the great morning papers, and I tried to make myself agreeable to him in the hope of getting an appointment on the staff, which would have brought our marriage to the verge of possibility. Well, he asked me to play a game of bridge, and I dared not refuse. We sat down laughing, and I rose up ruined. I had no idea how much I was losing with the frequent "doubling," and now I owe him £1,000—and this is all my wealth"—and he thrust his hand into his pocket, and brought out a handful of silver with a rare gleam of gold.

"What will you do?" cried Eva, looking at him with terror-struck gaze at the idea of such an enormous sum, as it seemed to her.

"Do?" he cried bitterly, "Nothing! What can I do? I have not the money nor any possible means of raising it. When the date comes at which it is payable I shall be declared a defaulter and a man without honour."

"Oh, Gerald," she murmured—"just for a game of cards? I know gambling is wicked; but if you can't pay you can't help it. It is not as if you had bought something and refused to pay for it. You could explain, and ask him to let you off."

In spite of his trouble Gerald could not help smiling at her ignorance of the unwritten law of men's honour, but answered shortly:

"No, my dear girl, that is impossible. Even your father's sermons must have taught you who plays must pay."

"But what will you do?"

"I don't know—go away, I suppose, where I am not known

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and live as best I can. But for you and your sweet love I believe I should have killed myself."

Eva shrank from the wild words.

"But that would have been wicked."

She was more than a little shocked at all these wicked things which seemed suddenly to have come so near to her, and, though she loved him dearly, she was shaken and spent with crying, and felt she could bear no more, so she held out to him the little turquoise ring he had given her, and said with a sob:

"Then it is really good-bye? Good-bye, my dear love. I shall never forget you. May God bless you and lead you to happiness wherever you go."

Gerald strained her to his heart, with a passion she did not understand, and partly feared, and said with emotion:

"All I have ever known of God, or of happiness, has come through you. Good-bye, my little love! This ring, with stones not half so blue as your eyes, shall be my talisman in the dark life before me."

Then he released her, and stood watching her slight figure as she passed slowly down the narrow woodland path, the ruddy brown beech trees dropping their leaves about her. At the bend she turned and waved a last farewell, and, with her handkerchief to her eyes, went out of sight—and out of his life, he thought.

Naturally, all the village knew more or less what had happened; and what they did not know they imagined, so that the tale, with varied embellishments, was soon going round the parish.

Marion Transome's smart London maid was brushing her hair and regaling her with this, the latest scandal, only a few days after Gerald and Eva had bade farewell in the wood.

Marion was a stylish-looking girl, though not quite of the best style. Her father, who "had made money in the City" (be it whispered low, in a tailor's shop), had built for himself a palatial barrack on the hill overlooking the little village in the valley below, and called it "Transome Hall." She was his only child, and had had a very expensive education, and when not over-dressed might have been taken for the real thing. She was not remarkably handsome, but many people admired her; and it goes without saying that she had received many offers, though she had not thought fit to accept any one of them.

"And so poor little Miss Burton has gone to London to be out of the way of that good-for-nothing Mr. Dacre—— "

"Sarah," cried Marion sharply, "you forget yourself! Pray don't presume to speak in such a manner of visitors to this house."

Sarah bit her lip, and was silent—her mistress was not wont to be so particular.

Truth to tell, Marion was suffering keenly for the sake of Gerald Dacre. Surrounded as she always was by flatterers and fortune-hunters, she had been much attracted by this poor, handsome young man, who paid her no compliments, and even appeared not to see when she made it plain that attentions from him would be very acceptable. She had not resented his becoming engaged to the pretty but equally penniless daughter of the rector; in an odd sort of way she respected him for choosing love and good birth to money; but she suffered all the same, and now especially the thought that he was in trouble gave her pain.

Having dismissed her maid early, she sat by the window, looking down into the valley, and pondered long and deeply.

"They say he has disgraced himself in some way, and the old rector has forbidden him the house and broken off the engagement; and she, the good, obedient child obeys. I would not. Had I been in her place and he in trouble no one should have parted us. Ah—if it had been I—— "

The next day she sent down a little note to Gerald:—

"DEAR MR. DACRE,—*Father wants to ask your opinion about a picture he has bought. Will you come up to-morrow afternoon and see it?—Yours sincerely,* M. TRANSOME."

Mr. Transome had more than once put money in Gerald's pockets in one way or another; and, disinclined as Gerald felt to see anyone, he did not like to refuse

"I shall have few enough people to speak to next month when all is known," he said to himself somewhat morbidly; "I need not anticipate my troubles."

So he went; and Marion received him in her most-becoming and quietest frock. "Father will be in directly; sit down and talk," she said in the frank, friendly manner that was her greatest charm.

It then struck Gerald that the picture was an excuse, for an autumn afternoon is not the time to wait about before seeing a picture. The idea that he had been brought there to be made to talk rendered him morose, and the conversation languished.

On her side Marion was too deeply shocked by the havoc trouble had wrought in his appearance to be able to keep away from the subject. It was a very real and deep sympathy that made her speak, though perhaps a more delicately-sensitive mind would have felt instinctively that it would be kindest so appear ignorant of anything out of the common.

"Mr. Dacre," she said impulsively, "I must speak. You are in trouble—can I help you?"

Gerald winced, but he said to himself, "After all it is pure kindness of heart, and not vulgar curiosity"—so he replied:

"I am afraid no one can help me, Miss Transome. I have lost money that I cannot pay, and next month I shall be known as a man who does not pay his debts of honour."

After all, there was a certain relief in stating the ugly fact in the crudest manner—and she was a woman of the world, not an innocent child.

Pity stirred within Marion, and her eyes filled with tears as she realised dimly what this descendant of an honourable—if dissipated—race would suffer at being unable to meet his engagements.

"But your friends—can they not help you?"

"My friends!" he cried. "They are not wealthy. The whole of my possessions, if sold, would not bring in a ten-pound note, and my friends are in the same condition. It would be an impossibility for them to raise £100 between them—how then £1,000?"

A sudden courage came to her.

"And why did you not ask me?"

A dark flush rose in Gerald's face.

"I am not yet sunk so low as to beg from a woman," he said with concentrated scorn.

"Oh, Mr. Dacre," she cried eagerly, "I was not thinking what I said. I was only sensible of how glad I should be if I were allowed to help as one of your friends might have done. The money is there, if you would take it, till you could pay it back."

"That might be years," said he. "No, Miss Transome, these things are not done by a man with a shred of self-respect."

"You would have taken it from Miss Burton had she had it," she burst out in a wrath born of the pain she felt and her inability to help the man she loved in his trouble.

"That would have been a very different matter," he said coldly.

She felt she had said more than was allowable, and, cut to the heart at his displeasure, and deeply humiliated by the knowledge of what she wished him to say, she sank sobbing into a chair.

Gerald was at a loss to know what to do; but he slowly crossed the room, and stood by her side.

"Pardon me for my rudeness, Miss Transome—I am not quite myself at present—I should have thanked you for your most kind and generous offer."

She raised her tear-stained face, and said:

"I want no thanks."

What Gerald saw in her eyes flashed a sudden thought into his mind.

After all, why not?

As her promised husband, he could take the money and save his honour before men, Then, he promised himself, he would slave night and day till he had paid it back and regained his own self-respect. It was only the time he wanted.

And Eva was lost to him in any case!

Should he or should he not?

L. Hughes.

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She Had Had Experience of Him.

HE: "My motto is, 'Always think before you speak.'" She: "You must find it very hard to carry on an animated conversation."

A Pressing Invitation.

HE: "You have a very bad cold." She: "Yes; and I'm glad of it." He: "Why, pray?" She: "Because I'm too hoarse to scream if you should attempt to kiss me."

A Momentous Decision.

MAUDIE: "Oh, Gertie, what a lovely engagement-ring! How I envy you!" Gertie: "You needn't, dear. When it comes to the point, I've either got to marry him or give it back."

A Possible Method.

MISS WITHERS: "I presume Mr. Flipp made his usual weekly call on you last night?" Miss Callow: "Yes; and I must say that he made a fool of himself." Miss Withers: "Proposed to you, eh?"

What She Believed.

BOREM (11.57 p.m.): "When I was a child my nurse made me afraid of the dark." Miss Cutting: "Oh, that accounts for it." Borem: "Accounts for what?" Miss Cutting: "You are waiting for daylight so you can go home."

Fanny was Old for Her Years.

UNCLE: "Well, Fanny, aren't you going to kiss your uncle?" Fanny (aged seven): "No, indeed." Uncle: "And why not, little darling?" Fanny: "Because there's your wife looking on, and I don't want to make any trouble in the family."

She Wasn't to be Caught.

MR. LAWHEAD: "Why do you treat me so coldly? Why didn't you answer the note I wrote you last Thursday?" Miss Brushley: "Sir, I don't wish to have anything more to say to you. You began your note by saying you 'thought you would drop me a line.' I want you to understand that I'm not a fish."

Food for Thought.

"YOU say you want to marry my daughter. Have you spoken to her?" "Yes, sir," replied the young man, "and have gained her consent." "Well, if she has said 'Yes,' that settles it. Anything I might say or do wouldn't have the slightest influence." Then the young man went home and wondered if he were not too young to marry such a girl.

Convincing Signs.

CLARA: "I don't know what to make of your brother. For three months after we met, he did nothing but write poetry to me." Dora: "Has he stopped that?" "Yes. Since then he has made me some nice presents, but he has even stopped that." "H'm! Let—me—see. I have it. The household pages of our newspapers have been clipped terribly of late. No doubt he is making a collection of cooking recipes. He's in earnest."

Rather Cutting.

HE: "Won't your *fiancé* be jealous at this interview?" She: "Not when he sees whom I'm with."

Vindictive.

MAY: "She said she would never forgive him." Ethel: "But she afterwards married him." May: "That merely shows that she meant what she said."

He Thought Her Rather Plain.

MRS. PASSAY: "Everybody says my daughter got her beauty from me. What do you say to that?" Mr. Witts: "Well, I think it was very unkind of her to take it from you."

A Lover's Quarrel.

"HALLO, Fitzy! where did you get that black eye?" "Oh, it was only a lover's quarrel!" "Lover's quarrel! Why, your girl didn't give you that, did she?" "No, it was her other lover."

Oh! What a Story!

HER father (coming suddenly into the room): "Eh, what is this?" Her lover: "I was telling Miss Budd a story." Her father: "With your arm round her waist?" Her lover: "Er—yes, sir. It was a love story."

Accounted for the Number.

HE: "Miss Flipp says she had nearly one hundred proposals at the seaside this summer." She: "That is true." He: "She must be very popular." She: "Oh, I don't know. You see, Mr. Softly proposed to her every day for three months."

A Hint that Succeeded.

SHE was inclined to be sentimental. He was nothing if not practical. "Would that you could tell me how to mend a broken heart," she said. "I have known of cases where it has been done by splicing," he replied. That was the remedy tried in this case.

A Successful Appeal.

JUDGE: "Was that young Mr. Smith I saw leaving the house as I entered?" Daughter: "Yes, papa." Judge: "And didn't I prohibit him coming here any more?" Daughter: "Yes, papa, but he appealed to a higher court, and mamma has removed the injunction."

She Knew the Pattern.

LANDLADY: "I'll have to request you to pay in advance, Mr. Shortleigh." Shortleigh: "Why, isn't my trunk good for a week's lodging?" Landlady: "No; it looks like one of those emotional trunks." Shortleigh: "Emotional?" Landlady: "Yes; one that is easily moved."

A Sensible Rejoinder.

"Don't you think," asked the young man with the long nose, "that Miss Quickstep dresses as much like a man as possible in order to get herself talked about?" "On the supposition that she does," replied the other young man, with a frosty glitter in his eye, "I suggest that we defeat her purpose by not talking about her. Understand?"

It Couldn't be True.

"THERE is some money, my love," said the husband, "I don't want any," replied the wife. "Come now, darling, take this £5 note and go out shopping." "Thank you, dearest, but I really don't care to. I would rather stay at home and see to the housework." Then the husband awoke and found, as the reader has already suspected, that he had been dreaming.

A Thrilling Scene.

SHE had marked the huskiness in his voice for the past ten minutes, and the nervous manner in which he fidgeted in his chair spoke volumes to her. She knew what was coming, and hoped it would. "Clara," he said finally, and his throat seemed dry and parched, "would you—that is, could you—do you think that you——" "Go on, George," she murmured encouragingly, "I am listening." "Would you—er—do you think you could—er—get me a drink of water, Clara? I am as dry as a fish."

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THE AMATEUR UMBRELLA MENDER.

The Tale of a Curious Mistake.

GILBERT REYNOLDS glanced at his reflection in the office mirror and laughed. He was a tall young fellow, with bushy brown hair, a Roman nose, and a very determined-looking mouth and chin. Just now he had buttoned himself up in an old ulster, and pulled a soft felt hat down over his eyes, and with his brother-in-law's umbrella and his sister Amy's parasol under one arm, and his own umbrella under the other, he cut very much the same figure as the man who went the rounds of the City crying "Umbrellas to mend!"

It was just six o'clock and beginning to grow dark, when Gilbert left the office. Some grey clouds were scurrying across the autumn sky, and a few chilly raindrops splashed on the pavement.

Gilbert started briskly in the direction of home, busy with his own thoughts, until his attention was attracted by a sudden tap on one of the windows of an old-fashioned dwelling-house which he passed every day.

Looking up he saw to his astonishment a very pretty girl beckoning to him. Her hair was fair, and curled about her forehead and neck in loose ringlets; and a roguish-looking dimple kept guard at the corner of her smiling mouth.

Now Gilbert was too gallant a young fellow to pass on unheeding, while a pretty girl like that beckoned to him. He paused, smiled, and would have raised his hat had he not been, as I have already told you, burdened with umbrellas.

The young girl threw up the window and called to him in a sweet, clear voice:

"Wait a minute, please! I have an umbrella for you!"

And immediately she vanished.

Gilbert stood for an instant quite dumbfounded, and then, as the ludicrousness of the affair rushed over him, he burst into a little laugh of amusement, calming himself, however, when the front door opened.

She had mistaken him for the umbrella man.

Gilbert was young, and of course admired a pretty girl; so he at once decided to accept the situation, as it promised further opportunity of seeing this charming creature.

So, when she appeared with a black silk umbrella in her hands, he turned to her with grave attention.

"The handle is broken, you see," she said, "and the spring," partially opening the umbrella and shaking out the dark folds with her fair little hands. "I have been watching for you all day," she added naïvely; and Gilbert's heart leapt into his throat.

How nice it must be to have that dear little thing watching for a fellow *every* day!

The young lady turned a little anxious look upon him from a pair of wide, blue eyes.

"Do you suppose it can be mended?" she asked, confidingly.

"Oh, yes, indeed!" was Gilbert's reckless answer, although he knew no more about it than she did.

"And when can I have it?"

"To-morrow," said Gilbert, promptly, congratulating himself on the prospect.

"So soon? Very well."

She nodded her bright little head at him and ran up the steps while Gilbert passed on with an additional umbrella in his hand and visions of golden curls, blue eyes, and rosy lips mingling in delightful confusion in his brain.

That evening he sat down to supper with a dreamy and abstracted air. His sister tried to rally him.

"Gil," she said, "your future wife is in town."

"Eh—what?" said Gilbert.

"The girl whom I have decided upon for my sister-in-law," pursued Amy, laughingly. "She was in the same class as I at school. The family have just moved to town, and next week you must call with me."

"Well, I'll see about it," said Gilbert dreamily, as he put a teaspoonful of salt into his second cup of tea.

Amy looked at him with wide-eyed amazement.

"What has come over the boy?" she ejaculated. "Gil, dear," leaning across the table, "you have not been gambling or robbing the bank, have you?"

Gilbert shook his head as a reply.

The next morning on his way to the City, he rang the bell of the house which contained his unknown beauty.

The young lady opened the door.

"I shall not be able to return your umbrella to-day," he explained, glibly. "It will take longer to repair than I expected. To-morrow, without fail, I will bring it."

(Gilbert had left the umbrella with an old man, whose sole employment consisted in mending chairs, umbrellas, and musical instruments.)

"Oh, very well," said the little lady, as she cast a smiling look at the clear sky, and another at the young man, who, in his neat business suit, presented a different aspect from the rather rough-looking figure of the previous evening. "There is no particular hurry about it, so long as the weather is fine."

And then, as he went striding away, she looked after him.

"What a very respectable-looking person he is for one in his position," she murmured.

The next day Gilbert was prompt with the umbrella, and the young lady as prompt with her purse. She looked her property over with a little nod of satisfaction.

"That looks very well," she said. "And now, how much am I to pay you?"

Gilbert hesitated, faltered, and flushed, and finally stammered, like the man whom Dickens has made famous:

"It's of no consequence."

But the amused surprise in the girl's face brought him to his senses, and he coolly named the price which he had that morning paid to the old man. It is safe to say that the silver coin which passed from the girl's hand into his was put sacredly away; for by this time Gilbert was very far gone. The bright eyes and sweet voice had quite bewitched him.

On the following week Amy insisted upon Gilbert calling with her on the young lady whom she declared he should marry.

"She is the dearest girl in the world," said Amy enthusiastically, "and the very prettiest. You will be sure to like her."

"Oh, yes, I know," drawled Gilbert; "a tall, dashing girl, with flashing black eyes, and an awful temper. Of course, I must go with you, sis; but don't build any matrimonial air-castles, for my heart is no longer in my own keeping."

And he straightened his tie with a sentimental sigh, and took his silk hat in one neatly-gloved hand.

Amy looked at him sharply as they started off together. Was her pet brother really in love with some strange girl?

"What a goose you are, Gil!" she said, half provoked. "Claire doesn't answer to your description at all—wait until you see her."

Great was Gilbert's surprise when his sister led him up the steps of the identical house which contained his unknown divinity; and great was the unknown divinity's surprise when her old friend, Mrs. Ross, introduced as her brother the tall young man who had taken her umbrella to mend!

Gil smiled into the wide blue eyes of Miss Claire Edmonds, and bowed low before her, while she, after one swift, bewildered glance, burst into a merry peal of laughter, in which she was joined by Gilbert.

"Why, it's the umbrella man!" she exclaimed; and Amy looked on in blank amazement, wondering if her brother and her friend had taken leave of their senses.

Explanations followed. Of course my readers may imagine that Gilbert's first call was not his last one, and that Amy's matrimonial air-castles were built of substantial material; for Gilbert Reynolds and the pretty fair-haired girl are happiest when sharing one umbrella, and they are soon to be married.

Stanley Hammond.

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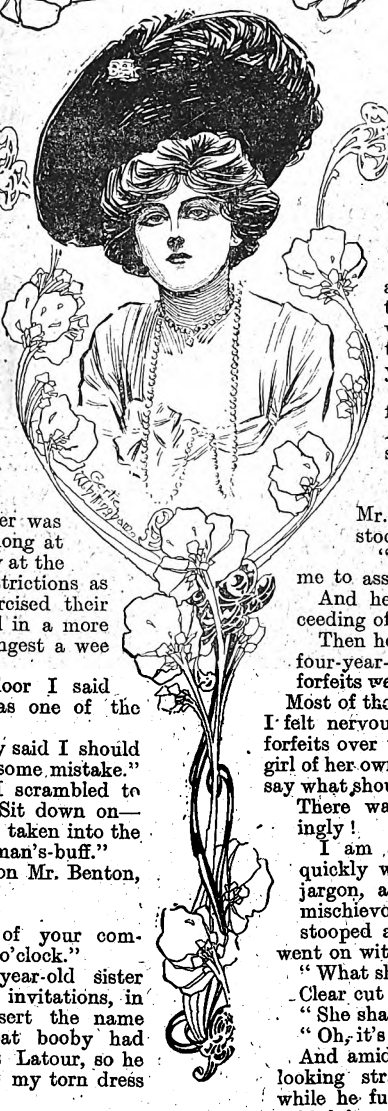
BASHFUL, YET FEARLESS.



How a Shy Man Won a Bride.

If I had been caught in such a situation by anybody but John Benton I should have been terribly annoyed.

There I was sitting on the floor of the nursery, with hair tumbled, my face red, and a great rent across the front of my skirt, where it had been caught by a nail a few minutes before during a fierce blind-man's-buff scrimmage.

My little sister Alice was having a Christmas party, and of course I had to assist in entertaining the guests. There were just twelve, seven boys and five girls. Supper was over—everybody was too excited to sit long at the table—and we all retired to the nursery at the top of the house, where there were no restrictions as to noise, and where the seven boys exercised their shouting franchise to the utmost, assisted in a more subdued way by the five girls, the youngest a wee little girl of four years.

When John Benton tapped at the door I said "Come in" carelessly, supposing it was one of the servants.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Latour. They said I should find you here. But perhaps I have made some mistake."

"Not at all, Mr. Benton," said I, as I scrambled to my feet. "We are pleased to see you. Sit down on—on the piano stool. The chairs have been taken into the other room. We have been playing blind-man's-buff."

"I—I received this invitation," went on Mr. Benton, taking an envelope from his pocket.

The gilt-edged card within read:

"Miss Latour requests the pleasure of your company on Tuesday, December 29th, at five o'clock."

I looked reproachfully at my seven-year-old sister Alice. She had sent one of her printed invitations, in which the printer had neglected to insert the name "Alice," to John Benton, and the great booby had taken it for granted, that I was the Miss Latour, so he had come in full dress—a nice contrast to my torn dress and dishevelled hair.

"Well, I am glad you have come, though I suppose this is not exactly the kind of gathering you expected to find, is it?"

I did not care much what I said to John Benton. Ever since I had met him at the Warrens' ball, three months ago, my brothers all declared that he was in love with me, but was too bashful to tell me so. I met him often, and though I am sure I am not an awe-inspiring personage, I could not help seeing that he was never at ease in my presence.

Not that he was backward where men were concerned. My brother Will took me to the Stock Exchange one morning, and I saw John Benton, with his hat on the back of his head, grasping a brass railing with one hand and shaking the other, holding some papers in the face of a savage-looking man, and shouting at him at the top of his voice in the most defiant manner. Will said the savage-looking man was a bear, and that Mr. Benton was a bull. Then Mr. Benton caught sight of me, and came and stuttered and stayed with me for ten minutes.

But Mr. Benton was not thinking about the market as he walked over to the piano-stool in his dress coat and white necktie, and sat there with one of the most sheepish smiles I ever saw on a young man's face.

"Now, Lou, you must sit down on the floor again so that we can play forfeits. And you, too, Mr. Benton. Come on," said Alice.

John Benton blushed and looked at me.

"We shall have to obey, I am afraid, Mr. Benton. But you can sit on the piano stool if you prefer it," I said.

"Oh, but I don't, Miss Latour! Allow me to assist you to sit down."

And he actually tried to make a courtly proceeding of depositing me on the floor.

Then he sat down himself, with little Stella, the four-year-old mite, between us, and the game of forfeits went on.

Most of the penalties were in the shape of kisses, and I felt nervous until my turn came. Alice held the forfeits over the head of a particular friend of hers, a girl of her own age, and it was the duty of the latter to say what should be done with the owner of the article.

There was my handkerchief held up threateningly!

I am ashamed to say that my heart beat quickly when Alice repeated the familiar nursery jargon, and it fairly jumped when she, with a mischievous glance at Mr. Benton and myself, stooped and whispered to her friend. Then she went on with the question:

"What shall be done with the owner?"

Clear cut and distinct came the answer:

"She shall kiss Mr. Benton."

"Oh, it's Lou—it's Lou!" shouted Alice.

And amid the tempest of laughter, Mr. Benton sat looking straight before him with a crimson face, while he fumbled at his white necktie until the bow was under his left ear.

There was a silence, as everybody except Mr. Benton looked at me to see the operation performed, when a baby voice at my side said:

"I'll tiss him for you, Lou."

So Stella climbed up to Mr. Benton's neck, with one of her hands on his white shirt front, and, as she said herself—

"I tissed him right on the mouf, and it tittled my nose!"

I did not want to play at forfeits any longer—it was too dangerous; so I proposed that we should all sing.

"Ess, I tan sing. I know lots of songs," said Stella.

She did not feel at all abashed over the fact that she had left a dark, sticky impression of her fingers on Mr. Benton's starched shirt front, and as for him he seemed to feel flattered at her evident preference for him.

I sat down at the piano and played accompaniments for school songs, while the children stood around me and bawled the words into my ears with the excruciating, flat intonation peculiar to the untrained voice.

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Mr. Benton was sitting near the window, with little Stella on his knee, apparently enjoying the noise, and with his eyes fixed on me in a blank stare of admiration that I could not help seeing whenever my face was half turned in his direction.

"Now let me sing a song all by myself," said Stella.

Mr. Benton looked inquiringly at me, and I answered:

"Yes, Stella, let us hear you sing one all by yourself."

So she commenced deliberately:

"Little bir-die, on—the—tree! (a long breath) on—the—tree! (another long breath) on—the—tree!"

Then she stopped, and with a haughty disregard of the desires or opinions of her audience that would have been worthy of a petted prima donna, turned carelessly round on Mr. Benton's knee and looked out of the window, while the company awaited her pleasure.

"Oh, loot—loot at the big birdie on the tree out of the window," she said, suddenly pointing downward towards where I knew a tall tree grew close to the house.

Mr. Benton was apparently startled by this evidence of Stella's keen vision, for I saw him jump as his eyes followed the direction of her finger. He controlled himself at once, however, as he replied quickly:

"I think that is the shadow of a cloud in the moonlight, and not a birdie, Stella."

"No, no, I saw a birdie on the tree," she persisted.

He put her down and she ran over to me. As I took her on my lap I heard the door close, and saw that John Benton had disappeared.

"That is rather unceremonious. I wonder whether he is coming back? Well, I don't care whether he is or not," I thought, as I made up my mind that the festivities could proceed without him.

I sat Stella on the end of the piano and played a lively polka for the children, with Stella's assistance, she drumming on two or three of the keys in the bass at intervals, with a very weird, if not harmonious, effect.

"I want some more sugar-candy," announced Stella imperiously.

"I shall have to go downstairs for it, Stella. It is all in the dining-room," I said.

"Well, do down. I'll be dood."

Of course I had to go. I left Stella in Alice's charge, and ran swiftly down the stairs. The nursery was on the third floor. I do not know what induced me to open the door of my parents' bedroom as I passed it. I did so, however. It was quite dark save for one narrow bar of moonlight forcing its way through the branches of the poplar outside the window.

I glanced carelessly into the room, with my hand on the handle of the door, and was about to continue my journey to the dining-room when I felt a current of air from an open window, and saw something white gleaming in the moonlight for an instant, and then disappear.

"What is that? It looked like a hand," I thought, as an indescribable feeling of terror passed over me and left me shivering.

There was not a sound to be heard in the room save the rustling of the curtains as the light wintry breeze blew them from the window, but I was certain someone was there.

What was that?

Surely a man climbing in through the window! Yes, I was not mistaken. My eyes had become accustomed to the darkness by this time, and I could plainly see the outline of his figure defined against the window.

In that terrible instant all I had ever heard or read about burglars and their desperate actions when brought to bay passed through my mind. I remembered half a dozen stories wherein a young girl had successfully outwitted expert midnight thieves, and captured them alone and unaided.

The man, with his round head covered by some kind of closely-fitting cap, was cautiously creeping through the window, and I saw the tree shake, as if just relieved of a burden. He had evidently climbed the tree to reach the room, and I remembered hearing my brother Will say only the day before that it was a favourite plan of thieves in robbing a house to get up to the second storey by means of a porch or tree, while the family were gathered in the lower rooms in the early evening.

I could not move! There was no light in the passage outside the room, and I could not be seen by the intruder, as I stood with my hand on the door-handle, watching him, and listening in a dreamy way to the noise of the children in the nursery overhead.

He was inside the room by this time, and I noticed that his footsteps were noiseless, as if he had no shoes on, as he moved across the bar of moonlight towards the bureau where my mother always keeps her jewellery. I saw a round patch of bright yellow fall on the keyhole of the top drawer, and then heard a metallic rattling. The thief was picking the lock.

If I could only scream or call Will!

The drawer opened; the man was fumbling at its contents, when—crash! The yellow patch of light disappeared and, with a fearful word, I saw the man fall, another man holding him! Then a pistol shot rang through the room, and echoed up and down the stairs, and the room was flooded in light. Somebody had switched on the light.

For a few seconds my eyes were so dazzled that I could not see anything. Then I saw two men rolling on the floor in a desperate struggle, while a pistol lay just out of their reach. The man underneath, with his closely-fitting plush cap, was scowling at me as he tried to release himself, and I thought I could see murder written on his thin lips and short, turned-up nose so plainly that I should have been in favour of hanging him on the spot.

But who was the other man, holding the thief with a grip of iron, as each tugged and writhed in the attempt to subdue the other? Surely that was the bow of a white necktie at the back of his neck! That was a dress coat with the tails spread out like the wings of an eagle, or I was much mistaken!

In the battle, just as Will and my father reached the room and rushed past me, the combatants rolled over, and a very red face, which, however, was anything but sheepish now, was turned toward me. The face of—John Benton!

Will had the thief by the arm in a minute, while John Benton lay panting on the floor. Then it was I saw a great red stain on the white shirt front. It was blood!

Somehow, I forgot all about the thief, Will, my father—everything, as I threw myself down by the side of John Benton and pressed my handkerchief over the red stain.

"John, John! What is it? Where are you hurt? Oh, father, he is killed!" I screamed. "What shall I do?"

I will never believe again that John Benton was ever bashful, for he just put one of his hands on the back of my head, pulled my face down to his, and whispered:

"Do just what you are doing now, and as you have commenced to call me John, do it all the rest of your life, and let me call you Lou."

There was a sudden disturbance! The thief had broken away from Will! The tree shook violently, and Will said, as he put his head out of the window:

"Well, let the rascal go. It will save a good deal of trouble. Ah, there is his pal, who was on guard. They are both running as if the whole detective force were at their heels." Then, turning to John: "How are you hurt, Mr. Benton? You don't look as if it was very serious."

"It is not serious," said John, sitting up. "That fellow cut his hand in some way while opening the bureau, and he rubbed the blood all over my shirt; that's all."

I bit my lip and gave John a look that should have frozen him. It did not have the proper effect, however, for he followed me upstairs to the nursery, where the racket of play had rendered the children oblivious to the disturbance below.

As he took Stella on his knee he said:

"You must sing 'Birdie on a Tree' for us again, will you?"

"Ess, I will sing it for you, but you must tiss Lou for me now. She has diven me lots and lots of tandy."

"Yes, I think so," said John. "And I'll tiss her for you."

And he actually did it. Moreover, he says now that it is his privilege, and I suppose, under the circumstances, he is right.

John Mandeville.

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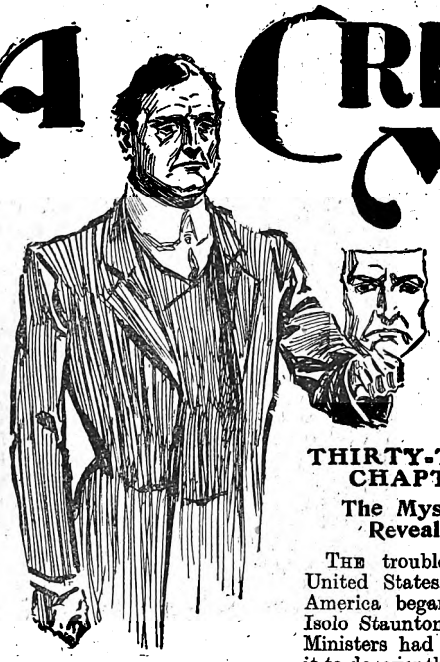
POWERFUL ROMANCE.

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE



By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

THIRTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

The Mystery Revealed.

THE trouble in the United States of South America began just as Isolo Staunton and his Ministers had intended it to do, over the making of the Inter-Oceanic Canal. Columbia had finally rejected the treaty for the concession of ten miles of territory on either side of the Panama Canal, and Panama had also started business as a Sovereign State.

The powerful group of financiers, who had been working to make the Nicaraguan Canal a fact, got to work at once, and had almost engineered the scheme through Congress when the Washington Government was faced with a Note from the Sovereign State of Nicaragua, informing all whom it might concern that the said Sovereign State had merged its identity into that of the United States of South America and that Nicaraguan territory was no longer available for the making of the canal.

"I guessed he'd do that, Mr. President," said Kesteven to his host in the bungalow at Oyster Bay nearly a month after the *Isola* vanished from the Bay of Funchal. "You'll find that Staunton is a hard man to deal with. He's got all the fire of the Spaniard and the grit of the Anglo-Saxon in him, and I can tell you for your own information, and it may be for the safety of the United States up here, that you haven't got to take the United States down there as any sort of a joke. If my late partner means fight, there'll be war such as you have never known!"

"I can't help it," replied the President. "The point is that, if we can't have both of these canals, we've got to have one of them. Don't you see what it means? We'll have the American continents cut in half in two places, and when that's done there's nothing to prevent these United States of South America, as they call themselves, allowing Russia, China, and Japan to send their warships right through from the Pacific to the Atlantic and—well, just knocking the Monroe doctrine kite high, and you know as well as I do that the United States can't stand that. The American people would fight the world first."

"And, my dear Mr. President," replied Kesteven, getting up from his chair, thrusting his hands into his trousers pockets, and walking with long, slow strides, up and down the room, "you'll have to forgive me if I tell you, speaking as a loyal and patriotic citizen of this Republic, that under those circumstances we shall get the most almighty hiding that a country ever asked for."

"That, Mr. Kesteven, is impossible," exclaimed the President, jumping to his feet. "There is no power that could conquer a country of this size, with seventy millions of Americans in it."

"They wouldn't want to, Mr. President," replied Kesteven; "you have just got to look at the map to see that. The other United States have ships enough now to clear the seas of this half of the world, shut up every port we have, and leave a couple of millions of very angry American soldiers marching up and down the country from Maine to Texas, looking for something to shoot at and not finding it. That's the trouble."

"Then I suppose I am to understand," replied the President, facing him, his hands also thrust into his pockets and his legs wide apart, "that from what you know—and you'll excuse me if I say that you seem to know a lot more than you've told me—you think that I should ask this late partner of yours, this President of the other United States, round to afternoon tea, and talk matters over."

"That's it, Mr. President," replied Kesteven. "I have told you everything I can tell you, except just this: You'll have to negotiate about those canals. You can't fight the question. You may take it from me that Isolo Staunton has resources behind him which are quite too big a proposition even for the United States to get a grip of. He has every power on earth behind him except two."

"And those?" asked the President.

"Great Britain and Japan. They were the only two he couldn't buy."

The President lit his cigar, blew a cloud of smoke towards the ceiling, and said:

"Good enough, Mr. Kesteven! I don't want to inquire into the private concerns of yourself and your friend Staunton, but as far as the Nicaragua proposition concerns this country, you can cable to him right away that if the United States of South America makes the Nicaraguan Canal, the United States of North America will make the Panama Canal, whether his new United States likes it or not. That territory is part of this continent, and I reckon that my good friend Diaz of Mexico will also have something to say on that subject. He's not having any back door of that sort left open. What he doesn't know about those greasers down yonder isn't worth forgetting, and I reckon he'll agree with me that if your friend wants war right away, he has only got to ask for it."

"I don't know, Mr. President, that he wants war, as such, any more than you want it. Still, he's about as ready for it as you are, and if he found that you weren't quite as ready—"

Kesteven heard a low buzzing sound under the President's desk.

"You'll excuse me a moment, won't you, Mr. Kesteven? There is something I have to attend to right now in the next room."

"Why, certainly. Please don't let me make any trouble

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about that, Mr. President. In fact, I don't think I have much more to say, anyhow."

When the President left the room Kesteven got up and began to walk up and down, pulling hard at his cigar and digging his heels into the carpet.

"It looks as if he'd got hold of some of it somehow. I wonder how much? I hope Staunton hasn't made that old mistake again, trusting a man too little—and if that man happens to be myself, he's just going the shortest possible way to find trouble. We've been partners long enough now for him not to play the——"

The door opened at this moment, and the President came back with a piece of grey paper in his hand. He closed the door behind him and locked it.

"What do you make of that?" he said.

Kesteven took the piece of paper and looked at it.

"Receiving Station, Cape Breton. October 13th. Message picked up in mid-ocean from Minnesota *en route* to Boston, says: 'Aerogram received from unknown source stating Wilfrid Ellerton, son of Sir Wilfrid Ellerton, well-known manufacturer and millionaire of Ellerton Manor, Yorkshire, assaulted and drugged on yacht *Isola*, belonging to Isolo Staunton, now alleged President of United States of South America. Transferred by unknown means to subterranean regions somewhere near Iceland. Location believed to to be near intersection of twentieth meridian of west longitude with 62½ north latitude in south-western line of Hekla's volcanic activity. Possible connection, Teneriffe. Submarine manufactory, money. Silver especially. Also gold. Large production notes of all countries having coinage on gold basis. Only possible communication, yacht *Isola*. Find if possible and catch. Great revelations may then be expected. WILFRID ELLERTON.'"

"Well, Mr. Kesteven," said the President, when his guest had read the message and was looking at him eye to eye with a note of interrogation in each of his own, "I should like your opinion on that."

"It is just about a month ago, Mr. President," said Kesteven, sitting down again and taking a long pull at his cigar, "that I had a conversation on board the *Isola* with my late friend and partner Staunton, during which conversation I resigned."

"Your late partner, Mr. Kesteven?" echoed the President; "then am I to understand that you had a share in the world-wide fraud which this mysterious message tells us about?"

"That's as it may be, Mr. President," said Kesteven, getting up from his seat and facing squarely. "But, anyhow, I am doing neither the United States nor any other power or community of people any harm just now, and I don't propose to, chiefly because my girl Cora is going to become a Grand Duchess within the next month. That is why I want to give you my word as a man and an American citizen that at present I have no hand in this game. Further, under certain conditions, I am ready to do all I can to convince Staunton that he must let up on this Nicaraguan business. How will that do for the present?"

"We may as well let it go at that, I guess. I think you were wrong, very wrong, but Bryan and the silver people call what you've been doing sound finance. I'm not making any friends with coiners and counterfeiters; but if the son of my old friend Kesteven tells me that he has cut this business and will help in what may be necessary to get this thing straightened out, we'll shake."

Kesteven at once held out his hand and said:

"My word of honour on that, sir. I'll help all I can but you must let me do it in the way that I think best."

"Very well," replied the President. "I shall trust you implicitly, but we haven't got to forget that other vessels, warships of half a dozen nations, maybe, have most likely picked up this message by now."

"That's so, sir," replied Kesteven, "and that, it appears at present, is just where my late partner is going to find trouble."

"Yes," said the President. "If you'll excuse me saying so, there's a heap of difference between a man who creates a new world-power on ordinary political lines and a common swindler who finances the racket on bogus coin and bad notes—a man, in short, who has cheated pretty well all the civilised nations of the world. That man, it seems to me, isn't going to find much recognition, except as an enemy of Society. When this gets known, as it probably is now, the United States of South America won't have a friend on earth."

"That's so, sir. I tried to tell him what kind of fool he was to do that with Ellerton, but he wouldn't have it. Now, I guess, he's going to have it somewhere about where the turkey got the axe."

THIRTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.

On the "Isola" Again.

"WELL, Ramiero, it seems that you were right after all When one begins empire-making, half measures are worse than useless. In this case it looks very much as though they were going to be something like ruinous.

"What luck!" continued Staunton. "Here I am, or at least a few hours ago I was, President of the United States of South America with a million men, the best fighters on earth, behind me, and a hundred and fifty warships ready to go anywhere, do anything if I gave the word. And what am I now? Why, in a few hours I shall be nothing better than a hunted criminal—for that's all the world will think me now. It's hard, Ramiero, most fearfully hard. Twenty-four hours ago I had realised the ideal of my life. I had made a whole continent full of warring little states what might have been the nucleus of one of the most splendid empires on earth, and here, just at the twelfth hour, the whole fabric of my life's work tumbles into ruins——"

"Yes, Señor," replied Don Ramiero, his voice shaking with real sorrow, "it would seem that that is so. And yet, if I may say so, at present this is not quite the question. The real question is, what is to be done? Are you absolutely convinced that you cannot trust these people?"

"Trust them?" cried Staunton with a savage laugh. "About as much as I ought to have trusted Billaud, and that was not at all. As long as I could supply them with unlimited money, they would work for me and never ask where it came from, but now that these infernal messages of Ellerton's have exposed me as a coiner and a counterfeiter from one end of civilisation to the other, all is different!"

"No, my friend, as far as I'm concerned, the game is up. I can't fight the fleets of the world with an unarmed yacht, whatever I could have done with the armies and fleets of the late South American Republic. No, that dream is over, and done with—an empire lost by a single mistake. I have a few millions left, which may not be much good to me now, but I would give all them to go back to that day when you advised me to kill Ellerton—and take your advice."

"Alas, Señor!" said Valdez, shaking his head slowly. "The mill will never grind with the water that is past, and it is

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no use talking about that. What is lost, is lost. The only question now is, how much can be saved? You have still an empire left, unapproachable and impregnable—and you have a vessel which nothing afloat can catch."

Staunton leant back in his chair with his eyes closed, taking long pulls at his cigar, and there was silence for a few minutes, during which he saw the most crucial events of his life pass in swift procession before the windows of his soul.

He saw himself, the convict labourer, working in the Chincha Islands. Then came the whale-boat, and that stroke of the axe which had proved so fateful.

Then the scene shifted from the Pacific to Lady Medcalf-Mears' drawing-room, and from there to the lanes about Cricklewood—then back again to where he was sitting now, and he heard Don Ramiero's voice suggesting that Wilfrid Ellerton should be abolished. If he had only taken that advice! He had taken the wrong turn and he had lost everything. That was all.

The swiftly flitting visions passed. He raised his eyelids and said slowly:

"Yes, I see what you mean, and, after all, the Underworld would be better for us than penal servitude, or a quick transition to another world—which I suppose it would come to in the end. We could also find out how Master Ellerton has managed to make these mysterious signals, and, yes, the possibilities are almost infinite. Yes, friend Ramiero, you are right."

"That, Señor," replied Valdez slowly, "is most true. If, as you say, life in the over-world becomes either impossible or too unpleasant to be supported, why should you not make, as you might do, a paradise of that other world which is wholly yours?"

"Is it?" replied Staunton, lifting his eyelids again. "Do you feel quite sure of that? I don't see myself how there is going to be any certainty on that score until we know how Ellerton has managed to get those messages of his into this world. Can't you see that it must have been either a miracle or a conspiracy, and—well—there you are. If it's a miracle we have another difficulty, and perhaps other dangers to face, but if it is a conspiracy may the Fates do so to me and more also if a man of them escapes the Lake."

"It would be nothing less than their deserts, Señor," replied Valdez, looking at his master's face, and picturing him standing on the ledge above the boiling sulphurous waters, watching each of the culprits brought up, and pronouncing sentence of death.

"Very well, then," said Staunton getting up again, "this time I will take your advice, my friend, and I think the sooner we get out the better. I hope you didn't forget about the coal and the oil fuel."

"No, Señor, the vessel is filled to the decks with them."

"Very well," said Staunton, ringing the telephone bell, "then we may as well start at once."

"Ask Captain Durtal to come aft at once," he said, "as soon as he can."

"He will be with you in a moment, sir," replied Darfield's voice over the wire.

Then a few minutes later there came a rap at the outside door, and Don Ramiero pulled the lever. The Captain came in as the doors opened.

"Captain," said Staunton, "it appears that we have got into a rather bad place, and so I have decided to get out of it as quickly as possible. How are you provided with fuel?"

"I have obeyed your instructions, sir," replied the captain. "The coal bunkers are full to the last pound, and so are the oil tanks."

"Then up-anchor as quietly as you can, put every light out, and get outside as soon as you can. As soon as you get under weigh, see that the guns are in order, and that there's plenty of ammunition at hand. I don't want to have trouble with anyone, but you may as well be prepared. Besides, we shall probably have to pick up some coal on the way home, but just now the principal thing is for you to get out of Rio Bay as quick as your luck will let you."

"But the fleet, sir!" exclaimed the captain, his eyes opening wide with amazement.

"It is quite possible, my dear Durtal," replied Staunton, biting off the end of a cigar, "that if we are not outside within half an hour, not only the fleet, but the forts as well, will open fire, and smash the *Isola* into scrap-iron. I will explain things more fully afterwards, for the present it will be enough if I tell you that Mr. Ellerton has somehow found the means of giving away part of the secret of the Underworld, and that the Bay of Rio, with all these warships and forts about us, is just as unhealthy a place as we can be in."

The Captain's eyes widened again for a moment, then he pulled himself up, saluted, and said:

"It is not for me to ask questions, sir; your orders shall be obeyed. In an hour the *Isola* shall be twenty miles away in the Atlantic."

"Very well," replied Staunton, and the sooner the better."

The *Isola* was lying in the lower part of the harbour of Rio de Janeiro, about half way between Point Calhabouco on the Rio side, and Fort Gravata on the Nitheroy side; in front of her was the fortified island of Villegayon. A couple of miles ahead was the Island of Lage, also fortified, which forms a triangle with Fort San Joao to the west, and Fort Santa Cruz to the east. Four battleships, ten cruisers, and fifteen destroyers were ranged in three long lines on the Rio side, with the exception of a couple of destroyers, which were prowling to and fro across the bay, and down towards the forts to the southward. Altogether, granting that Staunton's suspicions were correct, and that the news from the Underworld had changed his late friends and subjects into enemies, it was a particularly tight place to get out of.

"Well, friend Ramiero, I suppose we may as well go and see the fun, if there's going to be any," he said, throwing the doors open. "The probability is that some of them will begin to shoot when the lights go out, so I think I'd better go and take command."

"As for me, Señor," said Valdez, following him, "where you go I go, and if it is a case of sinking, my place should be by your side."

"And so it shall be, my father's friend—and mine," replied Staunton, laying his hand on his shoulder, with a rare gesture of emotion. "Come up on to the bridge with me—and—yes, why should not our guests come and see the fun as well? Our good friend Smith-de-Ronski might bring his fiddle up and play us an accompaniment to the music of the guns. Suppose you were to go below and present the invitation with my compliments."

"Ah, Señor," murmured Valdez, laying his hand on Staunton's arm with an inimitably Spanish gesture, "that is how I love to see you best. Even as your father was always greatest in the

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darkest hour and the deadliest danger. But, if I may advise, do not entertain our guests until we are safe outside. The men would do anything to have us caught, and the women, as we know, have nerves of steel, and, remember, that a single shout, even the striking of a match, might ruin everything. No, no, let them stop in their cabins until we are once more free on the Atlantic. Think only what a single shell might do."

"It might not be a very bad way out of the trouble after all," laughed Staunton as they went forward; "but, still, I think you are right, and I'm not going to risk ignoring your advice again."

When they reached the bridge they found Captain Durtal in charge, with Darfield forward in the bows, and the second officer aft. It was now almost midnight. The sky was covered with a dense curtain of clouds which had been gathering during the afternoon and evening, and already a few drops of rain were splashing heavily on the decks.

"Excellent! Could not have been better! The best thing that could happen to us would be a regular deluge. I don't care so much for their guns as long as they can't use their searchlights. Are you ready to let go?"

"Everything is ready, sir," replied the captain. "The men are at the guns in case it is necessary to shoot back, we have a full head of steam on, and I can give you thirty knots within ten minutes, and thirty-five within fifteen."

"Very good," said Staunton, going to the engine telegraph and taking hold of the handle. "Slip your cables, and then out lights. Ah, here comes the rain; now catch us who can!"

As he spoke the bottom seemed to fall out of the firmament. A blast of wind burst out of the north-east and came howling across the bay, driving the rain in hissing sheets before them. Instantly the lights of the city, and the electric sparks which showed where the warships lay, were blotted out, and at the same moment those of the *Isola* disappeared, and the cable was slipped.

"Come and take the wheel, Durtal," commanded Staunton shortly; "keep her due south, if we don't get out in this squall we never will, but as long as they can't see us they daren't shoot for fear of hitting each other or the town."

Captain Durtal touched his dripping cap and went into the wheel-house. Staunton swung the telegraph-handle over at full speed. The bell tinkled its answer, a broad sheet of foam sprang out from under the *Isola's* stern, only to be beaten down the next instant by the wind-driven floods of rain. The beautiful fabric of the yacht shuddered for a moment, and then, as the thrill of the engine woke her into life, she leapt away into the darkness and the storm, heading due south for the entrance to the bay.

The rapidly blurring lines of light on either hand and behind were suddenly drowned in a flood of white, misty light, which seemed to take the form of luminous clouds flung up from the sea into the sky. In an instant they were all round the *Isola*, and she was flying through them, a white, swiftly-gliding, ghostly shape, her propellers flinging the water far astern until she was flying at nearly forty miles an hour through the screaming, pelting storm.

"I thought so," laughed Staunton to Valdez, who was clinging, drenched and shivering, to the bridge rail. "Just in time. My luck again, Ramiero, if we had waited till to-morrow morning we'd have had them all round us, and it would have been a case of sinking or surrender, and that, of course would be quite impossible, considering that we have got nearly all the witnesses for the prosecution on board with us. No, it's neck or nothing now; in the morning it would have been nothing. We have the advantage of the alternative now."

Bang—bang—bang—thrurraddud—dudd—dud—deraud, dud-a-duud.

"Yes, I thought so," he shouted through the storm into Ramiero's ear, "there's proof positive that we were right in getting out, I wonder what they think they are shooting at?"

The crash of the big guns, and the thudding roar of the smaller artillery, were already mingling with the howling of the storm as Staunton said this. He had again pulled up the handle of the telegraph, and rammed it down to full speed, and a quarter-master had been sent below to order the engine-room staff to do their best if they wanted to get out of a very tight place. The fire grates were kept heaped with coals, and from the tops of the furnaces the spray pipes poured an incessant shower of vapourised oil. The boilers throbbed and panted as though they were living organisms, working to the extremity of their power. The steam roared through the turbines, and the three propellers whirled faster and faster until the dim white shape was tearing through the waters at more than forty miles an hour, the crash of the guns and the screaming of the shells growing ever fainter and fainter astern."

"Ah, look, look, Señor!" yelled Valdez, pointing ahead. "There is a destroyer crossing our bows!"

Staunton looked up, and saw a dimly outlined black shape, with four flaming funnels, shooting out from Fort San Joao.

"Well, if he wants it, I suppose he'll have to have it," he shouted shrilly, for the ecstasy of battle had got hold of him now.

He took a whistle out of his pocket, flung open the door of the wheel-house, and shouted:

"Three degrees starboard, run her down."

He ran back to the rail, bending down, fighting against the hurricane that was sweeping across the bridge, pulled his revolver out of his hip pocket, and fired three shots in the air. They cracked out distinctly through the dull roar of the storm, and the next instant the two twelve-pounder quick firing guns, which had been mounted on either side of the *Isola's* forecastle, and a couple of Maxims on either side of the short bowsprit, began to roar, and rattle, and thump, pouring their seven hundred shots a minute at the black shape looming up ahead.

One or two white flashes gleamed out from her decks, contrasting strangely with the red glare of her funnels. Two silvery shapes leapt from her deck, plunged into the water, and just as Captain Durtal screwed his wheel over and the *Isola's* head came round, the two torpedoes passed harmlessly to right and left. The next moment the over-arching prow of the thousand-ton yacht hit the destroyer amidships. There was a slight check lasting only for an instant, and the *Isola*, travelling now at nearly forty-five miles an hour, passed over the divided hull of the destroyer amidst clouds of steam from her broken boilers, grated over the fragments of the wreck, and vanished into the storm and darkness to the southward.

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THIRTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.
Another Consignment for the Underworld.

THE next day all the world knew that the *Isola*, thanks to the foresight, the almost miraculous intuition of her owner, and a marvellously fortunate combination of atmospheric conditions, had escaped from the Bay of Rio de Janeiro shortly after midnight; in other words, on the morning of the day on which he and his fellow-criminals manning the yacht were to have been captured and handed over to the tender mercies of that society which for the last ten years they had fleeced with such consummate skill, that they had only just come to be suspected.

Everything had been arranged to perfection, at least so those who made the arrangements thought.

The President of the United States of North America had been proved to be perfectly right when he said to Kesteven that, although the Great Powers might recognise the maker of a New World Power created by legitimate means, they would not have anything to do with the man who had made the necessary millions by utterly illegal means. And so the President of the United States of South America had become an outlaw.

The question which the civilised world began to ask itself as soon as the cables had conveyed the news of the escape from Rio to the capitals of Europe and America, was: "What is he going to do with the yacht?"

It was generally admitted by this time that she possessed powers of speed and apparently of coal endurance which put her capture, even by the fastest warships, out of the question. She might keep the fleets of the world on a chase for years, and then not get caught, and yet until she was caught there was no chance of solving the mystery of that Underworld, from which Wilfrid Ellerton's messages had been received by nearly every ship in the northern hemisphere which was fitted with the Marconi apparatus. If he could only have given the exact latitude and longitude, the matter would have been simplified to a certain extent, but even then the problem of communication would remain unsolved until the *Isola* was caught. She was the only possible link between the two worlds, and it was, therefore, obviously necessary to catch her, which was about as difficult a task as the united navies of the world could have set themselves to do.

At six o'clock on the morning after her escape the *Isola* was steaming north-eastward from Rio about five hundred miles from the coast. It was a lovely morning, and as Staunton came up on deck he felt in quite a good humour with himself and the world, in spite of the fact that forty-eight hours ago he had had an empire, and that now he was an outlaw. His guests, who had not been allowed to appear on deck since the arrival at Rio, had now been given the freedom of the ship, and Dennison and Mr. Smith, who had now dispensed with his disguise, lost no time in availing themselves of it. In fact, Staunton had not been many minutes on deck before they came towards him on the promenade deck.

"Good-morning," said Dennison, flicking the ash of his cigarette overboard. "I am so sorry you didn't let us see the fun last night. We heard the guns going, and there was something in the way of a collision, wasn't there? We felt down in our cabins a nasty shock."

"Yes, Mr. Dennison, I suppose you did, and I must apologise for not being able to give you what I have no doubt would have been a very pleasurable experience. M. de Ronski might also have enjoyed it."

"I think we may as well drop that *alias* now, Mr. Isolo Staunton, otherwise Zuarez, since it appears that we have found each other out," replied Mr. Smith, "but I don't think that even you ought to forget that I've got a wife and daughter on board this precious craft of yours. Don't you think that even you are playing the game pretty low down?"

Staunton leant back against the rail and laughed.

"And what should I say in answer to that to a detective who accepted my hospitality and brought the said wife and daughter on board my ship to take part in a concert with the purpose of trapping me—me. Really, Mr. Smith, and

(*Continued on page 30*)

Hidden Treasure.

FOR a thing to be very difficult to obtain is to many people a great incentive to go in pursuit of it. Some clever brains have worn themselves out, and capitalists have been known to waste their fortunes, in the vain endeavour to discover perpetual motion. There are men in the world who will dig industriously for long periods in hope to unearth buried treasure, of the whereabouts of which there exists no certain knowledge, who cannot be induced to move one clod of earth for purposes of agriculture. It is a strange fallacy, this preference for what is speculative. Minds so constituted are generally neglectful of what they have while seeking for what they have not, like the Cornish peasant, who searched the road near Launceston all night in a drenching rain for a purse that had been lost. The peasant found the purse, was rewarded with £5, and caught such a chill that he died three weeks later.

Of all treasures, whether hidden or apparent, health is out of all proportion greatest. He who has it not wants everything. Its happy possessor is more than anyone a person to be envied. By preventing or curing indigestion (the first sign of many physical wrecks), Mother Seigel's Syrup has more than anything conferred the blessing of health upon the people of England. "Five years ago, when I was living at Grimsby," writes Mrs. Epton, of Bridge Street, Burgh-in-Marsh, Lincs., on August 18th, 1903, "I had the misfortune to take a chill. That was the beginning of my troubles. My appetite fell away until I could hardly look at food, and I used to eat barely sufficient to keep me alive. I had always a pain at the stomach, and sometimes between the shoulders, which food seemed to make worse. This, and a violent cough, prevented me sleeping at night, so that I became extremely weak. My doctor could do nothing for me but advise rest.

"Such was my condition for two months, when my husband, observing that I made no progress towards recovery, advised me to obtain a bottle of Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. He had recently read of some remarkable cures effected by that medicine. Though I had tried many patent medicines without avail, I agreed to buy a bottle, and my health began to improve from the first dose I took. I could now sleep soundly and awake refreshed. Five bottles were sufficient to complete my cure. My lost weight returned, and my health has since been excellent. My husband believes that it saved my life."

Mr. Epton was right. Instead of recommending to his wife new and doubtful preparations, he wisely advised resort to what has long been an acknowledged household treasure.

A Case for a Higher Court.

IN Paris in 1764 occurred one of those dramatic tragedies such as only take place in France. A young and beautiful lady publicly accused an officer of doing her a grievous wrong; but the court dismissed the case. A few minutes afterwards the lady, remarking that the case should now be tried by a higher tribunal, shot first the officer and then herself. The remedy is indeed a desperate one where they who apply it must needs succumb. Yet that is what often takes place as a result of using improper medicines. "About five years ago I began to suffer from Indigestion and Biliousness, and for eighteen months my life was a misery. My illness began with flatulence and pains in the stomach. I was hardly free from drowsiness and a sick, bilious feeling, and suffered acutely from headaches and dizziness. Nothing I tried did me any real good, until I commenced taking Mother Seigel's Syrup. Then I began to mend. The medicine seemed to put new life into me, and in an astonishingly short time I was quite restored to health. Nurse Douglass, 3 Cromwell Road, Redhill, Surrey."

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you too, Mr. Dennison, surely if you did know as much as you thought you did about your host, you would hardly have walked open-eyed into such a simple little trap as that. To put it quite plainly, you two gentlemen and possibly Madame de Ronski and Mademoiselle Paula, with the assistance of your friend Monsieur Trapané, and my late assistant, Doctor Billaud, thought that you had caught me in the Bay of Nice. You did not. We have since been in the Bay of Funchal, and we have lately left the Bay of Rio de Janeiro, and, you see, I am not caught yet."

"And *we* are," replied Mr. Smith, with a coolness of manner which Staunton did not quite understand.

Dennison strolled over to the other side of the deck and threw the end of his cigarette overboard. When he came back he said, with a nonchalance which Staunton liked even less than the *sangfroid* of Mr. Smith:

"Would it be trespassing too far on your hospitality, Mr. Staunton, if I were to ask you whether it isn't about first drink time? I should like a cocktail, and I shouldn't wonder if my colleague could also do with one. We seem travelling pretty fast, and the breeze, which this wonderful craft of yours makes, is just a trifle chilly."

"Ah," exclaimed Staunton, with a genuine admiration, "what I could have done if I had only had a couple of iron-nerved men like you to help me, but, of course, that is impossible now. Come to the smoking-room and we'll have our cocktails."

If a stranger had been present that morning at breakfast in the saloon of the *Isola*, he or she would not have had the slightest notion of the tragedies which were working underneath the surface of the pleasant, easy manners of host and guests. It would have been impossible to guess that the host was the jailor and that the guests were prisoners, over whom he held absolute power of life and death.

For all that such a stranger would have seen, the flight of the *Isola* from Rio to the Underworld was nothing more than a yachting trip under the most pleasant conditions. Everybody on board appeared to be the best of friends with everyone else, so much so indeed that one night, after a most charming dinner, Staunton had been intoxicated by his prisoners with the magic of sweet sounds. Don Ramiero said to him over their last cigar in the Council Chamber:

"Does it not seem to you, Señor, that these guests of yours take their present circumstances a little too easily?"

"By which you mean, my friend—"

"That there may be something," replied Don Ramiero, very slowly between the puffs of his cigar, "that neither you nor I may know anything about. On the other hand, of course, I am obliged to admit that they may be people of such perfect sense that they're able to accept the circumstances of their present condition as though they were quite normal. That, of course, is only a suggestion, Señor."

"And not at all a bad suggestion either," replied Staunton. "They may be resigned to their fates and awaiting developments, or they may be gambling on the impossible, but as long as the one essential is impossible for them—as long as they can't get weapons, what does it matter what they are thinking about? I could strangle both the men at once, and, as for the women, of course they wouldn't count in any trouble of that sort. And once we have the lot down in the Underworld—well, those who live will see.

It so happened that while this conversation was taking place in the Council Chamber, and while Captain Durtal was on the bridge, Darfield went into Dennison's state-room, and, after closing the door carefully, put a brown leather hand-bag on the sofa, and said:

"Well, sir, there's my part of the contract. Five Mauser pistols, and two-hundred rounds of ammunition; you understand that I'm doing this for my wife's sake, not my own."

"I quite see what you mean," replied Dennison, taking an envelope out of the inside pocket of his dress-jacket. "It is very curious how this affair has got mixed up. This man Staunton, a sort of world-wide swindler, and until just now our jailor, holding our lives in his hands. On the other side, Mercedes in love, and as it would seem, desperately so, with the man whom he meant to either murder or abolish. Your wife chosen among all the nurses of Edinburgh to nurse her through the illness which was caused by the disappearance. She becomes devoted to her patient, and therefore our friend Staunton has got to disappear in such fashion that the world will never know what has become of him. That, I take it, about the situation."

"It is," replied Darfield, almost in a whisper, "it is, I have promised Janet, and, as you know, I could not break my word to her. From now until the end, whatever it may be, I am under the orders of yourself and Mr. Smith."

"Very well, then," said Dennison, giving him the envelope. "You can leave the rest to us. If we put this little adventure through successfully, we guarantee that you shall be a free man, as soon as you land on civilised soil. We are not going to distrust the man who is the husband of such a woman as your wife, whatever blunder he may have made a few years ago. You know just as well as I do that we are just now in a mess that none of us may get out of alive, and so it's just a case of trusting life for life."

"And I, sir," replied Darfield, taking a little glass tube full of white pellets out of his waistcoat pocket, "am the last man on board this ship to mistake your meaning. If you see any sign of me turning traitor, shoot me, and if our adventure, as you call it, does not come off all right, and I have no chance of going back to the old life with Janet, I have got these, and I shall use them."

"That's quite enough, Mr. Darfield," said Dennison, holding out his hand. "I entirely believe you, and so does Mr. Smith. You stand by us, and if we worry through this business alive, you shall find yourself as good a man as ever you were. Perhaps a better one."

"I hope so, sir," said the other one humbly, as he gripped his hand, "if not, I should have no hope of being worthy to be her husband again."

"Keep that thought in your mind," said Dennison, returning his grip, "and we shall get through all right. But, anyhow, living or dead, you will be found worthy of her, when the general balance-sheet is struck, and we all get what we have earned."

"Those are the best words I've heard since Janet spoke to me last. Good night, sir. It wouldn't do for me to be in your room too long," replied Darfield, opening the door, and closing it behind him, without a sound.

(The conclusion of this splendid serial will appear next week.)

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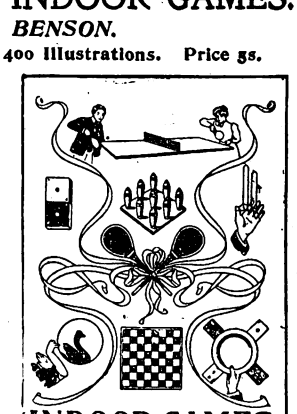

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Kissing Cousins.

"WHAT is the law about kissing cousins?" asks "ARTHUR," who has several very charming girl relations, whom he often visits.

* * * * *

There is no law about it, "ARTHUR." It depends so much on the cousins. If you have known each other since childhood, the kiss seems a harmless enough thing. If you have only got intimate with them of late years, then kissing should go by instinct. You are not in duty bound to kiss a girl-cousin, neither are you prevented from doing so. It entirely depends on how much you know each other, and if the desire to kiss is mutual and harmless.

Cure for Shyness.

"WHAT is the best cure for shyness in a girl?" asks "MABEL," who is very awkward in the presence of the opposite sex, so doesn't make very much progress in securing a lover.

* * * * *

You'll grow out of it, "MABEL." You would be surprised how a few years change shy girls. Some of the boldest young ladies of twenty-two were very shy at sixteen or seventeen. A very good cure for serious shyness is to keep the mind well occupied at all times, and to read a good deal. If you meet a man, and find it awkward to keep a conversation going, it is always a good idea to know something about books, or other subjects, so that you are not at a loss for a topic.

Returning a Ring.

"FIVE and a half years ago," writes "BEREAVED," "I was engaged to a girl, to whom I gave, of course, a ring, and some other small presents, including—a locket. Six months after our engagement she died, and as her 'intended' I expected something to be sent me as a memento. This I never got, though I remained on the best terms with her parents. They have now gone to another town, since when I have not seen them. I would like your advice as to whether the ring and locket ought not to be returned to me. There are still two or three sisters in the family, and I believe they are using the articles themselves."

* * * * *

I certainly think the parents ought to have sent you a memento. As to returning the ring, I suppose that is for them to decide. It would seem a very natural thing to do, but perhaps the sisters you speak of may only have kept it themselves because they valued it as a token. If that is so, you can scarcely formally demand its return. If you can see them, you might gently hint that you expected to have the ring back, but it is a thing that requires delicate handling.

The Girl Slanderer.

"WHAT am I to do in the following case?" asks "C. V." "I met a girl some years ago, who always seemed very friendly to me. I did not admire her in any serious way, it is true, but always made myself agreeable. Some time ago, I heard from a friend that she had been making the most slanderous statements about me, without cause. Yet when I met her afterwards she seemed as amiable as ever. How should one treat a girl like that?"

* * * * *

Of course you do not know definitely what statements she made about you. Perhaps somebody misunderstood her, or she merely said something in a frivolous way, without intending to do you injury. Your best course would be to continue being as amiable as possible. If she dislikes you, or wishes to do you an injury, you can only cure the feeling by showing her that she has misjudged you.

From the Far West.

I AM always glad to hear from Colonial correspondents. "PRAIRIE FLOWER" writes me from Winnipeg, Canada: "Is it unusual for a young woman to marry a man three years younger than herself? A young man I am very fond of wants me to become his wife, but I am twenty-seven, and he is only twenty-four. Would it be right to marry one so much younger?" The second question is: "How can I get rid of superfluous hair on my face without hurting my complexion?"

* * * * *

In answer to your first question, I do not think the difference in your ages need affect your marriage. Three years is not a great deal under the circumstances, and I advise you to marry the man you love. As to your other question, "Isobel," of *Pearson's Weekly*, tells me that she thinks the only permanent cure for superfluous hair is the operation of electrolysis, which I imagine would not be very possible in so far away a place as yours. I am, however, sending you by post the name of a treatment which is recommended, and can be prescribed for those at a distance. These questions, of course, do not come into my sphere, but in the case of so far away a reader, I am pleased to make a departure.

An Extravagant Youth.

"REFORMER" writes, "I am twenty-two, of good parentage, and in a good profession. But, unfortunately, I am rather extravagant and too fond of pleasure and do not value money as I should. I feel that if I made the acquaintance of a young lady of similar age, of an affectionate and thoughtful disposition, it would be a turning-point in my life, and that I should not feel the desire for pleasure and extravagance. Would you advise me to advertise for such a girl?"

* * * * *

When a man's tastes are extravagant, love affairs are not usually very economical. It simply means that you will have more cause for extravagance. If you met a girl of the very economical type you might be cured; but, somehow, I don't think that kind of girl *does* often reform an extravagant man. In any case, nobody can do himself harm by meeting the right sort of girl. I don't recommend your advertising, as I always think a young man ought to be able to meet a girl socially. The girl who answers matrimonial advertisements may not be quite all that is to be desired. I advise you to wait until you get to know some nice girl in the ordinary way. As to your extravagance, I think I should try a little strength of mind and common sense, and not look to a girl to keep you from the habit.

Cynthia

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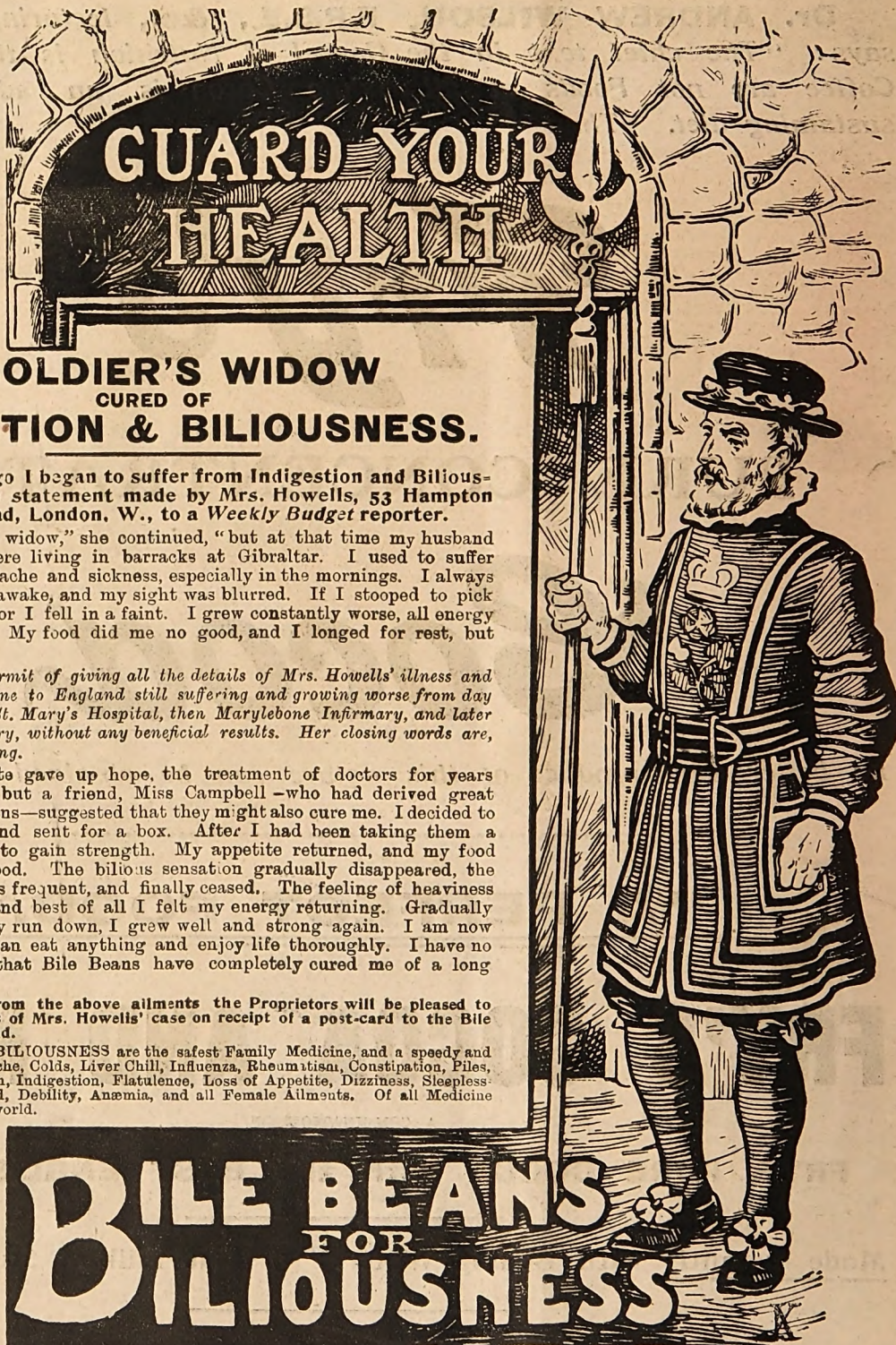

A SOLDIER'S WIDOW
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INDIGESTION & BILIOUSNESS.

"SEVEN years ago I began to suffer from Indigestion and Biliousness," is the statement made by Mrs. Howells, 53 Hampton Street, Harrow Road, London, W., to a *Weekly Budget* reporter.

"I am a soldier's widow," she continued, "but at that time my husband was alive, and we were living in barracks at Gibraltar. I used to suffer continually from headache and sickness, especially in the mornings. I always felt more asleep than awake, and my sight was blurred. If I stooped to pick anything from the floor I fell in a faint. I grew constantly worse, all energy seemed to leave me. My food did me no good, and I longed for rest, but could find none."

Space will not permit of giving all the details of Mrs. Howells' illness and cure, how she came home to England still suffering and growing worse from day to day, went first into St. Mary's Hospital, then Marylebone Infirmary, and later to Paddington Infirmary, without any beneficial results. Her closing words are, however, worth recording.

"I believe I quite gave up hope, the treatment of doctors for years having been useless, but a friend, Miss Campbell—who had derived great benefit from Bile Beans—suggested that they might also cure me. I decided to give them a trial, and sent for a box. After I had been taking them a little while I began to gain strength. My appetite returned, and my food seemed to do me good. The bilious sensation gradually disappeared, the headaches became less frequent, and finally ceased. The feeling of heaviness and dullness left me, and best of all I felt my energy returning. Gradually from being completely run down, I grew well and strong again. I am now completely restored, can eat anything and enjoy life thoroughly. I have no hesitation in saying that Bile Beans have completely cured me of a long and serious illness."

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SHORT STORIES

No. 784.] Week ending January 9, 1904. [Price One Penny.

"THE CARDS FORETELL YOUR DEATH IS IMMINENT."

(A Striking Incident from the Story, "JUST IN TIME." See inside.)

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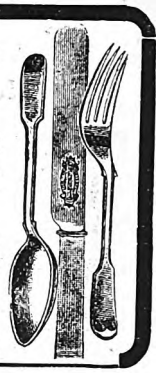

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BODLEIAN 16.1.1904

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Short Stories

No. 784.] [One Penny.

For the Week Ending January 9th, 1904.

JUST IN TIME.

Telling How a Fortune-Teller Saved Her Lover From Death.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

"You can't do better than have Laurence Wilding for the mural paintings."

Lady Blanche Hargreaves spoke with her usual decision, and looked so convinced of her own infallibility that it required some strength of mind to differ from her. She was a pretty little widow of eight or nine-and-twenty, whose soft, wildflower face concealed an iron will.

"He did you very well, certainly," replied her visitor thoughtfully. "I know you recommend him everywhere."

"I've taken him up," proclaimed Lady Blanche. "He's doing Lord Warner's house now, and making a grand success of it. You try him, Florence, or, rather, get your husband to try him."

Lady Blanche had rather a contempt for women hampered with husbands, and seemed to regard her own early widowhood as a proof of sagacity.

"I think I can manage it," returned Mrs. Deering. "There is another thing I wanted to ask you, Blanche. I want some special attraction for my garden-party next month. Can you suggest anything?"

"Have Stella. She's coming to the front as a fortune-teller of the old-fashioned sort. She isn't a crystal-gazer or a palmist or medium, she just "lays the cards" as the gipsies call it. She's very clever, really. My maid, Parry, first told me of her. It seems she had been to her and had heard of wonderful things. I sent for Stella and she really told me some most extraordinary truths."

"That she had heard from Parry," interpolated the sceptical Mrs. Deering.

"No, indeed, things Parry knew nothing about. So I've taken Stella up, and I've introduced her to lots of people and got her heaps of engagements. You'll try her, won't you, Florrie?"

"Let me have her proper name and address later on, and I'll write to her. But I want to know more about Laurence Wilding. How did you pick him up?"

Lady Blanche blushed a sudden vivid scarlet.

"I heard of him as a clever artist," she replied somewhat evasively, "and I wrote to him about the mural paintings for my dining-room. He was so successful that I recommended him everywhere, and now he is very well known."

"Yes, I've heard him called 'Lady Blanche Hargreaves' tame artist,'" observed Mrs. Deering drily. "Isn't he awfully handsome?"

The door was thrown open at this moment with the announcement: "Mr. Wilding"—and a young man, not so much handsome as distinguished in appearance, advanced eagerly to greet Lady Blanche.

"We were talking of Stella, the fortune-teller," observed Lady Blanche, after greetings and introductions were over. "Mrs. Deering thinks of engaging her for her garden-party."

"Have you, too, consulted Stella, Mr. Wilding?" laughed Mrs. Deering.

The young man shook his head.

"I'm afraid I'm a thorough sceptic in those matters," he replied.

"Yes, you won't even investigate," cried Lady Blanche. "Now, why won't you go and interview Stella and test her for yourself? Then you could let Mrs. Deering know if you thought she ought to try Stella at her entertainment or not."

"Oh, do, Mr. Wilding," chimed in Mrs. Deering. "I could so rely on your report. Dear Lady Blanche is perhaps rather easily carried away in such matters, but a keen, cool unbeliever like yourself is not to be deluded. Do promise me to go at once and let me have a full, true, and particular account."

"You can't go at once," said Lady Blanche. "You must first write and make an appointment. She has a room in Tottenham Court Road, where she meets people, and where her letters are sent, but she doesn't live there."

"You will write at once and make an appointment, won't you?" cried Mrs. Deering impulsively.

Laurence promised, and the conversation drifted into other channels. Now that Mrs. Deering had seen the young artist, she was anxious to secure his services for the decoration of her drawing-room, but Laurence was unable to undertake any more commissions for some time to come. He was not dependent on his art for a livelihood, as he possessed a very comfortable fortune of his own; therefore the fact that he was rapidly becoming the fashion, and could command what prices he liked for his work, was of less importance to him than it would have been to many men. He looked a thoroughly happy, contented, prosperous young fellow, as, having secured an

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appointment with Stella, he strode along to the fateful interview with the fortune-teller.

He was in excellent spirits. Everything was going well with him, and his prospects were rosy. He was not in love with Lady Blanche Hargreaves, but he admired her very much, and he felt that he could make her an excellent husband. Without being a coxcomb, he could not help seeing that she was very fond of him, and if he chose to ask her to marry him, there would be no difficulties.

She was a widow and absolutely her own mistress; he had no near relations to interfere. Her fortune was not a temptation to him, for his own means were ample, but he was an ardent lover of beauty, and Lady Blanche was exquisitely pretty, with her fair curls and blush-rose face, lit up by velvety brown eyes.

He had no belief or even interest in any method of foretelling the future, and there was a very supercilious smile on his lips as he entered the bare little room where the sorceress awaited him.

He was going through this farce to oblige Lady Blanche and her friend, and he cared little how obvious was his disdain of the folly.

A tall, slender woman came forward at his entrance. She was robed in a black silk garment, which fell in graceful folds from her throat to her feet. Her face was almost startling in its beauty and the weird intensity of expression.

She hardly noticed his greeting and explanatory remark, and making no response beyond a slight inclination of her head, moved behind a small table strewn with cards, which she took up and shuffled.

"The usual business," thought Laurence scornfully, as he watched the cards slip through the slim, white fingers. "Now for the inevitable 'a fair lady loves you,' 'You will receive a legacy,' and all the rest of the humbug."

"The cards foretell your death is imminent," said Stella suddenly, in her full, musical, but slightly trembling tones.

"What! My death?" exclaimed Laurence, startled against his will. Then recovering himself, he added smiling: "That is rather unnerving. Tell me some details, please. My death is imminent, you say; from an accident, perhaps? No?" as she shook her head. "Sudden illness, then? Not that either? Violence?" She made a sign in the affirmative. "This grows interesting. Who seeks my death?"

"Your enemy."

"Don't believe I've an enemy in the world," observed Laurence brusquely. "You are mistaken there."

"I am not mistaken," she said, still looking at the cards, as they fell from her hands to the table. "You have an enemy—a man—whom you have baulked in some wish of his three times. He has vowed vengeance. He will have your life, and that shortly."

"How melodramatic! I'm afraid you are on the wrong track, Miss Stella. I can't follow you a bit."

"This man is young, very handsome in a dark Italian style, with—let me see—yes, with a scar on his left cheek. Do you know such a man?"

"By Jove, yes," answered Laurence, interested in spite of himself. "I should say I do. But he's not my enemy; the man I mean, the man with the scar on his cheek is my best friend."

"You have been his successful rival twice in a competition of some kind—painting I should think."

"Well, that's true, but he wasn't unpleasant about it. No one congratulated me more heartily than he did."

"And now you are his rival again, and this time there is a lady in the case. She is very fair and pretty, and he loves beauty; rich, too, and he wants money; she has position and influence, and he would like to be a power in Society. She prefers you, but if you were out of the way, she would, he thinks, turn to him again, for she liked him first. He introduced you to her, and he thinks——"

"Thinks I cut him out," broke in Laurence, laughing. "There is more than witchcraft in this, Miss Stella. You didn't get all that out of the cards, you know. Now, who posted you in my affairs? Tell me honestly?"

"I tell you what the cards tell me," she persisted. "Am I to warn you that you are in serious danger?"

"From good old Pinto? He isn't Italian, by the way, but of Spanish blood, though born and brought up in England. I simply can't believe that he is my enemy or that there is any truth whatever in anything that the cards have told you."

Stella sighed heavily.

"I have done my best," she murmured. "I made this appointment with you that I might get a chance to warn you. I thought perhaps you would believe me."

Laurence had been looking at her steadily for some minutes.

"I thought I had seen you before," he said, "and now I know where it was. It was not you but your portrait. You sat for the girl in that last picture of Pinto's, 'Rest at Eventide,' did you not?"

"Yes, he is a distant relative of mine, and I have acted as his model several times."

Laurence could not have told the reason, but his heart suddenly melted towards this girl with the pale, beautiful face and the pathetic, dark eyes. Something in her appealed to him more strongly than ever Lady Blanche's gay, triumphant beauty had done. He altered his tone.

"I'm sure you really mean kindly towards me," he said. "I suppose you heard Pinto make some nasty remarks about my luck, and, being sensitive and imaginative, you have jumped to the conclusion that he meant to murder me. Rather far-fetched, perhaps, but you are evidently highly strung and nervous. It is good of you to take so much interest in the fate of a complete stranger."

"A complete stranger," she repeated, and for the first time a faint smile parted her lovely lips. "Do you remember the name of Marsden?"

"Marsden? Why, of course I do; my dear old tutor. Can you possibly be—— You must be little Essie Marsden. No wonder I seemed to know your face," and Laurence seized her hand and shook it heartily.

"Yes, I am Esther Marsden, who used to ride on your shoulder, years ago when you were a boy reading with her father, and she was a tiny baby-girl."

"But how is your father? I fancied—— Did I not hear——" Laurence hesitated and stopped.

"Yes, he is dead. He died three years ago, leaving my mother and me almost penniless. She is in such delicate health that I could not leave her to take a situation of any kind, and so I have had to make money as best I could. I have sat as model to Mr. Pinto, taken in art needlework, gone out by the day to do mending, and given lessons on the piano at a shilling an hour. I used often to 'lay the cards' for the amusement of my girl-friends, so one day I thought of doing it for At Homes, bazaars, and so on. I was very successful, and then Lady Blanche Hargreaves was interested in me, and since then I have done very well."

"Poor little Essie," was all Laurence could say, as his thoughts went back to the days of his boyhood, when his tutor's little daughter had been such a cherished household pet, and his own little plaything. How bravely the girl was fighting the battle of life, handicapped as she was by the helpless, invalid mother.

"You will not forget my warning," said Esther, after a pause. "Indeed, *indeed* I have a reason for what I say. Mr.

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Pinto hates you. He thinks Lady Blanche Hargreaves would have accepted him if it had not been for you, and since he has heard of your engagement to her he has been like a madman."

"I am not engaged to Lady Blanche Hargreaves," said Laurence, almost sternly, "nor have I any intention of asking her to be my wife. At the same time, Essie—I may call you Essie, may I not?—I will accept your warning so far that I will be on my guard against Pinto. Not that I believe he would really attempt my life; still, I will be on my guard. Now, dear Essie, I will go, but you will permit me to see you again, won't you? I want to call and see your mother."

Esther hesitated; but knowing the pleasure it would give her mother to see one of the friends of her prosperous days again, she gave the required permission, and, noting the address in his pocket-book, Laurence withdrew.

* * * * * * *

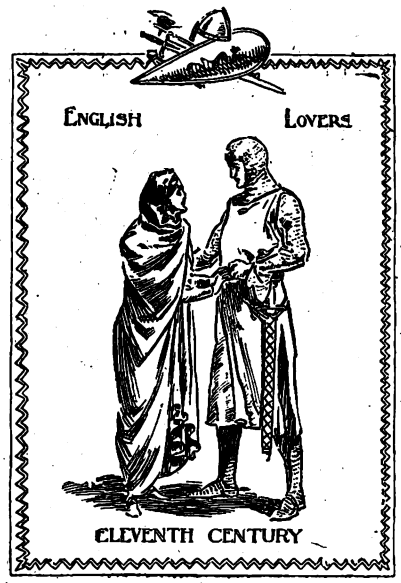
Lady Blanche Hargreaves was in a state of thorough dissatisfaction. The world was decidedly out of joint, and she did not see her way clear to setting it right. Her "tame artist" had deserted her. For weeks she had seen nothing of him, and her friends were beginning to ask questions which she found very disagreeable.

"Stella," too, had turned out most unsatisfactory. The young fortune-teller had refused to attend Mrs. Deering's garden party, and had also declined several other offers of engagements which her would-be patroness had obtained for her, explaining in a brief but courteous note that she no longer attended entertainments or received clients.

"Stella" had, in short, retired into private life, and, angry as that fact made Lady Blanche, she would have been much more wrathful had she had the slightest idea that the unaccountable behaviour of both the recalcitrants was indirectly caused by herself. Had she not joined Mrs. Deering in urging Laurence to consult "Stella," the young artist would never have met his old tutor's daughter again and fallen in love with her.

For Laurence loved Esther with a real, true love, such as he had never felt for Blanche.

He had called on Mrs. Marsden in her dreary lodgings, and been cordially received, for he had been a great favourite in his tutor's household, and the poor invalid was glad to see a friendly face from the happy past.



She confided her troubles to him, and Laurence, who was, though an artist, a keen business man, at once suspected dishonesty on the part of her lawyer. Mrs. Marsden gave him her authority to investigate matters, and he soon found out that she was being cheated by the man who had her small affairs in charge.

Laurence acted with vigour and wisdom, and managed to secure to the widow a yearly income, which, if small, was sufficient to live on in modest comfort.

Thus Esther was enabled to give up her uncongenial work, and devote herself to nursing her mother.

While Laurence was arranging the widow's money matters it was of course necessary, or he thought so, that he should call every day, and every visit deepened his love for Esther.

His heart had never been touched by Blanche. He had admired her, and perhaps his vanity had been flattered by her evident liking for him; but as he contrasted her gay flippancy, her caprice, her petulance, her shallowness, with the noble devotion, the uncomplaining fortitude, the deep feeling shown by Esther, he realised the difference between a true woman and an irresponsible trifler, and knew that what he felt for Esther was indeed love.

Blanche had no way of placing herself again in touch with Laurence except by writing to him, which she was reluctant to do, so she was very gracious to Pinto when he called one afternoon. She knew he was an intimate friend of Laurence Wilding, for it was at one of his studio teas that she had first met Laurence.

Cautiously she introduced his name. Pinto had seen little of his friend lately, he returned carelessly.

"I fancy there is a lady in the case," he added, smiling, and Blanche flushed scarlet. She had never thought of a rival. Eagerly she plied Pinto with questions, which he dexterously parried, contriving to leave her with the impression that he knew very much more than he chose to tell.

"Are you likely to see Mr. Wilding soon?" she asked, as her guest was taking leave.

"I'm going to his studio now," replied Pinto. "Can I give him any message from you?"

Blanche had come to a sudden decision. The idea of a rival was insupportable to her. She must make an effort to win Laurence back.

"Please give him a note from me," she said, and hastily pencilled an urgent request to Laurence to meet her at his studio at five o'clock on the following day.

* * * *

"Shall you be very much disappointed if we put off going to see those pictures till next week, Essie?" asked Laurence anxiously. "To-morrow is my only free day this week, and I have just had a note from Lady Blanche Hargreaves, telling me she will call at my studio to-morrow at three o'clock on urgent business. I think I ought to make a point of being there, for she has been very kind to me, and I have not seen her for five or six weeks now."

"Oh, certainly you must go. Perhaps she wants you to paint something for her."

"Yes, I had better be there. Curious thing. She says 'Mr. Pinto will give you this note,' but it was delivered by a messenger boy. I haven't seen Pinto for quite two months."

"Mr. Pinto," repeated Esther, in a startled tone. "That is curious. What can it mean?"

"I suppose Pinto was calling on Lady Blanche, and perhaps was going to the club, where he thought he'd see me, so offered to take a message. When he didn't see me, he sent the note on by messenger."

"But why should he offer to take a message? Why did Lady Blanche intrust the note to him? It seems very odd to me."

"Lady Blanche is odd, that's all," observed Laurence lightly. "But I don't suppose my interview with her will last very long. An hour or so will be enough to discuss any business she may have to talk about. We might manage the pictures after all, Essie, if you would be at my studio at about four o'clock. I'll have tea ready for you both. My old Mary can get up the jolliest little teas, I assure you. Do come, won't you?"

"Yes, do go, dear Essie," broke in Mrs. Marsden from her couch. "I know how much you have been looking forward to those pictures, and I should be sorry for you to miss the pleasure. She will go, Laurence," she added to the young man, and Esther's lovely, smiling face gave no contradiction.

* * * * * *

Laurence Wilding's studio was picturesque in the extreme. All that money and good taste could do had been done, and a more perfectly beautiful place could not be imagined.

It was three o'clock, and Laurence stood awaiting his

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fair guest. He was very much annoyed, for his old caretaker was not to be found, and the dainty little tea which he had intended to have provided was out of the question.

Also there was no one to open the door, so that when presently Laurence heard a knock, he hastened to attend to it himself.

"Hallo, Pinto!" he exclaimed, as he saw the visitor. "Come in, old man. Why, I haven't seen you for ages."

Pinto walked silently into the studio, and looked round.

"You are alone," he said tonelessly.

"Yes, but I'm expecting someone on business shortly."

"You're expecting Lady Blanche Hargreaves," said Pinto, suddenly facing round, and there was something so strange in his look and manner that Laurence involuntarily thought of Esther's warning.

"What do you mean?" he asked sharply.

"You are expecting Lady Blanche," snarled Pinto again. "She wrote to you that she would be here at five o'clock, but I altered the hour to three before I sent the note on to you."

"How dare you meddle with my letters? And what do you mean by your extraordinary behaviour now?" cried Laurence. "You must have been drinking, man."

With the bound of a tiger Pinto sprang upon him, and bore him to the ground. Laurence was the slighter and smaller man, and was completely taken by surprise, so his resistance was futile. Pinto held him firmly down, and Laurence saw something gleaming in his hand. He raised his voice with a wild shout for help.

"There isn't a soul in the building," observed Pinto, grimly. "I saw to that. At five o'clock Blanche will come here, but she will find you dead. It will be suicide, the doctors will say, for I shall arrange that. I shall console the beautiful Blanche, and she will be mine once you are out of the way."

Laurence felt a sudden shock, a pain as if a red-hot knife were plunged into his breast, and all was dark.

"Dead," muttered Pinto to himself. He rose, and opening the door of a large closet half full of lumber, he thrust the body within, placing the stiletto with which he had done the deed in the nerveless hand. Then softly and quietly as he had come he slipped from the room.

* * * * * *

"I can't make anyone hear."

Esther turned round as she heard a step behind her, and found herself face to face with Lady Blanche Hargreaves.

"Stella. *You!*" exclaimed Blanche in amazement. "What are you doing here? This is Mr. Wilding's studio."

Esther explained and Blanche listened, her face flaming with anger. This, instinct told her, was the rival Pinto had hinted at, and, she feared, a successful one.

"We had better go in," she said coldly. "Mr. Wilding's servant must be out. The door is not locked."

Pushing the door open, she swept in, Esther following with a vague anxiety in her heart.

The room was vacant. Esther took a seat near the window, and looked timidly around. Blanche amused herself by closely examining everything in the room. It was a long time before she broke the silence.

"Very odd he should be out," she remarked at last. "I said I should be here at five o'clock, and it is now nearly six."

"Didn't you appoint three o'clock?" asked Esther. Blanche shot a fiery glance at her.

"No; five. And Mr. Pinto undertook to give him the note at once. I don't understand this."

Esther shivered as she heard the name of Pinto, and the uneasiness increased.

"I shall wait no longer," proclaimed Blanche, at the end of another quarter of an hour. "You may do as you like, but I shall go," and she swept to the door.

But before she had time to turn the handle, a low, thrilling cry arrested her. She turned, and saw Esther standing frozen with horror, pointing to a door, from under which crept a dark, sluggish stream.

"What is that?" gasped Esther. "*What* is it? Merciful Heavens, it's blood, it's blood!"

With a cry that echoed through the whole building Blanche sprang to the closet and tore open the door. There, senseless and bleeding, lay Laurence Wilding.

"Oh, my darling, my darling, he has murdered you after all," wailed Esther, pressing the cold hand to her lips.

Blanche made one bound to the door, and fled shrieking down the staircase.

In a few seconds, as it seemed, the room was filled with people, and a doctor made his way to the side of the victim.

A moment's breathless suspense, and then:

"He lives, and his wound, though serious, is not necessarily fatal," he said.

Blanche had returned, and was waiting anxiously for the doctor's report.

"Thank Heaven!" she breathed softly, and then she stretched out her hands to Esther.

"He is saved for you, Stella; I feel it. You love him and he loves you. May you be happy."

For the wilful, capricious Blanche had a heart after all.

* * * * * *

"My darling, you are looking better."

Very tenderly Esther said it, for her husband of a few weeks was exceedingly precious to her, and had hardly yet recovered from his dangerous wound.

They were spending their honeymoon in the south of France, and every day seemed to bring fresh life and vigour to Laurence.

He looked up with a beaming smile to greet his young wife.

"I'm as fit as possible, dearest. What have you there? Letters? Heard from the mater?"

"Yes, and she is so much better. Oh, Laurie, how happy I am. Here are some letters for you."

He read them silently through.

"There is news of Pinto," he said, suddenly looking down at her, as she sat on a cushion by his couch.

Esther shuddered.

"Oh, Laurie, that dreadful man."

"The police tracked him to a common lodging house, where he lay very ill with pneumonia. He must have learnt that I had been found alive, and have tried to conceal himself. He is dead, Elsie."

She breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"And there is some more news in this letter, darling. Blanche is going to marry a friend of mine, a right down good fellow, and writes me the nicest letter about it. Read it yourself, dear. She seems almost as happy as we are ourselves."

"But not quite, Laurie. Nobody could ever be *quite* as happy as I am with you."

Vera Serkoff.

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LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Eardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

PROLOGUE.

A YOUTH is in the private room of Messrs. Samuel Sharpe and Quirke, solicitors, awaiting the head of the firm's announcement as to whether he is the heir to the baronetcy of the late Sir Basil Wingate or not.

Mr. Sharpe says:

"You will remember, Mr. Rust, at the reading of the will, the title, which by special remainder he had power to dispose of, and the money were left by Sir Basil Wingate to the elder son of his run-away only daughter, Helen Jerningham, *should* she have one; and failing a son being born to her, the title and the money *with* the estate, should go to you, his nephew; afterwards to *your* son—should you marry, or to the *son* of your daughter; no child of the feminine sex directly inheriting it."

He then tells Cyprian Rust that, hearing Helen Jerningham went to Australia, he has extensively advertised for her in Australian papers, but with no effect. Therefore he congratulates his listener on becoming Sir Cyprian Rust.

The solicitor is called out of the room, and Cyprian Rust sees on the table an unopened letter with an Australian stamp. The address he recognises as being in the handwriting of his cousin, Helen Jerningham!

Is it written to announce the birth of a son and heir? If so it would rob him of the legacy at the eleventh hour!

A step sounds outside the door. Quickly Cyprian Rust thrusts the letter into his pocket. He hurriedly says good-bye to Mr. Sharpe, and when he reaches his hotel he reads the missive. It tells how Helen Jerningham has left Australia, so that the future heir—if a boy—may be born in England!

Sir Cyprian Rust carefully burns the letter that might have dealt the death-blow to his ambitions, and mentally resolves to go to any extremes to retain the title.

Meanwhile Helen Jerningham is dying on board an ocean liner in giving birth to twin sons.

From incoherent remarks that she makes, the physician who attends her is led to believe that a secret is attached to the boys' history. But she dies ere she reveals her name or the boys' identity!

Many years later.

MARCELLA RUST, daughter of Sir Cyprian, finds a spade guinea which a mysterious man has hidden underneath the mat outside a certain room which she has been forbidden to enter in their home, Wingate Court, Crawley. Her curiosity is naturally aroused, and she tells her father of the occurrence. He seems annoyed at her alertness.

Sir Cyprian learns, through the Rev. Philip Nullius, that a dying woman wishes to see him.

He goes to see her, and she shows him a later will of Sir Basil Wingate, by which all his property is left to the descendant of Helen Jerningham unconditionally. Sir Cyprian snatches this will from her, and she dies before she can inform anyone else.

Sir Cyprian visits Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox, where he meets Mr. Caleb J. Johnson, millionaire and City magnate, who is in love with the hostess. The baronet, who has Lady Violet in his coils, forces her to swear to take particulars of the millionaire's house and property.

Late in the evening Johnson proposes to Lady Violet. Knowing her position, she, of course, refuses him. As she does so, the palms in front of the window part and a man lurches heavily into the room.

Lady Violet recognises him as her husband—a former Major in the Army, who has been separated from her for many years. Hastily she requests Johnson to leave; then, turning on her unwelcome visitor, she by threats prevails upon him to go.

In the corridor this Society ruffian encounters Sir Cyprian, and sees upon his watch-chain the Sign of the Spade.

Edward Day proposes to Marcella. Being refused, he angrily lets fall an allusion to Marcella's dead mother.

Lady Violet overhears this, and, with blazing eyes, dismisses Day, who acts as her secretary, from her service.

She makes him an allowance of £250 a year, and gives him a letter of introduction to the millionaire, Caleb J. Johnson.

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The latter discovers, through a private inquiry agent, the whole history of Major Richard Frayne-Lennox, and buys off a General Lyster the cheque that he had forged.

Edward Day makes a satisfactory visit to the financier, and afterwards visits his wife, Lottie, a chorus girl, of whom he has grown tired. He tells her of the rupture between himself and Lady Violet, who does not know that he is married.

At Wingate Court, Marcella reads of the theft of a valuable picture from Caleb Johnson's house. As she was one of the last persons to see the picture, which the millionaire prized very greatly, she evinces great interest in the accounts of the robbery.

Sir William Slade, of Harley Street fame, visits Sir Cyprian, and, as the day is very boisterous, is greatly concerned to hear that Marcella has set out for Danger Point, a very dangerous rock on the coast. His host, however, assures him that Marcella will be quite safe, as she knows the locality well.

As a matter of fact, she is only just rescued in time from a very perilous position.

FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

"Love's Young Dream."

WHEN Marcella opened her eyes she was on the beach beneath the shadow of the rock on whose grim surface she had so narrowly escaped death. For a time she knew nothing of what had passed; then recollection dawned, and, with a slight shudder, she looked up to see the face of the man she most hated, bending over her. It was Edward Day.

"You!" she gasped, in tones of undisguised disappointment, that made him shut his teeth with a metallic click. "How do you come here?"

"I am sorry," he said slowly, "if my presence annoys you, Miss Rust, but I happened to be staying a day or two in Crawley, and a very fortunate chance brought me out this way this afternoon. I am glad to have had the honour of being of some assistance to you, and to also apologise for having let my conduct be so utterly unworthy of the family to which I am proud to belong!"

This was a chance shot, as he was not sure whether Lady Violet had not also informed her niece that he had no right to the protection of her name. Apparently she had not, for Marcella hesitated, then said slowly:

"I am glad you apologise, Mr. Day, for it shows that you at least realise a little of the enormity of your conduct. But I will be only too pleased to try to forget our last interview, and attribute it to any cause than that it at first appeared to be. Had you no one with you?" she asked wistfully. "I thought I heard a voice call."

Before Edward Day could reply a shadow came forward.

"It was my voice you heard, Miss Rust. I seemed to know that there was someone in trouble on Danger Point, and having had some little experience with the 'Point' on previous occasions, I hastened half-way, and met this gentleman, who kindly mounted the rock for me, as I was prevented doing so owing to a recently-sprained ankle, which put the veto upon any undue exertion such as climbing.

"I would have gone right up to you if I could have carried you down the steep, but I felt that I would have ignominiously failed had I attempted it, so this gentleman kindly went up for me. I hope you are not hurt in any way? It was madness for you to have risked such a climb in this awful weather."

Marcella's heart contracted with a sudden gladness. The voice of the second man was the curate's, Philip Nullius, and somehow it put a new courage into her. Her pale face flushed with a colour Edward Day was keen to note, and her eyes brightened.

"You, Mr. Nullius?" she exclaimed. "Oh, I am so glad! You will take me back to the Court, won't you? I think I am all right now, only a little shaken. But I am anxious to return to father; he will be so worried about my absence." She struggled to her feet, then turned to the man who had carried her down to the shore. She had not forgotten that he had wilfully insulted and abused a dead mother's memory, just because her rejection had piqued his vanity.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Day," she said, with a gracious coldness. "You rescued me from a perilous position on Danger Point, and I am glad Mr. Nullius was here to draw your attention to me. I owe my life to him, and incidentally to you also. Had it not been for him, you might have passed on."

He bit his lip savagely. He felt her words were a dismissal. She looked upon the poverty-stricken curate as her saviour—not himself. Aloud he said:

"I will see you safely to the Court, Marcella. Your friend, Mr. Nullius, may be eager to continue his visits to the rest of his flock; we had better not detain him."

Philip Nullius' dark face coloured slightly, and he raised his hat preparatory to leaving. The calling of Sir Cyprian's daughter by her Christian name had struck him with a strange feeling that the fair fashionable Londoner was the lover of the girl who had been for so many weeks enshrined in his holy of holies as the most perfect woman he knew.

"Stop!" Marcella said coolly. "Mr. Nullius, will you relieve this gentleman of his self-appointed task, and accompany me home to the Court; that is, if your ankle is strong enough?" Then turning to the chagrined Edward, she went on carelessly: "I will not detain you any longer, Mr. Day; you must have plenty to do on your brief visit to Crawley, and my father has not those attractions at the Court that would appeal to you!"

As she strolled painfully and slowly away, leaning on the arm of the tall young curate, Edward Day looked after them with a bitter smile on his weak, vindictive face.

"Snubbed, eh?" he muttered. "Shelved for the society of a beggarly curate whom you credit with all the virtues under the sun! So, ho! Miss Marcella, you remember our last parting in London and mean to keep me at arm's length. Evidently your dear aunt has not informed you of the change in my fortunes, and I shall do nothing to enlighten you. You forbid me the Court, eh?" he laughed softly. "We shall see. There are many ways of reaching one's destination, and judging from your leisurely stroll, you will not get there for some little time."

The storm had abated almost as suddenly as it had risen, and only a dull murmur of the still turbulent sea, and the dismal soughing of the wind, remained as witness to the reckless gale that had swept over the recently sunny landscape. It was growing dark, and the fine rain that was steadily pouring from the heavens had ceased to lash as at first.

In the meantime Marcella and the curate slowly walked along the sea coast in the direction of the Court. The wet had penetrated to their very being, and they shivered, but both were strangely contented.

"Tell me," Philip Nullius said abruptly, "what took you up Danger Point in such weather as this? Surely it was not your own choice?"

Marcella laughed weakly. "My father told me that it was an interesting walk," she said. "Of course he did not know the danger in which the sudden gale would place me. He will be very anxious about me."

The curate was silent. He remembered that it was strange for an old inhabitant like Sir Cyprian not to have thought that such a walk as that to Danger Point would be dangerous to a girl who was ignorant of the treacherous freaks of the elements.

"Will you see your—your friend at the Court?" he inquired slowly.

"I hope not," Marcella answered briefly; "he is not a friend, he is my aunt's nephew, and I dislike him immensely, but occasionally tolerate him."

A sigh escaped the lips of the man by her side. It seemed almost that he was relieved by her statement.

"Then—then—you are not engaged to him?" he stammered. "I imagined you were!"

Marcella flushed deeply; the rain splashed against her hot cheeks as she turned her face to him.

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"Engaged to that man!" she repeated. "Oh. Mr. Nullius, I thought you understood me better than to think such a thing of me!" The reproach in her voice stung him.

"I wish I were in a position to understand you as I do myself," he exclaimed passionately; "but whenever I fancy that I know you just a little more, Miss Rust, I suddenly remember that the village curate, obscure and unknown, with probably a shameful parentage, has no right to try to understand the Lady Bountiful of the village!"

"You can never be obscure to me," she said gently, "because, Mr. Nullius, I recognise that you are my equal—or more so—that I am your inferior! You will one day have the living here, perhaps," she went on, "and then will lose that sense of not being equal with the people who are beneath you. I am always your friend," she added softly. "I hope you will remember that."

The curate's dark eyes met hers wistfully. "I will never forget it, Miss Rust. It will be a memory with a halo round it when I have left Crawley."

"Left Crawley," she said quickly. "Why, oh, Mr. Nullius, what has made you think of leaving?"

"The same reason that actuates the decision of all men with a sense of honour," he answered bitterly. "I cannot trust myself to stay here without doing what would lower me not only in the eyes of everyone in the parish, but particularly in those of the woman for whose sake I am leaving Crawley."

"Then you—love!" she breathed. "And the woman—does she reciprocate?"

"I do not know," he said slowly. "I dare not ask her. It is better to leave in ignorance. At any rate I shall have my honour left to me; I shall not have dragged it in the mud by declaring my love for a rich woman, when I have nothing in turn to offer her. Don't you think I am wise?"

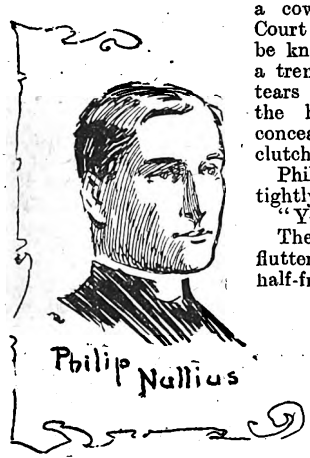
"If you ask me, Mr. Nullius," she said in a low tone, "the woman would rather you let her be the judge of what is best. She will know at once whether your love is more acceptable than money; she will know which she prefers—the glitter of gold, or the smile in your eyes. In justice to her you should let her be the arbiter of her fate. It is cruel to deny her the divine prerogative of her sex to bring joy to the man she loves!"

The curate's breath came hoarsely to her ears. It was too dark to see him; she only knew that his eyes were searching her face.

"You advise me to tell her?" he whispered. "To play pitch-and-toss with my happiness, and to be denied the humble privilege I have hitherto enjoyed—that of occasionally seeing her face and hearing her voice?"

She came to an abrupt standstill.

"Let her rather exercise the right of royalty, Mr. Nullius; let her bestow upon you the mark of royal favour! Then the blame will be on her shoulders—not yours. Don't be a cowardly suitor and flee the Court of Love; rather stay and be knighted 'Sir Chosen.' With a tremulous laugh, a blend of tears and smiles, she held out the hand that had remained concealed beneath her coat. It clutched a faded rose.



Philip Nullius grasped her hand tightly.

"You mean?" he said hoarsely.

The clouds hid the smile that fluttered to her lips; half-proud, half-frightened.

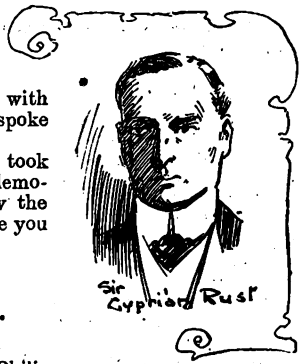
"That you are knighted a courtier in the Palace of Love!" she whispered.

He drew her closer.

"Marcella! Can I be awake—or is it a dream?"

She laughed tenderly.

"A dream—Love's Young Dream," she murmured; then, after a pause, in which the rain beat unnoticed against their faces, and the wind lashed them with cutting gusts, Marcella spoke again:



"Oh, Philip, how long it took me to change you from a democrat into a courtier, but now the 'Order of the Ribbon' will tie you to me for ever!"

FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

"White Heather."

WHEN Marcella and Philip arrived at the Court it was quite dark, and the lights twinkled from the many windows that faced the long avenue leading up to the hall door.

"Come in with me," Marcella said softly—"let me tell father that you are not only my rescuer but the man I love."

"Dearest," he replied tenderly, "you do not know Sir Cyprian as I do. He would immediately think that I had presumed upon my position as your protector to force my attentions upon you—and in his anger and disappointment, he would deny you to me and perhaps take you away. Wait until I have obtained that living that is almost mine, then we will tell him together. It will only be for a few weeks now."

Marcella was silent. She would dearly have loved to have created a barrier between herself and her cousin, Edward Day. She distrusted him, and the open acknowledgment of her engagement would have shown him that all further hopes in her direction were out of the question.

But she saw the wisdom of her lover's advice, to wait until he had obtained the "living" for which he had worked, as then there would be more chance of Sir Cyprian listening to him. So, after a tender leave-taking, under the shadow of the trees, Marcella entered the Court by herself.

The hall was empty, but in the second hall opening out of it, and which generally was used as a smoking lounge, three figures stood near the glowing log fire.

They did not turn as Marcella stood motionless in the doorway, but she recognised Sir Cyprian, whose face was grave beyond the common; the second man was a stranger, with a particularly fine face, and kindly eyes, that Marcella instinctively felt she could trust. Then she remembered that her father had been expecting an old friend to stay with him, and guessed the identity of the new-comer.

The third figure was so much in the dark that she could only discern the faint outline of a man standing beside a mailed figure in armour. With a swift movement she gathered up her wet, clinging skirts and turned a little to the right towards the wide staircase, preferring rather to meet her father's guests in more conventional attire than a dishevelled dress, and wild, wind-tossed hair, whose moist strands still clung to her forehead.

As she moved noiselessly, the man standing in the shadow of the armour spoke suddenly, and Marcella caught her breath with a cry of amazement. It was the voice of the man whom she had hoped had accepted her snub, and left Crawley, or else had gone where she would never meet him again—at least until she could openly claim the protection of her lover from his attentions.

"How dared Edward Day come here when he knew that I did not desire his society even from Danger Point!" she thought angrily.

"Marcella can't be very long now, sir," he was saying, in his languid, aristocratic voice. "I left her under the care of the village curate; she probably desired to ask him questions regarding the Sunday-school, or on some other rural point. Anyway, I felt rather in the way, and came on alone. Marcella is in good hands, doubtless, though for

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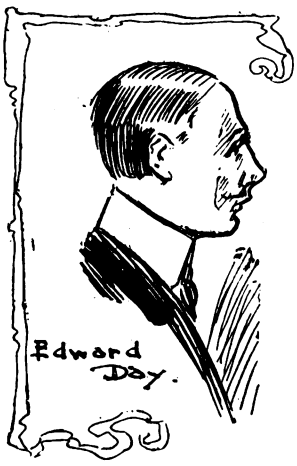

myself I don't much fancy that curate chap. He has a sneaking way about him, as though he would think nothing of trying to be the social equal of a girl like Marcella."

Marcella's face burnt with indignation as she listened to the cruel, insidious tongue of her cousin—or rather the man she still imagined to be her cousin. That he had said the very words to incense her father against Philip, she knew only too well.

Sir Cyprian was a great believer in the distinction between the "rich man" and the village "Lazarus," and she guessed why Edward Day had so early paved the road to distrust and enmity against her lover in her father's mind. He was jealous already of her preference for the obscure curate. She pressed a little against the portière, the heavy folds of which fell round her, screening her from view.

"The curate!" Sir Cyprian's voice said, in tones of icy disgust. "I am surprised Marcella should show such a radical strain as to prefer *his* society to yours, her cousin! He is a worthy young man, I have no doubt, but Marcella must remember that she is the future mistress of the Court after me, and should learn that dignity befitting her position."

"What is the curate's name?" said the courteous voice of the man whose face had attracted Marcella. "After all, Rust, you must not forget that from curates have sprung our Deans, Bishops, and Archbishops. The church gives high honours to her servants."

The eyes of the listening girl sparkled with joy. Her lover had one defender already! She felt she almost loved the owner of the voice that had spoken so generously of an absent man.

"I admit the truth of your words, Slade," Sir Cyprian answered, with a sarcastic laugh, "but in the church, as in every other profession, it is influence that helps a man to success, and so far as I know this curate, Philip Nullius, has no prospects. The vicar tells me he came from some charity school!"

"Poor lad," murmured Dr. Slade, "all the more credit to him for having got on so well."

"Still," suggested the oily voice of Edward Day with a sneering laugh, "that is no excuse for his presumption in forcing himself upon Miss Rust, sir. Penniless adventurers have been members of the church before now, and the little I know about this curate is not very reassuring. He is a man of absolutely obscure parentage, and I should hardly consider him the sort of person of whom my cousin should make a friend."

"Coward! Despicable coward!" breathed Marcella, as she reached her room in safety, and gazed at her reflection in the mirror. Her eyes were gleaming, and her cheeks flushed with the wave of contempt that swept over her, as she thought of the cruel, back-biting man who stooped to insinuate vile motives to another man immeasurably his superior in every way.

Her maid looked at her young mistress curiously. "Lor, miss," she exclaimed, "you'll catch your death of cold if you don't change quickly—you are drenched to the skin, miss, with being out in this storm!"

Marcella laughed carelessly. "A hot bath will put me all right, Jane; a little rain won't hurt me."

The maid went about her duties quietly, and when, refreshed and glowing from the contact of the warm water, Marcella sat down to have her hair dressed, Jane said:

"The housekeeper is so put about, miss; the master sent for 'er some time ago, and told 'er to prepare one of the guest rooms in the north wing for Mr. Day, who will stay till next week, and she did think it a shame she should 'ave been told so late—only just before dinner."

Marcella frowned. The thought that Edward Day should be living under her own roof for even a few hours was distasteful to her.

She wondered uneasily whether her visit to Danger Point rock had not been the beginning of a succession of ominous events, in which the only bright one was her secret engagement to Philip Nullius; but aloud, she said quietly: "Don't gossip, Jane. The housekeeper has not much cause to complain. The Court sees very few guests at present. Take out my white satin dress, and my pearls," she went on, "I will wear them to-night."

When she was dressed Marcella dismissed her maid, and going to her writing-table, opened a box that had arrived that morning from an old school-fellow at the Convent in Brussels, and who now was staying in Scotland.

In the box lay a wreath of white heather, and a few words written in a hasty girlish hand.

"DEAREST MARCELLA,—*I am sending you some white heather. It is very rare now, and it has taken me a long time to get enough to make the inclosed wreath. You know the old adage, don't you?—that if you wear white heather on any special event in your life, only good fortune can follow you! So I am inclosing this wreath of heather for you to don when you wish your luck to be especially brilliant! Let me know if the proverb comes true in your case, dear! If it does not it will prove a very strange exception.—In haste, your affectionate friend,*

"DIANA WESTBROOK."

Marcella smiled as she folded the note, then took up the wreath of white heather and looked at it. "This is a special event in my life to-night," she murmured. "My engagement to Philip Nullius! It is strange that Diana should have sent this now. The very day on which I desire my luck to be bright and prosperous. Yes, I will test Diana's adage and wear her heather, and I trust it will be a harbinger of joy for Philip and myself."

Quickly removing the pearls from her hair she fastened the wreath around the soft coils of her brown tresses, then picking up her fan, she left the room and went downstairs to the drawing-room.

"Ah, Marcella," Sir Cyprian said quickly, "I am glad to see, child, that your adventure has left you none the worse. You were fortunate to be in such good hands."

Marcella looked at her father thoughtfully, then said quietly: "Yes, father. Had Mr. Nullius not heard my cry, and being unable to get up the Point himself on account of a sprained ankle, sent Mr. Day to bring me down, I should still have been on Danger Point—or, rather, over it!"

A curious expression crossed Sir Cyprian's face. Then it vanished, as he said suavely: "I referred to your cousin, Edward Day, as the 'good hands' in which you were, my dear. It was he who brought you down to safety—Mr. Nullius merely played a secondary part."

Marcella shrugged her shoulders. "The subject is hardly worth arguing about. *I* am inclined to think that I owe a great deal to Mr. Nullius—*you*, that I owe a great deal to Edward Day! Why discuss it any further? You must introduce me to your friend," she went on, with a gracious smile, turning to Dr. Slade, who since her entrance had watched her with searching eyes and a slightly amused smile as he heard her put her important father on one side so carelessly.

Sir Cyprian concealed his vexation, as he said lightly: "This is my truant daughter, Slade! Don't you think she is a handful to begin contradicting her old father on her return from a dangerous adventure?"

"I think Miss Marcella shows a very pretty spirit in defending the person to whom she considers she owes her life!" he replied laughingly. Then addressing Marcella, he said admiringly: "Forgive me for noticing your unusual decoration, Miss Marcella. White heather is quite a Scottish amulet for good luck."

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Marcella laughed. "I am wearing it for that reason, sir," she returned prettily. "I have a wish for this day to begin a new era in my life—much has changed it for me."

A strange light leapt into the pale eyes of Edward Day as he came up to her with suppressed eagerness. His vanity was supreme, yet he hardly dared hope that it was his influence that had changed his cousin's life.

"Let me beg for one leaf of the heather, Marcella," he said laughingly. "My luck needs repairing badly. I'm sure you won't refuse me."

She drew back sharply, and shook her head. "No, I shall share my good fortune with no one. It is mine to mar or to cherish, and I prefer to cherish it."

SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Marcella Flings Down the Gauntlet.

AFTER dinner Marcella went into the drawing-room and scribbled a note to Lady Violet. She remembered that her aunt had asked her always to write her when she felt worried or in any way lonely, and in spite of her happiness there was a subtle something in the air that told her that her cousin's presence in the Court would work some ill to her, or her lover..

"*I wish you were here, dear aunt,*" she wrote. "*I want to pour something into your sympathetic ear, and, besides, I want to feel you near me. Did you know that Edward was here? He came to the Court this evening and is staying some days.—I am your always loving,* "MARCELLA."

She stamped and sealed her letter, then turned to see Sir Cyprian at her side. "Well, Marcella," he said gently, "Writing to your aunt? Give me your letter. I will put it in the post-bag with mine." Then he went on quickly, "I am sorry that you should have snubbed your cousin, dear. He is a nice fellow, and having just obtained a post as secretary to the financier Caleb J. Johnson, seems in a position to become a wealthy man."

"I don't like him," she said coldly.

He smiled. "Perhaps you prefer the curate?"

Marcella laughed. "That's rather rough on Mr. Nullius, father. He deserves a better comparison than Edward Day. "Ah," she cried mockingly, as the portière shook slightly. "Don't be afraid, Edward. Come in openly. I am not ashamed of my opinion of you. Come and hear it."

With a livid face and skulking manner, he came forward and looked at her, radiant in her white glitter of satin, and with the wreath of heather resting on her dark hair.

"Be silent, Marcella," said her father coldly. "I forbid you to speak like that to my guest and your cousin. I forbid you also to hold any further communication with the curate, Philip Nullius! Do you hear me?"

An expression like that which had been in the face of Lady Violet on the occasion of her last interview with Sir Cyprian crept into the face of the baronet's daughter.

"I hear you—yes, father," she said slowly, "but I cannot obey you. I am over twenty-one, you know, and my own mistress. And to-night I have given my allegiance to someone who will come first with me in future."

Sir Cyprian took a step towards her, then stopped abruptly as though recollecting that it would not do to drop his mask before her. "What do you mean, child?" he said, with a forced smile. "Are you mad, or playing a practical joke on me and your cousin?"

"Mad," she laughed recklessly, forgetting the secret she had agreed to keep, in her eagerness to humiliate the man who had dared to spy upon her. "No, not mad, unless it is with love. I mean that there will be no further occasion for Mr. Day to annoy me, nor you to question me, father. I am engaged to the curate, Philip Nullius!"

A muttered imprecation rose to the younger man's lips, but Sir Cyprian stopped him with a raised hand. His face was very pale, and his eyes shone brilliantly.

"I won't discuss this matter any further, Marcella," he said gently. "You are naturally overstrung, and not yourself. It would be unkind to take you seriously; Dr. Slade has gone out for a stroll, or I would ask him to see you; but go to bed now, my child, and rest—a good long sleep will work wonders."

"But—but," Marcella faltered, feeling that her bold stroke had fallen strangely flat, "I am quite well, and know what I am talking about—I am engaged to Mr. Nullius. Nothing will alter that!" She spoke defiantly, yet the stillness with which her words were received struck a sudden chill in her. She had expected anger, argument, pleading—anything but this pitying commiseration.

Edward Day's white face stood out like a cameo—only his eyes gleamed viciously upon her, and Sir Cyprian's voice grew even more gentle, as he said:

"Come, dear, you must go to bed. To-morrow I will let you talk to me as long as you like, but now I will not risk the responsibility of letting you talk yourself into any great excitement." He held the door open, and feeling that she somehow had failed to hit the note of dignity and outraged pride at which she had struck, Marcella left the room with burning cheeks and stately head.

The door closed gently upon her. Then Sir Cyprian turned and looked at his sister-in-law's nephew. "Come, my boy. Cheer up"—he laughed—"girls always talk like that! Marcella is like other girls. You and I must prevent her from following up her folly!"

"We must not let that miserable curate win her, sir!" panted the young man.

Sir Cyprian laughed again. "That will be easy to prevent, Edward. It rests with you to help me keep Marcella at the Court, or let her waste her beauty in a cottage with the curate."

Edward Day bit his lips. "I would do anything," he muttered, "anything to keep them apart."

Sir Cyprian looked at him sharply. "Anything," he murmured. "Well, well—we shall see! You may be able to help me, and your cousin from making a *mesalliance*."

Edward Day leant forward, his white, passionate face startling even the self-possessed baronet.

"Anything!" he repeated, with a hysterical laugh. "Yes, I would do anything to keep that miserable curate from winning her. I would commit any crime even—break any law—to stand between them."

When he had retired to the library to wait for his old friend the doctor to join him after his ramble, Sir Cyprian sat smoking silently, deep in thought. Once or twice he muttered; "That hot-headed fool will be as pliable as wax! His love for the girl will be a powerful lever. I shall touch the notes, and they, the unconscious instruments, will make the music.

"Danger Point cheated me this afternoon. But I must not let the elements interfere with my plans. Providence has a knack of slipping in between the arrangements of man in a way not always pleasing. I must so work that Providence will have no chance of thwarting me." He drew from his pocket the letter Marcella had given to him to post, and read it with cynical smile—then flung it on the fire.

"So, there are confidences with her aunt already, are there? I must stop these!"

As he took up another cigar the door opened suddenly, and Dr. Slade came into the room. His face was

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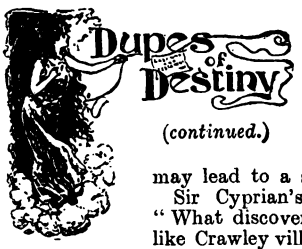

(continued.)

alive with an intense excitement, and his voice trembled, as he caught the baronet's shoulder.

"Cyprian, old man, I have made a discovery!" he cried. "I've a good mind to follow it up—it may lead to a sensational story."

Sir Cyprian's blue eyes opened lazily. "What discovery could you make in a place like Crawley village?" he laughed.

"The discovery," continued the doctor impressively, "that the young curate at whom you and your nephew laughed this evening, is one of the children of that poor girl I attended on board the Australian liner twenty-five years ago. He is the boy whose history is wrapped in secret mystery. And I am going to find it out. That fellow, Rust, is no ordinary waif—you will find in time that he may prove himself even a fitting match for your lovely young daughter—more so than that puppy Edward Day!"

Sir Cyprian turned languidly in his chair. He looked interested, and his cigar had gone out. "That sounds quite romantic; 'pon my soul, Slade," he said gently, "you ought to be a novelist! Because you brought a waif into the world twenty-five years ago, you jump to the conclusion that all succeeding waifs must be your special one.

"I suppose," he went on, "you met the curate serenading my daughter."

"No," snapped the doctor. "I met him at the dispensary of the doctor here; he was getting bandages for an old woman. We strolled into the village together, and by a few leading questions, which he answered rapidly enough, I patched up the facts. He was sent to the Foundling Home that my waif had been sent to—the same year, the same month, and they told him in the house that he had come from a ship as a baby. I like the boy, and for his dead unknown mother's sake, I will try to help him." Then with an angry snort Dr. Slade slammed the door behind him.

Sir Cyprian rose, looked at himself in the glass, then smiled softly.

"I shall have to be particularly careful—particularly prompt. Those inquiries must be nipped in the bud by Fate. The curate must *always* be 'Philip Nullius!' It will be safer for him than—*than the other!*" He shivered, and glanced at the door. "It's strange, Marcella, and that—that boy—if it should be so! But," he exclaimed suddenly, and with a tightening of his lips, "I must step in between, and turn the wheel of Fate towards myself. Nothing shall intervene—nothing can cast me from my position—nothing, except——"

With another shiver he switched the light off, and opening the door, went softly to his own room.

SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Sir Cyprian Makes an Offer.

THE first thing Marcella did the following morning was to escape as soon after breakfast as she could without offending her father's guests, and steal out of the Court by a side door in the garden, then make her way through the few fields that lay between her home and the parish church.

She felt she wanted to see her lover, to tell him that in her anger the night before she had betrayed their secret, and broken her word to him.

As she walked up the quiet church yard, Philip Nullius came out of the vestry door.

There had been a choir practice, and he had been glad to get away from the singing, and seize the chance of a few quiet minutes to himself. He wanted to think of this woman whose gift of love had changed the world from a dull grey monotony into a brilliant place of promise and joy. He was loved—and he loved! The whole of his past life rose before him in contrast with the radiant visions that lay full of beauty at his feet.

And at the door of the vestry he came face to face with the woman of his dreams! Marcella swayed towards him with a tender smile.

"Philip!"

"Marcella!"

The sunlight flashed upon them—the birds in the ivy that clustered up the walls of the church chirrupped one to the other, but they only heard the throbbing of each other's hearts—only saw the love-light in each other's faces.

At last Marcella spoke. "I have a confession to make," she faltered. "I—I—oh, Philip—I could not help it, but I told my father, before my cousin Edward, that I was engaged to you. I was annoyed with him, and forgot that you had asked me to wait until you had obtained the living that you expected. Forgive me."

"Forgive," he murmured. "How can you ask me, darling! After all I am glad that you were open and frank at first. Perhaps I was in the wrong to have suggested your silence until I had made sure of the living. You were right, darling, to have spoken at once. I will see Sir Cyprian to-day. Was he very angry with you?"

Marcella blushed. "Well, I can hardly say," she murmured. "He seemed to think that I was not in a fit state to be argued with about anything. He did not take me at all seriously, and suggested that a good night's rest would put me right. But oh! Philip," she said, with a sudden burst of fear, "you understood last night that I knew what I was talking about when I gave you my heart for all time, didn't you? My father thought I was joking, but—but you knew that I was never more serious in my life than I was then?"

His eyes flashed eagerly into hers.

"Darling, I know that last night you made me the proudest and happiest of men. I can understand your father not crediting you with a serious motive in declaring your love for such an ineligible fellow as myself," he added sadly. "But I will work hard, and prove myself almost worthy of your love, my darling, though now I am indeed but a poor match for the heiress of Sir Cyprian Rust."

"Don't say that," she murmured. "Since love levels all things, then it has made us equals. And, oh! Philip, you have changed the world for me! Before I had only Aunt Violet to love—somehow I could never feel more than respect and obedience for my father, though he has always been very good to me, but you have put rose-coloured glasses on my eyes, and I see the world through tender tints!"

It was a very secluded spot that the vestry door of the Parish Church opened upon, great trees hung protecting branches almost over to the church walls, and the strip of vivid green was trodden by no feet save those of the vicar—the curate, and the boys who went in to choir practice on week days, and to church on Sundays.

There was no possible chance of the handsome curate and the lovely heiress of the Court being interrupted in their stolen love-making outside the vestry door, and safe in their knowledge of these simple facts the lovers indulged in those sweet greetings that mean so much when exchanged between "two hearts that beat as one," and in whose eyes the sun rises, and sets.

So Marcella nestled in her lover's arms and received his kisses as her due homage, revelling in the knowledge that there—outside the vestry door—within the shadow of the church, they could exchange their tender love words safe in the seclusion of the rarely-trodden path.

"And"—Philip Nullius said in a deep, tender voice—"you are really mine, beloved! Wherever you go, in whatever brilliant assembly your duty takes you, your heart will remain true to the obscure curate in your father's parish? It is almost cruel to let you make a sacrifice like this," he went on bitterly. "Your youth and beauty should have a better setting that I can give them—yet a deeper love will never be found than mine for you, beloved."

"Hush!" she said softly. "If there is any sacrifice at all, Philip, it is one that I welcome with all my heart. Love delights in sacrifices, and it is only a joy for me to escape from the artificial atmosphere of the London drawing-rooms,

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where I meet men cast in the same insipid mould as my cousin, Edward Day, and it is no loss to lose sight of such men as he.

"Only this morning I thought that, compared with your honest, straightforward nature the strained, unnatural compliments of Edward Day were an insult to a self-respecting woman. I felt that a nasty insect had crawled across my hand when he touched it—and I shivered."

A woman's hand was pressed against the glass panel!

A light, sneering laugh broke the lovers' confidences, and, turning with crimson cheeks and frightened eyes, Marcella saw her father and her cousin, Edward Day.

Sir Cyprian looked sad and reproachful, an air of dignity seemed to have touched him, and in the presence of such silent reproof, Marcella became suddenly like a small child caught on forbidden ground. Edward Day, on the other hand, was smiling at her with a leering expression that gave his cruel face an additional menace.

Sir Cyprian broke the silence. He addressed himself to Marcella, ignoring the presence of the tall, grave young curate, who stood so calmly beside his daughter.

"You had better return to the Court, child," he said gently. "I am of course astonished and hurt at your conduct, but," he shrugged his shoulders, "youth and indiscretion always run hand-in-hand, so I will not say any more, except that you should be glad that your father and cousin only witnessed your disgrace, and for our own sakes you may rely on us not to publish it broadcast."

"Father," Marcella cried, with flashing eyes. "How can you speak like that! I am not ashamed of myself. I have every right to be here with Mr. Nullius. He is my future husband, as I told you last night. Tell them, Philip," she went on, in a quivering voice. "Tell them that we are engaged!"

"Your daughter has done me the honour of accepting me as her future husband, Sir Cyprian," began Philip Nullius. "I wished to call and see you to-day."

Sir Cyprian, ignoring his words entirely, turned to his nephew. "You see," he said sadly, "how the poor girl is induced to believe that she means the nonsense this young man has put into her mouth."

Then addressing Marcella, who had grown a little pale, he said gently; "Now, my dear, run along home and try to rest. I see you are inclined to be wild in your speech again, and to encourage unconventional proposals in a manner that would be impossible were you not under the influence of this man!"

Marcella cast an appealing glance at her lover, who had also grown white and stern looking, but he smiled reassuringly at her as he said quietly:

"Do as your father wishes now, dearest. We understand each other, and nothing can take back the vows we have sworn."

"Good-bye," she returned. "I love *you*, Philip, and no one"—with a defiant ring in her voice—"can rob us of each other. Good-bye, darling!"

With a last tender look she moved away, then paused, and glanced back at the three men.

"Go home, Philip," she said. "I don't wish you to stay long after I have gone. For my sake be wise and refuse to quarrel, however great your provocation."

As she walked down the path that led into the road, her cousin caught her up.

"Your village lover shall not be ill-treated, Marcella!" he said laughingly. "I shall not stay to frighten him."

She looked at him contemptuously. "*You* frighten him!" she said slowly. "Why, one blow from Philip Nullius would half kill you. You have more reason to fear *him*. Go back, I wish to be alone; had I desired society I would have called my dogs to follow me. I do not care for mongrels!"

He stood where she left him, his eyes full of hate and rage. "Mongrel, am I! All right, my lady Marcella! The mongrel will teach the thoroughbred a lesson one day."

In the meantime Sir Cyprian was speaking to the curate, who had briefly stated his love for Marcella, and his modest expectations.

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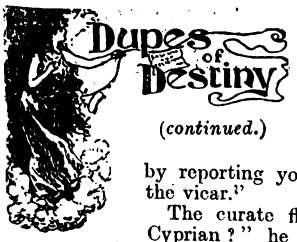

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"I am glad that you have spoken so openly," said the baronet, looking at him intently, "and in spite of my disapproval of this sort of thing, I will, on one condition, not punish my daughter or you, by reporting your breach of confidence to the vicar."

The curate flushed. "And that is, Sir Cyprian?" he said quickly.

"That you don't attempt to see my daughter for a month, or to tell her by letter anything of the confidence or conversation that passed between us, Mr. Nullius," Sir Cyprian began slowly. "She is highly excitable, and I sometimes fear for her reason in those moments of mad, passionate rage. I have this proposal to make to you, and if you consent to it, you may succeed in making yourself financially better able to think of marrying.

"There is a friend of mine, a clergyman, living in the South of England. I will send you to him with a good letter of introduction, on those terms of silence concerning my daughter. She would think nothing of following you, and creating a scandal. Do you consent?" and Sir Cyprian's lip quivered with a suppressed emotion.

Philip Nullius hesitated. The thought of leaving Marcella in ignorance of his destiny or even his parting, was hard, since he knew that she would wonder and perhaps doubt because he had not trusted her.

But, on the other hand, he was desirous of winning a chance of making a better home than he had at present to offer any woman, and as his annual holiday was drawing near, which would mean a month, he thought it a good plan to accept Sir Cyprian's offer, and so please him, though it hurt him to feel that he was going to do something to bring tears to those dear eyes. But the living—the extra income it might mean—decided him, and, besides, Marcella's father had made the offer.

"Yes," he said simply. "I will accept your terms, sir, and on my honour I agree to do as you ask, only you will tell Marcella that I am away on business for you, sir?"

Sir Cyprian smiled distantly. "Certainly, Mr. Nullius. She shall hear enough to ease her mind concerning your safety."

As Philip Nullius went off in the direction of the village, Sir Cyprian smiled softly as though well pleased.

"Well, sir," said Edward Day, "has he listened to the voice of reason?"

"Mr. Nullius has agreed with me," replied the baronet gently, "that it will do his health good to start on a month's holiday."

The two pairs of eyes—both blue, both wicked—met in a steady glance.

"A month's holiday," murmured Edward Day thoughtfully, "that will be very good for him I should think, sir."

Sir Cyprian nodded and linked his arm in that of the younger man. "Yes, Edward. A lot can happen in a month. Let us hope that Mr. Nullius will meet only with the good luck we both desire him on his month's holiday. You must console Marcella, while I"—he sighed—"while I arrange matters concerning our friend the curate."

Then laughing softly, both men strolled down the narrow strip of gravel between the graves, and slowly sauntered towards the Court, their arms linked, like their lives, in a bond of fellowship.

EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

What Marcella Saw.

Two days later Marcella, who had been kept indoors on account of a nasty chill, the result of her experience on Danger Point, sat down at her little writing-table and penned a letter. It was to her lover, and in it she begged him to write her and tell her what had passed between her father and himself. Then she sealed it, and addressing Jane, who was waiting on her, said with a slight blush:

"I want you to leave this letter at Mr. Nullius' rooms, Jane. Don't let it go out of your hands until it is in his possession. It is an important letter."

"Mr. Nullius, miss," replied Jane, a great understanding regarding her young mistress' troubled eyes, coming in a sudden flash upon her. "Why, miss, it's the talk in the village that Mr. Nullius is going away this afternoon. And there are some as says that there is a lot be'ind it. He looks so sad like!"

Marcella caught the woman's arm. "Away, did you say, Jane?" she cried. "Then there is no time to be lost—none! He will be starting by the two o'clock express from Crawley to London; I know the train, you must go down to the station, Jane, and put that letter into Mr. Nullius' hands. Do you hear? Go now! I will finish that lace you were unpicking. You have just an hour before the train goes—hurry—hurry!"

Jane hesitated. Servants are keen to read between the lines of a family estrangement, and Jane guessed that her handsome, high-spirited young mistress, had vexed Sir Cyprian because of her liking for the society of the fascinating curate.

But she loved her mistress, and she feared Sir Cyprian, and Jane had all an old maid's liking to see the ways of lovers made easy. So she took the letter obediently, and slipped out of the Court by the servant's entrance, and started at a jog trot for the station, which was three miles off.

Marcella walked up and down the dainty sitting-room which was her own special den. She was wondering how it came to pass that Philip Nullius should be leaving Crawley without letting her see him to say good-bye. She knew he loved her, and yet he was going off without making a single attempt to see her.

What did it mean? Whose hand was moving beneath it all? She could not help thinking that her father, and, incidentally, her cousin, had a share in the departure of her lover.

Her eyes flashed and her cheeks paled with a sudden resolve that, let come what may, she would fight her enemies and his, and not be moved one inch from the course she had marked out for herself.

She wished, however, that she had received an answer to her letter to Lady Violet. She longed for the sympathetic voice and caressing smile of that beautiful aunt, and her silence was a little disappointing.

She preferred to keep to her room, for Edward Day was still in the house, and she had determined not to meet him again, or to leave the privacy of her own rooms until the unwelcome guest had gone. After what seemed an interminable length of time, Jane returned, hot, panting, but triumphant.

"Did you see Mr. Nullius?" Marcella said quickly.

Jane nodded. "I was just in time, miss, the train was on the point of starting when I saw Mr. Nullius on the platform. 'E was quite alone, so I stepped up to 'im and gave 'im your letter. 'Is face lit up sudden-like, and he opened it quick, then said to me, very slow and impressive:

"'Tell your mistress that all is well. Not to worry or to think that I shall forget our conversation outside the church. I am going away on business that will be a means of my future advancement.' Then he wrote some words on a bit of paper and put it in your envelope. I got away, miss, just as Sir Cyprian drove into the station, but 'e didn't see me, 'is eyes were all on Mr. Nullius."

Silently Marcella took the note. That her lover was going away openly was a relief, but why had he not called or written before, and what did her father's presence at the station portend?

She untwisted the note and read the pencilled words:

"*Sweetheart—good-bye, my thoughts and heart's love are yours. I love you.*—P. N."

She pressed the words to her lips, with a sigh. Philip was gone. She could only possess her soul in patience and wait

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till he returned. Perhaps after all, her father was not so hard as she had imagined.

She dined alone, and after writing another letter to her aunt, went out into the corridor for a stroll. She knew that her father and his guests would be smoking and playing billiards, and she was not afraid of meeting them.

She found herself after a time near the wing that contained the mysterious door her father's valet had forbidden her to enter. It was the corridor through which the dark, silent man had passed, then vanished. She looked at it and saw the key in the lock, and acting on a sudden impulse, passed through, and turned the key. She was on the right side of the unused wing now.

Walking softly, aided by a dim flicker of light, she came to the door that Deacon had barred. The key was in that also.

Marcella smiled. Her father's servants were strangely lax in their supervision.

She pushed the door gently, it yielded, and she found herself at the top of a flight of stairs that finished in darkness.

She poised irresolutely on the narrow landing. It was dirty and did not look inviting. After all, why trouble about lumber rooms. Deacon was right, the dust was awful.

As she turned to retrace her steps a sound filtered through the darkness to her acute hearing. It was a faint cry. She listened, and it was repeated. Then with a swift spurt of courage, Marcella went down the stairs, and found herself in a passage, fairly clean.

On one side was a door, and in front of the door hung a curtain. Cautiously, and with quickened breath, Marcella lifted one end of the curtain, then stood petrified with amazement.

The panels in the door were of glass, transparent; and pressed against one of the panels, as though tired of beating it, was a white delicate hand.

It was the hand of a woman!

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

MR. PORKHAM: "Again I ask you, Miss Leflard, will you be my wife?" Miss Leflard: "No, Mr. Porkham, I cannot be your wife; but I will be——" Mr. Porkham: "A sister, of course." Miss Leflard: "No; a grandmother. Your grandfather proposed last night."

JESS: "Jack's entire truthfulness was what captivated me." Bess: "What did he say when he proposed to you?" Jess: "It ran thus—'I have never loved a woman as I do you since—since'—(referring to his notebook)—'since—let me see—the 18th of August.'"

MAY (to her best young man): "Now, Charlie, you must be careful and not expose yourself to the weather. Now, you were out in the rain last night?" Charlie: "No, I wasn't, little one. What makes you think so?" May: "Why, papa came home and said he met you coming home from the lodge, and that you were thoroughly soaked."

HUSBAND: "Now, I think that is going too far. You promised me you would countermand your order for that dress." Wife: "I wrote to the dressmaker that very day." "But here are the dress and the bill for it—enough to make me bankrupt almost! How do you explain that?" "I gave you the letter to post, and I suppose you forgot it, as usual."

JOHNNY: "Oh, my prerogatives are chapped!" Father: "Why, what do you mean, Johnny—your lips?" Johnny: "I always thought they were lips until last night, when I saw Mr. Thayer kissing sister in the hall, and when I asked him what he was doing, he said he was only exercising his prerogative, so of—" Sister: "Father, will you put Johnny to bed?"

Your Editor Chats.

I HOPE you will all like "Decoyed!"—the new series of which the opening instalment appears in this number.

Nowadays my readers have been led to expect so much from *Short Stories* that it is by no means an easy matter to supply their very exacting demands, yet I flatter myself that I am gifted in being able to discriminate between just what they *do* and what they do *not* want. That is the reason why I think that "Decoyed!" will be a popular series.

The young lady who is narrating in these episodes the story of a noteworthy period of her life does not, of course, considering the position in Society she now occupies, wish for her real name to be disclosed, so she has concealed herself under the name of Vivienne d'Alton. For the same reason she has carefully disguised all other clues by which she could be personally traced. But for these slight exceptions, the experiences related are perfectly true, incomprehensible though they may appear to many readers. Others, who have themselves been the victims of unscrupulous persons, will understand how such marvellous things can happen in Society circles, even in the twentieth century. In the vast majority of cases where young girls are made the butt of swindlers, nothing of the scandals ever sees the light of day, because those who have suffered do not care to have their misfortunes made the subject of common gossip. Unfortunately, the rogues who systematically practise their loathsome calling, know this, and, in the end, when their misdeeds are discovered, they successfully trade on the feelings of those they have ensnared.

However, the lady who calls herself "Vivienne d'Alton" has decided to tell *Short Stories* readers of all that happened to her, so that they, if they are ever placed in similar circumstances, may steer clear of the danger she encountered.

IN a cheery letter that Private C. H. Williams, F. Company, 2nd South West Borderers, Bloemfontein, S. Africa, sends me, the writer states how he, being a Northampton man, was greatly interested in the account of the experiences of Sara Gillespie at that town. He deplores the fact that "being a soldier on the veld I can scarcely get any papers to read. I should especially like a complete set of *Short Stories* containing 'The Pursuit of Sara.'"

May I remind readers that though the actual Boer War is now happily over, there are still many thousands of British Tommies in the two new Colonies. These have the greatest difficulty in getting any literature to read, and you would be doing a very kind action if, after you had finished with this paper, you would forward it on to the men who carry the guns. This is almost the only way in which Tommy Atkins can get anything at all to read.

On page 35 there appears the first of a series of pictures illustrating types of English lovers in various centuries. Some Scottish ones will also appear.

Your Editor.

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LOVE— AND AN ACCIDENT.

How Robert Dutton Tried to Save His Honour.

"I SHALL never learn to feel indifferent about it, Robert."

"But, Muriel, don't you know that people who act in the most impassioned love scenes often hate each other?"

"Well, I am sure that sallow Italian girl loves you. Her soul is in her eyes when she is with you."

"Poor little Sigismunda!"

"You pity her—you *know* that she loves you!" exclaimed the young girl pettishly, drawing away from the arm to which she had been clinging in that openly affectionate manner which would have stamped them in the eyes of the most casual observer as betrothed lovers.

"Muriel, am I a conceited cad? I have felt sorry for the girl, who has to face trials of which you can't conceive. She was stolen in her babyhood by some man, I believe, and starved and beaten till her talent for singing was discovered. Then she was a street singer, a forlorn child out in the frozen streets—at tavern doors—in the crowd after a play—till her talent grew more marketable, and here she is."

"But the man does not own her now, does he?" asked Muriel with some interest.

"No, she is free. There is no one—she is alone in the world."

"No wonder there is such a hunger in her eyes, Robert. They devour you when she looks at you."

"You jealous little girl! Well, I'm afraid I like you being jealous," Robert said, holding her fast. "But do you think I care for the glances of those gloomy, dark, cavernous eyes, when such a blue, laughing, heavenly pair are watching me? Do you not know that I am thinking of you when I utter the burning, passionate words, and when I seem to enfold that poor girl in my arms I imagine you are there?"

"Don't make it too real, Robert, or she—she might mistake," whispered Muriel blissfully, looking up at the magnificent proportions of the being who was all her own, and feeling an ecstatic delight in her property. He was only a singer in comic opera, and there had been considerable opposition to the engagement, as the young woman's father, a dealer in tallow, did not behold the demigod with his daughter's eyes. But Muriel was an only child, and had never been opposed in her life. And it must be confessed that Robert Dutton was quite a presentable individual, with a well-bred air about him which rather confounded the tallow-chandler, and kept him at a distance.

The two young people were lingering in one of the bright little parks of our city, where the grass had grown emerald-green during the few days of Spring sunshine. On the boughs overhead a light and delicate tracery of green seemed hovering, and a few daisy stars shone whitely in the sod.

Muriel, pale and fair as a Scandinavian princess, with eyes as cold and blue as any turquoise stone, and hair of the palest gold, looked like a snow-maiden.

Only under Robert's ardent looks did a faint rose-flush ever colour those cheeks, and then it was like the after-glow kindled by sunset on the snowy peaks.

"I wish I could melt her—I wish I could waken her soul, if she has one," Robert thought, with some disappointment, as he left his betrothed that day.

He often felt the chill—the limitations of her nature; but though she were as soulless as Undine, he loved her, and spent his time in trying to warm the cold heart to life.

* * * *

"I say, Podsnap, that Italian girl's gettin' a stunner," said a languid dandy to the manager, as they looked on the stage from the side-scenes, "colour's no longer sallow, it's luminous—what Davenport would call sun-steeped. And she used to be such a skinny little beggar."

"All the difference between macaroni and beef," returned the manager, looking at Sigismunda with the eye of one who raised prize cattle. "She was starved before. Tell you what, my boys, look at those eyes—ain't they lanterns, ain't they stars. No, by Jove! They're blazing bonfires, they're fireworks, they're conflagrations!"

Sigismunda, in the dress of a Roman peasant girl, looked like the true type of the ardent tropical land from which she came.

Lithe and graceful in every movement, she seemed one blaze of colour, in her gorgeously-tinted raiment, with the strings of pink coral on the neck, the scarlet of a pomegranate blossom on cheek and lip, the blue-black gloss of her hair, and the flashing eyes, like antique jewels—dark, yet bright, appealing, tender, passionate, disdainful, scathing—blasting with a lightning-like scorn the villain in the play who approaches her with unlawful love.

Then Robert came upon the stage, and it was her *rôle* to spring forward to him with an appeal. He is her betrothed, and she cries out to him to save her, to deliver her from her persecutor, who never gives her peace from his unhallowed pursuit. It is Robert's part to shoot the villain down. He fires, and, to his horror, Sigismunda falls. By some mischance he has used a loaded revolver, and the girl had happened to receive the bullet.

She does not faint—she does not see—but she feels who it is that raises her up.

"Do not," she moans; "go away, do not look at me, I must be hideous."

For she knows by the horrible pain that her face must be drawn and distorted, and even in the agony of that moment she cannot bear that the man she loves should behold her.

"My poor child, do not think of that!" cried Robert, in an agony of terror. "I thought I had killed you. I believe I should have shot myself if I had. Look at me. Good Heavens! What is it? Can you not open your eyes?"

"She is fainting!" said a doctor, who had sprung upon the stage. "Take her out and give her air."

Once out in the green room the wound was examined. The bullet had torn its way across her face in an eccentric course and entered a pasteboard tree near.

"She will live," was the verdict, "but I fear she is horribly disfigured, and may lose the sight of one eye."

Robert Dutton dropped on his knees at the side of the girl in an agony of self-accusation.

"Save her sight, doctor!" he cried. "Send for the best assistance—spare nothing. I will be responsible."

"We will do what we can, but that pretty face is fatally marred, and I fear the worst with the eyes."

The girl was in a dead faint during this cruel verdict.

With the use of restoratives she came to her senses and moved her hands. Robert seized them

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"I am here," he whispered.

"How dark it is. Have they put all the lights out?" she said. "Oh, I remember," and she clutched Robert's hand. "But why, why can't I see? And then this burning, fiery pain, as if my very eyeballs were scorched out! Oh, tell me—tell me, I am not blind—not blind!"

"No—no," whispered Robert pitifully, "all will be well in time, but you have been hurt. You know I did that, and I am miserable. I can never be happy again unless you recover, so you must try, will you not, to be quiet and calm, and do all they say? We will have the best skill, and hope for the best."

"I will do all you ask," she said softly. "Don't grieve too much, but I hope I may not be frightful in your eyes."

* * * * * *

For weeks after this terrible scene Robert went in vain every day to the humble lodging of the wounded girl. He never saw her. He had quite won the heart of Mrs. Bolger, the fat landlady, who had set him down at once as a distracted lover, and sympathised with him accordingly.

"Which it wrings my 'eart to see the poor lamb," she said, "as he's werry quiet, an' only moans now and then, as stands to reason, seein' her livin's gone, which she were not one as could go about with a dog a-singin' ballads like a blind man, but was that ladylike and delicate, an' wotever is to become of her?"

"I'll attend to that!" cried Robert. "But why — why won't she see me?"

"Well, it must be owned as her looks is not wot they was," Mrs. Bolger said, hesitatingly. "An' wot's beauty, arter all, when the 'eart's the right sort; but it comes 'ard, and then she can't see 'erself, and that makes it wuss and wuss."

"But the doctor said only one eye was affected."

"I believe she do 'ave a glimmer in one, an' in time that will be better."

"She must hate me!" cried Robert.

"Lord love you, it's t'other way!" cried Mrs. Bolger. "Which I do think, an' so I tells 'er as it would be better to get the first visit over."

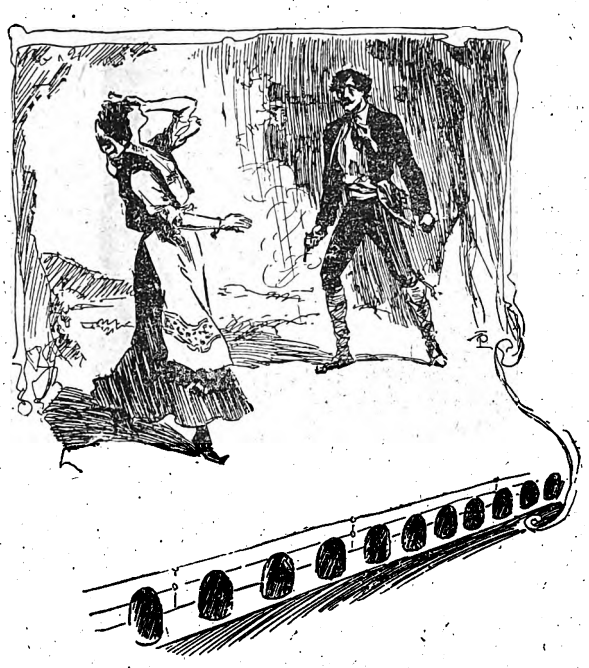
"Yes, let me see her!" exclaimed Robert. "Tell her I cannot believe she feels kindly if she shuts me out; tell her anything, so that she will see me."

Whatever little romance Mrs. Bolger may have extemporised, it proved effective, and Robert followed up the stairs, anxious, yet loth to go and look at his work.

The girl was sitting in an easy-chair by the window. It was a warm day, and she was there to catch the breeze, for she could not yet see well enough to enjoy any view. On the window-ledge stood a pot of violets that Robert had sent the day before.

The attitude of the young girl was hopeless in the extreme. She sat with her hands clasped in her lap, and her face turned away from the door. Yet she was waiting, listening, and caught the sound of the first step Robert made into the room. She did not turn even at that sound, but Robert saw that she was trembling from head to foot.

When he did catch a glimpse of that face he sprang to her side with a cry.



He had used a loaded revolver, and the girl had received the bullet in her head.

"Oh, is this my work?" he gasped. "Oh, those lovely eyes! Have I quenched their light for ever?" He had her hands in his now, and spoke on with a sudden impulse of pity and self-accusation. "Let me make what atonement I can; let me be your eyes from this time; I cannot leave you to your cruel fate! Be my wife, Sigismunda, and you shall not feel your loss."

The girl turned her white, disfigured face towards him, and reached out her hands blindly. In spite of all, the great love shone there and illuminated the marred beauty.

"Can you—do you—love me?" she faltered. "Then I thank Heaven. I am happy—I would bear more than this for your love. Oh, how weak I am! I ought to be noble and self-sacrificing, and not permit you to burden yourself with a helpless creature like myself. But I can't, Robert, I can't. It seems so heavenly that you should love me!"

The young man had not perjured himself by any vow of love, but the poor girl was too blissfully happy to notice that.

"I do not expect you to love me as I do you," she cried pressing his hands to her lips. "I am only a poor wounded little bird, glad to find shelter in your breast. But you! Oh, you are so grand, so noble——"

"There, my child!" cried Robert, with a forced laugh, turning away from the quivering face with a horrible sinking of heart as he remembered Muriel, "that is all settled, and you will get well as soon as possible. You need have no more care for the future—your future is mine." Then feeling that, some caress was called for under the circumstances, he touched her forehead with his lips. They were so cold that the girl shrank from them. "Ah," she said, "I am one of the children of the sun. You, Robert, are from the North, and you know what your poet says:

"'*The cold in clime are cold in blood,*
Their love can scarce deserve the name;
But mine is like the lava flood
That burns in Etna's breast of flame.'

"But you are so good—you are so good, my Robert. And, oh, you have proved your love by taking the poor blind girl to your heart. Do you know, I was sitting here and thinking that as soon as I could go out I would find my way to the river and end the story, for I did not dare to dream that you loved me. Now I want to live."

"Yes, yes. You must live for me!" cried Robert. "If you had drowned yourself I would have felt like a murderer. When you are quite well we will go to the seaside for a month, and see what the breezes will do. Would you like that?"

"I don't care—anywhere with you," said the girl, turning her eyes toward him. "Robert, I believe I can almost see your face. If God should give me that blessing, I would be content. Do you think it can be possible that I shall see again?"

"Yes, the sight of one eye only will be lost," answered the young man.

"But my face, is it very, *very* much disfigured?" she asked. "Mrs. Bolger puts me off. You will tell me the truth"

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And she turned towards him with a little shiver, as if she dreaded the scrutiny.

The injury had affected one side of her face, leaving the other as perfect as ever, but the effect was horrible. It was as if half of a grotesque mask had been applied—the drawn mouth, the hanging cheek, the drooping, bulging eye-lid, that half-veiled, but did not conceal the dead, staring, sightless eye.

Robert instinctively shrank away from her, but she could not see it. A vision of Muriel, his pure and peerless snow-maiden, came to him as his eyes rested on this distorted face. Ah, the atonement was very hard.

"My dear girl," he said, grasping her hand, but turning his eyes away, "you are altered, but your heart is not changed. Do not let us talk of your looks. Whatever change is there, it is my work. If you will not mourn for your lost beauty I will not."

"As you love me, it is nothing!" cried the girl, with a sigh. "And since you make me sure of that, I do not care."

And so they parted for the time.

* * * * * *

Sigismunda could see the waves as they raced up the sand—a glitter that came and went.

She had a safe nook under a rock, where, shaded from the glare, she could hear the soft plash of the water, and see the white spray dash on the beach below.

She spent hours in happy dreams, while Robert wrote his music, for he was a composer in his way.

He had been very good to her—he had soothed her tenderly when for the first time she realised the terrible change in her face, and shrank in horror from her own likeness—this strange new being that stared at her from the mirror.

"How much he must love me when it stands such a test!" the girl thought, as she idly leant back against the rock. "Oh, God, I thank Thee! Oh, I cannot think of what life would have been without him—how desolate! No, I could not bear it."

At this moment came from the rock above the sound of a girl's voice clear and high, with a tone of scorn.

"How dare you speak to me, Robert Dutton?"

"Muriel, hear me. Am I not suffering enough?"

"And all for a ridiculous, quixotic notion! Why in the world should you marry her because you shot her? I never heard of such a thing!"

"But she is helpless. She has only me."

"And I had only you."

"Oh, you have everything. Beauty, and friends, and fortune, Muriel."

"Well, you have proved to me that you never loved me."

"Loved you! Can't you see what I suffer in giving you up? Do you think I love *her*, that poor object, who can only awaken pity and horror in all who see her?"

Sigismunda felt as if sea and sky were swimming away and melting into each other. The very rock was upheaving from its base, but she clutched it and held it down.

"God knows I love you, Muriel—that it would be Heaven to me now to call you mine. But do you not see that I cannot please myself? I believe, before God, that it was the sight of your sweet face which made my hand swerve that night. You were coming in with some gentleman, and a jealous pang seized my heart. Don't you see I ought to atone to that poor girl with my life's happiness, with my heart's blood, if need be?"

"No, I don't see it. She could have gone to some institution. We might have helped her."

Sigismunda stifled a cry, and sat with her half-blind eyes staring out to sea. Ah, how near the water came! She had only to sit there long enough, and the kindly sea would sweep her out of the path of those two lovers.

"Robert"—the girl's voice grew more tender as she spoke; "I will forgive all the past. In a moment of pity you felt that you must sacrifice yourself for that girl, but now, now that you see how you are spoiling your life and mine——"

"Oh, don't tempt me—don't let me see how sweet life might be for me! Muriel, I see a vision of your sweet face whenever I look at her, but then I remember—it was my hand—I must go on in this path, though it will be like walking over burning ploughshares."

"Then I must say 'good-bye!'" returned Muriel proudly.

Sigismunda's heart had ceased to beat; it seemed as if all the wheels of life stood still, and the water was creeping up to her feet, cold as the touch of a deathly hand.

"Muriel, we may not meet again; but do not go so coldly away from me. Think what you were to me—think what you are! Let me kiss you once, dear—let me kiss you for good-bye. You are dead to me, I know, but we kiss our friends after they are dead."

There was a sudden cry as of a soul in pain, then the sound of a splash in the water near; but when the two gained the top of the rock, they could see a woman's form floating in the distance, and a mass of black hair drifting on the waves.

"God forgive me!" cried Robert, with a blanched face. "It is Sigismunda! I must try to save her or die in the attempt."

"No, no! You shall not—it is madness!" cried Muriel, clinging to his arm. "She is almost out of sight."

"She must have heard us," muttered Robert, staring after the disappearing form. "She is beyond the reach of any comfort I could give her now."

"It was the best thing she could do," exclaimed Muriel, showing conclusively that she had not yet come into possession of a soul.

But Robert clasped the girl to his heart with a glad thrill in the midst of his horror. He did not know the value of the heart that was drifting away from him, and he only felt that this treasure was his own—all his own once more.

Helen Pierson.

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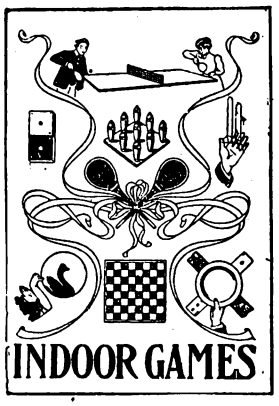

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FIRST EPISODE.

I am Transplanted to a New Sphere.

I WAS sitting in the class-room plodding discontentedly at an Italian translation which Fräulein Wernher had imposed upon me as a punishment for having transgressed some trifling rule of the establishment which recognised her as its supreme authority. The other regular boarders had gone out, under decorous escort, to take the daily walk which had become sickeningly monotonous to me, for I had done the same dreary round for eleven melancholy years, and even if I had been blindfolded, I could have picked out every step, or window, or lamp-post between the school and the circuit of the town.

Still, even our daily constitutional was mildly exciting in comparison with doing solo penance, and after a while, feeling thoroughly miserable, I put my task aside, and yielded to the fit of weeping which had been threatening all the morning.

"Surely," I thought, "no girl was ever so friendless and forlorn as I am!"

True, the school I was at was considered the best in Bochum, my fees had always been paid punctually, and I had invariably had more pocket money than any other girl in the school. Indeed, some of my fellow-students made a point of envying me because I lacked nothing that could be required for comfort.

But they forgot that I knew none of the home joys with which they were all blessed. I had neither mother, sister, nor brother, and my only near relative, my father, had never once been to see me or expressed a desire for a glimpse of me, since he first placed me in Fräulein Wernher's care, when I was a dot of seven.

No wonder, therefore, that I was miserable. And no wonder that my misery, having at last asserted itself, had made me so oblivious of everything else that I did not become aware of another presence in the room until I was shaken vigorously by Mademoiselle Touret, the French governess, who was brimful of excitement.

"Mees Vivienne!" she exclaimed in her funny, broken English, "Mees Vivienne, you cannot guess what has happened! Something so wonderful as you never did dream!"

"Something wonderful!" I echoed dismally. "I suppose we are going to have a different kind of pudding for dinner to-day, or something equally exciting."

"Oh, no, it is not that at all. It is that you will not want puddings here no more."

"That won't matter. I never like any of them, and will be glad to escape eating them. I wish I could escape everything else here. I am just tired of my life."

With these words I burst into a fresh fit of weeping. But I soon forgot my grief, and jumped to my feet as if electrified when Mademoiselle said dramatically: "Tired of *this* life, yes. But not tired of the new and beautiful life with your father, who did send for you this day."

"My father has sent for me? Ma'mselle, you are not saying this for a joke? If I thought you were, oh, I believe I should go mad with rage!"

"Oh, what one temper you are, Mees Vivienne! I am not joke. It is a veritable fact. Meestare D'Alton has asked Fräulein to send you home at once, and she tell me to fetch you to her."

Not another word did I wait to hear! It was enough for me that Ma'mselle appeared to be thoroughly in earnest, and with a stifled cry of excitement, I rushed out of the class-room, down two flights of stairs, and, without even giving a preliminary knock, I burst into Fräulein's private sanctum.

"Is it true?" I cried. "Is it true that my father has at last sent for me?"

Before Fräulein uttered a word, I knew that the wonderful had really come to pass, and that I was to leave school life behind me for ever. At any other time the principal of the Bochumer Töchterschule would have been very indignant at my unceremonious intrusion. But now she was an odd mixture of smiles and tears, and kissed me most affectionately, by way of emphasising her tremulous remark: "At last, my dear child, the dreaded fiat has gone forth, and I must lose the pupil over whom I have watched since she was little more than a babe!"

Somewhat to my astonishment Fräulein, for the first time in my recollection, began to cry bitterly, and it suddenly dawned upon me that she must be really fond of me. The idea had never occurred to me before, for Fräulein was not demonstrative, and I had always looked upon her as the stern preceptress, who never allowed the faintest deviation from established rules. Now, however, she was all tenderness, and I actually, amid the wild joy which my approaching freedom gave me, had room to feel sorry for Fräulein because she was losing me.

"But I am glad for you," she said, as soon as she had mastered her emotion. "I had begun to fear that your father cared no longer for you. In all these years he has never once seen you, and has never invited confidence concerning you. But when I sent him the receipt for his last payment to me, I sent also one of the photographs you had taken

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recently, and he is now most anxious to see you. He said he did not guess you could be so lovely."

"He might have known what I was like if he had cared," I remarked soberly.

"Yes, that is true. And I wish he had come here to fetch you, instead of only meeting you in Rotterdam, for I would have liked to see him once more, and talk to him about you. But that cannot be, as he is unable to spare time to come all the way."

"But how am I to travel alone to Rotterdam?"

"That is all arranged. I will go with you to Ruhrort, and will see you safely on board the steamer. At the end of your short voyage your father will meet you, and then things will be well with you."

"Fräulein, I am almost afraid, after all, of what lies before me. Just think, I shall not even know my father when I see him!"

"No, Vivienne, but he will know you. He has seen your photograph, and I shall write at once to the address he has given me at Rotterdam, and describe the clothes you will wear, besides giving the name of the boat you will sail on."

This programme was duly carried out. There was a certain amount of weeping, a lavish exchange of souvenirs, a short journey to Ruhrort, an affectionate parting from Fräulein, and then, with the fever of excitement dancing in my veins, I was sailing down the Rhine. to meet the father who was a complete stranger to me.

Under other conditions, I suppose, I should have taken a vast interest in my surroundings. And the scenery, though not so attractive as it is higher up the river, would have afforded a certain amount of delight to me, if my thoughts had not been centred in the meeting which was so near at hand. But not all the lack of parental affection which I had endured for so many years was enough to quench my eager desire to show my filial love; I could think of nothing but my father, and I mentally compared him with every man I saw.

The faint recollection I had of him was that of a tall, handsome man, with a fresh-coloured face, and kind, grey eyes, and this recollection was borne out by Fräulein Wernher's more mature memory. He was young, too, and as he could not be more than fifty even now, I pictured him as more attractive than ever.

Concerning the house in which I was to live in future I had but the most hazy of notions. While I was at school my father seemed to have spent his time in travelling all over Europe, without any fixed abode, and his remittances to Fräulein Wernher arrived from all sorts of places. But he intimated in his last communication that he meant to settle in a splendid establishment in London almost immediately, and that I was to act as his housekeeper.

"A splendid establishment" implies a staff of servants, and while I was smartening myself up a little, just before the steamer reached Rotterdam, I wondered if a lady's maid was to be included in the personal blessings in store for me.

Presently it became apparent that we had reached our destination and I rushed eagerly on deck that I might see my father as soon as possible. Hastily casting my eyes upon the throng of people who were waiting to come aboard as soon as the vessel was moored, I tried to recognise the one man in the world who possessed any interest for me.

A tall, handsome gentleman pressed eagerly in my direction, and my heart thrilled with pride and joy at sight of him. But alas! he looked past me to a lady who occupied the next berth to mine in coming down the river, and I was bitterly disappointed that he ignored me altogether.

But a worse disappointment was in store for me. I was glancing anxiously ahead when a sharp, incisive, but not unmelodious, voice accosted me with the words:

"I think there can be no mistake. You are Miss D'Alton?"

The speaker was a short, stout, sallow-faced man, at sight of whom my pride and joy sank to zero. I believe my disillusionment showed itself in my face for an instant. Then it occurred to me that this might not necessarily be my father himself, but someone whom he had sent to meet me, and I beamed smiles upon him.

"Yes," I said, "I am Vivienne D'Alton. I expected my father himself to be here. I am all impatience to see him, so I hope you will take me to him at once."

"What would you say if I were to pose as your father himself?"

"That you were having a little fun with me, because you happen to know that my father and I are practically strangers."

"My dear Vivienne, that is exactly what I expected you to say, for I've altered frightfully. When a man takes to adding superfluous flesh like I've done, even his own mother would look in vain for his former good looks."

"And you are Beverley D'Alton?"

"The very same, my dear, and very proud I am to be your father. But come along, child. I have a carriage waiting to take us to the house of a friend of mine who awaits your advent most anxiously."

That was all. There was no loving embrace for me. Not even a fatherly kiss of welcome. Just a stiff handshake such as might be bestowed upon the veriest stranger, and I felt more horribly depressed than I could have imagined possible.

Yet there was nothing tangible for me to complain of. My father's manners were those of a perfect gentleman, and he showed the utmost desire to insure my comfort in every way. He even insisted upon carrying my waterproof and umbrella to the carriage, and I noticed that the porter who disposed of my luggage upon a cab smiled delightedly at the heavy tip which was given him.

In fact, everything looked correct to the casual observer, and the studied deference which was paid to my comfort was gradually instrumental in making me see things in a somewhat different light. Of course, it was not my father's fault that Time had played such havoc with his good looks, and I reproached myself for having let it influence me at all.

After driving about twenty minutes we arrived at a large mansion, where I was enthusiastically welcomed by a Mrs. Sherwood, who was introduced to me as "my aunt."

"You sweet child!" she exclaimed. "Beverley and I thought you must be lovely when we saw your photograph, but you are infinitely prettier than we imagined. You will be immensely popular when you go to London."

Several kisses accompanied this eulogium, and I tried to be pleased with Mrs. Sherwood's welcome, but could not resist saying: "I hope looks are not supposed to be the only passport to popularity?"

"If they were," put in my father with a laugh, "I shouldn't stand much chance, eh?"

I blushed guiltily at this gentle reproof, and felt sorry that I had allowed my disappointment to be seen so plainly.

But Mrs. Sherwood saved me from further embarrassment by observing gaily:

"Thank goodness, the world nowadays knows how to appreciate people for mental and moral qualities. So women like me, who are painfully *passée*, need not worry because the Goddess of Beauty forgot to leave a permanent impression on them. But there, how forgetful I am! My dear Vivienne, you must be famished! Come with me, and I will show you the room you are to occupy while you remain here. Then, when you have taken your hat off, you shall have your lunch."

"Thank you, Mrs. Sherwood. I really think I am very hungry."

"Not *Mrs. Sherwood*. That sounds so distant. Why not call me 'Aunt Flora'?"

"With pleasure. But, do you know, I have never known that I had an Aunt Flora."

"Well, I'm not really your aunt. But your darling mother and I were just like sisters, and she would have loved me to watch over your welfare. Unfortunately, I did not know where you were until I met your father two months ago, or I should certainly have sought you out."

Part of this conversation took place as we were going upstairs, and I no sooner reached the room allotted to me than I impulsively kissed my new "aunt," for the dearest friend of my dead mother must naturally win my affection.

Left to myself by and bye, I hurried through my toilet, and,

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having barely glanced at my dainty surroundings, I ran softly downstairs to join my father and "Aunt Flora" in the dining-room. Half way down, opposite the top of the first landing, there was a pretty sitting-room, as I could easily see, for the door was partly open. I was tempted to peep in, but drew back when I heard my father ask somebody who, like myself, was hidden by the half open door:

"And you think she will swallow all that?"

"Absolutely!" was the reply in "Aunt Flora's" voice. "She is so deliciously inexperienced, and as gullible as a dove. Trust me to manage her all right."

The conversation struck a chill through me, for I was bound to connect it with myself, and I instantly wondered what sinister object could underlie Mrs. Sherwood's affectionate manner towards me. But eavesdropping is not exactly in my line, so I walked straight into the room, saying defiantly: "And in what way is my gullibility to be taken advantage of?"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed "Aunt Flora," "you surely don't connect our conversation with yourself?"

The surprise I witnessed was nothing like consternation, such as might be expected on the part of persons overheard talking of the discomfiture of the listener. On the contrary, it savoured more of amusement than anything else, and this amusement broadened into laughter when I tried to justify my apparently erroneous supposition.

"I certainly thought you meant me," I said shamefacedly.

I was tempted to peep in, but drew back when I heard someone remark; "And you think she will swallow all that?"

"What else could I think when you spoke of somebody's 'delicious inexperience'?"

"My dear child, when you have had servants under your control for a while, you will quite understand my present difficulty. I have a cook who came to me with splendid credentials, evidently given to her by people who were glad to get rid of her services as cook, just as I shall be. She knows absolutely nothing about cookery, but I fancy she can be converted into a first-class lady's maid for you. So I am going to ask her to resign the presidency of the kitchen in favour of a better cook. But, to avoid unpleasantness, I shall tell her that she is to be 'promoted' because she is in every way satisfactory."

"But why should she be unpleasant about such an improvement in her position?"

"Because she has better wages as a cook than she will get as a lady's maid, and it will require a little *finesse* on my part to make her fall in with my views."

Once more I felt myself painfully in the wrong, and the uncomfortable feeling of culpability was intensified when my father added gravely: "I am sorry to observe, Vivienne, that Fräulein Wernher has neglected to teach you that listening at doors is unladylike, and that a suspicious temperament is a never failing curse to its possessor."

"Beverley! How can you be so unkind! I'm sure she did not mean to listen, and still more sure that she is no more suspicious by nature than the rest of her dear mother's relations always were."

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With these words my affectionate aunt put her arms round me and folded me in a motherly embrace.

And I ?

Well, I believed her to be the kind creature she professed to be, and I murmured broken regrets at being a source of disappointment to my father, who now displayed his parental love by kissing my cheek the while he enjoined me to forget what had been said and to think of nothing but being as happy as possible.

I did my best to obey the injunction, and soon became quite happy in the conviction that I was the central object of the love of a good, kind father and an aunt who desired nothing greater than to make me like her as much as my long-lost mother did.

Poor Vivienne ! If you had but heeded your first instinctive impulses you would have saved yourself and others an infinity of suffering at the hands of two of the most pitiless schemers who ever plotted the ruin of their fellow creatures !

* * * * *

Three days passed over, and I was thoroughly happy. Aunt Flora took me to all the best shops in Rotterdam, and bought me so many pretty things that I began to exclaim at the amount of money spent upon me.

" My darling Vivienne," was the smiling rejoinder, " what you are getting now is nothing to what is in store for you. You must not forget that your father is now a very rich man, and that he is so proud of you and so pleased with you that he does not care what is spent so long as you are happy.

" And he wants you to go to London, looking already as if the enjoyment of unlimited wealth was second nature to you. That is why he has left you with me while he goes to superintend the furnishing of his house in Park Lane. It is to be the most gorgeous residence in London, and Beverley wants his lovely daughter to be the queen of the coming season."

It was pleasant at first to hear myself spoken of as a beauty. But the flattery was becoming stale now, and I was by no means so sure of conquest as my affectionate relatives seemed to be, for I had often read that London contained thousands of beautiful women, and could not see why the addition of one more should make a great sensation.

However, I was not obstinate enough to argue the point, but yielded myself unreservedly to the delights of the present. The only mitigating drop in my cup of happiness was Annchen, my new lady's maid, promoted, so I was told, from the kitchen. Annchen was certainly not expert in her duties as yet. But she was a willing worker, and was anxious to improve herself, so I supposed she would be an accomplished maid in course of time.

But I could not bring myself to like having her about me. She struck me as being a prying, inquisitive person, who gathered up every crumb of information concerning everybody with whom she came in contact, but whose lips were firmly sealed about her own affairs. In fact, she gave me a creepy kind of feeling, and was everlastingly on my nerves. But she afforded me no real cause to complain of her, and as Aunt Flora was always singing her praises, it followed that the fault must be with me, and not with Annchen.

One thing struck me as rather odd. Mrs. Sherwood, who owned that she was not a blood relation of ours, and that she and my father had not seen each other for a great number of years until lately, always spoke of him by his Christian name, and I noticed that he reciprocated the familiarity by calling her " Flora."

It seemed, however, to be pushing intimate friendliness too far when I heard her observe to Annchen :

" I had a letter from Beverley this morning. He says the pigeon will be here in an hour or two."

I had gone to Aunt Flora's dressing-room, to show her a letter I had just received from Fräulein Wernher, in which I was given much interesting news about the schoolmates whom I left behind. Finding myself alone, I was waiting till my aunt appeared from the adjoining bedroom, and was very much astonished when I heard Annchen reply :

" Then we will pluck him very soon. Kaspar is quite ready."

" Auntie, may I come in ? " I called out, and I fancied there was a smothered exclamation when my near presence was thus made known.

" Is that you, dear ? " was the almost instant rejoinder. " By all means come in."

Then as I entered Aunt Flora turned a whimsically smiling face to me, and continued :

" What do you think, Vivienne, of your father's latest experiment ? He has recently tasted some pigeons cooked after a queer Dutch fashion in white wine, and he wants his London *chef* to know what they are like. So he is sending an order to a poulterer near Rotterdam to supply Kaspar Krause, who has the secret of the cooking, with a pigeon each day.

" This has to be got ready to send over by next morning's boat, and the supply has to be kept up daily until the London *chef* has guessed the recipe which Kaspar guards so carefully."

" And I have to see to the plucking before the pigeons are sent to Kaspar," added Annchen.

The explanation sounded plausible enough, though I was inclined to think the whole proceeding rather silly. But, of course, a man who was as wealthy as my father could afford to indulge in the most extravagant gastronomic tastes, and how was I to guess that the secret spoken of was of so terrible and so ghastly a nature that the consequences of it will haunt me to my dying day ?

" By-the-bye," remarked Aunt Flora, about three hours later, " there is a gentleman calling to-day with a letter of introduction from your father. I think he has business of some sort in Rotterdam, and Beverley asks me to be hospitable to him while he is here. Of course we must invite him to dine with us, though I don't suppose he is very interesting. People who come with letters of introduction seldom are.'

As I had never encountered anybody bearing a letter of introduction, I was not in a position to contradict this statement until the gentleman now being discussed put in an appearance, when I emphatically told myself that he was exceedingly nice.

He was a Mr. Graysworthy, a man about thirty-five years of age, of irreproachable manners and pleasant conversation. There was something about him which seemed to win confidence at once, and he readily accepted Aunt Flora's invitation to dine with us.

His special business in Holland, it appeared, was to sell some wonderful diamonds with which he had recently returned from South Africa, and if the merchants in Rotterdam fought shy of them, he meant to go on to Amsterdam, in the hope of finding somebody wealthy enough to pay the enormous sum the diamonds were worth.

" And you carry such a huge fortune about with you ? " inquired Aunt Flora. " I wonder you are not afraid of being robbed or murdered ! Some people would do anything to secure such a fortune at one swoop."

" I daresay they would," was the confident reply. " But I do not advertise my possessions to the casual onlooker. I do not even display a watch-chain or a tie pin, and nobody but those in the secret could guess that the belt I wear round my waist is worth fifty thousand pounds at the very least."

" Fifty thousand pounds ! " I echoed. " What an enormous fortune ! "

" My dear Vivienne," was Aunt Flora's smiling comment, " You have no real conception of what a big fortune is. Compared with what your father has, fifty thousand pounds is but a small sum."

" How strange it seems ! Aunt Flora, has he always been as rich as that ? "

" Oh, no ! It is only within the last few years that he has become enormously wealthy, since he took a number of shares in some South African diamond mines."

" And it is precisely because Mr. D'Alton has been so successful in his diamond dealing that I was recommended to ask his advice," supplemented Mr. Graysworthy.

I felt glad that this pleasant, gentlemanly visitor had sought and found kindness at my father's hands, and as the serving of dinner made it inadvisable to continue talking about the whereabouts of valuable diamonds, we changed the subject, our conversation ranging through such a variety of interesting

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topics that when the evening was at last over I felt sorry to think that Mr. Graysworthy would perhaps soon pass out of my life altogether.

Could I but have guessed at the tragic sequel to that most delightful evening, I should have been filled with horror. As it was, I enjoyed myself wonderfully, and was more than pleased when our guest, just before bidding me "Good-night," expressed the hope that he might see a great deal of me in future.

"I shall probably leave Rotterdam on Friday or the next day, according to the exigencies of business," he continued. "But I am looking forward to meeting you constantly in London."

"I believe I am to go to our new house next week," I smiled. "So you must be sure to look us up very soon."

"And in the meantime," added Aunt Flora, "we don't want to lose sight of you here. What do you propose to do with yourself to-morrow evening?"

"I have no particular engagement, and am sure to be free, for the diamond merchants will not be doing business after nightfall, I suppose."

"Well, I am sorry I cannot ask you to dine here with us, as I have promised that Vivienne shall visit some very old friends of mine, and I have fixed to-morrow for the visit."

This was the first I had heard of the arrangement just mentioned, and when I saw how disappointed Mr. Graysworthy looked, I felt that I could easily forego visiting Aunt Flora's friends.

"But that need not deprive us of your company," continued my smiling chaperon. "Herr and Madame Althaus are the nicest people in the world, and I am sure they will be delighted if you will join us at their house in time for dinner."

Mr. Graysworthy gladly fell in with this scheme, and promised to join us at seven o'clock at the residence of Herr Althaus. It did not occur to me that he had not got the address until I saw Aunt Flora write something on a card, which she handed to him.

"Here are explicit directions for finding the place," she observed. "So you will have no excuse for losing your way, and we shall expect you very anxiously."

Mr. Graysworthy took the card, read it carefully, and put it into his pocket-book. Then, with a happy smile and a warm hand pressure, accompanied by an ardent look of admiration when speaking to me, he bade us "Good-night."

And that is the last I ever saw of Gilbert Graysworthy.

* * * * * * *

During the following morning I heard a great deal of the Althaus family. It seemed that all the children were married and living elsewhere, and that both Herr and Madame Althaus were never so happy as when they had young people around them.

"You will enjoy yourself immensely," said Aunt Flora. "And Mr. Graysworthy will help to make the evening still pleasanter for you."

He bade me good-night—and that is the last I ever saw of Gilbert Graysworthy!

Of the truth of the last assertion I had no doubt, and it was a very happy girl who stepped into the carriage which was to convey us to our destination.

"You look fresher than ever," commented Aunt Flora. "But don't be rash, my dear. Mr. Graysworthy admires you immensely, and he is certainly not a bad *parti*. But your father has much greater ambition than that for you. He thinks you ought to marry nothing short of an earl. Besides, you have seen no men hardly yet, and must not lose your heart to the first comer."

This advice was no doubt well meant. But it jarred exceedingly, and I was conscious that my face put on a mutinous

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expression which warns Aunt Flora not to be too obtrusive with her worldly counsels.

Our drive was a very long one. But it ended at last, and we arrived at a big, lonely, dingy house, of which I did not like the outside look at all. Nor do I find the interior much more to my taste, and I actually looked with dismay at the commonplace, unwieldy, unprepossessing couple who proved to be Aunt Flora's much-vaunted friends, Herr and Madame Althaus.

If it were not that Mr. Graysworthy was expected to be here in the evening I should have felt tempted to feign a headache or some other flimsy excuse to go home again, and as the dreary afternoon wore itself away, I began to think that even prospective gay companionship was hardly worth the waste of time involved in spending a whole afternoon with the Althaus couple.

We had coffee and the others also had cakes. My aunt talked a great deal. Our hosts talked very little, and I talked still less. By way of breaking the monotony Aunt Flora asked me to play "some of my pieces" on the old piano, which was horribly out of tune, and I obeyed with alacrity, for if I could sit at the piano I should be exempt from listening to the intermittent, twaddly conversation of the most uninteresting couple it is possible to conceive. However Aunt Flora could regard them with comparative affection was more than I could understand, but that was probably because I was still young enough, and buoyant enough, to feel that reciprocal youth and bouyancy were necessary for my well-being.

I played on till seven o'clock without paying any further attention to my surroundings. But after a surreptitious glance at my watch had shown me that it was now time for Mr. Graysworthy to have arrived, I was all ears for the slightest noise at the front door.

But something must have detained him most unaccountably for more than another hour wore away without interruption. My fingers were tired of strumming the keys of the piano, and I was conscious of feeling more than ready for the dinner which was to have been served at seven precisely.

Madame Althaus had wandered in and out of the room several times, and Mynheer disappeared through the doorway just as I turned round from the piano, leaving Aunt Flora and myself alone for a moment.

"I'm awfully hungry," I said querulously. "I wish we had stayed at home instead of coming to a humdrum hole like this!"

"Vivienne!" reproved Aunt Flora. "I'm surprised at you!"

"And I'm surprised at you!" I retorted, rising and walking across the room. "You spoke of Herr Althaus and his madame as if they were somebody. I should be delighted with. And they are simply the most uninteresting old bores in existence! I wonder why they can't give us our dinner?"

"They are waiting for Mr. Graysworthy, who is behaving very badly in being so unpunctual."

I looked into an old mirror which hung over a dilapidated dwarf china cabinet, and saw such a discontented face that I felt it my duty to straighten it a little. Then I said:

"I suppose something has detained him. But that is not sufficient reason for keeping us without dinner till this time."

"Vivienne, you are very unreasonable."

"Who can be reasonable when dealing with such stupid people?"

"We will have dinner now, Mees D'Alton."

I started with confusion when I heard these words, for they were spoken in the oily, unpleasant voice of Madame Althaus, who had entered the room again without my hearing her.

"I am sorry to keep the young mees so long without her dinner," she added, striving to look benevolent, though her beady eyes flashed a malicious glance at me. "But it is the English mynheer who is to blame, and I am afraid the dinner is now spoiled by being kept waiting."

I was apologising for my own rudeness when I heard a noise outside which I instantly recognised at the "churr" of a nightjar, and I ran to one of the windows in excitement.

"What an odd thing for a nightjar to be churring already!" I exclaimed. "I thought they did not come out till quite dark."

"Vivienne, come here this minute! You must not disturb Madame's curtains by pulling them aside!"

It was Aunt Flora who spoke thus dictatorily to me. And, incredible though it seemed, there was a note of terror in her voice. Greatly wondering at the consternation I had apparently caused, I wrenched myself loose, and demanded to know what harm there could be in trying to see the nightbird which was jarring outside.

"There is no harm, Mees D'Alton," Madame assured me. "But I do not like my blinds pulled aside, and Madame Sherwood knows that it is so."

"I will take care to touch nothing of yours, Madame," I responded angrily. "One would think I were a mischievous baby. Aunt Flora, kindly excuse us to Madame. I am going back home."

"Not without your dinner," invited Madame Althaus, who was shaking as if she were frightened to death over something or other.

But I was not inclined to accept further hospitality at her hands, and as I was angry with Aunt Flora too, I was firm in my determination to go home as soon as the carriage could be brought out again.

"Very well," said my aunt, "I suppose you must please yourself. But if I had known what kind of girl your father was asking me to chaperon, I should have thought twice about it."

To this remark I made no reply, and during the drive back into Rotterdam we were both very reticent. I was spared the embarrassment of bidding "Good-evening" to the unctuous couple who inspired me with such unconquerable dislike, for Madame waddled out of the room when I refused to stay to dinner, and neither she nor her husband showed themselves to me again.

Although I said little, I was thinking a good deal, for I was feeling extremely puzzled. I wondered why both Aunt Flora and Madame Althaus should have been so afraid to let me look through the window. They were too late to prevent me from seeing that my maid, Annchen, was standing outside, with a big, rough-looking man, who had his fingers to his mouth, as if he were using them to regulate some sound he was making, and I couldn't help wondering what the girl could be doing there.

However, I did not tell Aunt Flora that I had seen my maid, and that I knew the "nightjar" to be the latter's uncouth companion, for I had an idea that some kind of trickery was afloat, and I resented having been induced to waste the greater part of a day under such uncongenial circumstances.

Being young and healthy, I did full justice to my supper, and slept well enough, too. But a great shock awaited me when Aunt Flora and I were having breakfast next morning. I was reading a most affectionate letter, just received from my father, when the English girl who acted as waiting-maid entered with a freshly-buttered hot roll, and burt into tears.

We both looked at her in astonishment. But my astonishment turned to horror when she sobbed forth: "Oh, Madame, I cannot help it. It is so terrible! They have found another dead body lying in the Messiner Straat. He has been murdered, stabbed through the heart. But he has not been robbed, for his money was in his pockets, and his watch and ring still on when he was found. And his name was on his cards and pocketbook."

"Yes, that is very dreadful," commented Aunt Flora, whose voice quavered with strong emotion of some sort. "But why should *you* take the affair so much to heart?"

"Because," sobbed the maid. "I saw the gentleman looking well and happy only two nights since."

"Two nights since?" I almost shrieked, for a horrible foreboding had seized me. "Where could you have seen him?"

"I saw him here, Miss Vivienne. The body is that of a tall, handsome Englishman, and his name is Mr. Gilbert Graysworthy."

(Another instalment of this exciting series next week.)

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Pamela Gordon's Escapade.

How a Girl Outwitted her Mean Father.

THE Gordons were, or considered themselves, the very first people in Ramtown, and Josiah Gordon, the present head of the family, was very proud of his ancestors. He was about one meanest man in money matters ever known. He had driven his boys from home by his niggardliness; and now that his wife was dead, his daughter Pamela was all that he had left.

She was a handsome, strong, well-made girl, and intellectual, although he had given her the very poorest education, and no accomplishments whatever. She worked in his house without help, or thanks, or reward of any kind; her only consolation being that she *was* Miss Gordon.

"Much good that does me," she used to say, as she toiled away to save her rich father a few more pounds.

Girls who had no grandfathers to boast about had accomplishments and good clothes, and comforts and pleasures of all sorts, which she never knew, and which her father could well afford.

At last, on her nineteenth birthday, after she had longed in silence for many days, Pamela grew bold. Long, fur-lined cloaks were just coming into fashion, and how she wanted one only a girl can know.

It was while her father sat counting over a great roll of notes, which he had just received as the rent of certain property, that she went softly behind him, and said, meekly:

"Dad, can I have one of those large, black silk cloaks, such as Patsy Burroughs wears—one with a fur lining? I'll make it myself. It will wear for years. Oh, dad, I do so want it!" and she paused, with hands unconsciously clasped together.

Mr. Gordon looked at her horror-stricken.

"A *silk* cloak, with a fur lining!" he repeated, slowly. "No, you can't, Pamela; it's too expensive. Get your poor mother's grey cloak and wear that out. I'm sure she'd be willing."

"Poor mother's shawl had moths in it two years before she died," sighed Pamela. "She couldn't wear it, and you never knew, dad; you don't know how badly off I am. I've outgrown my jacket, and look quite a sight in it. I have boy's shoes, and a hat—oh, dear, such a hat! I cannot really go out anywhere."

"Women should stay at home," said Mr. Gordon.

"Certainly I ought to go to church," said Pamela.

"Not to show fine clothes," said Mr. Gordon.

"But I ought to dress like a lady," sighed the poor girl. "I should think you'd admit that, dad?"

"*Ladies* are not always the best dressed," said Mr. Gordon. "Far from it. You are Miss Gordon. Remember, the Gordons are the oldest family in Ramtown."

"Oh, I know all that, dad," interrupted Pamela; "but it does no good, if I must go about looking like a beggar."

Mr. Gordon brought down his cane on the floor, thundered out, "Hold your tongue, Pamela," buttoned his pocket-book into his bosom and trotted away to deposit the money, while Pamela, scarlet from brow to chin, remained where he had left her.

"Oh, what shall I do?" she exclaimed at last. "Is this a woman's fate, to beg all the days of her life? I have no education. I cannot teach. I can do nothing but housework. I'm the best washer in the village, but—There!" cried Pamela, bringing her foot down on the floor suddenly. "There! I've got it. A girl who can wash and iron as I can doesn't need to beg for her clothes."

Brushing her tears away she ran into the hall, took from a peg her shabby jacket and hat, put them on, locked up the house, and hurried down the village street as fast as her strong young limbs could carry her, until she stopped at a little white house, at the low window of which she tapped.

A little girl opened the door, and Pamela followed her into a sitting-room, where a thin woman sat, amidst cushions, in a big rocking-chair, with a brand new baby across her knee, two older ones on the floor near her, and two little boys building a model on the table, while the little girl who had opened the door made the sixth of the youthful group.

"Why, Miss Pamela" said the mother, "how pleased I am to see you! Excuse my getting up. I'm not strong yet. I was thinking when you came in whether or no I should be able to darn that place in the carpet, but I don't feel I shall. Nurse has gone away, and sister can't come because her husband is down with fever, and I'm awfully unsettled."

"You must be," said Pamela, fondling the baby. "Why, what a little beauty it is, Mrs. Pease. I suppose you've got a washerwoman this week?"

"No, I haven't. It's my worst trouble," said Mrs. Pease. "I had Kitty bring the things, and they are all mended and sorted out; but Barbara is engaged up on the hill, and I don't know what I'll do."

"Hire *me*," said Pamela.

"What?" laughed Mrs. Pease. "Why, Miss Gordon!"

"I mean it," said Pamela. "I wash better than Barbara, and I want to earn some money. You can pay me what you pay her, Mrs. Pease."

"Three shillings a day," said Mrs. Pease; "but, gracious, Miss Pamela, you *can't* mean it?"

"I mean it from my heart," said Pamela. "Dad thinks

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more of his money than he does of me. I'm going to earn clothes for myself. I need them, I'm sure."

"Men are *so* peculiar sometimes," sighed Mrs. Pease. "If you really mean it, it will be a great comfort to me."

Pamela instantly took off her hat and jacket, tucked up her skirt, and took Kitty out into the kitchen with her.

Before night "the washing," white as snow, was piled in a great clothes basket. Mrs. Pease had had a good bowl of soup, and all was tidy in the little sitting-room where Pamela sat mending the bit of carpet.

"I knew it would bother you until it was done," she said, "and now I'll go home and get dad's tea."

"Oh, Miss Pamela, I'm so much obliged," said Mrs. Pease, "and I believe you've only done it to oblige me."

"No," said Pamela, "I did it to earn money. May I come next Monday?"

"Why, gracious me! If you *will*," said Mrs. Pease.

"Been to see Mrs. Pease?" asked curious Mrs. Chalker peeping out of her kitchen door as Pamela passed.

"I've been washing for her," said Pamela.

"Why, how very kind of you, to be sure," said Mrs. Chalker.

"Nothing of the sort," said Pamela. "I took my money for it. Have you your washerwoman, Mrs. Chalker?"

"No, I haven't, and I'm not able to wash," said Mrs. Chalker.

Pamela instantly offered her services.

"I am going to go out washing," she said. "I'm going to do it, just as other washerwomen do, for money. I shan't explain why. But here I am, a splendid laundress, ready to be hired six days in the week, from seven to six, if any one wants me."

So it began. Before long Pamela had many employers, and the village was rife with supposition as to the why and wherefore; but never was girl prouder of herself than was Pamela when she laid down upon the counter of a draper's the money for the silk and fur of her coveted cloak; hard-earned money, but all her very own, not a penny of it coaxed out of any unwilling man alive.

She wore the cloak and a pretty plush bonnet and new kid gloves to church on Christmas Day. She looked well. The squire stared at her solemnly, but he knew she had had no money.

"I expect," he thought, "she's cut up her poor mother's old black silk. I won't ask any questions," and he held his peace.

Pamela, as she looked at him, wondered what he would say if he knew all. That week she had had some cards printed —professional cards.

The printer brought them home next morning. They read thus:

"MISS PAMELA GORDON—Laundrywork or House-cleaning done in the best manner. GORDON HOUSE, —— ——."

The cards were circulated through the village by a boy hired for the purpose, and on her return at night from her day's work, Pamela found a post-card awaiting her.

"MISS GORDON, Laundress—*Please call at Mr. Bothwell's early to-morrow.* "G. BOTHWELL."

Now Mr. Bothwell was the new minister, a widower, with two children. He knew nothing of the Gordons, or of the village as yet. He had preached there once, and had been "called" in consequence, on the demise of the excellent Mr. Dolorous, who had departed this life at a ripe old age. Pamela laughed a little as she determined to call and see what was desired. At seven o'clock she rang the bell of the pastor's very small house, and was answered by the gentleman himself. He was in evident distress of mind, and his dressing-gown needed mending sadly.

He looked at Miss Gordon for a moment, and then requested her to walk into his study. It was a dusty place, with a good deal of manuscript lying about; and the shrieks of weeping children were heard in the distance.

"May I ask what I can do for you, miss?" inquired the gentleman, motioning to a seat.

"You wrote to me," said Pamela. "Miss Gordon, laundress."

"Oh, dear me, yes," replied Mr. Bothwell, with wide open eyes, "I wrote to you. Thanks for your promptness. The fact of the matter is, my housekeeper—an aged person—I thought her most estimable—is lying terribly intoxicated on the kitchen floor, and has been for two days, and things are—are—— "

And Mr. Bothwell, running short of words, spread his hands out in a pantomime descriptive of chaos.

"I understand," said Pamela calmly. "Where is your kitchen?"

Two hours afterwards the master was calmly writing in his study, and the children, washed and dressed, were listening to the stories Pamela told them as she rubbed away at the wash-board.

The housekeeper had been dumped upon a bed in a small bedroom on the lower floor to sleep off her intoxication, and potatoes were boiling and a couple of chickens roasting for the family dinner.

Meanwhile Mr. Gordon, having some important documents to inspect, had come home unexpectedly, and entering the house, had found it empty, and in the sitting-room came upon a sight which petrified him with horror.

A little portable desk, which his daughter had appropriated for her own, lying open on the table, and in it the cards we have described, and her account-book.

He read the cards first:

"MISS PAMELA GORDON—Laundrywork or House-cleaning done in the best manner."

Then he ran his eye over the account-book.

"Washed—Monday for Mrs. Pease; Tuesday for Mrs. Chalker; Wednesday for Mrs. Mott; iron, Thursday afternoon; house-cleaning for Mrs. Down on Saturday."

He read this in a furious rage, and almost foaming at the mouth, until he came to the following items:

"Dec. 5th.—Bought silk and fur for cloak.

"Dec. 10th.—Made cloak. It fits well.

"Dec. 25th.—Wore the cloak to church, and thanked heaven I hadn't to beg it from father."

Then Mr. Gordon closed the book, and with a queer disposition to cry, sat down beside his solitary hearth, and looked at the fire for several hours without stirring.

When Pamela opened the door and came in she saw her father, and knew that he knew all.

"Pamela, come here," he said. "How long has this been going on?"

"Since October, dad," the girl answered.

"Then you've been disgracing me and yourself for three months," said the old man. "*You*, a Gordon! And all to spite your poor old father for being careful of his money."

Pamela was not afraid of her father now. She came over and sat beside him.

"Dad," she said, "it was not for spite; it was for want; I suffered so much mortification, not only from being shabby, but having to beg. If there is anything in good blood, as you think there is, perhaps that made it hard for me to beg even from you. I was happier earning what I needed. Would you like to be a beggar, dad?"

"You've done very wrong, Pamela," said her father. Then he paused and added: "You shall tell me what allowance you need for your clothes, and I'll let you have it monthly. Now, give me those cards."

He burnt them in the fire when she had handed them to him, and she hurried away to get his tea, and no more was said. The Gordons were not great talkers.

But Pamela is not sorry for what she did to this day.

As for Mr. Bothwell, he rejoices; for otherwise, perhaps, he might, being a shy man, never have met Pamela Gordon, who is to marry him before long. Other people may blame her for her "escapade," or call her "odd" or "spiteful"; he understands her and admires her all the more for her independence.

"Though, Pamela," he often says, "I should have offered myself all the same had you actually been a laundress."

Maud Vickers.

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The Reason Why.

"I'll never ask another woman to marry me so long as I live." "Refused?" "No; accepted."

A Sure Sign.

CARRIE: "Are you sure that May and Algy are engaged?" Amy: "Why, certainly! I heard them quarrelling last night."

Something Fatal.

"She had the fatal gift of beauty, had she not?" "Well, I don't know whether it was her beauty or her money that was fatal, but anyhow she married a titled nonentity."

A Hint Accepted.

"MAY I kiss you, Miss Jane?" "I am sorry to see, Mr. Briggs, that you, too, are affected by the prevailing cause of business depression." "And that is?" "Lack of confidence." Then he kissed her.

Not Very Complimentary.

HE: "My people are bothering me to marry Miss Mayford." She: "You'd be lucky if you did. She is very clever and very beautiful——" He: "Oh, I don't want to marry brains and beauty. I want to marry you."

Pa was Sorry for Him.

SHE (anxiously): "Have you asked papa, Reginald?" He: "Yes." She (nervously): "What did he say?" He: "He didn't say anything; but I know he gave his consent, for he looked at me in a pitying sort of way, don't you know."

Naturally She Wouldn't.

GERTIE: "I want your advice. I've been proposed to by three men, and I don't know which one to choose." Mabel: "Do you know which has the most money?" Gertie: "Of course I don't, you silly! I shouldn't want anybody's advice if I knew that!"

How Ungrateful!

HE: "I am really surprised at Dr. White. After being our family doctor for years, and treating me for all sorts of things, and to think of all the money we've paid him, too!" She: "What has he done?" He: "He wouldn't pass me for the life insurance company."

A Most Awkward Allusion.

GEORGE: "Do you know what I am going to give you for a birthday present this year?" Maud (enthusiastically): "No; only I'm sure it will be something new, and stylish, and elegant, and awfully expensive. You dear, reckless boy, you!" And George wishes he had not said anything.

Circumstances Alter Cases.

THEY were standing at the front gate. "Won't you come into the parlour and sit for a little while, George?" "N-no, I think not," replied George hesitatingly. "I wish you would," the girl went on; "it's awfully lonely. Mother has gone out, and father is upstairs groaning with rheumatism in the legs." "Both legs?" asked George. "Yes; both legs." "Then I'll come in for a little while."

Not a Paradox.

SHE: "There is a woman whom I envy. And, curious as it may seem, she envies me." He: "How can can that be?" She: "We were both after the same man—and I married him."

It Always Happens Thus.

TED: "I've been trying to catch Dolly under the mistletoe, but Miss Autumn seems to be the only one I can find there." Ned: "It seems to be an instance of the wrong girl in the right place."

A Slight Misapprehension.

ARTIST: "What do you think of my peasant girl?" Young Miss: "I think her hat is perfectly charming. Is she going to the theatre?" Artist (despondently): "That's not a hat. She's carrying hay."

A Slip of the Tongue.

HE (pleadingly): "Why can't we be married at once?" She (coyly): "Oh, I can't bear to leave father alone just now." He (earnestly): "But, my darling, he has had you such a long time." She (freezingly): "Sir!"

Tit for Tat.

ETHEL: "Mr. Fiddleback wanted to send you a birthday present, but I told him you have stopped having birthdays ten years ago. Was I right?" Maud: "I believe so. I know very well it was two years after you stopped."

An Averted Tragedy.

"THE first man that made a declaration of love to me said that if I did not marry him he would shoot himself before my eyes." "Good Heavens, the man was crazy. Why did you not have a watch put over him?" "I did. I married him."

How He Won Her.

"No," said the fair girl, "it's no use. You don't come up to my ideal." "Perhaps not," he answered. "But I don't care if I can only get anywhere near my own." "Your own?" she answered. "What is your ideal?" "You," he whispered.

Out of the Frying Pan.

MR. BLUNDER: "Why, your mother looks as young as you do, Miss Stale." "Miss Stale (stiffly): That is not very complimentary to me, Mr. Blunder." Mr. Blunder (confusedly): "I—I didn't mean that—I—I mean you look as young as your mother!"

Altered Matters a Little.

"I HEAR your engagement with Miss Boodle is off. How did it happen?" "In strict confidence, my friend, she got cross because I stole a kiss." "I don't see why that should provoke her—when you were engaged." "Well, you see, I stole this kiss from another girl."

Quite Successful.

"So Winnie gained her object, after all?" said Miss Vinaigrette to her friend. "No," was the reply; "he married someone else." "I know," said Miss Vinaigrette; "but he didn't marry Daisy. Winnie prevented that, which was all she wanted to do."

A Lifelong Sentence.

"I DON'T like to spoil your Christmas, dear," said the sweet little thing, "but I think we might as well consider our engagement as broken." "I don't see why. Your father said postponed." "Postponed until you arrive at years of discretion, and in your case, Reggy dear, you know what that means."

She was Flattered.

MRS. SANSOM: "I understand, sir, that you have secretly been making love to my daughter, and I must forbid an acquaintance begun in that way. You should have seen me first." Shrewd Suitor: "Madam, had I seen you first I should have forgotten your daughter and fallen in love with you." Mrs. Sansom: "Um—the informality of the proceeding was all I objected to. Come with me and I will introduce you."

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Concludes in this number.

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE.

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

THIRTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Lion at Bay.

FOR the next forty days the guests on board the *Isola* enjoyed the pleasures of the unexpected almost in daily succession. Their idea, like the rest of the world which was wondering what had become of the vanished President and his yacht, was that he would take the shortest route to the entrance to his unknown Underworld.

But Isolo Staunton and his trusty adviser knew that this would be expected of them and therefore the exact opposite was done. No sooner was the *Isola* well out of sight of land than she altered her course to the south-south-east and ran in an almost direct line at her utmost speed, save when the sighting of a vessel, which her guests would have so dearly loved to speak, necessitated a change of course and slowing down.

Meanwhile they noticed that, day and night, men were slung over the sides on stages, working hard with paint brushes and pots.

When they came on deck on the fifth morning they found that one of the two big funnels had disappeared and that yards had been rigged on the fore-mast. The next day in the place of the after funnel there was a crossed-tree main-mast with the main and topmast shrouds and the rigging all taut and trim, and with mainyard, top-sail, and top-gallant yard, braces, and everything complete, already fitted.

"I feel bound to confess, my dear Smith," said Dennison, when he looked round at the constructive changes which had taken place during the night, "that our friend ought to have been born just about the end of the eighteenth century. He would have made quite a perfect pirate. Just look at this ship. At Nice and at Rio she was about the finest-looking yacht afloat. What is she now? A dirty grey-and-white, red-daubed hooker that no one would insure for a couple of thousand pounds, and fancy putting sails on her—sails on a boat that can do her forty knots, nearly. What is she now? A three-masted, one-funnelled, shabby-looking steamer, probably, as anyone who saw her would think, loaded up with hides from the Argentine, staggering somehow across the Atlantic."

"Yes," said Mr. Smith, looking round the dirty decks and at the tarnished brasswork which had once been so spick-and-span and brilliantly shining, "yes, I think I may say that I know something about disguise, but this disguise of a whole ship, so that her own builder wouldn't know her, this, my dear Dennison, proves, as I said to you yesterday afternoon, that we have to do with a genius, and if we only catch him, what a triumph."

"Good morning, gentlemen," sounded Staunton's voice from windward across the deck, "you see, we have been making a few alterations. I'm afraid we haven't improved her appearance very much, but, unhappily, it is sometimes necessary to put even beauty into disguise."

"And that," said Mr. Smith, "I think you have done this time very effectually. Would it be allowable to ask our latitude and longitude?"

"If you will come up on the bridge," said Staunton, "I think I can about tell you."

He went up and they followed him. He took a pair of prismatic binoculars out of a case in the wheel house, took a look through them to the eastward ahead, then giving them to Mr. Smith, he said, pointing to what looked like a little cloud lying on the surface of the water:

"There, the land that you see ahead is, to be quite exact, 49° 20′ S. and 69° 24′ E."

"In other words," replied Mr. Smith, passing the glasses to Dennison, "Kerguelen Island."

"Otherwise known," added Dennison, when he had taken his squint, "as Desolation Land."

"Yes," replied Staunton, "that is one of the names that was given to it, and from what I have heard about it, I should say that it would be rather a dismal sort of place for civilised people to spend the balance of their days in. I believe there is just about enough growing on the land to keep life going with the help of the fish that you catch in Christmas Harbour, but it is only natural to conclude that the average civilised man—and woman—would deteriorate very considerably after working out an existence of that kind for a year or two."

"Yes," said Mr. Smith, "I suppose they would. As you say, it would be only natural. I have read about the place in Ross' 'Voyage to the Southern Seas,' and, speaking quite impersonally, I should say it was a most undesirable place for winter residence. And, again, trespassing on your confidence, Mr. Staunton," he went on, picking up the glasses again, "I don't suppose that you would choose such an utterly inhospitable spot even under present circumstances for your winter quarters."

"Not for myself, Mr. Smith, by any means," replied Staunton, with a laugh, as he looked round into the barrel of a Mauser pistol which Mr. Smith had put just under his nose.

"It's good enough for you, swindler, thief, assassin, and worse, for I happen to know what you wanted to do with my wife and daughter——"

"Durtal, Durtal," shouted Staunton in French; "come here."

"What do you want, sir," cried the captain, flinging open the door of the chart room.

"That," said Dennison, sending a bullet through his brain.

"To the rescue!" shouted Staunton, turning round and seeing two of the Mauser pistols pointed at his eyes. "What, you my prisoners here on my own ship——"

"Drop it, Señor," said Mr. Smith, in a curious mixture of the London vernacular, as his left hand caught the wrist of the arm which was moving towards Staunton's hip pocket.

Staunton was a man who could have broken Mr. Smith across his knee, but when that terrible upward wrench came, he was as helpless as a child. A lurch of the vessel sent Durtal's body pitching and rolling down the ladder from the bridge to the deck. At the same moment Darfield swung one of the Maxims on the forecastle round so that it commanded the bridge.

Staunton looked at it for a moment and shrugged his shoulders.

"And now," said Mr. Smith, with his eyes staring straight into Staunton's and his finger on the trigger of his pistol, "you know as well as we do that if we were to take you and your yacht back to England there would be very little difficulty in getting her condemned as a smuggler of false coin and counterfeit notes, and I need hardly add that there would be still less difficulty in sending you to the scaffold after we had produced the evidence which we possess as to the real cause of certain murders—call them mysterious deaths, if you like—which happened in London shortly before the *Isola* made that

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mysterious trip from Leith to the Bay of Nice and somehow managed to sight the ice cap of Hekla *en route*."

"Don't worry about details, Mr. Smith," said Staunton, still looking at the muzzle of the Mauser. "Get to the facts, please."

"Just what I was going to do," replied the detective. "No, don't move, please. We have got everything arranged, and if you lift a finger Mr. Darfield will sweep the decks with that Maxim. What I was going to say was this: If Mr. Dennison and myself did our duty, we should either shoot you now or take you home to be hanged with your friend and accomplice Ramiero Valdez, otherwise Padre Ramiero, who was so very nearly caught over the West Indian business. But you have a daughter who loves this victim of yours, whom you thought to consign to a living death of slavery and degradation—a fate which I understand you had also reserved for my own wife and daughter—in this Underworld of yours. For her sake we are going to give you and Valdez the option of disappearance."

"In Desolation Land, I presume," laughed Staunton; "well, what's the alternative?"

"For the present, at least," replied Mr. Smith, "you have the choice between Desolation Land, from which you may one day return, as you did from the Chinchas, and the undiscovered country——"

"In other words, Mr. Staunton," said Dennison, "you can take your choice between going ashore at Christmas Harbour with your friend Valdez and making the best of it there, with, of course, an ample supply of your own provisions, or being taken to the nearest British port and given in charge as the common, though gifted, swindler that you are. For your daughter's sake we should recommend absolute disappearance. Of course, there is a third choice, but, for your daughter's sake and Ellerton's, it would be a pity for you to take that. It would not be nice for us to have to go home to England and let it be known that your daughter's father had been shot or hung as a pirate and a murderer."

"You are perfectly right, gentlemen," replied Staunton, with all the coolness of the gambler who has staked all and more than he has against the fall of the loaded dice of the Fates and lost, "and you may believe me or not, as you like, but I am honestly, genuinely grateful to you for sparing Mercedes from the shame that you might have brought upon her. For her sake, I accept your terms unconditionally. I will answer for Valdez. Take the ship and everything there is in it. Give us a boat and some stores and I will promise you, in Mercedes' name, and by the memory of her mother, all that I hold sacred in the world, that we shall never contradict any story you like to tell about us."

THIRTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Back to Civilisation.

As nothing was heard of the vanished *Isola* for over three months after her disappearance, it was universally concluded that she must have been so badly injured during her escape from the Bay of Rio that she got out to sea only to founder. As a matter of fact, her disguise had been so complete that, although she had been sighted over and over again, none of the keen-eyed watchers had recognised her, and so she was able to reach the Anchorage without exciting any suspicions.

But when once the couplings had been made there still remained the greatest danger and difficulty to be overcome. The nearer they got to the moorings, the more distinctly the Marconi apparatus on board interpreted the signals from the Underworld, but, try as they would, they could get no response to their own, and, therefore, it was impossible to converse with Ellerton. It was plain that, although by some means he had managed to construct an apparatus capable of sending signals through earth and water, either the Hertzian rays could not penetrate to him, or he was not able to receive them.

True, there was the telephone running through one of the guiding cables, but, as Darfield, who was the only one on board who completely understood the working of the diving-chamber, explained—if Herarra was still in control of his submarine kingdom, and Ellerton had managed to transmit his signals without his knowledge, to make the descent would simply be to enter a trap from which there would be no escape. For Mr. Smith, Dennison and himself, capture would mean death in the Boiling Lake, and for Madame de Ronski and Paula hopeless slavery. On the other hand, it seemed incredible that Ellerton, alone and a captive, should have been able to overcome his jailers and gain control of his vast prison-house with its population of slaves.

It was at this juncture that Darfield proved his complete sincerity and devotion by offering to go down alone in the diving-chamber and find out the true state of affairs. No one knew better than he did the tremendous risk that he was running, but he stopped all discussion on the subject by saying quietly:

"I am the only man who could possibly do it, because only four knew the secret—Mr. Staunton, Valdez, the Captain, and myself. Granted that Herarra is still in command, if a stranger went down he would simply be taken and killed at once. On the other hand, I could make them believe that I am on ordinary business and bring Herarra and Vizard back with me to have an interview with the Señor, as we used to call him. In that case, of course, it will be perfectly easy to deal with them. If they didn't believe me it would be awkward, but I still might manage to have a talk with Mr. Ellerton and get back, though then we could never rescue him. Still, I am the only one who can do anything, and I should be utterly unworthy to go back to Janet if I didn't do it."

He had his way, and when he had once more very carefully explained the working of the diving-chamber and the signals to the engine-room for lowering and raising it, he took down the telephone, rang up, and as soon as the answering ring came back, he said:

"Are you there, Herarra?"

"Yes," came the reply after a few seconds. "What have you been doing away so long? We thought you had got yourselves wrecked. Is the Señor on board, and have you any more stuff? We are getting short."

"Yes," replied Darfield. "I am bringing you a load down immediately, so stand by and have everything ready."

"All right," came the reply.

Darfield hung up the telephone again, and said to the others:

"That's a good idea—I didn't think of that. He can't very well suspect anything if I take him a load of silver down."

He pulled a lever at the end of the wall opposite to the sloping passage. A steel panel slid back, disclosing another room about ten feet square, half filled with ingots of silver.

"There's plenty there," he continued. "Now, I'll ask you to lend me a hand and load some of this into the diving-chamber."

They set to work with a will, and in half an hour or so, they had loaded in five hundredweight of the ingots. Then Darfield once again described the working of the mechanism with the help of a diagram which he had drawn for them, and went into the chamber. They both shook hands heartily, and Mr. Smith said shortly, but not without feeling:

"You are a brave man, Mr. Darfield, and I hope you'll have all the luck that your courage deserves."

"I hope so," replied Darfield, "but, remember, that if you make one mistake with the machinery they will know instantly down there that something is wrong. If I'm not back in an hour you may as well cast loose and go home, for the Underworld will be closed for ever."

They drew the levers and when the steel door had slid into its place the signal to lower was sent to the engine-room, and three rings on the telephone down the cable. Two answering rings came back, and then there was nothing for it but to wait and see what the fateful hour should bring forth, whether, in short, the Underworld was to be discovered and Ellerton rescued, or whether his fate and that of Darfield were to be shrouded in everlasting mystery.

Three-quarters of the hour passed, and still no signal came.

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Mr. Smith and Dennison had stopped talking. The latter stood by the levers, and the former beside the signal-bell, each with a Mauser pistol in hand. The forty-five minutes grew to fifty, then to fifty-three.

"I'm afraid it's about all up!" said Mr. Smith, who had his watch in hand.

"I am not," said Dennison, in his matter-of-fact way. "It's quite possible that they're just having a quiet talk together. Darfield, naturally, wouldn't want to seem eager to hurry them."

"You seem to forget, my friend," said Mr. Smith, almost anxiously for him, "that Darfield told them that the Señor was here, and wanted to have a talk with them, and from what I have heard and remember of our late host, he was not a man who cared to be kept waiting. Ah, there it goes at last!"

Four loud rings on the telephone announced that the diving-chamber was ready to ascend. Mr. Smith at once sent the signal to the engine-room for it to be hauled up. Fifty seconds later another bell rang, announcing that the chamber was in its place. Dennison pulled the lever which drew the plate in the floor of the *Isola* back into its place, and Mr. Smith counted four minutes by his stop watch. Then he nodded to Dennison, who at once pulled the second lever. The water-tight door at the bottom of the passage slid back, and that of the diving-chamber was opened. As they stepped back out of sight they heard, to their intense relief, Darfield's voice saying:

"Welcome back to the Overworld; you will find the Señor waiting for you in the Council Chamber. After you, gentlemen."

Leon Herarra and his lieutenant André Vizard walked all-unsuspecting up the sloping passage, as they had done in the same circumstances many a time before. But as Herarra took his first step into the lighted chamber at the top he heard a voice, which he had heard before in a crisis of his career, saying quietly in Spanish:

"Hands up, Señor, or I fire!"

At the same moment, Dennison had gripped Vizard by the collar, and put the muzzle of his Mauser under his ear, saying in French:

"You surrender, Monsieur?"

And, of course, there was nothing for it but that or sudden death, and so one of the most absurdly simple and yet momentous captures in the history of crime was made.

As the readiest means of disposing of them for the present the two prisoners were ordered to go into the still open treasure-room, which they did in savage and wondering silence, then the panel was shut upon them, and they were left to discuss the miracle at their leisure.

Darfield then made a second trip to the Underworld, and in about half an hour returned with two other passengers, one of whom was certainly not less astonished, though decidedly better pleased than his last had been. It need hardly be added that this one was Wilfrid Ellerton. The other was Señora Herarra, who had ascended under the impression that the Lord of the Underworld had rewarded her faithful services, as he had done once or twice before, with an invitation to a yachting trip.

As soon as Darfield had made the introductions, they went up to the Council-chamber, and thence on deck. In the saloon the Señora was speedily and most disagreeably undeceived as to the true state of affairs by being handed over to the chief stewardess with orders that she should be taken to a state-room and locked in.

Certainly the most delightful meal that Ellerton had ever eaten in his life was the supper which followed his release, and perhaps never had so few people so much to tell each other. All that Ellerton learnt is already old news to the reader. So, too, are most of his experiences in the Underworld.

What his hosts, like the rest of the world, were naturally most eager to know, was the secret of those mysterious signals which at the eleventh hour had brought all Isolo Staunton's far-reaching and deeply-laid schemes to naught, and made his own release possible, and this was the explanation in his own words:

"To begin at the beginning," he said, "I began speculating on the source of the light that we have down yonder. It was not gas, I mean natural gas, or incandescent vapour, and it was not electricity, and, what is more, neither my late host, Herarra, nor anyone else in the place knew what it was.

"They have a laboratory, but the chemist is only a half-educated sort of fellow, with no idea of research, or, indeed, anything beyond the chemistry of metals. He told me, as the others did, that they found the substance there in large quantities, washed it well in leaden vessels with hydrochloric acid, and then found a residue which gave off light, such a light, indeed, that they had to wear dark spectacles when they worked with the stuff.

"Then they put a small quantity into their lamps, and the lamps went on burning, as one might say, for ever. Of course, I needn't tell you what the stuff was?"

"Not radium, surely!" exclaimed Dennison, almost dropping his glass.'

"Yes," laughed Ellerton. "Radium, and tons of it, as they say. Really, it is almost too ludicrous to think of these people going to all the trouble of breaking the law of nations to coin false money, and make counterfeit notes, when they had literally uncounted wealth close at hand just for the getting. However, that's only the first part of the explanation. As I told you, they thought they had got me there for life, and so they didn't make any objections to my amusing myself as I pleased, in fact—Staunton had given orders that I was to have perfect liberty within the Underworld.

"Fortunately, I had kept my chemistry well up to date, and it wasn't very long before I began to see the possibility of sending what I may call real radiograms to the Overworld, as, of course, they pass through rock and water just as easily as air, and so I set to work and made an apparatus, which I needn't bother the ladies by describing now, because I hope you will see a lot of them at work before long.

"All you have to do with it is to work a switch, which cuts off the rays given out from a large mass of pure radium, so that you can make longs and shorts of them according to the ordinary Morse code.

"Of course, I had a tremendous lot of trouble in finding a combination of substances to make my machine of, so that it would concentrate the rays, and send them in one direction, but when I had succeeded, I hoped that the signals would be picked up by some vessel with the Marconi apparatus on board, so I proceeded to fire off my signals—and the rest you know."

After supper there was a discussion on ways and means. It was, of course, absolutely necessary that the way to the Underworld should be kept open, and Darfield was the only man who could do so. Wherefore, as the second and third officers were quite capable of navigating the *Isola* back to Leith, where, according to contract, the crew were to be quietly paid off, and allowed to disperse, with no questions asked, it was decided that he should go back and take charge of affairs below, until the yacht should return with a regularly engaged crew and officers, and purged of her criminal character.

At Paula's earnest intreaty, her mother consented to make a short trip with her to the wonderland which Ellerton had been describing. It was nearly two hours before they came back, and when they did they brought Brenda, Thyrza, and Myra with them.

"It is all very, very marvellous," said Paula, while the others were wondering at the strange, almost unearthly, beauty of the three daughters of the Underworld. "But it is not nearly good enough for these poor darlings to spend their lives in. They should be daughters of the sun, and the blue sky, not of a lamplit cavern world like that. Our world will be a heaven to them when their poor eyes get strong enough to see it. Fancy, father, they have never seen the sun, nor the sky, nor the moon, nor the stars, nor the sea, nor the green fields. What a glorious revelation our world will be to them!"

EPILOGUE.

IT would take many more pages than are now available to describe the effect that was produced upon the civilised world

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in general by the news of the disappearance of Isolo Staunton and the revelation of some at least of the mysteries of the Underworld to the inhabitants of the Overworld.

For Mercedes' sake it was given out that her father had been killed by a shell from one of his revolted warships during the escape of the *Isola* from Rio, and, as it was not worth anyone's while to contradict it, it remained as an accepted fact, and whatever became of Staunton and Valdez after their landing on the shores of Kerguelen Island, both of them kept their word and never gainsaid it. It might be possible that this fallen Crœsus of criminality may from some unknown and obscure position have watched, as none but he could watch, the splendours of his darling's future progress, but, if he did, he gave no signs—possibly being well contented to know that one at least of his aims, her happiness in life, had been amply, if indirectly, secured, even though the greatest of his own projects had failed.

Mr. Smith, of course, kept his word to Darfield, and the authorities respected it. After all, he was only an accused and not a condemned man, and so, under the circumstances, he was taken as acquitted, and, being the only man capable of discharging the duties of the post, he was for the time being constituted keeper and manager of the Underworld.

And then, when everything else was settled, when all the stores of illicit coin had been given up, when Mr. Battley had been forgiven on condition of superintending the breaking-up of his engines and the minting and note-printing machinery which they ran, and when the somewhat wonder-stricken delegates from the mints of Europe and America had satisfied themselves that the source of the flood of illicit coin which had deluged the money markets of the world was at last honestly dried up, then there rose the somewhat momentous question as to the ownership of this submarine El Dorado with all its countless treasures.

The Danish Government at once put forth a claim, based on the original documents which related its first discovery, and which Kesteven, who had retained them against any emergency of this sort, placed at the disposal of the committee of inquiry, saying: "You will find, gentlemen, that our way into the Underworld is about fifty miles to the south-east of the coast of Iceland. If the Danish Government can find the way by which those original inhabitants got into that cavern, and gradually groped their road, maybe generation after generation, to where we found them, we'll talk, but not till then. Our way in is outside all territorial waters, and, therefore, by the law of nations, it is a new country, and we've a right to it."

It is true that there were certain somewhat awkward questions asked as to any share that he might possibly have had in the use that was afterwards made of this submarine territory, but for the sake of Cora and the Grand Duke he lied quietly and consistently, and as there was no one of any consequence who had an interest in contradicting him, the upshot of the whole matter was that the splendid inheritance of the Underworld was divided between Mercedes and Cora.

Of this the almost immediate result was the formation of the Ellerton-Kesteven Radium Syndicate, under the presidency of Sir Wilfrid Ellerton, whose grief at his son's supposed death could only have been equalled by his delight, not only at his restoration to the liberty of the Overworld, but also at the genius, for it was nothing less, that had accomplished his release.

None better than he recognised the illimitable possibilities of the new source of power and light, and none knew better than his co-director, Derrick Kesteven, how to turn them to the best financial account.

And while all this was being settled, a somewhat singular compact was being made among those who had not had a little to do with the solving of the mystery of the Underworld. Wilfrid and Mercedes had renewed the promise they had given each other behind the Council Chamber of the *Isola*, on the terrace of Señor Martinez's villa high up among the tree-clad, flower-scented mountains overlooking the moonlit bay of Funchal.

But it was impossible that their vows could be fulfilled until the year of mourning had passed, and so Cora and her Grand Duke, Lady Maud and her engineer, and Paula and her "detective," as she persisted in calling the man whose courage and devotion had won what many a man in Europe would have given a noble name and a coronet for, held a curious, but, for all that, intensely interesting, meeting in that same Council Chamber of the *Isola*—then lying spick and span in her own true guise and trim in Funchal Bay.

They also would wait for the fulfilment of their own happiness until Mercedes' sorrow should be turned by the magic of her strangely re-awakened love into joy, and then they would spend their collective honeymoon amidst the mysterious splendours of the Underworld, over which Darfield and Janet now reigned as king and queen.

And when in due course of time all this came to be accomplished, and they came back to the Overworld, they said, with well-justified agreement, that no such honeymoon had ever been spent in a world upon which no moon had ever shone.

The End.

A Model Wife.

The Tale of a Well-Merited Punishment.

JONES was well aware that his wife was in the habit of rifling his pockets when he was asleep, but, like a wise man, he kept silent on the subject. One night, however, he awoke and caught her in the act.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "what are you doing, my dear?"

The lady started, her cheeks flushed, the trousers dropped from her grasp, and she was about to make a full confession, when a bright idea entered her head. Recovering her composure, she said:

"I was looking to see whether your trousers needed any buttons."

"They do, they do, my dear," he exclaimed, springing out of bed; "needed them for weeks, months, and I wondered why you didn't sew them on; but I waited, for I was sure you would do it some time. And how kind of you to get out of bed at this time of night to attend to them. Say what you will, there's nothing in the world like a good wife. Let me turn up the gas while you sew them on. Got your needle and thread, and the buttons? No. Well, tell me where they are and I'll get them for you."

Mrs. Jones proceeded to sew on the buttons, while her husband sat on the side of the bed and encouraged her with words of praise for her wifely care and thought for his comfort, occasionally remarking that he would always say there was nothing in the world like a good wife.

Then he went to the wardrobe and brought out several pairs of trousers, a coat, two or three old vests, and a number of shirts, from all of which buttons were missing, and cheerfully observed:

"While we're at it we'll make a night of it."

Two hours later, when Mrs. Jones, with a weary sigh, removed the thimble from her finger, Mr. Jones patted her on the cheek and said:

"I say it again, my dear, I say it again, that wherever I go I will make it known, proclaim it from the house-tops, shout it in the highways and byways, that a wife who gets up in the night to sew buttons on her husband's clothes is a priceless treasure, a crown to that husband, and an ornament to her sex."

Then Mr. Jones, chuckling to himself, lay calmly down and slept the sleep of the just.

Tom Down.

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HOME NOTES

(No. 521)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

The Lorn Colonial.

THE Colonial reader who painted such a doleful picture of his success with British maidens has the sympathy of "HONOUR BRIGHT," who writes: "I, for one, admire Colonials very much. They are more open and not so stand-offish as stay-at-homes. Your correspondent will find girls here more reserved than in the Colonies, but I am sure he will get on with them all right when he once gets to know them. He only wants a little patience."

* * * * *

I hope my Colonial friend will be encouraged by these kind remarks.

Girl Who Doesn't Like Music.

"BERT" is very musical, and plays the violin and piano well, but his *fiancée* does not care at all for music, and never wants "BERT" to play. In fact, she is jealous of his being so fond of his fiddle, and thinks it makes him less fond of her. "BERT" wishes to know if this might not mean unhappiness in after years.

* * * * *

It is a great pity your intended does not share your love of music. It might mean unhappiness in after years, and it seems very foolish that she should be jealous of your accomplishment. I would not advise you, however, to worry about that, if you are fond of each other in other ways. Such a difference might arise, but only if the couple were not really attached to each other. Besides, surely you can educate her into liking your playing? There are very few girls so unmusical as to object to music in others, and I hope, for your sake, your *fiancée* is not one of those.

Jealous of 'Bus Passengers!

SOME young men seem to have very jealous sweethearts, but I think "CLARIS" is unusually afraid of hers. She writes: "He was recently thrown out of work, and accepted a post as 'bus conductor. He sees a good many young ladies, and I have seen him deep in conversation with many of them. I have complained to him, but he said, 'I must speak to the passengers sometimes.' But I know he was a great flirt before I went with him. What is your advice?"

* * * * *

My advice is for you not to be so silly. Just fancy being afraid because your young man is civil and pleasant to his passengers. As for "deep conversation," well, conductors who have to explain to young ladies several times over that Charing Cross is not the Bank, and that every street isn't Holborn, have to be fairly "deep" or there would be trouble. Take my advice, and don't bother about your young man. He is evidently a very pleasant fellow, and none the worse because he shows it in his duties.

Unreturned Love.

"R. G." I am sorry you did not agree with my advice to "JACK" about meeting the girl who is so fond of him. But you know, I don't believe in "stock" advice, but try to enter into each case on its merits. In my opinion, "JACK" should agree to the girl's suggestion that they should meet. Because so far "JACK" does not return her love, is no reason at all why the two should cease to know each other, is it? It would be a very hard rule if all acquaintanceships had to cease because both were not in love from the first. You must know that love often takes time to mature. What may at first be mere friendship, deepens in time into something stronger. I quite agree that there is reason in your argument, but you know, the "correct thing" is not always the right thing, especially in love affairs.

The Absent Husband Again.

"SINCE I became engaged last March," writes "BEATRICE," "my lover has learnt that he will be sent to South Africa about two months after our wedding this year. He will be away for about a year, and fears he will not be able to afford to take me as well. What do you advise? Should we postpone the wedding until he returns, or should we get married, and then part for such a long time? I will abide by your decision."

* * * * *

I think, if both of you are willing, it might be better to postpone the wedding. After all, it would be very hard on you to part so soon after for a year, and it would not be very nice for you after marriage not to have a home of your own. When he comes back, you would be able to settle down happily together.

Tea and Etiquette.

Two girls know two young men. One of the latter lives in lodgings. Would it be incorrect for the girls to accept an invitation to tea at the man's rooms? This question comes from "VIOLET."

* * * * *

That depends on the sort of girl you are. There is nothing very terrible, to my mind, in two girls having tea at a young man's rooms. It is done a good deal in what are called Bohemian circles, and is not thought very much of. If you do not live in those circles, but have neighbours and friends who are easily shocked, then you should not accept such invitations unless accompanied by a chaperon. Under those circumstances, no polite young man would give the invitation unless he also included an older lady, say, your mother, or married sister, or maiden aunt.

An Awkward Fix.

"H. R." lives near a business establishment where a lot of young ladies are employed. He often passes them on the way to business, and one of them, who had stared very hard for some time, has now started bowing to him as they pass. "H. R." does not know her, and does not particularly wish to, but how should he act when they meet in this way?

* * * * *

You should make up your mind, "H. R.," as to the reason for the girl's bowing to you. Perhaps she fancies she has met you, and wishes to resume the acquaintance. On the other hand, she may be doing what is called "throwing her cap" at you. If you don't really wish to know the girl you should avoid meeting her, and look in another direction when you pass. After noticing that her attentions are unwelcome I suppose she will not continue them. But if a girl bows to a man, and he notices it, his duty as a gentleman is to raise his hat.

Cynthia

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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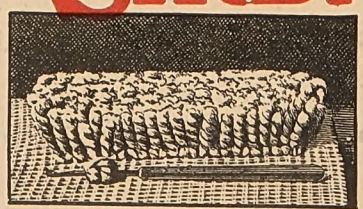

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For the Week Ending January 16th, 1904.

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

The Story of a Girl's Peril and a Tardy Retribution.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

"MRS. TYRRELL, Doris and I have come to ask for your sanction to our engagement!"

Austin Howard had prepared a pretty little set speech for this momentous occasion—not that he was a timid man, for he looked frank and fearless as he walked across the small, plainly-furnished room with the happy and blushing Doris by his side—but even the coolest of men find it difficult to make a good impromptu speech in such circumstances. He stopped somewhat abruptly, for Mrs. Tyrrell had not risen from the couch with a smile and with outstretched hands ready to pronounce the maternal benediction.

She looked up slowly and gazed at them with only half-comprehending eyes. As she looked at them, the full significance of the words flashed upon her, and she rose to her feet with something very like a groan, letting slip from her trembling fingers a letter which fluttered to the ground and lay near Doris' feet.

"Mother! What is it?" inquired the girl anxiously. She forgot the immediate object of their entry into this apartment and hurried to her mother. "What is it? Have you had bad news?"

There was a pause, during which time Mrs. Tyrrell appeared to be gathering her strength for a great effort. When she spoke, she did so in a clear, firm voice:

"Yes; I have had news which is bad and affects you two in a way which you do not suspect. I have never spoken of this matter, because there seemed to be no necessity for doing so; but now I must speak, for my enemy is finding me out once more!"

Austin and Doris stared at Mrs. Tyrrell in perplexity. The latter stooped to pick up the fateful letter and motioned them to take seats near her. The pallor of her face was striking, but there was an air of great determination on the features which impressed her listeners with a sense of the importance of what she was about to tell them.

Austin drew a chair near the couch, but Doris sat by her mother's side and flung her arms round her neck with a cry of "Mother dear, mother dear!"

"You will both learn for the first time that my name is not Tyrrell!" began that lady. "Don't interrupt me, Doris, my child, but restrain your feelings and listen! My name, and Doris', is Seymour. I need not go into the whole story. Your father, Doris, was a doctor with a good practice when we married, but we made an enemy by that marriage. Mr. Sidney Lucas, a solicitor, wished to marry me; he was also angry because your father's reputation increased, to the detriment of his—Lucas'—younger brother, who was also a medical practitioner in the same town. He set to work to ruin us.

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"I am telling you what I believe to be the truth, although I cannot produce proof. He spread lying reports concerning my husband's medical mistakes, and that kind of thing is very difficult to expose when it is done cleverly, while the results of such defamation are positive. My husband found that his practice was decreasing; he heard of the rumours, but could not trace the author. He denied them, but the calumny spread and we were distracted.

"Then came a diabolical climax. My husband was accused of having prescribed the wrong medicine for a particular complaint and the patient died! The paper on which he wrote the prescription was produced; it was a clever forgery, but everyone believed that the charge was correct. To make matters worse, when the patient's will was read, it was found that she had left all her estate to Dr. Seymour!

"Lucas swore to drawing up the will at the lady's request; he stated that he expostulated with her, but she was clearly under the influence of her medical adviser and she persisted in her intention.

"The will was contested by the relatives, but my husband declared that he had never mentioned the matter of will-making to his deceased patient and did not defend the suit, which, of course, went against him and left the property in the hands of the relatives as he desired.

"This will made things look very black against your father, Doris, and the verdict of the coroner's jury, that the death was due to misadventure, was regarded as a mistake. It was quite a wonder that my husband was not prosecuted for murder!

"The result was that we were ruined at last; we had to steal away and live in retirement on the small annuity which we were able to purchase with the money we had. We dreaded the evil designs of the villain who had done so much wrong; we feared that he would yet pursue us, for he found out whither we had gone and had spread greater calumnies abroad concerning us. So we left that part of the country altogether and hid ourselves under the name of Tyrrell, my maiden name. My husband did not long survive his ruin; he died when Doris was five years old—fifteen years ago—and I have lived in seclusion ever since.

"I have never heard of Lucas since then, and I believed—shall I say that I *hoped?*—that he was dead. Yet, after all this time, he is finding me out! This letter, which is from the only relative I have, and the only person who knows of my whereabouts and my assumed name, tells me that Lucas is on my track again! I will not read it to you; it sounds innocent enough, but I know the man!

"Now, it is quite probable that he will discover us and make

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our identity known. Everyone believes in the mistake, and many believe in the supposed guilt, of your father!

"You see what that means, Mr. Howard? It means that your wife will be branded as the daughter of a man who was morally a criminal, but who escaped the legal consequences by some lucky accident! Are you willing to face that?"

Mrs. Tyrrell's lips were dry when she finished speaking.

Doris had buried her face on her mother's bosom and was quietly sobbing—sobbing with sorrow at the misfortunes of her parents and at the overthrow of her own happiness.

Austin Howard's face was pale; he gazed steadily into the eyes of Doris' mother and saw in them a look which convinced him of the truth of her story. He rose, took the girl from her mother's bosom, and folded her in his arms.

"It will make no difference!" he said simply.

"No, no!" cried the girl, liberating herself from his embrace. "It will not be just to bring that disgrace upon you! Can we not do something to defeat the evil machinations of this man and bring his misdeeds to light?"

"I care nothing for what the world may say!" declared the young man passionately. "Doris, you are mine, you gave yourself to me only a few moments ago, and I claim you! I will not listen to these Quixotic scruples!"

"I think that Doris is not entirely wrong!" said Mrs. Tyrrell (for so we will continue to call her) in a tone of quiet decision. "I do not know whether or not we shall be able to do anything against this man, but I intend to try. I will let him find me out, if he can, and then act. I think, also, that you must submit to a trial of love, Mr. Howard!

"I propose to make a stipulation, namely, that you two shall not see one another or correspond for six months. Nay!" she added, as Howard broke in impatiently, "it will be a test for both of you. Do not blame me or think me hard; I am doing it for the best!"

"But perhaps Doris will be in danger, and I wish to have the right to help her!" cried Howard in expostulation.

"I intend to get Doris away from here without anyone knowing where she has gone," said Mrs. Tyrrell calmly. "You know our story, Mr. Howard. Doris was working hard for an appointment when she fell ill, and so proved herself unequal for it. Afterwards, she began to try for a post as secretary to some lady or gentleman, in order to eke out our small income. We did not like parting, but it was necessary. Well, she can take up such an appointment and hold it till—till other conditions arise!"

Howard protested, but there was a majority against him, for Doris desired it. He looked reproachfully at her as she expressed the wish, but the girl's eyes filled with tears and he called himself a brute.

"I yield to the suggestion, but with bad grace!" he said with a sad smile. "All I can say is that I should like to imitate Rip van Winkle during the next six months!"

So it was settled, and Doris continued her negotiations for the post of secretary to a gentleman in a country house not far from Inverness; these negotiations had been commenced, and it was this fact which hastened Austin Howard's declaration and led to the scene just described.

Strange are the ways of Fate! Doris obtained the post and left for Inverness within a week; and that new departure in her life was the first step towards the vindication of her father's character!

Eskadell, as the country house was called, was situated a few miles from Inverness, and it was a lonely place to all except those fond of purely natural beauty. Doris found life at Eskadell very pleasant after the first feeling of homesickness had worn off; she liked her occupation, which was to act as amanuensis for Mr. Martin Carden, in connection with his scientific researches and his commercial interests, and she delighted to roam about the grounds and the adjoining country, studying the flowers, the plants, and the animal life. At times she felt dull at the loss of Howard's company and letters, and the recollection of her father's misfortunes cast a shadow over her, but she was fairly happy in her new surroundings.

Mr. Carden was not difficult to please, and he began to take a fancy to Doris. On her side, the girl scarcely knew how to judge the man; he was courteous to a degree, and was held in high esteem by everyone, as she could see by the tone of the letters which reached him, yet she had an indefinable feeling that there was something hidden.

A month passed and she had overcome this feeling to some extent when, as he paid her the first month's salary, it was revived and intensified.

"I shall be away for a day or two, Miss Tyrrell!" he told her, with a curious light in his eyes. "I do not think that anything important will arise, but you will leave the letters unopened in any case. You will find many papers to put in order in the room above, and you will have sufficient occupation till I return. It is *very* important business!"

He turned away as he said the last words, but he was not quite quick enough to prevent Doris from seeing an almost fiendish gleam in his steely eyes. It made her shudder, and she felt inclined to tell him then and there that she must leave Eskadell at the end of the second month; he was out of the room, however, before she could say anything, and she afterwards tried to laugh at her foolishness.

Left to her own resources, Doris busied herself by setting things straight in the room above. There were all kinds of publications containing marked articles, which had to be indexed for reference; there were other cuttings which had to be pasted in books, and there were many letters and communications which had to be reduced to order. She was indexing a cutting when she came across the word "Lucas," and the name at once attracted her attention.

Turning to the page indicated, she found a cutting from a newspaper published in the town where her mother and father had lived; it was a sensational account of the flight of Mr. Lucas, her father's enemy, who had been detected in the misappropriation of trust moneys.

She read it again and again.

"That ought to go a long way towards clearing my father's character!" was her first thought; but she afterwards remembered that the flight of Lucas did not convict him of spreading calumnies against her father. "Still," she murmured, with a glow on her cheeks, "this information should give my mother a weapon of defence if Lucas should really be hunting her out with a view to pursuing his malevolent designs. I will tell her of this, and perhaps she can have him tracked and arrested."

She discontinued her work to write a long letter to her mother; when this was done, she had time for reflection.

"How did Mr. Carden come to take sufficient interest in Lucas to preserve that cutting?" she asked herself. "When he comes back, I will take an opportunity to casually inquire; I must be careful, lest he detects the secret of the name of Tyrrell!"

On the third day, Doris received a letter from her mother; in it the sorrowful woman explained that Lucas, much older in appearance yet still easily recognisable, had found her. He had stopped her on her walk and had deliberately stated his intention of persecuting her. "I had had your letter," continued Mrs. Tyrrell, "so I threatened him with arrest. He turned red with rage; he had evidently thought (and rightly) that I knew nothing of the past; but he soon recovered and laughed at my threat. He would make every place so unpleasant for me, he swore, that I should be glad to be at rest for ever. And then, Doris, he spoke of you and said that he would wreak his vengance on you! He would get you in his power and kill you! I am so glad that you are away, but I tremble for you, my child! The man must be mad!"

The letter ended somewhat abruptly, testifying to the mental condition of Mrs. Tyrrell; the reading of that note left Doris pale and agitated. Who was this man, and how could his wicked deeds be stopped?

"You look pale, Miss Tyrrell!" remarked Mr. Carden cheerily, when he appeared the next day. "Found it rather lonely here, eh? Yes, it must be lonely for you, although there are several servants here. Feel one bv vourself, of

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course. Well perhaps we can make it more pleasant for you. Ha, ha!"

Doris felt grateful for his consideration, although that laugh jarred upon her nerves; but Mr. Carden was really so affable that Doris began to feel less miserable. Perhaps Mr. Carden could throw some light on the Lucas matter?

"You have a curious collection of cuttings, Mr. Carden," she took occasion to observe with apparent unconcern. "I actually saw one about a dishonest solicitor named Lucas. Did you know him?"

Carden started as if stung. "Oh, you saw that, did you?" he queried slowly, and speaking with evident restraint. "I don't know why I kept that cutting. I met him once. Yes, we must soak that slip off the sheet and destroy it. Do *you* know anything of that man?" he inquired suddenly.

It was now Doris' turn to start and flush. "My mother knew a solicitor of that name years ago; possibly it is the same," murmured the girl.

Carden swung round on his swivel chair and did not reply; it was well for Doris that she did not see the cruel smile that played round his clean-shaven lips.

Doris concluded that she had vexed Mr. Carden by reminding him of the misdeeds of a man whom he had once known, and she also saw that she had been betrayed into saying more than she had intended; she therefore decided not to press for more details. In a little while Mr. Carden's good-humour returned, and he chatted with her in a manner which surprised her. He had not unbent to that extent before!

"You are rather a clever girl, Miss Tyrrell, and it is a pity that your health spoilt you for taking up a position such as the one for which you were trying," he remarked later in the day. "Yet I don't know that *I* regret it, for I should then have lost a valuable assistant. Now, you must help me more in my laboratory work; you are capable of it, I am sure! What do you say to making a beginning this evening?"

"I shall be pleased," cried Doris, with genuine pleasure. "I hope," she added, half in jest, half in earnest, "that I shall not make anything explode!"

"I shall not give you the chance," answered Carden drily.

The girl laughed; she saw only humour in the reply, and missed its real meaning.

It was eight o'clock when Carden summoned Doris to go with him to one of his laboratories. Dinner was over, and they could do a couple of hours work before retiring. He led the way to a far wing of the house, which was never used; servants were permitted to go there to dust and keep the place in some sort of order at frequent intervals, but otherwise nobody ventured there. There was a general notion among the servants that the place was dangerous because Mr. Carden carried out various chemical experiments there, and Carden himself had fostered the notion.

Carden ushered Doris into a long room, which contained many scientific instruments; this apartment was lighted electrically, the current being obtained from accumulators. He shut the door behind him and motioned her to a chair.

"Sit down, while I tell you something!" he said harshly.

Full of wonder at the change which had suddenly come over the man, Doris obeyed mechanically. The usual benevolent smile was gone, the aspect of the face was entirely altered; he stood before her with a diabolical look on his features, which was so unexpected that it paralysed her faculties for the time.

"Fate has aided me," he continued, with a ring of triumph in his voice. "When I advertised for an amanuensis, I did not dream that the successful applicant would prove to be the daughter of the man and woman whom I have hated for a period which may well be called a lifetime. I did not know you under your assumed name, and you do not sufficiently resemble either of your parents to make you recognisable. It was not till the day I went away that I knew anything of your identity. Do you guess mine?"

Doris shivered; the look of mingled horror and disgust told him as plainly as words that she had guessed. She tried to rise from her seat, but she found that she was held tightly in the grasp of the hinged arms of the chair; they had pinned her to her seat.

"You cannot get up, and it will be useless for you to call out!" declared Lucas, for it was he. "Nobody will hear you. This room has no windows and only a narrow skylight, so your cries could not be heard."

"Why are you so cruel to my people and me?" Doris contrived to gasp.

"I hated your father because he always thwarted my plans in some way or other. And I hated, and still hate, your mother because she refused me for *him!* And I can deal your mother a blow through you. I intend to do it. I will tell you how."

He pointed, with apparent inconsistency, to a small packet on the floor close to her feet.

"That packet contains enough to clear your father's name. Think of that! But you will never read it, nor will anyone else. You have learnt too much; you betrayed some of your knowledge when you spoke of the cutting, and I can easily suppose that a clever girl like you has gleaned much more information. I determined when I first came back to play with you and torment you, as a cat does a mouse, but that sort of thing is dangerous with one who has such knowledge.

"I am going to leave you here. I shall cause the room to be filled with a new gas which I have discovered and which has the effect of paralysing the organ of speech and the motor muscles at the same time as it sharpens the feelings and the mental faculties. When this is accomplished you will find the arms of the chair release you, but you will not be able to move.

"You will not be able to call for help even if you should hear some one outside the door.

"Then I shall set fire to this wing. The wind is blowing from the other part of the house, so only this wing will suffer. You will see the flames curling round you, your agony will be immensely intensified, but you will be powerless! And you will perish by an awful death, with your eyes on that packet!"

He almost shouted the last sentences in exultation, and quickly passed out of the room. In a few seconds Doris felt her sense of smell tickled by a peculiar odour, pleasant and soothing in its effects at first. It excited her; she tried to cry out, but her voice failed. In less than two minutes she felt the arms of the chair relax, but she could not move. She lay back in the chair with widely opened eyes and waited.

An ominous crackle struck terror into her heart; it was the beginning of the fire! She waited in agony; the flames came shooting from all parts of the room! Her heart seemed to stand still with fear, but she could not move in the slightest degree.

She knew what would be said. It would go forth to the world that she had meddled with the chemicals unknown to Mr. Carden, or Lucas, and that she had spilt something which had rendered her unconscious and had set fire to the wing. Her charred body would be found, and——

The flames were leaping from the walls towards the ceiling, and now the floor was catching.

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Nearer and nearer the tongues of flame came to her; great beads of perspiration stood upon her face. The fire would soon catch her clothes, but she could do nothing—nothing—except lay there and stare with distended eyes in front of her! How long before the devouring element caught her dress?

She fancied that she heard shouts outside, but probably the presence of the fire was not evident yet. She tried to turn her eyes to the packet, as Carden had said, but she could not move them.

The heat of the fire was affecting her; it would be a mercy if she were rendered unconscious! If not, she would go mad with horror!

Ah! A tongue of flame swept across her hand and was gone. The agony of that instant was terrible, but it proved to be her salvation. It caused her, involuntarily, to make one desperate effort to rise, and the strength of that effort broke the spell of the gas. She found herself on her feet, erect, with the flames dancing about her!

The instinct of self-preservation returned in all its power. She stooped to pick up the packet, and dashed to the door, thrusting the packet in her pocket as she did so. The door had not been locked, for Carden had to consider the possibility of the room not being entirely destroyed, and a door locked on the outside would tell awkward tales.

It required some nerve to hold up the skirt on one side so that it protected her face and hair from the flames, and thus rush to the door and fling it open, but Doris did it with firmly-set lips, and emerged into the corridor with a tiny tongue of flame burning a hole in her skirt. With great presence of mind she lay down and rolled over and over, extinguishing the fire and then sped down the corridor for freedom.

A thousand thoughts surged through her heated brain; Carden might be at the end, waiting to strike her down and take her back to the burning laboratory! She did not stop, however, but sped on till she reached the inhabited portion of the building. The place seemed deserted, so she concluded that the inmates had become aware of the fire, and were outside.

Here was her chance of escape with the precious packet in her possession! Carden, in aiming at the refinement of cruelty by causing her to die a terrible death within reach of the evidence she so longed to possess, had this time over-reached himself, as villains often do!

Doris would not lose time by repairing to her own room in order to obtain hat and cloak. She hurried out of the building by a back door, and ran through the grounds to the open country. As she broke her way through the hedge which formed the confines of Carden's estate, she heard a sound behind her; the next instant there was a sharp report and something struck the hedge quite close to her head. She divined the meaning of this; Carden had discovered her escape, and had so far forgotten his caution as to fire at her with his revolver!

Doris raced along the country lane for dear life; she knew that Carden would show her no mercy. The lane was a very tortuous one, so that she could keep clear of his bullets by maintaining an advance of only a few yards; but when she reached the end of this lane—— ?

She dared not think of that! Yet it was soon brought to her mind with full force, for in a couple of minutes she was in an open road at right angles with the lane, and she could hear the rush of footsteps behind her!

She ran on wildly, straining every muscle to maintain the pace, but her pursuer gained on her at every step. Panting, struggling onwards, stumbling, she reached the bridge over the railway line. She stumbled and collided with the buttress. A shout of triumph came from Carden. He sprang at her with outstretched hands to grasp her, and then——

He started back in horror, for Doris, with a wild despairing cry, had made use of her gymnasium training to scramble on to the parapet. For a moment she stood there, looking down at the metals, twenty feet below; then she gathered herself together and sprang forward from the bridge!

Even Carden uttered a cry of compassion as he started forward to catch at her dress, for he had heard what Doris had not and what had escaped her eyes, despite the bright moonlight which made everything almost as visible as in the daytime—a train which was rattling round the bend and towards the bridge!

The driver saw the dark object fall from the bridge right on the very line which his engine would soon pass over, and he involuntarily blew his whistle and tried to pull the train up in time, but it had passed under the bridge several yards before he could bring it to a standstill.

"I didn't feel anything, but he or she must be as dead as a door nail!" he told his fireman. "We must ha' gone clean over her!"

The guards went back along the line, followed by three or four of the male passengers who had heard what had happened. They found a woman lying between the two metals, unhurt save for a sprained ankle, but in a swoon; the train had passed over her without touching her.

"Phew!" whistled a guard. "She dropped lucky, and her swoon prevented her from moving, or I expect she'd have tried to get up and escape, and she'd ha' been settled!"

"Great Heavens!" cried one of the passengers. "It's Doris!"

The speaker was Austin Howard. Mrs. Tyrrell had told him of the visit of Lucas and of Doris' letter, and Howard had tracked the scoundrel to Inverness. There he had lost him, and was now on a wrong track, believing that he had a clue, when he was thus strangely brought face to face with Doris.

In order not to further delay the train, Doris was placed in the only vacant first-class compartment and there restored to consciousness while the train rattled onwards. She sobbed hysterically when she saw Austin and clung to him, but he calmed her, and they alighted at the first stop.

There she told her story, and at dawn the police were in possession of information which sent them in search of Carden, formerly Lucas, while Doris telegraphed to her mother to allay any fears which she might have if news of the fire reached her.

Later information from Eskadell showed that the wind had veered and carried the flames to the other portion of the house, with the result that it had been completely destroyed.

Carden, returning after he had seen Doris jump on the line, found the edifice burning furiously; he had made a desperate attempt to save certain property, entering the flaming building against the advice of all, and had been caught by the flames in an upper room, and had perished within sight of his servants and the local firemen, who were powerless to help.

Thus he had died the same terrible death as he had intended for Doris.

Little remains to be told. The small packet contained notes made by Lucas himself, a kind of confession of what he had done to ruin Dr. Seymour—a confession written gloatingly and in order to increase his delight at what he was doing and had done! The papers had a thumbed appearance, showing that he had often re-read them in later years, doubtless gloating over them every time!

Full justice was done to the memory of Dr. Seymour; the Tyrrells assumed their real name, and the clouds lifted from the horizon, showing a bright future. For Austin Howard had ample means, and he absolutely refused to await the expiration of the six months' probation! And, it must be admitted, neither Mrs. Seymour nor Doris was very pressing on that point.

G. Hubert.

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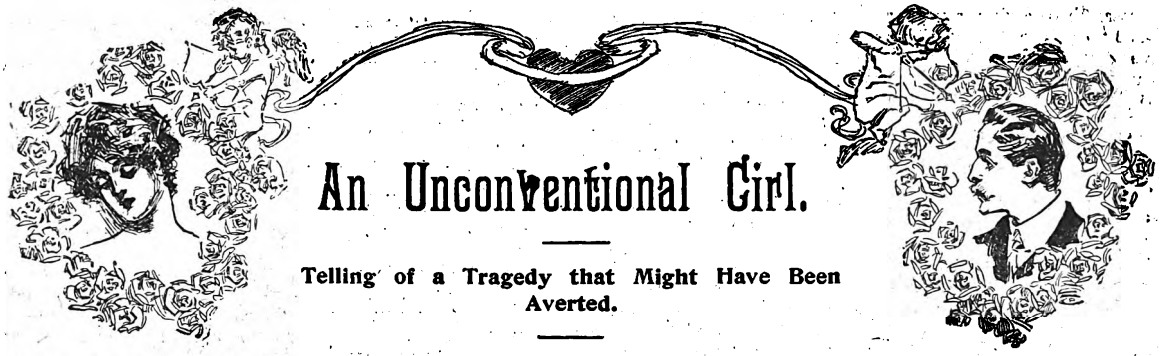

An Unconventional Girl.

Telling of a Tragedy that Might Have Been Averted.

"Look!" cried Mrs. Jephson-Hawes. "Good gracious! look at that girl!"

The good lady rustled all over with indignation.

Her companions were a tall, aristocratic young girl, in a simple black satin dress, straight in its folds, clinging in its outline as the drapery of a statue, its sombre hue only relieved by three strings of amber beads wound closely about her throat; with a broad black plush hat and long black plumes drooping over the pale, fair, high-bred face; and the other a handsome young Englishman with dark eyes and that languid air supposed to be "good form" in exclusive circles.

Howard Winthrop looked with a dawning interest kindling in his eyes at the girl whom Mrs. Jephson-Hawes indicated.

It was a fresh October evening and Venice was all aglow with light and sparkle.

Our friends were looking at a gondola near them, in which stood a young girl, her slight figure thrown out in relief against the sky. The sun had set, but the after-glow was still there; the water beneath was sheeted silver, the breeze had grown fresh, and blew full against the lithe young figure, whose heliotrope silk dress was of a soft, clinging kind. It had the beauty of falling in soft folds, and it seemed to cling caressingly to the well-rounded, supple limbs of this girl who stood with the oar in her hand propelling the gondola herself, while the gondolier looked on with a surprised grin upon his face. The light upon the flushed face showed intense and vivid colouring and all the charms of youth and health, added to a sort of radiant independence of everybody and everything. The bronze-gold hair that hung in a bewitching, soft, curly fringe almost down to the violet eyes, was carelessly blown by the wind, and the long old-gold feather that decorated a plush hat of the same colour swept out like a meteor upon the breeze.

"I knew I could do it, mamma," she said to a pale, delicate-looking woman whose plain grey dress formed the greatest contrast to her daughter's. "It only needs practice to do anything."

Howard Winthrop could not resist the thrill of admiration that ran like a subtle electric fire through his whole being. The fresh, unconventional attitude, the radiant health and youth, the vigour, the fire.

At that moment the long feather, having lost its hold in the rude struggle with the wind, fluttered away like some bright-winged bird, and sailing along for a moment with a sort of giddy delight in its freedom, dropped suddenly and softly as a golden shadow at the young man's feet.

He seized it rapturously but tenderly, and hastened nearer the water's edge. The flight had been noticed, and the gondola was turned towards the land.

The young lady looked about her as it stopped, and, having discerned a very handsome young man with her plume in his hand, she smiled a bewitching smile.

"It was carried to my feet," Howard said, bowing.

"She's terrible for losing her things," said the mother, in a plaintive voice, hovering near, like a moth about a gorgeous butterfly. "Nothing ever stays on her that can get away."

"I would call that an evidence of the depravity of inanimate things," said Howard, with an admiring glance.

The mother looked puzzled. The daughter laughed.

"They come back, you see," she said.

"I should think they would," answered Howard. "I'm sure I wish I might."

He was quite shocked at his own boldness, but perhaps more so at the girl's answer.

"I wish you would; we don't know anyone here."

Yet her face was so frank and ingenuous that he could not think evil of her cordiality.

"I should be glad to be of service to you in any way," he answered cordially. "I know Venice pretty well, for this is my third visit."

"We are not at a hotel but at a *pension*, and it's very dull," she said. "We stayed one night at a place in the Plaza San Marco, but the people never go to bed there, and mamma could not sleep. We are abroad for her health, and so we had to find a quiet place, and it *is* quiet—oh, deadly quiet!"

Howard suddenly recollected his companions who were waiting for him, and drew out his card. The mother produced one of hers, and feebly seconded her daughter's invitation. The whole proceeding struck the young man as curious and unconventional in the extreme as he walked back to his party. While he had looked at the radiant vision it seemed correct and proper.

"They don't know me. I might be a blackleg and an adventurer. I hope they don't admit everyone so carelessly. The girl is so beautiful."

And he experienced a sort of pang at the fear that anyone else should be taken into their acquaintance in the same unconventional manner.

"I can be of real service to them," he said to himself as he took out the cards and read

MRS. JOHN STIRLING MISS DULCIE STIRLING.
"Dulcie."

What an odd diminutive, yet it had a soft clinging music about it that thrilled him. It was singing itself over and over again in his brain when he came upon Mrs. Jephson-Hawes, looking very stately and sedate, and Miss Mabel with an additional frosting in her face and manner.

"Really, Howard, that very unconventional person seemed to have something to say to you," said the elder lady.

But Howard did not satisfy the curiosity that was evident. He only bestirred himself to procure a gondola, and in a few moments they were afloat on the smooth, shining water. It was not yet dark, the after-glow had not faded.

The golden lamps shone out like golden flowers against the deep violet shadows. Domes and spires came out distinctly in that light, and all the serried masts of the merchant fleet at the mouth of the Quidecca stood up like lances. So they glided on till the darkness fell and a pale crescent moon rose "like a silver sickle in a field of stars."

But Howard Winthrop was thinking of none of these things. He saw instead a slight figure in a pale purple gown, with a vivacious, sparkling face and wind-blown, bronze hair. "She's awfully pretty, but 'bad form.'" he decided as he lit his cigarette that night. Yet she had taken possession of his fancy, and seemed quite at home there.

No one could have been more astonished than our hero

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himself when a few evenings after this he found himself drifting over the sheeted silver of those same waters with the enchantress herself. How it had come about was not exactly clear to him; but it seemed as if the invitation had come from Miss Dulcie herself, and that her mother had failed at the last moment.

"We hire the gondola by the week," the young lady had volunteered, "and it's a pity to send it away, with such a moonlight too."

So Winthrop found himself at her side, feeling as if he were sailing in an enchanted boat on an enchanted sea.

"Mamma gets tired so soon," she said to him frankly, "that I have to go about alone. One hour in a picture gallery uses her up, and she doesn't remember anything about it, poor dear; so what's the use."

"But you are too young, and, excuse me, too pretty, to go about without a chaperon," said Winthrop, looking at the effects of moonlight on the glowing face that bloomed like a flower in that pallid light.

She wore a dress of Vandyke blue velvet, with a cape of white Spanish lace carelessly tied over it. About her neck was a quaint collar of filigree silver, and on her arms bracelets of the same delicate frostwork. A Rembrandt hat of blue plush, with a long blue feather, held in place by a bird's silver claw, shaded, but did not conceal, the glory of her ruddy hair.

It gave Winthrop a sort of pang that he could not explain to look at her and think of her freedom.

It was not the proper thing at all.

"They have such musty, fusty ideas nowadays," she said, smiling brightly up in his face. "I rather like to shock them. Perhaps I shock you too?"

"Would you enjoy that?" the young man asked evasively.

"Oh, no! I would rather you approved of me; though"—with a mutinous and bewitching smile—"I don't know that I would give up my own way to bring that about. I've been a good deal spoilt—you have seen that. I know. The doctors told mamma long ago, when I was a child, that if I was opposed I would burst a blood-vessel and die. I'm afraid I've made use of her fear to get my own way. It's an ignoble confession to make, isn't it?"

"Yet you look extremely healthy," he answered in a sceptical tone. "I own I should be tempted some time to oppose you. It's not a good thing for any human soul to meet with no opposition."

"Well, mamma consoles herself for her own weakness by thinking I may have a strong hand to rule me one of these days. She takes the most dismal views of matrimony, do you know, and says, 'Poor dear! she will suffer enough one of these days. Let her enjoy life now.'"

"But you? I trust your views are more rose-coloured," said Winthrop, feeling his heart beat more rapidly and half despising himself for it.

What was this strange, impulsive creature to him?

"I? Oh, yes! I have my own dreams—what girl has not? I do not believe life is so leaden-hued as some say. The poets are particularly to blame for that, I think. They should be crowned with cypress, instead of laurel, for all the dismal songs of grief and gloom they have perpetrated. But I have not seen the Fairy Prince yet—at least, I think I have not"—with a mischievous look into Winthrop's eyes. "You know I am not eighteen yet."

Winthrop thought it would be hard to find a girl more emancipated.

"I predict all bright things for you," he said; "let me look at your hand. I learnt palmistry once from an Arab."

The girl frankly held out her hand; it was rosy-white and dimpled. Its soft touch, as it lay in his own, thrilled Winthrop from head to foot.

"The line of life is——"

He hesitated. He knew it was all nonsense, but he felt his heart sink as he saw that mystic line so suddenly broken on the little rose-lined hand.

"Well, what is it? Shall I die soon? That will be when my husband contradicts me, I know."

Winthrop rallied and spoke gaily.

"You will have a long life, a rich husband, and always have your own way. Here is a dark man who loves you."

It was quite in the approved gipsy style, and Dulcie nodded.

"Oh, yes. I know the dark man."

"What?" exclaimed Winthrop in surprise. "I thought you knew no one."

"Oh, he is an Italian count we met at Trouville in the summer—a dark, gloomy fellow, with magnificent eyes. He has a history."

"They all have."

"He is very poor."

"They all are."

"And he talks English in a broken way, and in a low, musical voice. He was teaching me Italian, and I am going on with the lessons when I get to Naples. He lives in Naples."

"Ah!"

Winthrop could not account for the jealous pang that stabbed his heart.

"Mamma has been in constant terror lest I should fall in love with him on account of the romance of the thing; and I'm afraid of foreigners. I feel that Count Torriani could do any one of those dark deeds we read about in Italian romances; but there *is* an interest in being with a man who adores you," with a bright glance.

Winthrop winced.

"So he adores you and tells you so?"

"Oh, yes. He reads me sonnets full of volcanic passion. He accounts for my indifference by believing that I am too young to be fully awakened to the best happiness of life."

"And you go about with him?" Winthrop asked in a dumb fury.

"Certainly. He is splendid-looking and a perfect gentleman. Besides, he knows his country as a foreigner could not do; and he appears to feel so much that I cannot crush him at a blow—can I, now?"

Winthrop felt himself growing hard and cold.

"You can only decide that for yourself," he said.

Somehow the rest of the sail seemed to have lost its enchantment. They landed and climbed the sandy ridges that glisten in the silvery light.

Every pool is a molten mirror. Before them lay the placid lagoon, on one side a line of dark blue, with creamy waves crawling lazily upon the shore. It was the Adriatic.

It was in vain that Winthrop tried to withdraw himself from the subtle charm of Dulcie's society. In vain he repeated to himself that she was too unconventional and too impulsive for that strict, cold London circle to which he belonged.

Mrs. Jephson-Hawes shrugged her shoulders at the very mention of the girl, and Mrs. Jephson-Hawes was the autocrat of his society. She had voted Miss Dulcie "crude—crude in the extreme," and there was scarcely a more significant term in that lady's vocabulary.

There was Mabel, a truly high-bred and perfect specimen of conventional breeding—a girl whose voice, musically modulated, was never raised above the regulation tone, whose step, floating and graceful, was never quickened by impulse, whose manner was cool and quiet and charming, but she charmed Winthrop no more.

He found himself longing for Dulcie's changing, ringing, tones. There was everything in her voice—appeal, merriment, melancholy, tenderness—it was as changeful as her eyes, her face, her whole manner. She was never the same—a perpetual study, an eternal delight. She fascinated him.

He spent all the time when he was away from her in steeling his heart against her, but with the first glance into her fearless bright eyes all his panoply fell from him, and he became her slave.

And so at last they found themselves together in Naples, and a new personage appeared on the scene.

The tall, dark, melancholy nobleman, who expressed a whole record of past grandeur and fallen fortunes in his sallow, pathetic face and sombre, dark eyes, was seen everywhere with Dulcie.

Her mother seemed to keep in the background as persistently as if she were indeed a moth and shunned the daylight.

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When the Count saw Winthrop, an antagonism seemed to spring up at once in his breast. He discerned a rival, and hated him from that moment.

As for our hero, he ground his teeth in impotent rage when he saw his charmer leaning upon the Count's arm, looking up with a bright smile into his face, and listening to his broken sentences, as if they were the wisdom of the gods. He tried remonstrating with feeble Mrs. Stirling, who was just at that moment engrossed in a new symptom, and indifferent to all else.

"It gives rise to remark," he said, "unless a young lady is engaged to the gentleman."

"Oh, dear me!" she wailed; "don't ask me to interfere. Dulcie does as she likes; she always has—she always will; I haven't the nerve to control her—and, after all, I am sure of her, Mr. Winthrop. She is very independent, but she always will do right—I have that confidence in her. Do you know any remedy for neuralgia?"

Winthrop answered somewhat wildly, and got away in a discouraged mood. He must speak to the young lady herself. Most girls are keenly alive to rumour; and perhaps he might alarm her sufficiently to make her throw aside the languishing Count, who infuriated him so with his adoring airs.

It was a lovely sunset. As Winthrop stepped out upon the terrace between the sculptured vases full of trailing flowers, he saw a view which is, perhaps, the most famous in the world; the bay, like a shining crescent, lay before him, purple and emerald in the shadow of rocky headlands. The fishing-barks, with their white wings, looked like birds asleep on the blue waters.

There was a flicker of amber among the trailing ivies beneath him, and he hurried towards it. Dulcie was sitting there, idly picking some flowers to bits; a mosaic of bright leaves lay over her dress.

"So you serve the offerings of your victims?" he said grimly.

"Oh, they are from the Count. I couldn't keep all he gives me."

"Does it never strike you that you might stop it, if you don't care for it?" Winthrop asked, somewhat brusquely.

Dulcie opened her lovely eyes.

"But suppose it is not altogether unpleasant?"

"Oh, in that case it is quite correct, otherwise it might be better not to give rise to surmises that may be incorrect and injurious."

There was a slight rigidity about Dulcie's mouth and a little tremor in her voice.

"And why should *you* care?"

With those lovely eyes raised to his, the fresh young lips so near, the slender form within his reach, Winthrop's self-possession deserted him. A thicket of ivy and myrtle screened them from sight. He forgot everything but the rapturous beating of his own heart. In a second he had snatched her to his breast, and pressed a sudden kiss upon the scarlet lips.

"Because I love you, darling!" he murmured.

The golden-bronze head lay on his shoulder one second, while Dulcie said artlessly:

"Oh, I am glad, glad!" when a sudden rustle startled them. The Count stood glowering at them with gloomy eyes.

The Count stood glowering at them with gloomy eyes.

Winthrop started back, with a sudden impulse to knock him down, there was so much hate in the dark face. But he restrained himself—perhaps the man had done him a service. He had interrupted a passing frenzy; yes, that was what our unworthy hero styled his unpremeditated confession.

"Leave me," Dulcie whispered. "I must speak to him. I can calm the wild beast in him, I am sure."

Winthrop was glad to go away. He felt quite breathless with the plunge he had taken. It was all over now—too late to escape.

Was it too late? He had been betrayed into a sudden declaration and a kiss. Well! Dulcie had heard many such, and had been kissed before, very likely. A girl so very unconventional—no, somehow Winthrop could not wrong her in his mind.

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What was a kiss? He felt the touch yet upon his lips—light as rose leaf yet glowing as flame. Should he give up all for that kiss? Dulcie was sweet and bewitching, but she was not the wife for him. She was crude, "undeniably crude."

He felt, somehow, all the harder to her that he had been betrayed into that weakness. He had looked upon himself as a self-centred fellow, who had himself well in hand; this undisciplined rebound of his nature was owing to her.

Her unfettered nature had worked upon his own to his detriment; he must shake off the fetters.

He nerved himself to the task, and sat down to write. He would not see her again—he dared not. The very memory of her witchery stole to him like a subtle and bewildering perfume. He must write.

Never was task so hard. Over and over again he attempted and tore into bits the unsatisfying result.

Now it was diffuse and kind; now it was too short and cold. At last he kept one in despair.

It ran as follows:

"MY DEAR MISS DULCIE—*I am called away so suddenly that I fear I shall not have the happiness of seeing you again. Forgive me for the liberty I took this afternoon. I cannot forgive myself. Believe me, the feeling was not feigned; but I scorn myself for the weakness that betrayed me into an expression of interest that I cannot indulge. Circumstance, our own spheres in Society and the fitness of things, must all be consulted as well as that treacherous organ—the human heart. Make my adieux kindly to your mother. With best wishes for yourself, I am,*

"*Yours very humbly and repentantly,*

"HOWARD WINTHROP."

When the young man had dispatched this note he began to pack hurriedly. He had not the nerve to meet the girl again after having sent it.

He resolved to wait till it was dark, and then to go. He could trump up some reason for the Jephson-Hawes.

The night was singularly alive and bright. Winthrop noticed that Vesuvius' plume had grown into a column; it grew beneath his eye, piling itself mass on mass. As he gazed, it was no longer a plume, but an arch that spanned half the horizon.

It grew rosy, fire-tipped. The dark billows were rose-crowned, the sombre mountains of smoke were flame-capped. The mountain was in eruption.

He paused to look. The sight charmed him and made him forget his journey for the moment.

There was a trembling in the earth, in the air. Then a volley of black vapour shot up, rent with veins of fire, like a cloud veined with lightning, and streams of lava—seething, liquid flame—began crawling down the cone.

Standing so transfixed, Winthrop had forgotten everything. He was not aware of a dark shadow stealing behind him, or of the glitter of steel flashing near. Only when he hears a woman's cry and feels two round, young arms about his neck, does he realise that someone is crashing away through the shrubbery, and that Dulcie has fainted in his arms.

He lifted her to a long, rustic seat near by, and realised for the first time that he has stopped near the garden—nay, that they are on the very spot where he had kissed her that very day. She lay there now, pale as the stone statue that stood near, and he suddenly saw with a cold horror that there was blood streaming over her white dress.

But the lovely eyes were open for a moment, and an arm stole about his neck again.

"I saved you, did I not, darling? You are not hurt?"

"No, no!—but you? I do not understand."

"It is a scratch. But the Count's dagger was aimed at your heart. I have saved you—that is joy enough."

Then she fainted dead away again, and he was aware that the attendants were thronging about them—that the mother was hovering with feeble moans over her daughter, that a medical gentleman was examining the wound.

"It is not serious," he said.

Then Winthrop gave her up to other hands with a sickening feeling of reluctance, and she was carried into the house.

He paced the garden-walks a long time, but scarcely looked at the wondrous panorama before him. Only he felt as if he, too, had undergone some strange convulsion of nature, as if a torrent of seething lava coursed through his veins instead of blood.

"And I have been ready to cast away such a love!" he groaned; "a love that could fling away life as a worthless thing for my sake. Oh, my darling, forgive me! I know I cannot live without you now!"

Suddenly, the memory of the letter stabbed him like a dagger. It had not reached her, evidently, before she had left the house. His messenger had indeed stopped on the way to do a little courting on his own account.

"Oh, fool that I have been!" he cried, starting into a hurried walk. "My doom is certain if she sees that. She would never forgive that cold, heartless letter!—my proud darling!"

He hurried up to the hotel, hoping it might not yet have been delivered. He felt as if he would give ten years of his life to get that scrap of paper in his hand once more. He had some hope as he asked for Mrs. Stirling.

There seemed an unusual bustle about the halls. A flurried look in people's faces. Mrs. Stirling did not come to him. He made his way to their parlour. The door stood open.

"Is she worse?" he asked, as he caught Mrs. Stirling hurrying by. "Is the wound more serious than the doctor thought?"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, go away!" moaned the mother. "She has broken a blood-vessel, the doctor says. It is not the wound at all, only he says the excitement may have brought it on. She was quite calm, and was reading a note that someone brought her. The effect on her was terrible in the extreme.

"There is no hope. I cannot be calm, and so they will not let me stay with her. Oh, God, have mercy upon me! No—no, you must not go in."

But Howard Winthrop heeded nothing. He strode onwards to the couch upon which they had laid the wounded girl. She was ghastly white but conscious, and turned from him with a shudder.

He forgot conventionality then. It mattered not to him that his conduct was "bad form." He dropped on his knees at the bedside, and gasped out:

"Forget it, Dulcie, it is not true. I have found out my own heart now, and know that you are my life. I love you—before Heaven I love you!"

She lifted languid eyes to him, and the shadow of a smile touched her pallid lips.

"I told you that I had never been crossed in my life. You see, when it came I could not bear it. I am going to die, because I cannot have my own way. I am a poor, weak creature, after all."

"You are heroic," cried Howard, with a great sob in his throat; "do not slip away from me now, when I know your worth. Oh, darling! God has angels enough without you. Tell me—tell me you forgive!"

She held out the crushed slip of paper she still held in her hand.

"Take it," she whispered faintly. "I forgive—and believe—in spite—of all—that you love me."

A grey pallor settled on her face, and Winthrop was hustled from the room to pace his own floor till the sudden hush that falls on all earthly sounds when one Presence enters settled down over all. He knew that he had thrown away the most priceless boon ever offered to man, that he had murdered his own happiness for ever.

A voice followed him with a ceaseless cadence of pain, saying always: "It might have been. It might have been."

Helen Pierson.

LADY NOVELIST: "Darling, I have been untrue to you. I love another." Husband: "W-h-a-t!" Lady Novelist: "Calm yourself, dear; calm yourself. That is only what my heroine says to her husband, and I wanted to see how the husband would act."

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Unsolved Love Problems.

A Prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

VII.—THE ENGAGEMENT OF EDITH SARGEANT.

"INDEED, Wilfred, you make it very difficult for me to refuse you."

The speaker was a tall, fair-haired girl who was sitting on a sofa in a charmingly furnished drawing-room, and looking up at the grave, clerically-attired man who stood before her.

"That is naturally what I desire to do," he replied to her naïve remark, with a smile of singular sweetness.

"Oh," cried Edith a little impatiently, "what good would it do you if I married you and did not love you?"

"But you would in time," he insisted; "I am patient and I have learnt to wait. We have known each other since we were children together, and I am perfectly certain we are exactly suited to one another."

"Oh, yes, that is what mother says—a very suitable match, my dear—but I don't want only a suitable match—I don't want to marry a man unless I love him so much that I can't help myself."

"Edith," said the man, going a shade paler under his weather-beaten skin, "what do you know of love? If you do not love me like that, is there anyone else that you do?"

Edith flushed, and averted her head.

"Whom should I love?" she cried with a forced laugh. "I have not had an offer since Jack Osborne went abroad and got engaged on the way out, and this is being absurdly frank, is it not?"

And he was satisfied.

"Then," he cried, "if there is no one else I am content. Give what you can now, and I will teach you to love me more in time."

"But how can I tell if I shall ever love you more?"

"You will," he replied with a certainty that a man, even of his force of character, should dread to take upon him, and he seated himself beside her and took one of her hands in his.

Wilfred Arlington was not young, his hair was grey at the temples, and there were lines about his eyes and firm, compressed mouth, but he was young for a bishop, even a Colonial bishop, and Edith, who had sat on his knee as a golden-haired child, had still some of the awe left with which she had regarded the tall, grave clergyman, mixed now with admiration for his intellectual powers, and the rapid way in which he had come to the front.

She was flattered that he should seek her for his wife, and the thought of exchanging the narrow life of a cathedral close for the larger, wider existence of a bishopric in Greater Britain was very attractive to her, and she could not help being aware that had she never met Dr. Clinton she would not have hesitated to accept gladly what was offered her, and indeed to return his love with interest. There was only one thing she desired more than that she should love Wilfred Arlington, and that was that Maurice Clinton should love her.

And yet she was hardly aware of it; she had not been consciously telling an untruth when she gave him to understand that there was no one else, though a certain sub-consciousness had caused her to fence with the question. For the past six months she had not dared to question her feelings.

She had met Maurice at a friend's house, and they had immediately become friends. A friendship so devoid of flirtation, or any approach to sentiment, that she had not liked to refuse when he suggested they should write occasionally to one another, lest she should seem to put it on a different footing, and to be refusing what had never been offered.

A few letters had passed between them, but until Wilfred Arlington's declaration of love had caused her to inquire into the state of her feelings, she had never even wondered whether Dr. Clinton loved her, or she him. And now all that she knew was, that had she never met him she would undoubtedly have loved Wilfred.

Meanwhile, the bishop was watching her with more anxiety than she imagined. He loved her very deeply, but he thought it wisest not to show it too much lest she should be frightened, and afraid of the responsibility of accepting so much love.

"Edith," he said at last, drawing her closer to him, "will you not let me try to make you love me?"

And Edith, terrified lest she should have given her heart where it was not wanted, looked up into his earnest, deep-set, grey eyes, and said:

"Yes, make me love you, and I will gladly give my life into your safe keeping."

"Thank God," he cried with fervour, and before she could draw back he had kissed her on the lips.

By her instinctive shrinking Edith knew she did not love him, and she feared what she had done.

"No—no——" she cried wildly, pushing him away. "Do not kiss me again, I can promise nothing. Wait—wait, only wait, and I will try to love you. Give me time—six weeks—a month; I cannot answer you now at once."

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"As you will, my dear," said he a little wearily, for he began to see it is a terrible thing to give all your heart and get so little in return. "I have to return to Aralong in six weeks' time, so at the end of a fortnight I will come to you for my answer."

Thankful to him for his kindness and patience, Edith felt almost light-hearted when she bade him farewell at the little gate between the close-cut hedges of yew.

She would write to Dr. Clinton, and she would tell him of the offer she had had without mentioning any names, merely putting down her indecision to her doubt whether she was fitted to be a clergyman's wife, and whether she could bear to leave her country and all her friends. According to his reply she would know if he loved her or no. If he did, then the heavens themselves opened before her, and if he did not, then shame to her for having allowed her love to go unasked; she would cast all thought of him out of her heart and she would—yes, she determined she would—love this good man who so truly loved her.

She wrote her letter, she put the case before her friend, she asked his advice, and she sat down to wait.

At the end of a week no word had come, and her heart sank within her, for, as she argued:

"If he loved me he would have written at once, lest I should accept the offer, but if he only regards me as a friend he will wait a while to think it over that he may be sure to give me the right advice."

So for a time she was humbled to the dust, and then pride came to her aid, and she determined no one should ever guess she had given her love where only friendship was asked.

Just at the psychological moment came the bishop, and he said:

"Edith, I promised you a fortnight to think over my offer. I have just received a letter which makes it imperative I should return to my diocese, Aralong, next week. Will you not promise yourself to me now that I may go about my work with a heart at peace?"

While Edith resented his assumption that only one answer was possible, it showed her that by asking him to wait she had given him the right to hope, and the yearning look in his eyes, and the strained lines about his mouth, as of a man suffering great anxiety, made her feel she was not treating him quite fairly, so she said:

"I do not think I shall know more at the end of a fortnight than I do now. I do not think I love you yet, but I want to, and I have a very real affection for you, and if you will have me on those terms, I will marry you and try to make you a good wife."

Wilfred folded her in his arms saying in a voice deep with feeling:

"I am not afraid if there is no one you love better. You do not know how glad you have made me, for, next to my God, I love you, Edith, and you *shall* be happy."

Having thus cast the die, Edith was much happier. She was now fortified against the sting of the perfectly friendly advice from Dr. Clinton that she expected to get. There was even a certain amount of satisfaction that she would be able to tell him she had decided before she heard from him. He did not love her, she would marry the bishop, and, secure in her love for her husband, would only think of Maurice Clinton as a friend.

For the next two or three days Edith was kept busy receiving congratulations. Everyone was pleased with the engagement, both on her side and on his, and she grew very proud of her *fiancé* and quite convinced that she had done the best thing for herself, while the bishop was so quietly radiant that she was humbly grateful she could bestow so much happiness with so little effort. She did not allow her thoughts to dwell on Maurice Clinton in those days.

The afternoon visitors had gone, and Mrs. Sargeant had retired to write the great news to relatives at a distance, while Edith, a little weary of smiling and talking, sat thinking dreamily how good a man she was going to marry, and how wonderful it was he should love such a very ordinary person as herself in whom others found no attraction.

Suddenly the door opened and the manservant announced:

"Dr. Clinton!"

And not till then did she realise he had been in her thoughts.

Maurice came forward eagerly with outstretched hands.

"Miss Sargeant, I have not been able to come before, but here I am now to answer your letter in person."

The beating of her heart almost suffocated her, and Edith could only stammer:

"Why—why—did you not come before?"

"Oh, well, a chapter of accidents," he said. "First of all I was away for a few days, and then when I returned and got your letter there was a most important operation I was obliged to perform on a patient. It was two days before she was fit for it, and I have only now been able to pronounce her out of immediate danger and leave her to my partner, because—because I dared not delay any longer."

As he spoke he had been anxiously scanning her white face and what he saw there made him start forward and seize both her hands:

"Edith, Edith—tell me—I am not too late! You have not decided?"

She could only bow her head, and show the ring on her hand; she felt she could not have spoken a word to save her life.

Maurice fell into a chair like one stunned, then he said:

"It was a matter of life and death for that young girl, and I could not in humanity leave her, and now I am too late, oh, my God!" And he buried his face in his hands with a groan.

It needed no actual words to tell Edith that this man loved her even as she loved him, and her crushed pride reared its head from the dust where it had lain since she thought she had given her heart unsought.

She put out a pitiful hand and touched his shoulder.

"Why did you not write?" she asked.

"Because I was a fool! Because I wanted to tell you with my own lips how I have grown to love you till you are as a very part of myself. Because I thought we were so much one, it was impossible for you to love anyone else. Fool that I was, while I hesitated to spoil the crown of my joy by a letter I lost it altogether." Then he turned to her wildly:

"Surely I am not to be so terribly punished because I stayed to fulfil my duty as a doctor? Edith, you love me; surely you do. Is there *no* hope for me?"

Poor Edith, the words that would have brought her joy a month sooner, now gave her only pain, but she would not avow her love for one man while the affianced wife of another, so she replied with a touching dignity:

"Dr. Clinton, you are ungenerous. I have promised to marry my old friend, Bishop Arlington, you cannot expect me to say that I love *you*."

"You are quite right," said Maurice, regaining his self-control, "I ask your pardon. It was the suddenness of the blow that made me lose my head. I only distress you—I will go. Good-bye, Edith!" And he took her hand and gazed wistfully at her. "If — but, no, I will say no more—it must lie entirely in your hands. I know you will do what is right," and raising her hand to his lips he left the room.

So Edith was left alone to face the situation.

At the knowledge that Maurice loved her, all her love for him that might have died away, awoke in fierce intensity, and she knew now that whoever she married it would be Maurice Clinton alone that she loved.

She had given her word to the bishop, could she take it back again? Could she take her happiness at the price of his? And yet would it be right for her to marry him when she loved another?

L. Hughes.

HANDWRITING DENOTES YOUR CHARACTER.

And if you wish to learn what this is send a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope to BANER, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. A reliable delineation of your character will be sent in return.

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SPLENDID NEW SERIES. **BEGIN READING TO-DAY.**

Told by the Decoy Herself.

A Striking Series of Astonishing Revelations.

SYNOPSIS.

VIVIENNE D'ALTON, who in this series tells the story of a certain period of her life, is a young lady who has been educated in Germany.

Until the time when the story commences, she had never seen her father since he placed her at the school in Bochum, although her fees are paid regularly and she has a liberal allowance of pocket-money.

Her mother is dead, and she has no brother or sister. Hence, she seems quite alone in the world.

But one day her father sends a message to the school that he wishes his daughter to leave and to meet him at Rotterdam. Vivienne is greatly delighted at the news, and while she sails down the Rhine to meet her father, conjectures as to his appearance.

The person who announces himself as her father at Rotterdam is not in the least like the handsome gentleman she had pictured to herself, but is short and stout.

They drive to a large mansion, where Vivienne is enthusiastically welcomed by a Mrs. Sherwood, "a bosom friend of her mother," who requests Vivienne to call her "aunt."

Vivienne takes an instantaneous dislike to "Aunt Flora."

A Mr. Gilbert Graysworthy comes to dine at the house, and incidentally mentions that round his waist he carries a belt containing fifty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds.

A day or two later Vivienne is shocked to learn that Gilbert Graysworthy has been found murdered in the street! There seems no motive for the crime, for his money, his watch and chain are still upon his body. Who could the murderer be?

SECOND EPISODE.

I Journey to England.

THE dreadful news imparted so suddenly was such a frightful shock to me that I could neither speak nor move for some time. I could only lean back in my chair, feeling sick at heart, and trembling all over. Looking at my aunt, I expected to find her equally agitated, for it is a terrible thing to hear of the murder of a man whom you have welcomed to your table but a few short hours since.

But, having by a gesture dismissed the maid, Mrs. Sherwood displayed very little concern, and I think my stillness deceived her as to my real feelings, for she observed, in a callous tone: "What a mercy it is that he did not join us last evening, after all! People might have thought we had had something to do with the poor man's death, if he had been seen last in our company."

"Oh, how can you be so heartless?" I exclaimed passionately. "Fancy hearing of a horrible thing like that and thinking only of yourself. It's absolutely disgusting!"

Aunt Flora, for just a second, looked angry enough to kill me. But the anger disappeared like a flash, and she replied, with sweet self-restraint:

"My dear child, when you have lived as long as I have, and have seen as much of the world as I have, you will not be unreasonable enough to expect youth and age to show their emotions in exactly the same way. And when you have seen more of human nature, you will not run away with the idea that your heart and your judgment are so much better than those of other people."

I suppose I ought to have apologised for my rudeness when met by such an obviously sensible argument as this. But I am of an obstinate turn of mind, for I retorted, with scarcely less warmth of manner than I had displayed before:

"All the same, I've seen enough of the world to know that growing old does not necessarily make people grow callous, and, and——"

Aunt Flora was to have heard a few more home truths, but I was not equal to continuing my argument, and broke into a wild fit of weeping, which seemed to astonish Mrs. Sherwood considerably. For a while she made no comment. Then, noting that I had quieted down, she said, in a loud, sharp voice:

"Your present conduct, Miss D'Alton, is the reverse of seemly. When I tell your father that you have fallen in love with the very first single man whom we introduced to you, he will be extremely disappointed, for he thinks you are wiser, instead of more foolish, than the average run of impressionable girls."

"How dare you say that I was in love with Mr. Graysworthy?"

"I say it because nothing is more obvious. Yesterday, although you had only met the man once, you were ill-natured and unsociable to everybody else until you thought it was time for him to arrive. Then you brightened up for his sake, and when he failed to put in an appearance, you were so rude to Mynheer and Vrow Althaus that I was thankful to get you away from the place. And this morning, because I don't burst into tears and bemoan loudly the death of a man in whom I have no interest, you pile such insults upon me that I

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would never forgive you if I did not fully understand the reason for your vagaries of temper."

To this speech I made no response, not because I was sulky, but because I was not sure that Mrs. Sherwood was in the wrong. And when she made a dignified exit from the room, I remained in a very uncertain frame of mind for some time.

Could it be true that I had fallen in love with Mr. Graysworthy, and that that was why I wept bitterly on hearing of his death? Certainly I liked him, as anybody else would like him. But my love does not dwell so near the surface that I could fling it to the first comer, and I dismissed the idea as grossly unjust, especially after I recollected that our parlourmaid had been no more able to restrain her tears than I had been.

Concerning the indictment of rudeness on the previous day, I was willing to grant that *ennui* and disappointment might have made me less tolerant of the failings of our host and hostess than I might otherwise have been. But I felt quite sure that, under similar circumstances, I should again behave in similar fashion, and that, after all, there was a great deal that was strange about the Althaus couple.

About Mrs. Sherwood, too, for that matter. Else why should she have shown such fear lest I saw through the Vrow's dirty curtains and still dirtier windows? And what did the cry of the night-jar mean? Or the presence of the big, burly man who produced it? Still stranger, why should my maid have been talking to him? And how is it that she was not at home in time to perform her usual evening duties?

It also occurred to me that the unfortunate young Englishman had probably been attacked and killed while on his way to join us. And I wished with all my heart that we had not given him an invitation, as he would then have probably been saved from the death which awaited him.

But did it lie in wait for him? Was it not much more likely that the footpads who had killed him were simply lying in ambush for the first unwary traveller who might come their way? And was it not notorious that strangers of apparent wealth were often killed and thrown into the numerous canals of Rotterdam and Amsterdam?

I was so absorbed in thinking over all sorts of possibilities in connection with the tragedy of which I had just heard that I did not notice the presence of the parlour-maid, who was clearing the breakfast table until she observed timidly:

"Please excuse me, miss, for crying just now, but I really couldn't help it."

"Of course you couldn't," I returned sadly. "It's a very awful thing to have happened."

"They are saying downstairs, miss, that it must be the work of some enemy, or else the poor gentleman would have been robbed."

At these words a startling idea came to me, and I asked eagerly:

"Susan, are you sure he wasn't robbed?"

"The papers say not, because his things were all found on him—money and watch, too."

"Susan, let me see that paper. I want to satisfy myself about something."

Probably Susan thought simple curiosity was at the bottom of my wish to read the *Tageblatt*. But she obeyed me at once, and went to fetch the paper.

"Please, miss," she said a few minutes later, "Madame is very angry with me for mentioning the murder while you were there, and she says that if I give you a newspaper to read, she will dismiss me at once."

"And so I will!" joined in an irate voice from the doorway. "In fact, you may consider yourself dismissed now, this very instant."

It was Aunt Flora who spoke thus angrily, and it was easy to see that she was simply furious. Susan was dismayed beyond words.

"Oh, Madame," she implored. "Surely you do not mean it!"

"Indeed, I do! I will have nobody in my service who forgets her place like you have done this morning. There are plenty of well-trained waiting-maids to be obtained by anybody who pays good money."

"But, Madame, I am a stranger here now. My people have left Holland to go to America, and I have nobody belonging to me here."

"I cannot help that. You shall have a month's wages, and leave my service this very day."

The more I saw of Mrs. Sherwood, the less I liked her. But I was not intimidated by her, so said promptly:

"Susan, don't worry about that. If Madame Sherwood will not employ you, I will, and if you like, you shall go back to England with me."

Susan immediately expressed her gratitude, and hurried out of the room, with the wise intention of avoiding further unpleasantness. But Mrs. Sherwood looked daggers at me, and announced her intention of inducing "poor dear Beverley" to reconsider his promise to make me the mistress of his Park Lane mansion.

"You are no more fit to preside over a house than is a babe unborn!" was her scornful assertion. "You would have everything in a muddle directly, and your own father would find his authority disputed if you were allowed to take the servants in hand."

For all answer to this diatribe, I touched the bell, which Susan answered.

"Susan," I said quietly. "Go and order the carriage for me. I am going out."

Susan disappeared, and Aunt Flora seemed to suddenly realise that, although I was but a school girl, just emancipated from schoolroom discipline, I was quite beyond being ruled by her. For she dropped her antagonistic attitude, mustered a beaming smile, and exclaimed cheerily:

"That's right, dear! I'm so glad you've decided to go out. Where are we going to?"

For a second only did I debate whether to feign civility or not. Then I decided that no good could come of constant recrimination, and that, having evidently a most deceitful person to deal with, I might as well use a little moderation in showing my own real feelings.

So I answered her in kind, with the words:

"It's very good of you to think of going out with me. But I shall not need to keep you long, if you are pressed for time. I only want to read what the *Tageblatt* says about that poor man who has been killed."

"But you don't need to go out to see the paper!"

"There is nothing else for it, if you will not let me see your copy, and if the servants must not bring me one."

"My dear Vivienne, you are under a most strange misapprehension. I wouldn't presume to dictate what you should read or what you should not read.

"What I was angry about was your being told of this sad tragedy at all, as it was sure to be a shock to you. I had read the news myself, before ever you came down to breakfast, and had carefully put the paper out of your sight, for your father strictly enjoined me to keep all unpleasant things from you.

"Then Susan came and upset all my plans by blurting the news out at breakfast time, and, not content with that, she wanted her love of sensation to be pandered to by watching you read and cry over the painful details.

"No wonder I was angry! But, in the privacy of your own room, there is no earthly reason why you shouldn't read all the sensational news in Rotterdam, if you wish to."

I had won a victory, and I knew it. But I had sense enough to appear to take Mrs. Sherwood's elaborate explanation at its fictitious value, so said that I was sorry for misunderstanding her. The result was that I eventually perused the much disputed news sheet in my own room, and satisfied myself that that which I had half guessed at had indeed taken place.

As Mrs. Sherwood had truly said, the details of the case were painful reading to me. But to the outsider it would appear amply evident that personal revenge had been at the bottom of the tragedy. The victim had apparently been deprived of nothing, for was not his property, including his money, his pocket-book containing a few notes, and his watch and chain, all still to the fore? So how could robbery be suspected?

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But what about the belt of diamonds, worth fifty-thousand pounds? That was not included amongst the recovered items, and its disappearance left only one conclusion open.

Gilbert Grays worthy had been killed by somebody who knew of that belt of diamonds. He must have been lured to some pretended diamond merchant's house, and robbed of his life and his gems. Then, having carefully left everything else upon him, the murderers found a chance of depositing the body where it was found in the dark hours of the early morning, and I was thankful that nobody except Aunt Flora and myself heard him mention his wealth while he was in our house. Otherwise I might always have feared that the assassins got their fatal information through the indiscretion of one of our servants.

* * *

Aunt Flora really must have had my interests at heart, for she had been consideration itself ever since she and I fought out the question of supremacy, and she virtually insisted upon turning over all management of the household affairs to me.

I looked closely at the two. The man was certainly no whom I had seen before, and the woman looked very much like Annchen, my maid!

"'It will be fine practice for you," she said smilingly. "Of course it doesn't matter if a lot of money is wasted over the experiment, but it will get you into the way of giving your orders authoritatively before we go to Park Lane. And you don't know how thankful I am to find you so sensible and grown up! I had pictured you as a perfect innocent, who couldn't say 'bo' to a goose, and who must be managed accordingly."

"'And you are glad to find me different?"

"Can you doubt it? True, dear Beverley was going to give me a lot of money for training you into grown-up ways, and I find my occupation gone."

"Oh, well, you shall have the money, anyway, so don't worry about that."

It was evident that I certainly was grown-up. And my father ought to have been pleased, if he really wanted me to play the Lady Bountiful in a natural manner, for I had a happy knack of dispensing his wealth right royally. But, though it was Aunt Flora herself who was to be benefited this time, she did not seem to be at all delighted by my generosity. In fact, this was the only subject on which she and I were now in danger of being at variance, for she was as fond of safeguarding my father's interests as if they had been her own.

My maid, Annchen, had to be replaced for a time by Susan, for she had an attack of hysteria when she heard of the sad death of the poor gentleman who visited at our house, and I had not the heart to insist upon her performance of her duties. In fact, I would have liked to dispense with her altogether, for I preferred Susan. But Aunt Flora was so pleasant and obliging that I felt I ought to consult her wishes to a certain degree, and she seemed to think Annchen quite a treasure.

Remembering what I had seen from Vrow Althaus' window, I mentioned to Annchen that I had seen her talking to a man outside. But she was so hurt and astounded by the accusation, and furnished me with such a convincing *alibi*, that I was soon convinced that I had been misled by a chance resemblance, and that Annchen was not the girl I saw.

It is nice to have unlimited money to use, as I had already found out. We left Rotterdam by the Harwich boat and journeyed very comfortably. But, though the house was to be dismantled and given up, all the trouble I had was to allow myself to be dressed, step into a carriage, and be driven to the boat landing.

Aunt Flora kept her berth during the whole of the evening, and advised me to do the same. But I could do no such thing, for I was in vigorous health, and was voyaging back to my native country, which I had not seen since I was a little child. So I naturally spent as much time as possible on deck.

Susan attended Aunt Flora, and Annchen had an easy post in looking after me. There were very few saloon passengers on board. But the second-class cabins were fairly full, and, from the superior vantage post of the poop, I liked to look at whatever transpired on the lower deck.

"It is growing very cold, miss. Shall I fetch you another wrap before I go to my cabin again?"

It was Annchen who asked the question, and I replied in the negative, adding that I meant to go and lie down for a few hours, so that I might be fresh when my father met me at

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Harwich. Aunt Flora had already given Susan permission to go to bed, and Annchen informed me that if I did not require her services till within a couple of hours of landing, she would gladly go to bed, too.

I saw the girl close her cabin door behind her, after peeping into Mrs. Sherwood's stateroom, to see if the latter were really comfortable. Then I took my cloak off, and lay down on the lounge for a while. But, feeling absolutely wideawake and restless, I soon rose and wrapped myself up again. Then, creeping softly out of my cabin, and up the companion, I sat in the shadow of one of the poop ventilators, idly gazing, now upon the gliding waters, black as ink in the darkness of the night, and anon watching the few passengers who preferred the glories of the ocean to the seclusion of their berths, although it was long after twelve.

Suddenly, I looked with something more than passing interest upon two people who joined each other on the lower deck. One of them looked very like Annchen, only Annchen had no such cloak as this girl was wearing, and it clearly was a case of striking resemblance, as Annchen had said. The other was certainly the big, rough-looking man whom I had seen through Madame Althaus' window. He struck a match to light his cigarette, and left not a doubt in my mind that it was the same man. But his cigarette was left unlighted, for the girl snatched the burning match out of his hand, and flung it on to the deck.

I could not hear what she said, but fancied that she might be reproaching him for being indiscreet enough to show himself like that. And I could not help lingering there, watching the couple who seemed to converse in whispers. For they held a strange fascination for me, although their presence was as ominous of darkness as is the cry of the bird the man imitated on that fatal night at Rotterdam.

"They are birds of evil!" I told myself. "They are birds of evil! I wish they had not been journeying on the same ship with us!"

"Miss D'Alton, pray forgive me if I seem intrusive. But you have dropped your cloak, and will get your death of cold, if you don't be careful!"

These words were uttered by Viscount Broomville, a fellow-passenger whom Aunt Flora introduced to me during dinner, and they brought me back from foolish pessimism to a pleasanter frame of mind. Still, although I turned to the Viscount with a grateful smile for his thoughtfulness, I felt myself bound to take him partially into my confidence.

"You see that couple sitting near the hatch?" I inquired, almost in a whisper, receiving for answer:

"Yes, they are evidently enjoying themselves."

"Would you recognise the man again?"

"Yes. He is a perfect specimen of a rascal. But the woman is too closely wrapped up to be easily identified. Have they any special interest for you?"

"I saw them both, under ominous circumstances, a week ago, and something tells me that mischief attends them wherever they go."

The Viscount presumably was too well-bred to pooh-pooh my superstitious remark. But he must have thought me very foolish, for how could he possibly enter into my feelings over the matter. Still, this did not prevent him saying softly:

"If you will allow me to escort you down below, Miss D'Alton, I will walk on to the lower deck, and have a closer look at the couple. I shall then be certain to know them when next I see them."

Without a word, I turned, and, doing my best to avoid attracting attention, I hurried down the companion ladder, and waited near the saloon till the Viscount joined me again.

"I'm so sorry," he said. "But the birds must have scented my coming, for they have both disappeared. It's a pity I didn't get a better look at the woman."

"Oh, it doesn't really matter," was my somewhat shame-faced rejoinder. "I was really very silly to trouble you over the matter. But I thank you all the same."

"Oh, please don't thank me for having done nothing," was the smiling rejoinder. Then my new friend bowed and left me, and I passed quietly into our state-room, and was soon fast asleep.

I hardly seemed to have rested an hour when Annchen, bright, fresh, and smiling, brought me a cup of tea, and told me that we should be in Harwich in an hour. This was joyful news, and I lost no time in getting ready to join the eager throng of passengers who were preparing to land as soon as possible.

Aunt Flora did not come on deck until the boat touched the landing stage, and I think she was rather surprised to see me talking animatedly with Viscount Broomville, who, besides being a "genuine aristocrat," as she afterwards put it, was an extremely handsome man.

"How do you do, Mrs. Sherwood?" he asked cordially. "I have just been telling your niece that I already know her father, and that he is responsible for the good stroke of business I have done in Rotterdam. In fact, I hope you will both welcome me when I call to see him to-morrow."

I was delighted to know that I should soon see him again. But I would have given my right hand rather than let him come, if I had known what the awful results of to-morrow's visit were to be.

(Another long instalment of this exciting series next week).

I AM very glad to say that the interest in our Unsolved Love Problems is being well sustained; in fact, it goes farther than this, for the number of entries grows larger every time. All of you will be glad, therefore, to see that another one appears in this number, on pages 73 and 74. It is entitled "The Engagement of Edith Sargeant," and, in my opinion, the story forms one of the most interesting problems that have yet appeared, and I am anticipating that many of the readers who have not yet attempted to show their argumentative powers will make a start in endeavouring to explain what is the correct thing for Edith Sargeant to do. There is no doubt whatever that the position in which she finds herself is a truly embarrassing one to a strictly honourable girl. It is by no means always an easy matter to choose between love and duty, and the circumstances of every case have to be based solely upon their own merits. Now, readers, what do you think she ought to do? Would it be right for her to marry the bishop when she loves Maurice Clinton?

I will award a prize of one guinea to the reader who sends in what I consider to be the best reasons for the course he advocates Edith Sargeant to take. Replies must not exceed one hundred words, and should be written on one side of the paper only. The last day on which I can receive replies will be Friday, January 22nd. None arriving after this date will be considered. Address your envelopes to The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Mark the top left hand corner "Seventh Love Problem."

* * * * *

In my next chat I will announce the winner in the Unsolved Love Problem that appeared in our Christmas number, entitled "The Duty of Roger Forbes."

Your Editor.

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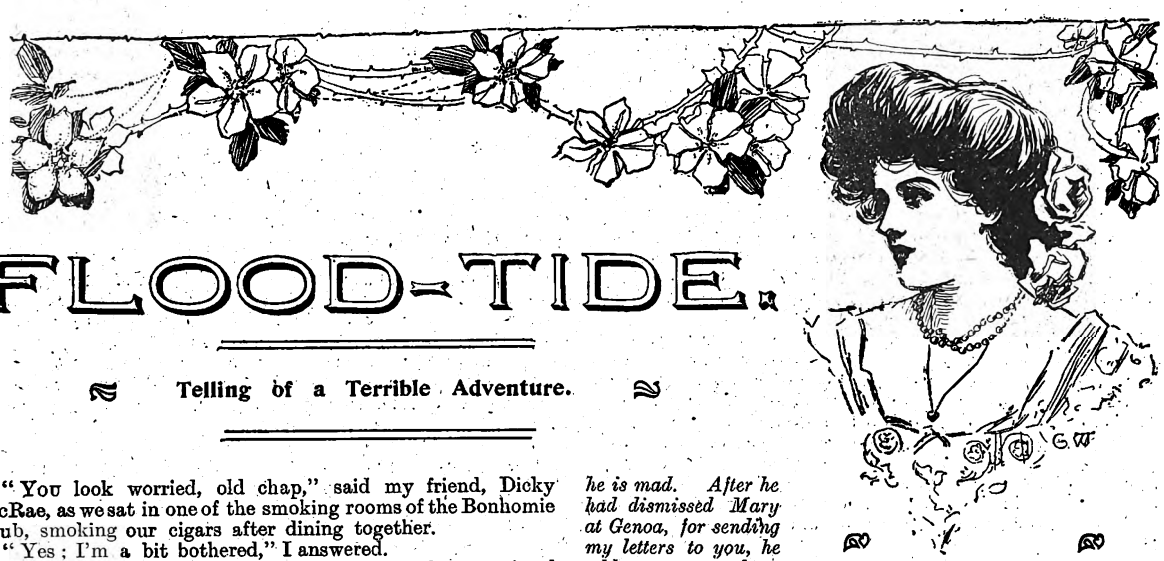

FLOOD-TIDE.

Telling of a Terrible Adventure.

"You look worried, old chap," said my friend, Dicky McRae, as we sat in one of the smoking rooms of the Bonhomie Club, smoking our cigars after dining together.

"Yes; I'm a bit bothered," I answered.

"Mammon or Cupid, Travers, if one may be permitted to inquire?" asked Dicky. "So far as my personal observation goes those are the only sources of trouble when a man is concerned."

I smiled in spite of myself, as I answered:

"Well, you've got it in once. Both the gods are mixed up in this. Shall I bore you horribly if I make a confidant of you?"

"Can't possibly say until you've got on a bit," rejoined my candid friend. "Fire away."

"Well, you know there is an understanding between Mabel—that is, Miss Dalrymple—and myself, although her uncle, who is also her guardian, is distinctly averse to the match?"

"I seem to have a dim recollection of listening to a half hour's rhapsody dealing with her charms and virtues as viewed through your eyes, old chap. Period, as they say on play bills, a year ago. The scene, if I mistake not, this very room. The course of true love was not running smooth. Uncle and guardian thought you were after her 'tin,' which, to do you justice, I'm quite sure you were not."

"I was, and am now most anxious that every penny of it be settled upon herself," I interjected.

"Good man," observed Dicky. "Well, I believe the lady will be twenty-one in nine months' time. Stern uncle's guardianship ceases to exist. Lovers marry and live happy ever after, eh?"

"That is what we reckon on," I said dolefully. "But complications have arisen. Mr. Dalrymple requested me to cease seeing Mabel, and intimated none too gently that the doors of his house I were closed against me. I told him plainly that I should still endeavour to meet his niece. His answer to that was to drag her off to the Continent, forbidding her to communicate their whereabouts to me. Indeed, he intercepted two letters she sent me, and returned them to her with his compliments. For a time we managed to correspond through her maid, but she got found out and got 'the sack,' poor beggar. I'm allowing her a pound a week to keep her going until she gets another berth. When she left, Mabel and her uncle were at Genoa, that was six weeks ago. I tried to get a month's leave so as to try and track them down, but several of our fellows are on the 'sick list' and the Colonel refused it. Since then I have heard nothing from her until this morning, when I got this."

I passed the letter across to him.

"*River House,*
"*Bank Side,*
"*Wapping.*

"MY DEAR JACK (he read out)—*I cannot imagine what has come over my uncle. The most charitable assumption is that he is mad. After he had dismissed Mary at Genoa, for sending my letters to you, he told me to get ready at once to travel. Since then we have been to, goodness knows how many places, remaining only a few days in each, but gradually getting nearer England. Three days ago he told me we were going back to London, and I rejoiced, thinking that at last I should be able to find some means to see you. Imagine my dismay when instead of our going to the old house in Mount Street, he brought me to this strange place where I am virtually kept a prisoner.*

"*I am afraid he means to do me some bodily harm. His manner is awfully strange. He turns a deaf ear to all my appeals to be allowed to go free, and when I threatened him with your vengeance yesterday, he flew into a mad paroxysm of rage.*

"*He has, however, in a calmer moment so far yielded to my intreaties as to allow me to have an interview with you here to-night at ten o'clock in his presence. Oh, come, dear love! I am not only pining for you but am in actual fear of my life.*

"*With all my love,*
"*Always yours,*
"MABEL."

McRae gave a low whistle of astonishment as he passed the letter back to me and ejaculated:

"And this is the twentieth century! Of course you are going."

"Certainly, but I am not sure that I ought not to take some precautionary measures. Under ordinary circumstances the obvious thing to do would be to appeal to the police, but I hesitate to drag my poor girl's name into a scandal. She would no doubt have taken some step of that sort herself had it not been for this consideration."

"No," said Dicky. "I can see the difficulty. But still something ought to be done. The place, judging from the address, is some out-of-the-way hole, where you might be knocked on the head and nobody be the wiser."

"At any rate, you will know where I have gone," I remarked. "Suppose I drop you a line to-morrow if things are all right. Should you not hear from me by—say, eleven, communicate with the authorities. Of course, it is just possible that Mabel in her fear may have unconsciously exaggerated the affair."

Dicky puffed away at his cigar meditatively.

"Yes, that is all right," he ejaculated at last, "but I don't like your going there alone. The whole thing looks 'fishy' to me. If I may, I'll come along with you, first sending a note to my brother telling him the address we are going to, and asking him to take steps if I don't arrive back by morning."

"My dear old chap," I objected, "I am awfully obliged to you, and should be only too pleased to have your company, but it's a beastly shame to drag you into this. There may be grave danger."

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"A delightful change from the monotony of life," he responded lightly. "Glad to be of some help to 'Love's young dream.' So I'm coming."

I tried to dissuade him from the venture, but he had made up his mind to stick by me, and finally I gave in.

By the time my friend had written the letter to his brother the moment had arrived to start.

The hall porter got us a hansom, and we were soon bowling along at a good pace towards our very mysterious destination.

On the way down we talked of nothing but the strange adventure upon which we were embarking. During the conversation Dicky remarked:

"By the way, haven't I heard somewhere that Dalrymple was once confined in an asylum?"

"Yes, when he was a much younger man," I rejoined. "But he was only there a few months, and was discharged as cured. Been very steady ever since, and people have mostly forgotten it. My own theory is that he has lost his mental balance again; that is about the only explanation which will fit in with his conduct."

"How awful for Miss Dalrymple," Dicky responded, "but buck up, old chap, we'll soon have her away from him."

Bank Side, Wapping, turned out to be a wretched street abutting on the river in one of the lowest parts of the locality. We dismissed our cab at the top of it, and walked down, keeping a sharp look-out for River House. After some trouble we found it at the end of the lane—a ramshackle place standing by itself with one of its walls lapped by the river.

"Cheerful-looking hole," I remarked as I knocked at the door.

It was opened quickly as though I had been expected, and Dalrymple appeared, holding a candle.

He started back as he saw I was not alone.

"As the place which you have chosen as a residence for your niece is in a distinctly dangerous locality, I have thought it wiser to bring my friend Mr. McRae with me," I observed sternly in answer to his look of surprise.

He muttered something about it not mattering, and motioned us in. I noticed that his looks were wild and distraught, and glanced meaningly at my friend.

As soon as he had shut the door, he bade us follow him, and we started across the hall towards the stairs at the farthest end, he being some little distance ahead.

He had reached the stairs, when suddenly he stooped down and lifted a lever, and before we could grasp his intention, the flooring seemed to sink beneath our feet and we were precipitated into a vault below, the floor of which was covered by about two feet of water; the boards which had given way returning to their original position when relieved of our weight. McRae being just ahead of me was the first to fall, and his body served somewhat as a shield for mine. It took a few minutes for us to recover, but having found we had not received serious hurt, beyond a few bruises and slight cuts, we started to examine our prison chamber.

It was about seven feet high and not very broad, as we found by linking hands and stretching across. Then we commenced to hammer upon the roof, calling out at the top of our voices, but received no response. Remember that all this time we were in pitch blackness for there was no window to the place.

Judge of our amazement when suddenly three thin rays of moonlight broke across the darkness and we saw each other's faces. It did not take us long to reach the spot whence the light proceeded. It was an aperture let into the wall which adjoined the river, and it was an inch or so from the top of our prison chamber. Evidently some sliding panel, worked from the exterior, had been removed, but the space thus exposed was too small to squeeze our bodies through and in any case the iron bars let into the brickwork would have prevented our exit. Dicky was the first to grip the reason of this change in our prison chamber.

"Your hand is smaller than mine; stretch it through the bars and see what is beneath them," he said.

Without seeing his reason I followed his suggestion, but drew it back quickly for it had touched water and the sudden contact was chilly.

As we crouched there, our faces were close together, and I saw a look of fear creep over his as I let the water drip from my fingers.

"Can you see the object of our jailor?" ejaculated my friend. "If I am not mistaken the tide is rising, and if that opening is below the level to which it reaches, this vault will be filled and we shall be drowned. That letter he allowed Miss Dalrymple to write was merely a trap to get you here."

Even as he spoke the river was slightly ruffled by a passing breeze and a few drops of water came full tilt at our faces.

"But we can swim," I said.

"Of what use to swim if the water reaches to the roof of this horrible vault," he asked.

"That we must see," I returned, and by jumping up, managed to run my hands over the roof. Alas! his fears were but too well founded. For the moisture still clung to it from the tide which had gone before. There was no doubt about it, we were trapped. The groan which involuntarily sprang from my lips told its own tale to my companion in misfortune.

"It is as I feared," he muttered, "and I can see no way out of it."

I need feel no shame in admitting that we were both panic-stricken. In an ordinary way neither of us would have shuddered at death. We had faced the grim old terror many a time, in the Soudan, and South Africa. But this was such a hopeless death. If only we could have died fighting, or even been given the chance to strike one blow in self-defence we should have been satisfied.

It was the thought of having to stand there whilst the remorseless water rose higher and higher, knowing that, struggle as we might, it must eventually touch the roof above our heads and creep with insidious force through our nostrils, until it soaked the life from our bodies.

It was only for a few minutes though, and then Dicky ejaculated hopefully:

"There is yet hope that we can attract the notice of some passing boat."

His cheerfulness went far to banish my terror, and I joined with him in sending a lusty hail across the water.

The sound travelled forth and returned to us in echoes, but there being no ships anchored near and the hour being far into the night, it was unlikely that any boats would be upon the river, and no answer came to us. Once I thought I caught the splashing of oars, but it was my fancy. After a while my companion realised the hopelessness of our cries.

"Let us save our breath for something which is likely to be of more help," he said. "You are of lighter build than myself, clamber up on my shoulder and see if you can move that trap."

I followed him to the centre of our prison chamber and did his bidding, but the heavy oaken beams were as hard as iron, and would not give a jot for all my pushing. Besides, from my position it was impossible to put forth full strength.

"See if you cannot find the join, and prise it apart with your fingers," ejaculated Dicky.

But the trap had been contrived so cunningly that I could not find a chink, although I searched closely with my penknife.

I dropped to the ground and we stood facing each other, trying to think of some fresh means of escape. I moved to the

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grating once more, and found, as I feared, that the water was nearing the opening. It was, in fact, nearly up to the opening, and the wind was rising, and blowing dead in our faces, so that every now and then a tiny cascade was blown towards us.

"Just one more shout," I said, "And then we must somehow close this opening."

"Best save our breath with this wind blowing against us, our voices will not carry an inch," answered my companion.

Nevertheless, I thought it unwise to neglect anything which might possibly help us, so I once more yelled at the top of my voice.

It was of no avail. The sound was beaten back in my teeth as though even the elements had conspired against us.

"Quick, your coat," shouted Dicky. "Perhaps we may caulk this opening. Another moment and the water will be upon us, and it will be too late."

I grasped his meaning, and tore the coat from my shoulders. Working together we pressed its ample folds between the bars, so that it formed somewhat of a barrier to the water, whilst kept in that position by our hands. We soon knew from the dampness that the water had stretched itself above and beyond the aperture, which knowledge gave us some hope as only a few drops filtered through.

"It will make us none the less secure if we give up more 'togs' to the service," I told Dicky. "Take off what you can spare, old chap, whilst I press my back against the bars to rest my hands a bit."

When he had added his coat and waistcoat to mine, I began to think we should cheat Dalrymple after all; but to make assurance doubly sure, I added all I had on except my trousers.

In spite of our predicament, Dicky's light-heartedness found vent in whistling one of Huntley Wright's songs from "The Country Girl." I was about to attempt to imitate his *sang froid*, when my attention was attracted by a slight whirring in the wall; and this time it was beyond our reach, even if we had the clothes left with which to stop it up. Once again the moonlight beams came into the vault, and we could catch a glimpse of each other's faces.

"What now?" I queried. "This looks a bit hopeless."

He was silent and I knew he was puzzling his brain for some contrivance to meet this fresh danger. I did not speak again for a few minutes, so that he might have a chance to get his thinking tackle to work; whilst at the same time I also racked my own. At last I could bear the silence no longer. It was some consolation to hear even one's own voice.

"Is it a case?" I asked.

He did not answer but I saw from the drooping of his head that he thought it was.

It was now my turn to act the part of consoler. Extending my hand, which he clasped in his own with a hearty grip, I said: "Cheer up, old chap! At least we have made a good fight for it. And now there is nothing left but to die as gamely as we can. I'm sorry I dragged you into this, Dicky——"

"That's all right, my boy," he answered. "Suppose the end had got to come some time. One might as well meet it trying to help a 'pal' as in any other manner."

We were slowly being drowned.

By this time the water began to come in from the second opening; at first in a trickling stream, and then in a regular cascade as the tide rose higher.

"Time we took to swimming," whispered my companion. "We may as well keep the 'ball rolling' as long as we can."

And thereafter we rose with the water.

It was awful. That unearthly silence in the semi-darkness! The river by now had covered three quarters of the upper grating, and the water in our chamber had crept up to the river's level. There was only an inch or two of space between our heads and the roof, and the water was rising higher and higher.

We watched the last rays of light slowly lifted upon the bosom of the river.

As though to mock our misery the moon had formed a silvery path leading right away to the farther shore. The houses stood out clear, with here and there twinkling lights illuminating their windows.

I thought of my past life. Of the many great deeds which as a boy I had resolved to accomplish, and of the very little it had been given me to attain in manhood.

Then we were plunged in darkness.

The river had risen above the grating and blotted out all hope even as it quenched all light!

There was not sufficient room to swim now, and we had to tread water to keep our heads clear.

Suddenly we thought we heard a scream above us, and as evidence that we were not mistaken, there was a heavy splash and a body was swept past us in the water outside.

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"I'm afraid Dalrymple is doing more murderous work and committing his victim to the river," said Dicky, grimly.

"Good God—Mabel, my poor darling!" I moaned.

Then came a trampling of feet above our heads, and the welcome sound of bolts being withdrawn.

"Keep quiet," whispered McRae. "I believe Dalrymple imagines that we are dead, and is going to gloat over his handiwork. Even if it is too late to save our lives, he shall share our fate!"

"I can at least avenge her," I muttered.

"Look out for the trap falling," came the warning from Dicky.

Down came the planks, striking the water with a sullen splash, and narrowly escaping my head.

A form bent over the opening and catching sight of our bobbing heads, would have given vent to a cry, but before it could leave the lips, I, being nearest, had made one desperate jump, and, catching the figure by the throat, dragged it into the water.

My rage would have caused me to choke the breath from the person, but suddenly it struck me that the flesh was too soft, and the throat too well covered, to be that of Dalrymple; whilst the limbs which coiled round mine in their agony were well moulded and supple. My fears as to some terrible mistake being thus aroused, I somewhat relaxed my grip, and fortunately it was so, for at that moment, Dicky McRae, who by now had clambered to the solid flooring above, shouted to me to stay my hand.

"You blithering cuckoo, it's a woman you have got hold of."

Then I glanced down and was filled with remorse, for it was my dear girl.

With his aid I managed to get her from the water, and we placed her upon a settee that was near and tried to revive her.

Slowly she recovered her faculties under our clumsy efforts and the sweet colour crept over her features as she realised who it was that was bending over her.

"My uncle," she gasped. "He has fallen into the river."

"A good place for him," muttered Dicky, *sotto voce*. But nevertheless he crossed to the window.

"I can see nothing of him, Miss Dalrymple," he announced. "But don't worry, no doubt he will reach the bank in safety."

"Tell me, dearest, what has happened?" I asked.

Then from her modestly-told story, we learnt that we owed her lives entirely to her.

The noise of our entry at the outer door had warned her of our arrival. Her uncle had promised to bring me up as soon as I arrived, but as he did not do so she had stolen downstairs to see what had become of me. By that time the trap-door had closed over us, and she could only see her uncle hovering about, but something in his stealthy movements warned her that he was up to mischief.

Silently she watched him manipulating some levers, without in the least knowing what it betokened. Then our cries penetrated dimly to her ears. Her uncle was dancing about, shouting with demoniacal joy, snapping his fingers; and was evidently raving mad.

In spite of her fright she had come lower down the stairs, and then saw that her uncle was leaning out of a window, which, on subsequent investigation, proved to be directly over the gratings. No doubt with the characteristic cunning of the homicidal maniac, he was ascertaining whether the water had entered the second aperture.

At that moment she had heard our cries once more, and realised that he was trying to murder somebody. She screamed to summon assistance. This no doubt startled the would-be murderer, and caused him to overbalance and fall in the river.

It was his body we had seen swept past the grating, and two days later it was washed up on the beach near the mouth of the river.

Martin H. Potter.

.. THE ..

INDEPENDENCE OF KITTY.

And How She Lost It.

THE many unfortunate circumstances which left Miss Kitty Sanderson and her young sister to face alone an appalling world need not be told here.

Her pecuniary assets (bar a few pounds) were nothing; but she possessed a radiant face, and was ungrumbling and fearless. And also she set great store on a suddenly discovered independence. Wherefore Miss Kitty held her head high in grim London town.

Bravely, with careful management, those few pounds held out. But an advertisement came to her notice and so she resolved to keep up her sister's music lessons still.

That morning, flushed and anxious, but confident, she answered several questions of a young-old, keen-faced agent for something or other. And in the afternoon (this was something like success) she was installed at a desk which had a typewriter fitted with a disappearing mounting. A simple desk to the unseeing eye. But you pressed, or pushed, or pulled, or something of that sort, and a shining typewriter bobbed into view.

For a consideration, payable weekly, Miss Kitty was to manipulate the disappearing typewriter. The room let in the sun splendidly, and it was summer; and she wore a cool, striped blouse, and enjoyed her work. Her little sister made a fresh start on the music lessons.

The agent for something or other did business on the second floor. On the same floor was another office, on the floor above more offices. On the third floor, higher up, to learn wisdom from the stars, was the office of a paper, *Love and Duty*. Mostly *Love and Duty* was Mr. Jack Pavitt, aged twenty-four.

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That gentleman, coming down from the heights one day, found a lady—who wore a neat striped blouse—in evident distress upon the stairs. The reason of her distress was that an office boy was blocking the stairs with two brooms and a dustpan, while he whistled in a manner calculated to irritate. In this office boy there was no chivalry.

Mr. Jack Pavitt, appealed to silently by the radiant face, said "Good afternoon," very pleasantly; cuffed the office-boy, and showed, standing and smiling like the hero of a melodrama, an unhindered way for the owner of the radiant face. But going home that evening, he blessed the office-boy, and that night he dreamt of a striped blouse. In case you have forgotten, I have said this already, let me remind you again that it was Summer. And even n London some birds were singing.

Very gradually—for she held tight her independence—he learnt of her situation. He resolved great schemes, most of them only to be rejected. On a Saturday afternoon (on that day the typewriter refused to bob up after two o'clock under any circumstances) Miss Sanderson, seated in the tiny sitting-room, heard a great commotion in the street. Her sister came in breathless.

"There's a man outside with a great big box. And he says it's for us. And he wants eightpence."

"It's not for us," Kitty told the carrier when she reached the pavement. "It can't possibly be for us."

And yet the address was quite plain.

"S'ouse me," said the gigantic carter. "This is the right street, or else I'm—or else I'm a bloomin' Dutchman!"

And he did not look at all like a Dutchman.

"The address is right enough," said Kitty. "You'd better take it back to your yard, or somewhere."

"This was our last job," said the driver of the van. "We knocks off at one—*supposed* to. The yard'll be shut. I wants my dinner, too!" finished he.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," said Miss Kitty, moved by the appeal. "Of course you want your dinner. I'll take the wretched thing."

Miss Kitty Sanderson gave him a shilling (remnant of the pounds), and told him not to mind. So he carted the huge box up to the sitting-room; and there, when he had gone, she opened it, and it was full to the edge of very pleasant things to eat.

Miss Kitty's independence choked in her throat. After all, as Grace said: "Well, you can't pitch them out into the road, Kitty, can you?"

Later, Grace found in the box a half-sheet of notepaper, with these words on it, "From Uncle Jim."

Kitty was dubious. But Grace said: "Mother did use to talk about a brother of hers who went away. Perhaps it's him," she said, ungrammatical in her excitement.

"Then why doesn't he come and see us?" argued Kitty, independent still.

On the next Monday Mr. Jack Pavitt was very pleased with himself. More than once he trembled on the verge of disclosure and disgrace. But he managed to hold the secret.

It was in that very week (the gods, as advertised, giving to Mr. Pavitt with both hands) that Miss Sanderson confided an ambition to him—to make money in her spare time. And she, personally, thought that writing stories was a very nice and easy way of making money.

To himself Mr. Jack Pavitt said: "Well, this *is* luck."

"I hate you for everything you have done! I loathe a coward!"

Aloud he said: "Well, Kitty," (they had got to that, you know), "there's our rag, of course."

"What's it called?" asked Kitty innocently.

"Come now!" Jack was a little hurt. "*Love and Duty*!—I've told you heaps of times."

"Yes, I remember," said Kitty.

"I'd try it if I were you," said he.

"I think I shall," she decided. "They'll be fearful rot, my stories, I. You don't have the things to read, do you?"

"Oh, no," replied Mr. Jack Pavitt, lying wholesale for the cause.

It should be explained that Mr. Jack Pavitt had a tolerable private income, with which he would be a philanthropist.

So now, in the evenings, and on Saturday afternoons, Miss Sanderson was very busy. From *Love and Duty* came a nice little note, thanking her, inclosing a moderate cheque, and asking for more.

Kitty was vastly pleased. And you must picture the audacious Jack (i.e. *Love and Duty*) in his chair, signing her cheques with his pen name. He had to decide reluctantly that her stories were not good enough to print. He paid for them out of his private income.

At this, Kitty, full of her independence, wondered very much. More cheques came, but she was not at all satisfied. She wrote to inquire when her stories would be used. Mr. Jack Pavitt, seeing the coming storm, sat tight, and did not reply. When he met her and she asked about her stories, he said he had heard nothing about them from the editor. They were bound to be printed soon. But still Miss Kitty Sanderson was not at all satisfied.

Then she made up her mind. The scene changes to the offices (third floor) of *Love and Duty*. Mr. Jack Pavitt sat at a desk by the window. His paid but unprinted contributor faced him from the chair.

"Good morning, Jack," said she. "I want to see the editor about those stories of mine."

For a moment he weighed in his mind further prevarication or otherwise. Then he decided. He caught his breath, and said:

"He's here! What is it?"

"What do you mean, Jack?"

Certainly Miss Sanderson was full of a great wrath.

"And the stories? No good at all?"

"Oh, I'll alter 'em a bit," said Jack lamely.

She would not be appeased. All the huge independence of Miss Kitty Sanderson swept back upon her. She said:

"I hate you! I hate you for everything you have done. And—I loathe a coward!"

She finished close to tears. In the silence that followed his manhood came to the help of Mr. Jack Pavitt.

Kitty turned upon him, and cried: "*Why don't you go?*"

"I will not go," he replied, "because you love me."

Outside the office of *Love and Duty* it was Summer still. Inside it was Spring.

But it was a long time before he dared to confess his identity with Uncle Jim.

Herbert Shaw.

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Parts of Speech.

"A KISS, I'm told," said pretty Susie Brown, "is both a common and a proper noun." "That's true," her lover said, "but you will find it is a noun not easily declined."

With an Eye to Business.

TOM: "Why were you so determined to kiss that cousin of yours? You can't call her pretty." Dick: "I wanted to establish a precedent. She has two very pretty sisters, you know."

It Seemed So.

MISS THIN: "Don't you think my new dress is just exquisite? They all say so." Her Friend: "Oh, lovely! I think that dressmaker of yours could make a clothes-prop look graceful."

The Conclusion was Obvious.

MISS A.: "Why do you say that Miss Van Million, who is to be married to-day, is so plain? Do you know her by sight?" Miss B.: "No; but I notice that the papers have only printed the picture of her future husband."

She Put Her Foot Down.

MRS. DE FASHION: "My dear, I have picked out a husband for you." Miss De Fashion: "Very well; but I want to say now, mother, that when it comes to buying the wedding dress, I am going to select the materials myself—so there!"

He Kept a Stricter Account.

"GEORGE," she said, as she looked up from her paper, "you were always telling me before marriage how much you loved me." "Yes." "And now you never mention it." "No." "Is it because—because——" "It's because I put it down in the cash-book now instead of telling you."

A Very Good Guess.

"AH, dearest," sighed a young man, kneeling at the feet of his ownest own, "do you know what, of all things, is nearest m heart?" "Really I cannot say," she sweetly replied, "but in this cold weather I should think it was a flannel vest." She was too practical, and it broke the engagement.

A Cure for Superstition.

MILDRED (very superstitious): "Oh, dear, I would never have accepted you, Jack, if I had remembered it was Friday evening!" Jack: "There's only one way to avert the evil omen, darling. We must very carefully kiss each other seven times at least every seven minutes during the first seventy minutes of our engagement."

A Ruse that Succeeded.

"PAPA," said the young mother, "I've decided on a name for baby; we will call her Imogen." Papa was lost in thought for a few minutes; he did not like the name, but if he opposed it, his wife would have her own way. "That's nice," said he presently. "My first sweetheart was named Imogen, and she will take it as a compliment." "We will call her Mary, after my mother," was the stern reply.

An Ambiguous Remark.

BASIL: "When we are married, my love, we shall have a lot to struggle with." Ella (consolingly): "We shall have each other!"

Another Version.

HE: "He that courts and runs away will live to court another day." She: "But he that courts and does not wed may find himself in court instead."

Who Could it Have Been?

MRS. SWEETSER: "George, you forgot to kiss me this morning when you went away." Mr. Sweetser: "Are you sure of it? I certainly remember kissing somebody this morning. I supposed it was you."

Such Flattery is Wicked.

"Is it a sin," asked a fashionable lady of her spiritual director, "for me to feel pleasure when a gentleman says I am handsome?" "It is, my daughter," he replied gravely; "we should never delight in falsehood."

He Immediately Repaired the Mistake.

"SIR!" exclaimed the fair maid indignantly, as Wittiman kissed her hand, "this is entirely out of place." "I thought so myself," returned the young man apologetically, "but I really hadn't the nerve to attempt the first one on your lips."

This Mercenary Age.

CLARA: "I am going to give you back our engagement ring. I can never marry you. I love another." Clarence: "Give me his name and address." Clara: "Do you want to kill him?" Clarence: "No; I want to try to sell him the ring."

He was Showing Good Tact.

"MAMMA," said the sweet young girl, "I think Mr. Meadows loves me and is beginning to have serious intentions." "What," the fond mother asked, "has brought you to this opinion?" "He laughed heartily at one of papa's jokes last night."

They are All the Same.

PHYLLIS: "Harry is the most conceited man I ever met." Maud: "What makes you think so?" Phyllis: "Why, he first asserts that I am the most adorable woman in the world, the most beautiful and intellectual, in every respect a paragon, and then he wants me to marry him."

She Rejected his Late Application.

"GEORGE, dear," she said with a blush, "do you know that Mr. Sampson asked me last night to be his wife?" "Well, I like his impudence. The idea of proposing to an engaged young lady. What did you say to him?" "I told him that I was very sorry indeed, but he was too late."

The Lesser of Two Evils.

MABEL: "Dicky, darling, mother wants to see me particularly, but it's so expensive travelling all that way. Don't you think she'd better come to us for a bit?" Dick: "Nonsense, dear; you've never found me stingy about that kind of thing. I'll give you the money for your journey after breakfast."

The Horse Mistook the Sound.

NELLIE (sympathetically): "You poor dear! What a narrow escape! And what startled the horse?" Maudie (indignantly): "Well, you know, Will was just helping me out of the dogcart, and—the stupid horse could not tell the difference between a 'Good-night' kiss and a signal to start. And he started. Some horses have so little sense."

His One Advantage.

"IT seems to me rather presumptdous for a youth in your position to ask for my daughter's hand," said the girl's father. "Can you give me any good reason why I should give my consent?" "Yes, sir," replied the young man promptly. "What?" "I am comparatively modest and economical in the matter of my personal expenditure, and I think you will find me less costly to maintain than any other son-in-law you could pick out!"

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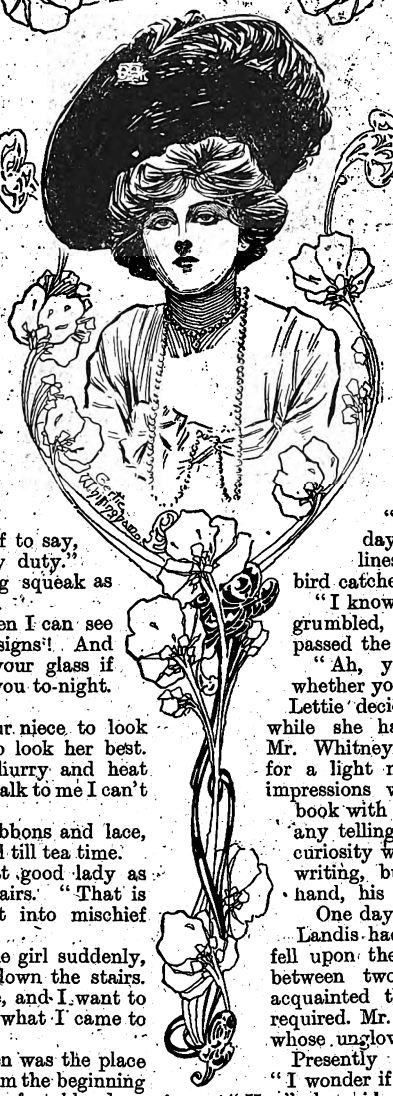
ODDS MADE EVEN.

The Tale of - - - - Two Mistakes.



"LETTIE, flirting is odious!"

Miss Elarson turned from her mirror, and looked at her aunt with wide-open eyes, round the corners of which lurked an expression of amusement.

"I quite agree with you, auntie," she said; "that is why I never flirt. I detest a flirt. And I never could see the fun in leading men captive in spite of themselves. There are always plenty of them ready to go into captivity without being led."

Mrs. Landis settled back in her chair with an air of hopeless expostulation, as if to say, "It will do no good, but I must do my duty." Her chair gave forth a timid, deprecating squeak as she rocked gently backwards and forwards.

"My dear! To say you never flirt, when I can see by the look of your eye that you have designs! And you would never spend two hours before your glass if you did not expect Mr. Whitney to admire you to-night. Confess, now, would you?"

"Why, Aunt Kate, you don't want your niece to look like a fright, do you? It is one's duty to look her best. And if I must dress, I am not going to hurry and heat myself. As for Mr. Whitney, if he likes to talk to me I can't prevent it. One must be civil."

The young lady leisurely adjusted her ribbons and lace, and announced herself at her aunt's disposal till tea time.

"Well, enjoy yourself, Lettie," said that good lady as she rose to accompany her niece downstairs. "That is what we came here for. Only don't get into mischief while you are under my care."

"I'll tell you a secret, Auntie," said the girl suddenly, facing her aunt when they were half way down the stairs. "My next story is to be one of the seaside, and I want to learn all I can about seaside life. That is what I came to Freshhaven for."

Certainly the lodging-house at Freshhaven was the place for experience of seaside life. It was filled from the beginning to the end of the season with a most comfortable class of boarders; schoolboys there for a fortnight's frolic, business and professional men with their families, some whose business no one knew, but all of whom were good-natured and eager to make the most of their holidays.

Mr. Roger Whitney, of whom Mrs. Landis and her niece had spoken, was a London artist, down for a few weeks of rest and change. He had from the first manifested some interest in Miss Elarson. What man fails to appreciate the fact that there is always a pretty face opposite him at table, that his position is the envy of half the men in the house, and that the young lady in question smiles upon him quite as frequently as upon the envious ones who would oust him if they could.

It came about naturally, as such things do, that Mr. Whitney was the escort of Mrs. Landis and her pretty niece on all occasions. If they wished to spend the morning on the beach, he carried camp-stool and cushions; if they carried their work to the lawn, he read or talked to them; he took them for drives, and generally made himself pleasant. As the days went by, he even allowed himself to be persuaded into giving Miss Elarson a sunrise row upon the water. But his temper was hardly proof against this unwonted early rising.

"It is downright tyranny getting a fellow up at such an unearthly hour," he said, as he helped her into the boat and shoved it off.

"It is the pleasantest time in the whole day," she said, as she adjusted the rudder lines in her hands. "You know 'the early bird catches the worm.'"

"I know it is the early worm that gets caught," he grumbled, looking over his shoulder to see that they passed the pier safely.

"Ah, yes," she said slyly; "it depends on whether you consider yourself the bird or the worm."

Lettie decided to begin the writing of her story while she had scenery and people at first hand. Mr. Whitney was developing into an ideal character for a light novel, and it was easier to write while impressions were fresh. She often took her note book with her on their little excursions, to transcribe any telling bit that came to her. Mr. Whitney's curiosity was sometimes aroused as he watched her writing, but as her notes were written in short-hand, his repeated inquiries were not rewarded.

One day, returning from a row, from which Mrs. Landis had been detained by a headache, a silence fell upon the two, such a silence as sometimes comes between two people who feel themselves so well acquainted that constant effort to entertain is not required. Mr. Whitney rowed slowly, watching Lettie, whose ungloved hand dabbled idly in the water.

Presently he said in a tentative kind of way: "I wonder if you were ever in love?"

"Yes," she said, rising to the situation, "lots of times. Weren't you ever?"

"I don't know. I've thought so once or twice, but I doubt if it was the real thing. How do you tell the genuine article?"

"Well, you know, Mr. Whitney," she replied, rescuing the boat from threatened collision with another by a quick turn of the rudder, "I never bother myself about that. It is so uncomfortable to be always analysing and weighing and measuring."

"I suppose so. But did you ever find the real thing?" he insisted.

She blushed. She was thinking of a certain love story not many months old, which was never going into any of her books.

"You are growing curious again," she said, flinging a handful of water on him as he sat facing her.

Lettie's story grew rapidly, and she found Mr. Whitney more than ever an inspiring subject for copy as his attentions grew more and more lover-like. Not that she encouraged

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him or drew him on; she simply let him "gang his ain gait," keeping him always away from subjects of purely personal import. She was not yet ready for that.

Several of the guests were sitting on the lawn one afternoon when Mr. Whitney strolled up and decoyed Miss Elarson off to a quiet, shady spot elsewhere. He seemed somewhat distrait, and all Lettie's attempts at conversation failed. At last she was silent.

"Miss Elarson," he said suddenly, "I want to tell you something."

His look and manner were unmistakable. It was coming unless she could put him off.

"Do you, Mr. Whitney?" she said cordially; "I have not heard anything amusing for an age."

"Has the Summer been so tame to you? To me it has been far from that. It has seemed like Heaven. Knowing you has changed my whole life, Miss Lettie."

"Do go on, Mr. Whitney," she said, smiling sweetly and provokingly on him. "Tell me the rest of it, and perhaps I can guess where you found it. I am sure I must have read it somewhere."

"Pshaw!" he answered, half angrily. "Why can't you give a fellow credit for being serious? I am in earnest, Miss Lettie."

She began to fear she should not be able to manage him.

"Of course you are in earnest, Mr. Whitney. I never knew a more earnest man. But it isn't good for you this kind of weather. It is insufferably hot here. Isn't it time for the bathers to be out? I promised Aunt Kate to go down to the beach with her."

But he was not to be put off long, and Lettie realised the fact. She wrote hard and long at her story, absenting herself from festivities in spite of the united protests of Mrs. Landis and Mr. Whitney. After several days' hard work she laid down her pen with a sigh of relief. Now she could let matters take their course.

She half wished he might have changed his mind, for she was not so hardened as to wish to break a man's heart for her own amusement. But if he would not be put off, if he would speak, why, her story was ready for the last love scene. That was a comfort.

An hour later she descended the stairs looking fresh and cool in the daintiest of pale blue dresses. Mr. Whitney was stretched full length on the grass near the verandah where her aunt was sitting.

"Where have you kept yourself for so long, Miss Elarson?" he asked, looking lazily at her from under his hat brim.

"I've been working," she replied. "Don't you pity me losing all the fun?"

"Pity you! I pity myself a great deal more. It has been an eternity."

"How old you must be by this time! Are there many grey hairs?" she asked teasingly.

"There were; but I tore them out in my despair. Are you going to work this afternoon?"

"Not if I can help it," she answered; "I think I have earned a holiday."

"Then come down to the beach with me," he said, sitting up and looking more animated, "I know a nice shady spot where we can get a breeze, and you can talk to me while I sketch."

"Very well; I am in an entertaining mood to-day. Wait till I get my hat."

Mr. Whitney did not seem inclined to stand by his programme for sketching. He drew fitfully for a few minutes, and then swung half round on his stool so as to face her.

"I am going to finish what I tried to say the other day when you left me so suddenly, Miss Elarson. I wanted to tell you that I love you."

He seemed rather nervous, making uneasy little scratches on a card that he had picked up. Lettie poked the end of her parasol in the sand and felt relieved that he stayed where he was. He was not going to be silly.

He went on calmly enough, yet with little nervous hitches between his words that showed the listening girl that he felt what he was saying.

"You have been such an inspiration to me this summer. Will you not continue to be that? Can't you learn to love me? Lettie, will you be my wife?"

Of course she could not, and would not. But he seemed so much in earnest that her conscience gave her some painful twinges as she told him so. She grew quite soft-hearted about it, and cried a little, thinking what a blow it must be to the poor man.

But to her unspeakable astonishment he seemed rather relieved than otherwise at her refusal. He tried manfully not to show it, but it was plain to be seen that he had feared she would accept him and was glad that she had not. She was puzzled, and inclined to be angry.

"Miss Elarson," he said, seeing her astonishment, "you have a right to be angry with me. I must make a confession, and then you will see that I do not deserve even your friendship. I painted a picture which I called 'The Wooing.' But the expression was not good; it was not real, and I could not make it so. Then I met you and found your face just what I had been longing for for my picture. I studied you for that. I really got to thinking a great deal of you, you know, so it was not all a pretence. But there is no excuse for me. There, you know it all!"

As he finished speaking he tossed the card into her lap. It was a cleverly accurate sketch of what her face must have been ten minutes before. The uneasy dashes were not from nervousness after all. She looked at the man. His head was in his hands, and his eyes bent on the ground, a most abject picture of humiliation. She looked at the card again, and thought how completely she had been duped. She need not pity him, at all events. Then the ludicrousness of it all struck her, and she burst into a hearty laugh. It was Mr. Whitney's turn to wonder. He looked up.

"I don't see anything funny in it," he said gloomily.

"You have confessed very frankly, Mr. Whitney. I shall have to confess now, though I did not intend to. You do not owe me anything for this."

"What can you mean?"

"I mean that I write stories and copy my heroes and their pretty sayings from life when I can. I have found you a very obliging model."

"You mean," he said, with rising anger, "that you deliberately led me on to make love to you so the public might have the benefit of it?"

"I didn't lead you on, and you know it, Mr. Whitney. I simply let you. You wanted me for your picture."

"True," he said, a smile taking the place of the show of temper in his eyes.

"I think we're even," Lettie said, holding out the card. "Use your sketch. I am sure I am very grateful for the help you have given me."

"And you really do not mind my using this?" he asked.

"Not in the least," she answered, smiling.

Then followed half an hour's animated discussion of the story and picture before they went back to the house.

Mrs. Landis was still on the lawn when her niece and Mr. Whitney returned. The glance that passed between the two young people as they separated at the steps told that astute lady that they knew something which the world did not. She followed Lettie to her room.

"My dear," she said, kissing her, "you need not tell me a word. I have eyes, and I have seen it all along. I see by your face that it is all settled."

"Yes, Aunt Kate," said Lettie, looking down demurely and trying not to laugh, "it is all settled."

Agnes Wiltberger.

WIFE (sweetly): "What's the matter, dear? Did I forget to mend your shirt?" Husband: "Madam, this is too much! The woman who neglects her husband's shirt front is no longer the wife of his bosom."

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SPLENDID NEW SERIAL. YOU CAN START TO-DAY.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Eardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

PROLOGUE.

A YOUTH is in the private room of Messrs. Samuel Sharpe and Quirke, solicitors, awaiting the head of the firm's announcement as to whether he is the heir to the baronetcy of the late Sir Basil Wingate or not.

Mr. Sharpe says:

"You will remember, Mr. Rust, at the reading of the will, the title, which by special remainder he had power to dispose of, and the money were left by Sir Basil Wingate to the elder son of his run-away only daughter, Helen Jerningham, *should* she have one; and failing a son being born to her, the title and the money *with* the estate, should go to you, his nephew."

He then tells Cyprian Rust that, hearing Helen Jerningham went to Australia, he has extensively advertised for her in Australian papers, but with no effect. Therefore he congratulates his listener on becoming Sir Cyprian Rust.

The solicitor is called out of the room, and Cyprian Rust sees on the table an unopened letter with an Australian stamp. The address he recognises as being in the handwriting of his cousin, Helen Jerningham!

Is it written to announce the birth of a son and heir? If so it would rob him of the legacy at the eleventh hour!

A step sounds outside the door. Quickly Cyprian Rust thrusts the letter into his pocket. He hurriedly says good-bye to Mr. Sharpe, and when he reaches his hotel he reads the missive. It tells how Helen Jerningham has left Australia, so that the future heir—if a boy—may be born in England!

Sir Cyprian Rust carefully burns the letter that might have dealt the death-blow to his ambitions, and mentally resolves to go to any extremes to retain the title.

Meanwhile Helen Jerningham is dying on board an ocean liner in giving birth to twin sons.

From incoherent remarks that she makes, the physician who attends her is led to believe that a secret is attached to the boys' history. But she dies ere she reveals her name or the boys' identity!

Many years later.

Sir Cyprian learns, through the Rev. Philip Nullius, that a dying woman wishes to see him.

He goes to see her, and she shows him a later will of Sir Basil Wingate, by which all his property is left to the descendants of Helen Jerningham unconditionally. Sir Cyprian snatches this will from her, and she dies before she can inform anyone else.

Sir Cyprian visits Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox, where he meets Mr. Caleb J. Johnson, millionaire and City magnate, who is in love with the hostess. The baronet, who has Lady Violet in his coils, forces her to swear to take particulars of the millionaire's house and property.

Late in the evening Johnson proposes to Lady Violet. Knowing her position, she, of course, refuses him. As she does so, the palms in front of the window part and a man lurches heavily into the room.

Lady Violet recognises him as her husband—a former Major in the Army, who has been separated from her for many years. Hastily she requests Johnson to leave; then, turning on her unwelcome visitor, she by threats prevails upon him to go.

In the corridor this Society ruffian encounters Sir Cyprian, and sees upon his watch-chain the Sign of the Spade!

Edward Day proposes to Marcella Rust, the beautiful daughter of the baronet. Being refused, he angrily lets fall an allusion to Marcella's dead mother.

Lady Violet overhears this, and, with blazing eyes, dismisses Day, who acts as her secretary, from her service. She makes him an allowance of £250 a year.

Johnson discovers, through a private inquiry agent, the whole history of Major Richard Frayne-Lennox, and buys from a General Lyster the cheque that he had forged.

Edward Day is engaged by Johnson, the millionaire, at a liberal salary. He afterwards visits his wife, Lottie, a chorus girl, of whom he has grown tired. He tells her of the rupture between himself and Lady Violet, who does not know that he is married.

At Wingate Court, Marcella reads of the theft of a valuable

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picture from Caleb Johnson's house. As she was one of the last persons to see the picture, she evinces great interest in the accounts of the robbery.

Sir William Slade, of Harley Street fame, visits Sir Cyprian, and, as the day is very boisterous, is greatly concerned to hear that Marcella has set out for Danger Point, a very dangerous rock on the coast. His host, however, assures him that Marcella will be quite safe, as she knows the locality well.

As a matter of fact, she is only just rescued in time from a very perilous position.

Marcella feels that there is something very mysterious about the doings at Wingate Court, so writes to Lady Violet for advice. Her father, however, gets hold of this letter, and destroys it.

Sir Cyprian is very concerned when Sir William Slade announces that he identifies Philip Nullius as one of the children that was born on the Australian liner five-and-twenty years ago. The baronet mentally resolves that the curate must be got out of the way.

He gives the curate a letter of introduction to a clergyman in the south of England. Philip, thinking it will be to his advantage, goes.

Marcella, a day or two later, penetrates to a part of the house, to which her father has forbidden her. The dust laying about is frightful. She begins to retrace her steps when she hears a faint cry.

She goes down some stairs, and sees a door with glass panels. Pressed against the glass is the white, delicate hand of a woman!

NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

The Woman of Mystery.

MARCELLA fell back with a cry of astonishment. The sight of that lily-white hand pressed against the glass panel in the door came as a sort of shock to her.

The secrecy that had appeared to exist concerning the forbidden wing, the attitude of her father's servants, even Sir Cyprian's own words to her, came with a flash of inspiration, illuminating the mystery of what lay beyond in the corridor, labelled by her father s orders "no thoroughfare!"

Who was the owner of that delicate white hand? she wondered—and why should she be confined in such seclusion in an underground passage of the Court?

Seized afresh with a desire to fathom the secret upon which she had so unexpectedly fallen, Marcella gently turned the handle of the door.

The slight noise it made had the effect of sending the hand from the panel, only for its place to be taken the following moment by a face, lit by unnaturally brilliant eyes, dark and frightened, that gazed in alarm upon the intruder in the passage.

Marcella nodded reassuringly. She felt that this woman with the timid, fawn-like eyes was no foe to be feared, but a helpless woman to be protected.

She put her mouth close to the glass and said in a low, cautious whisper: "The door is locked—how can I get in?"

Silently, and with a gleam of intelligence in the brilliant eyes, the woman raised her hand and pointed to an object in the passage behind Marcella's head. She turned quickly, and saw a nail, on which hung a key.

It was the work of a moment to detach it from its place, unlock the door, and walk into the room—her movements being followed keenly by the dark-eyed inmate who had crept behind a chair in the manner of a frightened child.

The room in which Marcella found herself left nothing to be desired in the way of furniture. It was as richly appointed as her own boudoir; flowers, plants, and mirrors being in profusion, yet the windows were nothing more or less than small panes of glass very high in the wall, and heavily barred outside, the only light in the room being that which came from the electric globes.

Marcella felt a strange sense of being in a beautiful cage, as she gazed round. She saw that another room opened out of the one she was in, and it was furnished as a bedroom—so the unknown prisoner in the Court lived in durance vile!

"Tell me," she said gently, "who are you—and why do you live so far from everything and everyone?"

The woman looked puzzled. "I have always been here," she said slowly. "I am happy here, *he* is kind to me sometimes, and I love Dolly!"

Marcella looked at the white, smiling face, that once must have been very beautiful, with a strange fear. She wondered whether her companion was quite in her right mind. There was a simplicity in her speech and manner that suggested a sudden stoppage of the powers of reason.

"Take me to 'Dolly,'" she replied gently. "Is she a little girl or your maid?"

"Dolly is Dolly—no one else!" the woman answered gently. "I don't know what I should do without her! Come, she is in there!"

Marcella followed her wonderingly, and lying in a miniature child's cradle she saw a life-size wax doll, over which the woman leant tenderly.

"They told me she was dead," she went on in a cooing voice. "Then when I said it was impossible for me to live without my baby, they let me have her. It is a long time ago since I was ill, but now she is with me, I don't mind anything—not even *him*," and she shuddered slightly, "only I wish baby would grow—she has been a long time like this!"

Marcella turned away.

Her eyes were swimming, and she could not trust herself to speak in the presence of such an awful tragedy. A woman with the mind of a child cherishing a wax doll instead of her own lost baby! It was more of a puzzle than ever that such a secret should be kept at the Court!

Why should the relatives of this lonely woman not acknowledge her openly, instead of burying her alive! Surely this was not the only reason for which Deacon had prevented her from entering the corridor?

A sudden thought struck her. She turned swiftly to the woman still caressing the doll.

"I want to ask you something," she said gently. "Who waits on you here? Have you a maid?"

She looked puzzled. "Sarah looks after me," she replied slowly, "and—and *he* always comes to see me on his way into the other rooms—the rooms where the beautiful things are kept." And she laughed softly.

Marcella did not hear the last words of her speech. She was wondering what man the lonely creature with the infinitely pathetic laugh could mean, when she spoke of him "hurting" her. Surely it must be Deacon!

"Tell me what man it is whom you see?" she said persuasively. "I may know him—I live here too, you know."

The woman looked at her thoughtfully, as though struggling with an idea that had floated accidentally into her mind.

"You live here," she murmured, "then you have seen *him*, too! He is dark—very dark—and sometimes he is harsh to me and says things I cannot understand——"

"A dark man!" Marcella exclaimed, remembering that brief encounter with the mysterious stranger coming out of the corridor some weeks ago. "Yes, I have seen him—but only once! Do you see him often?"

The woman nodded. "Yes, sometimes every day, but he has not been here to-day. I suppose he is busy—he is not often late."

Marcella leant towards her eagerly. "When does this dark man visit you?" she said quickly. "I should like to see him!"

A frightened expression crept into the woman's eyes. "He would not like it—he would be angry and scold me."

"No, not if he did not know I was here," Marcella breathed. "If you tell me when he may be coming to see you, I could hide behind those curtains until he had gone."

The frightened look intensified on the pale, quivering face, and the large, dark eyes gazed wonderingly into the clear, resolute ones of Marcella.

"I cannot," she murmured. "Go—please go; he will be

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very cross with me, and he threatened to take Dolly from me if I disobeyed him —and—" — a glimmer of tears showed in her eyes— "you don't want me to lose Dolly, do you?"

Marcella put her hand on her arm gently. "No, I will not stay since you fear it may get you into trouble," she replied. "I will go now, in case you think the dark man will soon be here and find the door undone. But I will come back again, now I have found you—only you must tell no one that I have discovered this room," she went on warningly, "or I may be prevented from ever seeing you any more."

"You will come again?" the woman repeated with a faint sigh. "Yes, come again, and I will take you to see the beautiful things in the other rooms—oh, they are wonderful—wonderful, and he loves them! I have seen him bending over them when he and his friends thought there was no one looking."

"That's a bargain then," Marcella said hastily —humouring what she imagined to be the fantastic play of a childish mind—"when I come again you will show me those beautiful things."

With a smile of infinite pity she opened the door and slipped into the passage, then, turning the key in the lock, she put it back on the nail.

Before moving on, she lifted the curtain that hung in front of the glass panels, and glanced into the room that held the mysterious captive. She was leaning over the wax doll that she had carried from the inner room, and the expression on her face made Marcella's eyes grow suddenly moist.

As she prepared to grope her way along the narrow passage, towards the staircase that led into the unused wing, a light step in the distance made her pause and listen with every sense strained to the uttermost.

She shrank back into a convenient corner, and waited while the steps drew nearer, and gazing from her hiding place, she presently saw the tall figure of a man coming in the direction of the panelled door.

It was too gloomy to see his face, but Marcella knew instinctively that he was the "dark man" to whom the strange woman had referred, and also identical with the man she had seen coming out of the forbidden corridor on Christmas Eve, and whose action in placing a spade guinea under the rug had so excited her curiosity.

"The dark man," she breathed, tingling with a sense of excitement, and watching with dilated eyes as the figure drew closer.

The man appeared apparently oblivious that he had an audience, for he walked slowly along, his face partly concealed by the profusion of black beard and hair, which, together with blue "goggles," acted almost as a disguise.

Moved by an uncontrollable impulse, Marcella swiftly stretched out one hand, just as he was passing her, and touched ever so slightly the white cuff that showed from under his sleeve. It was a slight action, so sudden and silent that the man did not guess that he had been touched, but passed on, and the next moment Marcella heard the closing of a door.

Some time later—perhaps a quarter of an hour—Marcella moved from her hiding-place and noiselessly followed the tall dark man up the stairs into the corridor. She was determined to trace him to his lair—to know who the stranger was that dared have secrets in her father's house. As she hurried after him, he suddenly stopped, as though to pick up something, then continued on his way.

Eager with the scent of battle in her nostrils, Marcella hastened her steps, and then before she could save herself, she fell heavily over something on the ground. It was an instant's work to spring to her feet, bruised yet not vanquished, and follow the tall figure ahead of her, that had not even paused at the sound of her fall.

Out into the corridor breathless and exultant, soon now she would know the man for what he was, she would come face to face with him, and challenge him with the secret in the corridor.

The strange steps kept ahead, and, moving to the left, the man went in the direction of Sir Cyprian's suite of apartments, quickening his speed.

Marcella was now almost abreast of him, but Fate, with that ironic method of dashing the cup from one's lips, again was on the side of the quarry, for a nail caught in her dress, and when she had freed herself the man had disappeared.

Suddenly she stopped; standing in the window seat on top of the stairs there was a shadowy figure. Could it be the same? she wondered.

With a noiseless movement she went up, and touched the man on his arm.

He turned quickly, and instead of the dark-bearded man she had followed so closely, saw the fair, almost hairless face of Edward Day.

"I thought you had gone to bed ages ago, Marcella," he said, in such tones of genuine surprise that she could only gaze at him silently. Was he acting ignorance, or was he really innocent of the fact that another man must have passed by him only a moment ago?

"I am looking for someone," she said coldly; "a tall, dark man who came out of the unused wing just now. Have you seen him?"

He looked amused. "I have seen no one of that description, Marcella. It could not have been Dr. Slade, because he is stout and rather bald, nor Sir Cyprian. Are you sure the man was not a servant?"

"It was not a servant," she said coldly, moving away, "but someone with no right to wander about the Court without leave."

As she turned back, he caught her hand in his.

"Marcella, don't keep me at such a distance always," he pleaded. "Give me a chance of winning back your regard."

"That is impossible," she retorted, "for you never had it! Besides, you are well aware of the fact that I am engaged to Mr. Nullius, the curate."

A slight smile flickered across his mouth. "Ah, I had forgotten for the moment that little incident of the interesting curate. By the way, he has left Crawley, has he not?" he went on carelessly, eyeing her between half-closed lids.

She raised her head and regarded him calmly. "Why ask me that when you knew of it before myself?" she said scornfully. "It's a waste of time to lay traps for me, Mr. Day. I can see through your methods very easily."

He flushed. "Really—ah, you say that, Marcella, because there are no traps or methods to be spotted," he laughed easily. "If I troubled to plot I fancy I should be rather successful."

"I don't doubt it," she retorted. "You would bring the whole of your genius to bear on an unworthy object! But I

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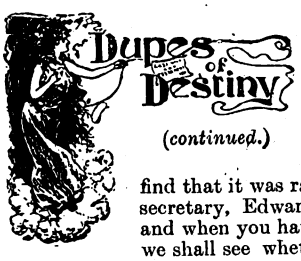

(*continued.*)

ani glad you will have no occasion to interfere in my private affairs."

He looked after her savagely. "Proud little termagant!" he muttered; "wait a bit, my dear cousin Marcella! You will find that it was rather unwise to snub the poor secretary, Edward Day. I shall score soon, and when you have lost the fascinating curate, we shall see whether you will be so ready to snub me then!"

In the meantime Marcella was knocking at the door of her father's study. She had dismissed Edward Day from her mind, and was occupied with the one thought concerning the man with the black beard.

Sir Cyprian rose from his chair as she entered. He was looking pale and slightly thoughtful, but he smiled lovingly upon his daughter as he said playfully:

"Well, my dear. It is rather late for a talk, but I will forgive you, since I am sure you have come to tell your old father that you are going to be a good girl and not worry him any more."

Marcella gazed at him steadily. "If by being a 'good girl' you mean that I have forgotten what I said about giving my love to Philip Nullius, father, I am afraid that I shall disappoint you again," she said gravely. "But you must know that I am not the sort of girl to take back to-day what I said yesterday—and I can never say that I do not love Philip. But in every other respect, father," she continued gently, "I will always try to please you by giving you no cause to worry about me."

Sir Cyprian stroked his moustache slowly. "Poor child!" he murmured half aloud, "I was hoping that you were better—that your foolish infatuation had given place to a more sensible frame of mind. But I can't scold you, Marcella; I can only regret the sad strain I see in you."

Something in his tone made Marcella flush angrily. The half tolerating, half-pitying speech was as gall and wormwood to her proud spirit. She would rather have had harsh vituperation heaped upon her head than be made an object for commiseration.

"I did not come here to discuss my engagement with Mr. Nullius," she said coldly, "but to tell you something else."

He shot a keen glance at her. "So long as you refrain from discussing the curate I shall be glad to listen to you, my dear," he said suavely; "only"—and he raised one white hand warningly—"spare yourself any great excitement. If you are afraid that you may lose your self-control, I beg of you to put off any discussion until you are stronger."

"I am perfectly strong," Marcella began hotly, when the words froze on her lips. Her eyes, following the movement of Sir Cyprian's hand, were fixed upon the shining linen of his cuff. Smeared across its white surface was a mark, as though a dusty hand had come in contact with it!

TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

The Man with the Black Beard.

"DEAR LADY VIOLET,—*I am coming to see you, if I may, to-morrow afternoon concerning the answer to that question I asked you some weeks ago, and to which you were unable to reply definitely on account of family reasons. I told you that I never gave in, and I fancy now that even you will reward my patience and perseverance by saying just that one little word so necessary to my happiness.—I am, sincerely yours,*

"CALEB J. JOHNSON."

Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox had read and re-read the letter in her hand many times over.

She had received it the previous day, and from that time to within a few hours of Mr. Johnson's arrival she had wondered how much he meant by his innuendo about the family reasons, and whether he was at all acquainted with the existence of the real skeleton in her domestic cupboard.

She had not seen the financier since his proposal, and the unwelcome interruption that had held back the answer on her lips. She had refused an invitation he had since sent her, having only accompanied Marcella in the *role* of a chaperone to view the celebrated copy of the "Mona Lisa."

From that date Lady Violet had avoided those houses where she knew the financier would be most likely to visit. But in spite of her withdrawal from gaiety, she had heard of the dramatic loss Mr. Johnson had sustained in the theft of his masterpiece, and the fair, creamy skin of her ladyship had paled to a sickly sallow as she read hungrily the many suggestions thrown on the affair by various experts.

She rose and looked at her reflection in the long mirror. "You cannot let this man have any other answer than that which you gave him last time," she murmured. "Even if that skeleton did not exist to put a barrier between us, there is another—not of my making, thank God, but one in which I have a guilty knowledge, and which must for ever stand between myself and Caleb J. Johnson or any other man.

"I must stand alone. I have someone to protect more dear to me than position, money, or even my life; whatever happens I must guard my darling from the leper's touch."

Her face softened, and a curiously tender smile touched her lips as she turned away from the glass.

"That man has left England," her thoughts ran on; "he will never attempt to return now that he knows I possess his secret. His liberty is dear to him, such as it is, and he will never dare to force himself on me."

She rang the bell, and ordered the carriage to be ready in half an hour's time, then sat down and began to write a long, loving letter to Marcella, from whom she had not heard for some days.

Then a short time afterwards she leant back in her carriage, a lovely statuesque figure in rich furs, followed by the admiring glances of men and women, who were acquainted with her beauty through the photographs in the shops.

As her eyes wandered carelessly among the moving faces round her, Lady Violet gave a little start. A figure had attracted her attention, though there was nothing remarkable about it, with the exception of a profusion of inky black hair and a trim black beard. A pair of blue glasses denoted that the wearer suffered from defective sight.

Upon this harmless individual the eyes of the woman in the carriage gazed with something akin to fear and wonder. "What can he be doing here in that dress?" she muttered. "I must find out—he usually tells me when he is coming to town; this must be a new move.'

She stepped from the carriage and dismissed it, telling the coachman that she had some shopping to do that would detain her a very long time, and that she would drive back in a cab. When he had disappeared in the traffic, she hailed a hansom, and telling the driver to follow the man with the glasses and black beard, pulled the fur collar of her coat round her face and closed her eyes.

Presently the driver raised the little flap at the top of the hansom, and said in a loud aside:

"Lidy, the gent as you want me to foller 'as been joined by another one; they're turning into Victoria Station now by the Underground.'

Quickly paying the man his fare, she slipped out and caught up the man with the beard, who was talking earnestly with his companion, who was so disguised in a scarf and slouch hat that nothing could be seen of his face.

They passed by the Underground station, and came into the London, Brighton, and South Coast line. The crowd was dense, and a dull wintry fog had settled upon everything. She stood behind the man with the glasses at the booking stall, and heard him say, "Two first return Clapham," and immediately knew her destination. Then she took her ticket, and once more followed closely behind them. They were talking more loudly, and with less fear of being overheard.

"The train does not go for half an hour," the man with the glasses said; "we had better go into the refreshment room and have something to drink."

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"Half an hour!" She sighed with relief; that would give her just time in which to collect her thoughts, and decide upon her action in following the man with the black hair and goggles.

After all, how could she successfully attempt to avert his discovery of her identity? Yet, in spite of everything, she felt compelled to learn something—to hold some string by which she could control the destiny of one dear to her—far, far dearer than all else in the world.

She went into the waiting-room, and sat down; the room was large, and there were not many people in it. On the seat a few yards from her, she noticed dimly the figure of a girl. She was beautiful after a theatrical type, but her face was thin. She seemed to have some trouble on her mind, for her eyes were blue-rimmed and weary, and her mouth quivered like that of a child.

The woman whose wealth had never brought her happiness, felt a fellow-feeling for the golden-haired girl, whose way in life seemed also hard, and she wondered whether she were a wayside flower that had been plucked and worn for an hour.

She leant forward impulsively.

"Forgive me," she began in her low caressing voice, "but you don't seem well—can I do anything for you? Are you waiting for someone or going by train?"

The girl had started violently when she spoke first, then surprise had given way to admiration when she gazed at the musical-voiced woman who had addressed her. The aroma of violets and the richness of the furs did not escape her notice.

"I am not ill, thank you," she said slowly, her hands twisting and untwisting nervously. "I am waiting for my train. I am going to Brighton to join a company for tour."

Lady Violet raised her brows—that explained her first impression of the stage—this pretty, fragile-looking little creature was an actress! A member of the great middle-class who neither sank nor swam, but just went with the tide.

She looked at the girl's cloak. It was an old waterproof ulster, and her hat was a shabby straw trimmed heavily with velvet.

A sudden thought seized her. She drew closer to the girl, and said in her most seductive tones:

"I wonder will you do me a great service? I am going on some business that necessitates my looking as quiet as possible, and in these things"—with a gesture towards her sable coat—"that will be impossible. I want you to change clothes with me for a time, just your hat and cloak. I will give you my address, and you must come to see me when you return from your tour. I may be able to help you, as I know some big people in the theatrical profession."

The girl looked at her without speaking. Her London-bred intelligence was averse to putting implicit trust in plausible strangers; still, the face of the woman was so proud and aristocratic that somehow the girl felt she could not be judged by the common standard. Besides, the thought of appearing among her fellow actresses in priceless furs and ostrich feathers was a temptation to her vain little heart.

"It's a funny sort of favour!" she laughed, "and I'm afraid you won't make much by the exchange; but I don't mind obliging you, as you say it is so important."

They passed into the inner room, and there were quietly metamorphosed respectively into each other's sphere of life, from an exterior point of view.

"Good-bye," Lady Violet said, holding out her hand and smiling quietly. "Tell me your name so that I may remember my benefactress."

"My name's Lottie Haste," the girl replied. "I will return your beautiful things when I know where to send them."

"Don't do that—if they are any use, keep them. The coat is warm and I have others. I am a rich woman, child; you must come and see me on your return to town. This is my card."

She pressed the piece of cardboard into the girl's hand and

Almost everybody knows the value of Bovril as a strengthening and nourishing beverage. Bovril is equally valuable in cooking, and a little added to gravies, soups, croquettes, hashes, &c., wonderfully improves their flavour and increases their nourishing properties.

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hurried out. Her train was almost due, and she wanted to secure a seat in the same carriage as that occupied by the man with the dark beard and glasses. She was quite safe from discovery now—the flopping hat and shabby ulster of the little chorus girl were an ample disguise.

In the waiting-room Lottie Haste looked curiously at the card in her hand. She had taken a sudden fancy to the beautiful dark woman whose personality dominated her completely. As she gazed at the card, her face changed colour, and an exclamation rose to her lips—the name on the card was "Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox, Grosvenor Place, W."

"*His* aunt," she murmured; "that beautiful, gracious woman is the aunt of the heartless blackguard whom I married—Edward Day, the man who deserted me! And to think that she, of all women in the world, should be the one to whom I should do a favour in lending her my old rags! and *he* said she hated actresses, and would never allow him to mention my name! Yet she has the sweetest eyes I have ever seen in a woman. I will keep the card and one day call on Lady Violet." She smiled grimly. "Why, she's *my* aunt by marriage!"

In the meantime Lady Violet had taken her seat in the carriage, in which already the two men had seated themselves. They did not once glance her way, though a shabby-looking woman in a first-class carriage is not often seen.

With the exception of those three the compartment was empty, and Lady Violet pulled the collar and hood of the cloak closer round her face, and settled in a corner to doze. Her gentle breathing was listened to with grim satisfaction by her companions; then the man with the black beard spoke softly, and at the sound of his voice the silent figure in the opposite corner began to tremble.

"It's rather important that he should know nothing about me. *You* are a friend of the old cleric who got him into St. Paul's from the Foundling Hospital. His name was the Reverend James Cray—he's an old chap, and I've discovered that he is since dead—but *he* does not know it, and you must personate the old man's representative, you understand?"

"Yes," said the other voice slowly. "You want me to win his confidence—and then——" He paused significantly, and laughed chillily. "I understand."

"That's well," replied the man with the black beard softly. "He is not an ordinary sort of chap; he is strong, I should say, and not easily bowled out. He is tall, dark, and has very distinctive ways. His name is also unusual; it is Philip Nullius; and he is spending his holiday in a village called Leyton. He is there for a month—and you know a lot can be done *in a month*."

The woman in the shabby ulster shivered as though a cold blast had struck her.

The conversation had been of a different nature from that she had expected, and she had nearly regretted having followed the man—but the moment she heard the name of their apparently unconscious victim, every nerve was again on the alert.

It was an uncommon name, one that once heard would not be easily forgotten, and the occasion on which she had last heard it had been when her niece Marcella had told her the name of the tall, handsome, young curate whom she had accidentally seen outside the Dovermarle Hotel.

She had observed the tinge of colour that had swept the girl's creamy skin, and her woman's instinct had instantly told her that Marcella's fresh young heart had passed into the keeping of the curate, Philip Nullius! And it was against that lover that the man with the black beard was plotting something sinister!

Why was he taking so much trouble to bring ill upon the hapless curate? she wondered. Surely he could not be taking such elaborate steps because Marcella's girlish transparency had revealed her secret?

No—she knew sufficient about the nature of the man in the black beard to be quite sure that another more powerful motive was at the root of his desperate plot. What it was, she determined to discover—for it must be a very powerful lever that would make a man like that risk so much—possibly his liberty.

Besides, there was Marcella—she must not lose her lover. What matter if he were poor and obscure; he was the man who had won that dear, tender, and true heart, and therefore, for Marcella's sake, he must be saved.

Thoughts flashed through her mind with kaleidoscopic rapidity; plan after plan was evolved, to be discarded. She must be very wary before pitting her brain against that of the man in the black beard.

As the train slowed into the station of Clapham Junction they spoke again.

"You will find him at this address. I told him that I had a clerical friend there who would take an interest in him. The house is right out in the country, about five miles from Leyton. It is called 'Water Grange,' because of a moat that runs round it.

"Philip Nullius is living in Leyton in rooms, until my *friend* arrives at 'Water Grange.' His address is '18 Lillie Road, Leyton.' Now you know all that is necessary. I expect you to be subtle and delicate—no blundering—no confidences with other men. It is always better to tackle difficult jobs single-handed. You understand?"

The man nodded. "It's risky, and no mistake," he laughed. "A job more suited to another sort o' man than me—but if I take it in hand I'll promise you it won't fail; by the way," he added curiously, "you don't mind my asking a straightforward question, do you? Is there a special reason why this young parson chap should be knocked on the napper?"

The woman in the corner held her breath for the answer.

After a pause the man in the black beard said softly:

"The reason why Philip Nullius should be out of my path is one so startling and unexpected that even your strong nerve would be shaken, my dear 'Shovel,' at the prospect of such danger threatening me—the man who has so long been your leader and brought you wealth through his successful daring.

"That curate, ignorant as he is of the fact, is the most deadly of *all* my foes, and I shall know no peace until he is removed from where he may do me harm. There are methods more safe than the extreme one, remember, but the one you adopt in order to do my bidding is one that must be equally silent and leave no traces behind!"

A few moments later the two men, followed by Lady Violet, got out at the Junction, one leaving the station. In a separate compartment the other and Lady Violet travelled back to town.

When the train arrived at Victoria, Lady Violet looked in vain for the dark-bearded man, he was no where to be seen; but passing straight on ahead of her she saw her brother-in-law, Sir Cyprian Rust, smiling as though on very good terms with the world and himself.

Once outside the station the baronet hailed a hansom, and drove in the direction of Piccadilly to his club.

As he leant back, busy with his thoughts, two men, in earnest conversation walking along the wide pavement, attracted his attention; one he recognised instantly as the financier, Caleb J. Johnson, but it was on the face of the financier's companion that Sir Cyprian's genial blue eyes were fixed in a gaze of horror.

The man seemed to be walking with an air of sullen unwillingness by the financier's side. He was sportive-looking in dress, and his reckless, dare-devil face had a cowed expression.

With a silent gesture from the financier, a brougham drove up, and as the two men stepped inside, Sir Cyprian wiped his brow with his handkerchief; the face of the man beside Caleb J. Johnson was that of the intruder who had accosted him so strangely the night of Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox's dinner-party—the man who had recognised the fateful sign on his chain!

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"What—what does *he* want with that Johnson chap?" he muttered, with chattering teeth. "Can it mean danger to me? Is my star beginning to flicker in the firmament of success?"

TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

"There is no Barrier Now."

"AND you understand that you go to-night? All is ready for you. As you step on to the deck of that Australian liner, a cheque for £1,000 will be put into your hands. A watch will be kept over your movements by agents of mine, who will notify at once whether you are keeping to your promise. The very instant you attempt to land anywhere in the British Isles, that interesting little cheque, which was dishonoured through your forgery, will be placed in the hands of the police.

"You understand, I hope; don't do anything rashly—take your time to decide about remaining in England to stand in the dock, and probably get a long term of penal servitude—or go to Australia and live on the best of the land for the rest of your natural life. I hope you follow me, Major Frayne-Lennox?" And Caleb J. Johnson bit the end of a cigar, and gazed across the room where that worthy, the derelict husband of Lady Violet stood chewing the end of his moustache.

"I understand well enough," he answered sullenly. "I am in your power. I haven't much choice. And as to agreeing to your terms, I don't fancy you need worry about my returning to England. A thousand a year is not easily earned nowadays. But don't think I can't guess your motive for wishing me conveniently 'dead,'" he said, with a slight sneer.

"I wish," replied Caleb J. Johnson slowly, "to relieve a good woman of such an incubus as yourself. To spare her the knowledge that you are alive to disgrace her again—to let her think that you are really as dead to the world as you are to her—and now I fancy you have the best chance in your life in which to retrieve your miserable existence by dying to all intents and purposes."

The other shrugged his shoulders cynically. "All right, I'm on the job. My wife will be able to write 'R.I.P.' over my grave in her memory from to-night."

When that night Major Frayne-Lennox, under another name, went on board a liner from the docks, the man who saw him off and returned in the tug to the shore, carried away with him a bundle, over which he kept jealous guard until the train arrived in Fenchurch Street Station, then jumping into a cab, he gave an address to the driver, and touched the bundle with an exultant laugh.

"So drops the curtain on *your* existence, my friend. I consider that I have done the kindest and most humane action in my life to-night—only I did not think it would be so easy. Money is a wonderful oil with which to turn round the wheels of life!"

* * * * *

"And now I have come for my answer. I have waited long for it, and you must admit, Lady Violet, that I deserve some little kindness at your hands."

Mr. Johnson held the slim white fingers of her ladyship in a close grasp, and looked steadily into her eyes. His own were rather bright, but the expression of his face was enigmatic, only his mouth smiled.

She released her hand slowly from his, and motioned him to a chair. She was trembling slightly, and her eyes were troubled.

"I am sorry, Mr. Johnson, that you were not content to accept my first answer as the inevitable," she said at last; "because it compels me to speak very plainly on a subject that I had hoped never to re-open with anyone for the rest of my life. I am not a free woman."

A curious light crept into the financier's eyes—a mingling of triumph and self-contempt.

"Don't tell me, Lady Violet," he said quickly. "I know

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CURES CONSTIPATION.

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all that you could ever have to tell me. I understood that relationship between yourself and—the uninvited guest at your dinner-party. I am a man of the world, and can read between the lines of Fate better than most men, and in spite of what I knew that night, I also knew that you would one day give me the answer I desired—the answer that would make you my wife and the richest woman in Society. It has come earlier than even I dared to hope."

He paused and looked at her keenly.

"Lady Violet, I cannot pretend to feel what I am going to communicate to you, because in my heart I honestly rejoice in the occasion that makes it possible for me to repeat my question."

She turned her head sharply to him, and he saw that she looked very pale.

"What do you mean?" she whispered, her voice unconsciously sinking to a murmur. "What can you have to tell me that will affect my answer to you?"

He took a swift step towards her. "Only this, Lady Violet," he said quietly, yet the blood was throbbing in his veins with the sense of victory—"you need no longer hug the chains that have for so many years fettered you to a scamp. I won't say any more—but tell you that your patience and long-suffering have been rewarded, and you are free now to choose another husband, and I am bold enough to dare hope that you may come to regard me in that light. I—I—care very much for you," he broke out passionately—"and could make you care for me."

She flung her hand out with a gesture that stopped the words on his mouth. "Tell me how you know—this! How you knew that it would be welcome news to me! Wives are generally supposed to mourn their husbands' death, you know"—she finished with a hysterical laugh.

He put his hand in his pocket, and drew out a paper.

"I will read it to you," he said quietly. "Sit down."

She obeyed him silently, then in a carefully-modulated voice Mr. Johnson read:

"While some dock labourers were at their work in the early hours of the morning, they discovered the following articles of a gentleman's wardrobe—a coat, stained with blood, and a waistcoat, together with a soft, crush hat. In one of the pockets of the coat a note-book was found, but no money or jewellery. The name written in the note-book was that of an officer in the Army, Major Richard Frayne-Lennox, who some years ago left the Service under a cloud, and was believed dead by his friends. The widow of the unfortunate man is a well-known leader in Society, and much sympathy will be felt for her; the police are already searching for the body, as they fear foul play."

"Oh, how awful—how horrible!" she gasped. "I never thought such a wretched end would be his." She started to her feet suddenly. "Mr. Johnson, I cannot play the hypocrite by attempting to feel that this is a great sorrow to me, but I am, after all, humane, and to think that that man was *once* my lover is a fearful shock; he must have sunk so low—so frightfully low. He was also the father of my child!"

"Your child!" he exclaimed. "I did not know you had one—is it dead?"

Her face flushed and then paled. She could have bitten off her tongue after she had spoken, but it was too late. "Yes," she said quietly, "I lost it." She turned to him with a pitiful smile. "Mr. Johnson, you will not compel me to listen to you to-night while that wretched newspaper paragraph is still ringing in my ears? Please go now—I could not listen—to-night—I want to be alone."

He took her hand in his. "I understand," he murmured, "and appreciate your reason for wishing me to go now; but you will understand that when I call again in a day or two I shall hope to be received as your future husband!"

She bowed her head. The strong overpowering personality of the Gold King made her absolutely unable to cope with his will. She was only glad of the respite—that there was yet a little time in which she could collect her thoughts and grow accustomed to the new phase of life spreading before her.

And gradually, when the nine days' wonder concerning the non-appearance of the body of the late Major Frayne-Lennox was over, Society heard with expressions of pleasure and disapproval that Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox would shortly and quietly become the wife of the well-known financier, Mr. Caleb J. Johnson of New York City.

She received a curt note from Sir Cyprian congratulating her on her conquest, but none from Marcella, either in congratulation or in reply to the letter she had written some days ago. It was unsuual for Marcella to leave a whole week without writing, and a vague sensation seized Lady Violet, in the midst of all her quiet preparations for her wedding, that something was wrong at the Court.

She wrote immediately to Sir Cyprian, warning him that should all not be well with Marcella, she would instantly go up to the Court and bring her away at all costs.

The following day a telegram arrived. She opened it fearfully, then sighed with relief. It was from Marcella, and ran:

"*In bed with bad cold, don't worry—sorry unable come to town for wedding. Love.*—MARCELLA."

She pressed it to her lips, and the murmured words, "My darling girl," reached the ears of the financier, who was looking at her curiously.

"You are fond of that girl," he said drily. "I shall be jealous of her soon."

She looked at him swiftly. "I love Marcella dearly," she answered softly; "almost as though she were my own child."

"More than you love Edward Day, your nephew, eh?" he said smilingly. "He is a clever young chap, and your letter of introduction to me came just when I wanted a secretary. He will be installed next week; at present he is holiday-making in the country, I believe."

"Holiday-making!" she said sharply. "I did not know. I am not very keen on him personally, but I am glad my letter procured him work."

She did not add that he was no relation to her—that he had been the child of the unfortunate woman whom she had befriended in a moment of impulsive pity. The little she had written had told enough without explaining too much. At any rate, she was glad that there would be no occasion for Marcella to meet Edward Day again.

Moved by a sudden thought she went up to her future husband and said quickly:

"Caleb, I want you to do me one great favour when—when we are married."

"You have only to command—I'll obey," he murmured, touching her hand with his lips. "What is it, Violet?"

"That you will do all you can to get Sir Cyprian to let Marcella live with us. She is unhappy, I fancy, at home—and I could be a mother to her!"

"Say, rather, a sister," he smiled—then added: "I will soon do that for you."

She looked at him gratefully. "Thank you, Caleb. You are a strange man, yet I think you really care for me."

A slow smile curved his lips. "I do care very much—I have dared a great deal to win you—my peerless bride!"

The wedding day dawned, and at an unfashionable church, at an unfashionable hour, the Society beauty and the New York millionaire were made man and wife. They had desired no publicity, and hardly anyone knew of the date of the wedding.

As the bride and bridegroom stepped out of their carriage at the station, *en route* for the Continent, Lady Violet's maid met her with a telegram.

"This has just come, my lady."

With a curious tightening of her heartstrings, she tore the orange-tinted envelope open. Instinctively she guessed that it contained bad news; as she read the few words on the inclosure she uttered an exclamation:

"Violet!" said the financier sharply, "is anything wrong?" Then, taking advantage of the prerogative of a husband, he looked over her shoulder, and read:

"*Marcella left Court. Keep her till I arrive. Sure to go to you.*—CYPRIAN RUST."

(Another long instalment next week.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Country Men v. Town Men.

"ETHEL" wants to know if a country girl is not more precluded from the chances of meeting eligible suitors than a town girl? No, "ETHEL," do not be despondent. Your case appears very much worse than it is. Living in the country is not necessarily prejudicial to a girl's meeting eligible suitors. In fact, I think the reverse is the case. You will find that the proportion of old maids in the country is less than in towns. Sooner or later the right man turns up, so don't be worried. Perhaps you do not meet so many men as a London girl, but perhaps you are all the better for that. Meeting a lot of men does not necessarily lead to marriage.

* * * * *

I myself know a family of three girls who have all their lives lived in the remotest country districts. Now all are well and happily married. Had they lived in town they might have had many flirtations and become experts at that pastime, but is it not better to meet few men and true, than many and unreliable? In the case of my friends, visits from men were few and far between, yet, somehow or other, when they did appear, they turned out to be, from a girl's point of view, worth a dozen of the town butterflies a London girl encounters.

The Best Time to Marry.

"WHICH is the best time to marry?" asks "ENA."—Whenever things seems opportune, my dear "ENA." Few girls are inclined to sit down and ask themselves this question in cold blood. I should imagine that you are not engaged, or, if so, you have entered into the thing in a very philosophical spirit. Generally speaking, early Spring is the best. Then you have all the external joys of Nature to accompany your realisation of love's dream, with all the outdoor recreations to share with each other, such as cycling, walking, driving, boating. The possibilities of any disturbance of that dream are less than if accompanied by the cold and damp of winter. And we all know how important it is to get over the early stages of marriage without a "tiff."

* * * * *

When winter comes, you will have accustomed yourselves to each other, and will take to fireside pleasures and winter enjoyments and responsibilities as a natural sequence and pleasant variance. But a marriage in winter, when all is drear and dark, when fog chokes one, when microbes are getting active, and household expenses and bothers are greater than in summer, may be the prelude to ill-temper, and perhaps divergence which joyous Spring drives away. So if your man did really pop the question under the mistletoe a week or so back, and you have an interest in this question, I advise you to wait till Easter, when the new year will be old and pleasant enough to beam on you.

A Love that has Endured.

"DARBY and JOAN" write me a joint letter, and this is what they say: "We are the happiest couple alive, and yet both of us are dreading the hour when one shall be called to rest, and so leave the other alone. We are eighty-three years old." I can quite understand your feeling anxious, "DARBY and JOAN," but you say you are the happiest couple alive, and surely this is something to be very thankful for. When the call comes I am sure the one left will have hope and faith enough to feel that the other is waiting with hands outstretched in welcome. So try to forget all but this. Life is so short that it should be happy, and, if possible, free from care.

Love and Jealousy.

"F. H. T." says: "I like two girls, one in England and one in America; the one in England is very jealous even if I kiss her married sister, and I have had a quarrel with her. The American never quarrels with me, is not jealous, and loves me more. Which one shall I be engaged to?" From what you tell me, "F.H. T." I should certainly advise you to get engaged to the American girl, but, at the same time, remember being jealous shows that the English girl loves you too. America is a long way off, but a girl who is not jealous is seldom met with, so I think you would be happiest with her. Jealousy is the ruin of many a happy home.

An Errant Lover.

I VERY much sympathise with "MADGE," but I fear that as her lover visits the other girl so constantly, and is so reserved about it, it rather suggests that his affection for you has waned. One can generally tell this when told that anyone's love for you is "just the same." Those words have an ominous ring, and generally mean, that while he still thinks you are a most charming and attractive girl, there is somebody else who—well, with whom he is *in love*. I should advise you to take no further steps in the matter, beyond telling him that while he continued these visits, all must be regarded as over between you. If he really loves you, that will soon bring him to his senses, and if, after all, he is merely flirting with the other girl, as is very likely the case, he will soon drop it.

Two Suitors.

"GRETA" is in a puzzling position about two gentleman friends. She met them both at a party, and both seemed to take a fancy to her. After the meeting they called in turn, but neither knew the other was smitten. "GRETA" likes them exactly equally, and cannot choose between them. One is rather a frivolous young man, who talks a lot, and is very agreeable. The other is much more serious, and steady. Would it be wrong for "GRETA" to receive the attentions of both of them for awhile until she makes up her mind?

* * * * *

I can see complications ahead, "GRETA," if you do so, though I can quite understand you do not want to make up your mind on so delicate a matter until you have seen more of them both. After all, I suppose you are not called upon to fall in love with either just because they pay you attentions. A girl can always reserve the right to have what friends she likes until things have reached the engagement stage. Wait until one or the other of them says or does something definite, then give him the answer you feel you ought to give. If you don't like him enough, have the courage to tell him so.

Cynthia

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Cures FACEACHE	in 5 minutes		
Cures TOOTHACHE	in 5 minutes	Cures ALL NEUROTIC And MUSCULAR PAINS	in 5 minute
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LINEEL PILLS Are the best remedy known to Medical Science for INDIGESTION, CONSTIPATION, LIVER COMPLAINTS, and BAD COMPLEXION.

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The LINEEL CO. LTD., 16 Bevis Marks, London, E.C.

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THE SAFE REMEDY FOR

Headache and Neuralgia.

CURES IN TEN MINUTES

Kaputine is not a single crude drug such as has been condemned as dangerous by the Medical Press, but is composed of several approved ingredients, having the full confidence of the Medical profession. The SAFE Remedy.

Kaputine is the only preparation of its kind used in British and Foreign Hospitals and infirmaries. Proof positive of its superior and sterling qualities.

Write to KAPUTINE, Huddersfield, for Samples Free.

Packets of 18 doses 1/1½; Samples 1d. each.

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Lung Diseases, Blood Spitting

I CLAIM TO HOLD THE WORLD'S RECORD

For the

ABSOLUTE LASTING CURE

OF ASTHMA, Chronic Bronchitis, Consumption and BLOOD SPITTING, Emphysema, & all other Lung Diseases

If you suffer from either of these complaints write to me at once, and I will send you, Free of Charge, and under cover, my new illustrated work, which will more than substantiate my claim to hold the World's Record for effecting LASTING CURES, as opposed absolutely to all forms of temporary or so-called relieving remedies. My treatment is the result of 25 years' continuous investigation and minute research, and embodies the experience consequent upon its application to nearly 90,000 cases, and can be carried out at home WITHOUT INTERFERENCE WITH DAILY OCCUPATION.

This is an Extract from one of Thousands of Testimonials I possess:

"*I have been a sufferer from Bronchial Asthma six years. If I exerted myself in the least I became short of breath; and wheezed so that I could be heard all over the house. I began to spit blood; could not rest day or night. Sometimes I spent the night pacing the bedroom floor, sitting at the window, and propping myself erect with pillows. Since I went in for your treatment I am pleased to say I feel as well as ever I did.*

"*Ruddington.* "(*Miss*) *A. VINCENT.*

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£1,000 I will forfeit this sum to any Charitable Institution if this testimonial is not genuine. Write to me at once and I will send you full particulars, and tell you free of charge if I think a cure can be effected or not.

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Curable

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Sixty Years Ago-and Now.

**"What's rank, or title, station, state, or wealth,
To that far greater worldly blessing, health?
What's house, or land, or dress, or wine, or meat,
If one can't rest for pain—nor sleep—nor eat—
Nor go about in comfort? Here's the question,
What's all the world without a good digestion?"**

The above lines are culled from the "Poet's Corner" of a journal of some sixty years ago. It was about the same period that **BEECHAM'S PILLS** started upon their long and prosperous career, and it is possible that the poet had not then tried the merits of that most excellent remedy. That he did so later is more than probable. If so, he may still be in the land of the living, hale and hearty. For nothing is more conducive to a long and happy life than a sound state of the digestive organs.

It is indeed, better to have a good stomach than a patent of nobility—to possess a healthy liver than unbounded wealth—to sleep soundly and rise in the morning "as fresh as paint," than to occupy an exalted position in society.

Fortunately there is not much occasion, nowadays, for anyone, rich or poor, to go about subject to the terrors of indigestion. A bad digestion may be cured, a weak one strengthened, and a good one confirmed.

BEECHAM'S PILLS

are, in fact, the recognised remedy for all forms of dyspepsia, a disease far-reaching and distressing enough, which generally arises from complicated irregularities of the stomach, liver and kidneys.

By their specific action on these organs, **BEECHAM'S PILLS** re-establish healthy digestion, purify the blood, eliminate uric acid, and act as a fine tonic upon the nervous system. There is certainly no other medicine before the public which combines so many life-giving properties as **BEECHAM'S PILLS**.

This Wonderful Medicine is specially suitable for Females of all ages. Every woman who values health should read the instructions wrapped round each box.

Sold everywhere in Boxes, price 1s. 1½d. (56 pills) and 2s. 9d. (168 Pills).

Advertisements should be sent to "Short Stories" Advertisement Department, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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SHORT STORIES

No. 786. Week Ending January 23, 1904. Price One Penny.

She crept stealthily into the room, and with the candle set fire to the curtains of the bed wherein Malcolm lay.

(A Dramatic Incident from the Story, "The Woman with Dark Hair." See inside.)

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VENO'S LIGHTNING COUGH CURE

The purest and most efficient Remedy procurable for
COUGHS, COLDS, BRONCHITIS, ASTHMA, CATARRH, WEAK LUNGS, and CHILDREN'S COUGHS.

BRONCHITIS AND ASTHMA

Veno's Lightning Cough Cure

Produces its most brilliant effect in Chronic Bronchitis and Asthma. It effects astonishing cures in the worst and most persistent cases.

Rev. W. W. TULLOCH, D.D., Bonar Bridge, Sutherlandshire, writes: "July 22nd, '03.—I have been a martyr to asthma all my life and lately to chronic winter bronchitis. I have found Veno's Lightning Cough Cure a valuable medicine"

CHILDREN'S COUGHS

Mrs. ADA S. BALLIN, 5, Agar Street, London, Editor "Womanhood," and a great authority upon children's diseases, writes:—"Veno's Lightning Cough Cure is an exceedingly successful remedy; it is very pleasant to take and the relief it gives is very rapid. The preparation is perfectly safe for children."

W. LASCELLES-SCOTT, F.R.M.S., in his Certificate of Analysis among other things says:—"I have pleasure in certifying that in my opinion VENO'S LIGHTNING COUGH COUGH is an exceptionally pure, safe, and effective preparation

LARGE TRIAL BOTTLES 9½d. Regular Sizes, 1/1½ and 2/9.

Ask for VENO'S LIGHTNING COUGH CURE at Chemists and Drug Stores, or post free from the VENO DRUG CO., Hulme, Manchester, England.

Kaputine

THE SAFE REMEDY FOR

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Kaputine is not a single crude drug such as has been condemned as dangerous by the Medical Press, but is composed of several approved ingredients, having the full confidence of the Medical profession. The SAFE Remedy.

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Write to KAPUTINE, Huddersfield, for Samples Free.

Packets of 18 doses 1/1½; Samples 1d. each.

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BRITISH Manufacture throughout.

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Dr. W. S. Rice (Dept. 431), 8 and 9, Stonecutter Street, London, E.C., has the distinction of perfectly curing even the most difficult ruptures of long standing. He does this without causing the patient one bit of pain, absolutely without danger and without the loss of a moment's time from work. He does not use the knife, and sends his method and treatment direct to the sufferer's home, where it can be used without assistance, and brings immediate relief. Dr. Rice has cured hundreds of old men who have been ruptured 30 and 40 years. Never before have such letters of testimony been received as Dr. Rice receives every day. Mr. James Cole, 13, Holdick Street, Midland Road, Peterborough, was cured at the age of 66 years. He writes Dr. Rice as follows:—"I had a bad rupture, and when I saw your method of cure advertised I was rather doubtful as to permanent cure; but I am thankful I tried it, for I do not feel anything of the rupture now. It was just the treatment I required to effect a cure." It will pay anyone who is ruptured to write to Dr. Rice for a sample of his method, which will be sent free by return of post. Investigate fully his method of cure. Do this at once. Don't delay in a matter of such importance. Write to-day. Thousands of cases cured.

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HOME NOTES

(No. 523)

A PAPER PATTERN of this

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Of all Bookstalls and Newsagents.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

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Short Stories

No. 786.] [One Penny.

Week Ending January 23rd, 1904.

The Woman with Dark Hair.

Containing the Incident depicted on the cover.

A Fascinating Tale of a Terrible Deed.

Malcolm Strong was sitting on a seat on the Brighton front, and also, a little to his right, sat Hilda Sladen, playing with a half-read book.

When Malcolm glanced up, quite idly, he did not know, of course, that Hilda Sladen had been looking at him for some time, and had decided that he was certainly an ugly man, but with something of a chin. But he looked up; he could have sworn that, for a second, their eyes met; then she was at her book again so quickly that he could not be certain whether she had noticed him. Yet he had seen her eyes—dark eyes, and she had dark hair.

Presently she closed the book and got up from the covered seat. She began to walk slowly westward.

But in a few minutes Malcolm Strong went westward, too. He was a lonely, struggling artist, dependent on his work, which up to now had been a dependence rather frail.

Soon Malcolm passed the girl who had attracted his attention, and he slipped into a tobacconist's shop to buy some cigarettes. When he came out she was standing just outside, talking to a gentleman. It was Frank Duncan, an old friend of Strong's.

The former saw the artist and stepped forward to greet him, saying:

"Why, how do you do, Strong? Haven't seen you for an age! Let me introduce you to my cousin, Miss Sladen."

After about half an hour had elapsed, which time they had spent in strolling along the esplanade, Duncan announced that he had an urgent engagement to attend to.

Hence Malcolm Strong and Hilda Sladen, who had been so opportunely brought together, were left to themselves.

They sat down, and in five minutes Hilda Sladen thought that she might have known him all her life.

She was at Brighton for a month, on a visit to some friends with her mother. Very often a girl is lonely with her mother. They talked of books, of plays and of players that they knew. When he left her, he was to meet her that evening at seven o'clock.

Hilda Sladen was not often with her mother during the afternoons and evenings of the next three weeks. Malcolm lent her good books for herself to read, and books of wild excitement and great improbability for her mother, which reading the latter loved. He took her to Lewes to see the white monument on the hills which marks where martyrs were burnt, who cried bravely for their faith in their last hour; he told her of them that had died there.

"I love everybody who has suffered," cried she.

"Why, so do I," said Malcolm. "It's the one creed worth having."

Down the steep road to the station she was silent. But while they waited on an empty platform for the train she said:

"I'll be back in London this time to-morrow. And—in a week you'll have forgotten me."

"I seldom forget friends," said Malcolm. "I might have said the same thing to you."

"It would not be true as far as I am concerned," said Hilda Sladen.

He stopped. "I was very downhearted the day I met you," he said. "Such trying—and such failure. I was beginning to think that I had better throw away my tools."

"Never do that. You may be great and glorious some day." This was a phrase she had used before.

"I'm not so certain about that," he laughed. "But you've bucked me up tremendously. New ideas, my own ideas all sharpened, and new thoughts. It's three weeks ago, isn't it? Three weeks—I feel as if I had known you for years!"

"Do you know," she said, "I felt like that the third time I saw you, when we went right east to where the cliffs start."

"Yes," said Malcolm, "we've hit it off well together. It's been a splendid time. We've been good friends."

She turned and looked at Malcolm. They were in a secluded part. Her lips were half parted. Suddenly her arms were round him:

"I don't give kisses like that for 'friendship'!" said the woman with dark hair.

"You're very good," said Malcolm. "I didn't know; you make me proud." He put his hands upon her shoulders. "I've never told a woman lies. I'm sorry—but I can't give you as much as you give me."

"I'd better not see you again," said Hilda Sladen. "It's not your fault at all. It's mine—I'm stupid! You see, I thought I was proof against these things. I had better not see you any more," she repeated. She paused, and added: "But I can't stand being lonely." A woman's cry.

"It's as you please," said Malcolm gently.

"Do *you* want it to end now?" she asked him fiercely.

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He shook his head.

"You are so different. You're sure you don't want it to end—you're sure you're not tired of me yet?"

"Quite sure."

"I must see you now and then." For he had told her he was going to London. "I'll be so good; I won't worry you. And you will forgive me, won't you, for being so stupid?"

"*Forgive* you!" cried Malcolm, a very humble man.

"And you'll let me know the day you're coming to London? I want to see you the first evening you're there. If you'll only be patient with your work, I know you'll get on. I want to see you succeed. You will write and tell me, won't you? Don't disappoint me."

He did not answer for a minute.

"Don't write if you're tired of me already," she cried, and her eyes had changed.

"You might get tired first," said Malcolm, smiling. "I'm a very ordinary kind of man."

"You don't understand me yet."

"I'll write," he said.

He would have given half his life for the power to paint her eyes as they were when they had changed.

Malcolm went to London, to begin a stern campaign with editors, and he met her at a post office in the Strand.

They walked over Westminster Bridge, and he saw her into a tram for Brixton, where she lived. The next day he started on his fight, and he tramped six weeks from office to office before he sold a single drawing.

But it was a good drawing, and the honest approbation of the editor who bought it paid for that six weeks' worry. When it appeared many people looked in the corner for the signature, and said: "A new man."

When he told Hilda Sladen, she was more pleased even than himself. "I told you so," she said.

"Don't say 'great and glorious' again," said Malcolm, "because it makes me feel so small."

At another time he said to her: "When are you going to begin to hate me?"

She looked at him surprised.

"Sometimes, you know," said Malcolm, "your eyes change—oh, often your eyes change—and then they're fine; but it's then that you hate me!"

"Don't talk like that," said she.

"Why not? I should never be afraid of your hate."

"Why will you say such horrid things? There's one thing I want you to promise me. If another woman ever comes for you, and you feel—at last—I want you to let me know. I couldn't stand that—unless I knew at once. You've got that tiny gold cross I gave you?"

Malcolm nodded. It was the one present that had passed between them.

"If that ever happens—directly it happens—promise that you'll send me the gold cross. Promise!"

"It's a promise," said he.

"Then I shall know," said Hilda Sladen. "Don't write a word, don't put a date. Just send the cross, in one of those grey envelopes you use."

Malcolm began to get commissions and to sell his work. His own work, too; the style he wanted to do; and his joy was greater than words. He went for one paper to do a series of sketches of the pottery districts, the country and the people around Hanley. When he came back a regular berth was offered him.

This provided his living money. Further, he had an idea for one big picture that had long been in his mind. A picture of few colours, black and orange and grey. No hack work about this; it was to be his own creation.

With a friend he rented a cottage at Ditchling, in Sussex, and went down there to fight with the picture. He thanked Hilda Sladen for the way she had encouraged him. Her heart leapt at the success he had made; for long she could not speak, but then she murmured again of the gold cross.

And she said: "Is it the cottage that you showed me once, when we walked over the hills from Lewes? You said then that you would like to work there. There was a fine light."

"That's the cottage," said Malcolm. "I can't thank you enough for the way you've helped me. Good-bye."

* * * * *

For long weeks Malcolm struggled with his picture in the little cottage at the foot of the quiet hills. Often he was lonely there, because Derriel, his friend, was often called away to London. Slowly the picture grew.

He longed to get it done, to go out one morning and shout to the hills, "This is my work!"

The other woman comes into the story in the manner of a melodrama. One day Malcolm could not work. He went out and climbed the rough road over the Beacon; he reached the yielding earth on the top, and he was striking away from the line of the telegraph-posts when a speck came flying towards him from High Park Corner.

It was a girl on a horse with head down, furiously bolting. Great wedges of soft turf flew up from the horse's hoofs, and the horse was heading straight for the steep, zig-zag road down the Beacon.

She was nearer now. She had lost her hat; she had fair hair and a white face, and her lips were close shut. If she had lost her hat, her nerve was still her own; for she sat back resolute, tugging the useless reins, her eyes a real flame.

She sat back there with the pluck of all the world, a matter of seconds how long she could keep her seat. Certainly she could not keep her seat at that pace down the hill. And once off the turf, too, on the hard road, her horse must jar and stumble.

Malcolm cried out in himself with admiration for her pluck and the way she rode. And as she was almost on top of him, he took what seemed a hopeless chance—he leapt forward, forward and with a clear mind; from the first impact he had a bruise on his shoulder that lasted for weeks; his tense pull wrenched the animal's head round with such a jerk that the girl was nearly unseated. He was dragged forward; he dug futile heels in the turf, and was, of course, swept on again. Again he dug his heels in the ground; the resistance lessened, he was dragged on again, but cried to her: "Stick on!"

His body was like fire; from the sharp, intolerable pain there might have been the weight of all Sussex on his arm; but he stuck grimly to it.

And presently he was lifting her from the saddle. Then his right arm, that now he could not feel, dropped to his side. His face was whiter than her own; the blood ran from his lips where he had bitten them in his struggle; she stood breathless and panting, and said:

"That was magnificent!"

"If you had lost your head I could have done nothing. What was the matter with your horse?"

He was holding the bridle by the left hand, and now the horse was blown and quiet.

"I don't know," she said. "I came out alone. He was very fresh this morning. Back there, I think there was a piece of paper fluttering on the road, and then he was off."

"You feel all right?"

"Splendid!" she laughed. "Now that it is over."

Malcolm's heart was big at her wonderful pluck. But, still holding her horse, he stooped down and touched a blood-stained spur.

"It was that more than the paper, I'll be bound," said he. "What do you want a spur for with a horse like yours? He was frightened at the paper, but he bolted at the spur which you did not know you were using so. Here's his side all marked. And every time you touched him with it he wanted to bolt the more."

"How beautifully you lecture."

"It's a lecture you ought to have," he retorted, and now they were smiling at one another. "It's all right, as it happened—and you ride very well, but there's no one can ride well enough to take the Beacon at a gallop."

"You're quite right, but I've not asked you if you are hurt."

"My arm's nearly pulled out," said Malcolm. "That's all."

"I'm so sorry."

"It's lucky I was about," said he.

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"I'm not going to ride any more this morning. I shall walk back home."

He waited. His eyes said: "Where's home."

Reading the question, she said: "It's not far—not very far—that is. Just at the beginning of the Common."

"The big white house?"

She nodded.

He brought the reins forward over the horse's head, looped his uninjured arm through them, and they went back to the big house together. On the way they passed his own little cottage; he told her of himself and his work.

"May I come in some day," said she, "and look at the picture?"

"Certainly," said Malcolm. "When it is finished."

Her name was Betty Ingram, and she lived in the white house with her father, a kindly, middle-aged man, retired five years ago from Indian woods and forests.

"It was nothing," Malcolm said to him.

"It was a great deal," said Mr. Ingram, and looked at his daughter, who had explained things. The colour was in her face again.

That day Malcolm found he could not work on the picture at all. Indeed, the total of his day's work was five sketches of Miss Betty Ingram. Betty Ingram on horseback, Betty Ingram as she had stood talking to her father, study of a face with fair hair (Betty Ingram's face), and so on.

When he had done these sketches, he looked at them carefully, swore to himself, and deliberately tore them up.

Two months afterwards he sent to Hilda Sladen in London the gold cross.

But no word came from her in reply.

* * * *

Winter came upon the Sussex hills, but could not rob them of their green, and gave a wonderful rich brown to the turned earth. Winter and dark nights, and damp and cold, but Malcolm, the picture done (and he knew that it was good), said that it was good to be alive.

He was a man worth notice in the papers now. The struggling was behind. And the papers gave a paragraph to his engagement, and another, later, to his marriage, which was to be at an early date.

It was on the last day of the old year that the dark-haired woman came by a slow train from London and left it at Hassocks.

I do not know that she had any set purpose in her mind. She came really against her will; she had been near Victoria since the early afternoon, irresolute, despising herself because she had repeated to herself over and over again that she must see him for the last time. Only this purpose then; how could she let him go for ever without seeing him once more?

"He might have written," she said. But then she remembered that she had not written after he had sent the cross, and by that he might have thought she had not wished to hear from him.

She knew the way to the cottage. She learnt that Malcolm was there by himself. When at last she reached it, it was late, and the cottage was black and lonely, no lights showing from its windows. He was asleep, then. Could she not just see him without his knowing, and then go? What could be wrong in that—was it not her right, who had loved him first?

Malcolm had found no need for security of the cottage with the four rooms, and the two rooms knocked into one, which made his studio. Hilda Sladen found her way in through an unlatched window.

She stumbled against a little table in the dwarf passage from the door, and waited breathless, fearful of any movement to tell her she had been heard. Then she struck a match, and found a candlestick on the table. With that in her hand, she went cautiously upstairs.

The little house was full of ghosts as she went, stair by creaking stair. She longed to cry out, to wake the house, to bring turmoil upon the awful darkness that pressed upon her, upon the more awful lights that the candle sent dancing up the walls. And she knew that control had gone from her; she knew that she must see him; she did not care for anything, because she knew that she was mad.

His room was unlocked. Carefully she crept in, holding the candle to throw the light between the curtains, and stood long looking down upon him who lay sleeping there.

Malcolm slept on his side, not stirring. For a long time she waited there, scarcely breathing, dry-eyed and terrible.

She left the room at last, and went as carefully down the stairs. And she was at the foot of the stairs when a thought came to her and shook her, and she whispered it in her madness to the walls. Her mood changed; the thought came like a storm and gripped her, and would not let her be—this thought to end all, perhaps for her as well, but certainly for him.

"When will you begin to hate me?" he had said to her long ago. And the hate, the sweeping hate that was not really of her own will, came to her now, in a lonely house of terror, while the old year died.

She took off her hat and coat, and put them on the table, and went upstairs again. He slept still. She stood shaking now, altogether uncontrolled, a child of rage.

She held up the candle and set fire to the curtains of the bed. The flame ran along the beaded fringe, caught and then stopped, caught again in earnest, and then the curtains flamed fairly to the ceiling. Now she stumbled out and down the stairs, heedless of noise, but could get no further than the door, which she had opened.

Her coat was on somehow, but all power to move had gone from her, as she stood and gripped the table in the passage with bloodless hands.

Suddenly Malcolm woke. He was aroused either through that noise on the stairs or through the smoke with which his room was quickly filling. He tore the curtains down. They ripped from their rings upon the wide rod overhead, and lay, a blazing heap, upon the floor. He leapt across the room for the water jug, emptied it over them, and trampled out the dull red. Nothing else had caught.

Wondering, but only half-awake, he slipped into his things. When he had dressed, he looked about for reasons, and then was conscious of the bitter draught that came up the stairs into his room. And there was another light beside his own, which he had been too stupid to notice. It came from the candle upon the table in the passage.

And in the passage he came upon the woman with dark hair. "You know me at my worst," she cried "Don't say anything, don't speak; I set fire to your room. Now. I'm glad you're safe. For I tried to go upstairs to put it out but I could not move."

He could not speak.

"But when I lit your curtains I meant to kill you. Don't be afraid I shall trouble you any more. I'm wicked, I'm bad. There's the gold cross. Just take it back for memory—you will take it back, won't you?—it's the last you'll hear of me. I think it's in my blood to be bad. I'm going before a priest. Good-bye!"

She went through the open door, on to the winter road. And the little gold cross shone in the candle-light.

But Malcolm went back to his room and dressed, and waited for the light. It was past seven o'clock when the grey broke into the beginning of the day.

He took a stick and went out towards Ditchling Common. Suddenly there was a flutter of a dress at the iron gates, and a girl came from the big white house towards him. It was Betty Ingram.

"Oh," she cried, when she saw him. "I've been awake a long time. I couldn't sleep—I've dreamt such dreams about you. All sorts of dreadful things were happening. You don't know how glad I am to see you."

"I'm as glad to see you. I couldn't sleep either. How strange a coincidence!" said Malcolm, and took her in his arms.

But he never thought fit to tell her of how the dark-haired woman came to him that night. So the story is written here—a story of two women who loved.

Herbert Shaw.

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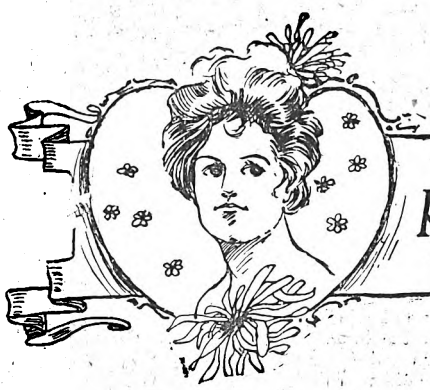

A Paragon of Perfection.

Being the Tale of an Idol Whose Feet Were of Clay.

"I DON'T like your paragon," said Winnie's father; "he is too perfect!"

And when Mr. Bradley said a thing he said it decisively, as much as to say that he meant it.

Winnie bent her pretty face a little more over her sewing—perhaps to hide a blush, perhaps not. Her father lit his pipe, which had gone out while he had been making the long speech of which the above words formed the conclusion.

"But everyone says he's good-looking and clever," ventured Winnie, without looking up from her work.

"A band-box dandy!" exclaimed her father with emphasis. "I don't care what everybody says of him; I've told you what I think."

Anyone but Winnie would have thought him angry, but Winnie knew her "dad" too well. She dropped her sewing, and, crossing over to the big chair in which he sat, she put her pretty cheek to his, and one arm about his neck.

"But I like him," she murmured, in the most winning of voices, and with the least accent in the world upon the personal pronoun. Mr. Bradley laughed and kissed the soft cheek that was so temptingly near him.

"You little witch," he said, "wheedling round your poor, simple, old dad once more!"

Winnie Bradley laughed, a little, soft, happy laugh, like the music of a brook in summer.

"Oh!" she whispered; "say 'yes,' dear daddy!"

And that was how "daddy" consented to his daughter's engagement—with the condition that a whole year was to elapse before marriage was even to be mentioned with Algernon Tempest, whom all Deephurst regarded as "a paragon of perfection."

How and in what fashion Mr. Algernon Tempest had acquired the honour of this appellation must be described.

He was handsome, though in a somewhat effeminate way.

His moustache was small, but elegantly trimmed and curled. He dressed to perfection. He could sing a little, play a little, do a hundred little things passably well. Nature had given him a fine pair of eyes and the knowledge of how to make use of them; a well-set-up figure, curly hair, and a blandness of manner which women took for civility and men for servility. And to conclude with, as if all these distinct advantages were not sufficient, he possessed an easy berth and a fair income.

"Such a man ought not to be lucky in love," said Deephurst society. But, strange to say, Algernon Tempest had come, had seen, and had conquered the heart of the prettiest girl in the place! Of a truth, it did not seem quite fair, but it was the fact all the same.

Winnie Bradley, only daughter of John Bradley, of Bradleys' mill, and the cynosure of all the young men's eyes, the desire of all their hearts, for miles around, had been captivated by the newcomer, and—well, hence the "yes" reluctantly wrung from daddy's lips.

And Winnie loved him. She thought him perfect, as most girls think their first lover. For Ronald, as she called him, at his request—he did not care for his first name, he said—was her very first lover, if not her first admirer.

But not one of her admirers had ever gone so far as to be constituted anything like a lover. No wonder Winnie's face flushed, and her heart beat and trembled, when Ronald told her that he loved her. Foolish little heart! Then he had laid his suit before John Bradley, and honest John Bradley, though he felt he for some unknown reason despised and had a kind of contempt for him, had said nothing of it, and had told him he would talk it over with Winnie. It must be said that Winnie's lover had pleaded his cause well—almost eloquently. That was another of his gifts. But the engagement was to be only a conditional one.

Winnie stole away from her father's side with a glance at the clock, after that "yes" had been spoken. In an hour she would meet her lover, at their usual trysting-place, the wooden bridge that crossed the millstream.

"What will Ted say?" said Mr. Bradley suddenly. Winnie started.

"I had forgotten him," she said.

"I hadn't," said Mr. Bradley drily.

There was a silence. What would Ted Warrender say indeed, Winnie was thinking. Her bright face suddenly went serious. He would say a good deal, and that not of a pleasant kind. Not that Winnie had ever thought of him as a lover, nor had she given him any encouragement. But she knew he loved her. So did her father know it as well. Poor Ted! There was a blow in store for him when he came home.

Ted Warrender was the son of John Bradley's greatest friend, and when Richard Warrender died, leaving a boy of nine alone in the world, John Bradley adopted him. Winnie, then a curly-haired mite of three, tyrannised over him, teased him, played games with him, wandered about Deephurst woods, gathering wild flowers with him. When seven years later he left school and went to China, Ted left his little playmate a shy little maiden of ten. He came home twice during the next ten years, the second time to find her a beautiful girl of eighteen. And he went back to China for the third and last time with her sweet face engraved on his heart for ever. And now he was coming home for good to settle down in England; and Winnie had forgotten him. And she wondered—even hoped that he had—if he had forgotten her.

What would he say, indeed! He had never seen, probably never heard of Mr. Algernon Tempest. How would his dainty ways, his affected little mannerisms, strike him, was what was in Mr. Bradley's thoughts. Grimly he imagined that they would not appeal favourably to the stronger natured man who had seen the world. And John Bradley almost chuckled when he thought of their meeting.

But Winnie? Her thoughts were very different indeed. She pictured sturdy Ted Warrender lost in admiration of her lover's handsome face and personal charms. So strangely does love blind us all!

Winnie met her lover at the appointed time, with her news. Ronald Tempest kissed her, and put his arms round her. But he was not excited. He was not an ardent lover by any means, feeling that all such display of emotion was "bad form" and "not the thing." But Winnie was too

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much in love with him to notice his somewhat calm demeanour.

They strolled away, and she slipped her arm through his. But even this he did not much care about.

"Are you not glad, Ronald?" she asked him gently.

"Of course I am, dearest, but I do think the year is absurd."

"But daddy wishes it!"

"Oh, of course, I know, if Mr. Bradley insists, it must be so. And, after all, he may relent later, dear."

Winnie looked up in his handsome face adoringly. She was a little shorter than her lover, and in response to her gentle pressure of his arm, he looked down upon her with a certain light of tenderness in his eyes.

"I hope so," she murmured.

"And now—the ring," her lover said; "look, Winnie dear; I bought it last week in town."

Winnie's blue eyes shone with love and delight as her lover produced a little case with a shining diamond ring in its velvet hiding place.

"Oh!" she cried; "but will daddy let me wear it?"

"He must let you."

"But——"

"I don't intend to let all the young men of the town be running after you, now you belong to me."

The dictatorial arrogance of this speech Winnie took for the pride of having won her, poor little woman! And after this tiny little momentary difference she tried her best to make up to him for what she thought was her unkindness to her lover! She clung to him even yet more closely, though Mr. Algernon Tempest did not respond in any great degree.

"Oh, bother!" ejaculated Winnie's lover five minutes later. But Winnie had been so busily employed gazing at her lover's handsome face that she had not noticed what he said.

Suddenly a very familiar figure caught his gaze. It was that of Mr. Algernon Tempest, and he was not alone!

A little four-year-old girl was sitting by the side of the wood through which the lovers were strolling. The path was broad and the grass underneath their feet was green, but the little maid was crying bitterly. Winnie slipped her hand out of her lover's arm in an instant, and ran to the child.

"What is it, dearie?" she asked tenderly, putting her pretty arms round the forlorn little mite.

"Please, I'se lost," said the little maid with yet more tears.

"Oh, don't cry! That will never find you!" said Winnie in haste; "who are you and who brought you into this pretty wood to see the flowers growing and hear the birdies sing?"

Baby gave a big sob and Winnie dried her eyes for her. In the meantime Mr. Algernon Tempest stood aloof, looking very indifferent, and somewhat displeased.

"Come along, Winnie," he remarked, after the tears had been dried and the little maid comforted.

"And leave this dear little mite alone?" said Winnie, facing her lover.

"Oh, bring it along with you if you wish," replied the lover.

I wish I could only reproduce in cold words the sulky face of Mr. Algernon Tempest and the pitying one of Winnie Bradley. But I cannot. The trio wended their way back to Deephurst, the four-year-old mite clinging to Winnie's hand tightly, but looking now and again at Mr. Tempest on the other side of her with a certain curious glance of awe, intermingled with repulsion. Mr. Algernon Tempest was not a favourite with children.

"Oh, I am home now!" said the mite, when they at length reached the high road; "I am found again!"

Winnie laughed, a bright laugh of sincere amusement, but Mr. Algernon Tempest only smiled.

"Do you know where you are now, baby?" said Winnie.

"Oh, yes. Me know. There's home—and mother!"

And she put her pretty little face up for a kiss, which Winnie gave her over and over again.

* * * * *

"So you are engaged?" said Ted Warrender quietly.

"Look!" answered Winnie; and she showed him the ring on her finger. "Won't you wish me happiness, Ted?" she pleaded, as he turned away. How was she to know that he cared for her?

Ted Warrender came back to her side, and held out both his hands.

"You know, Win, what I wish you—now and always."

Somehow, the sound of the old name, the name that no one but Ted had ever called her, went through Winnie's heart. But she battled bravely with the sudden strange feeling that had come over her, and made an attempt to laugh. But he dropped her hands.

"You have not seen Ronald?" Winnie said.

"Not yet," said Ted, with a half smile. "Do you expect me to fall in love with him too? That's asking rather too much."

It was a fortnight after Winnie's engagement, and Ted Warrender had only been back in Deephurst a few hours. But the first thing he had noticed was a ring upon Winnie's engagement finger; and his heart, that had hitherto been light and hopeful, had sunk to the bottommost depths of misery at the sight of it. He had come home with big hopes in his thoughts, with dreams of happiness, visions of gladness, but he never once had thought of—this!

"I wish you every happiness," he said, with an effort, and went away. But all that evening, even when with her lover, her affianced husband, Winnie could not forget the look upon his face, and the tone in which he uttered those few words.

"What a terrible infliction your friend, Mr. Warrender, is!" remarked Winnie's future husband a few days later, after he had been introduced.

Winnie coloured a little. Much as she cared for her lover, she felt that his remark was not in good taste. Perhaps Mr. Algernon Tempest noted her hesitation.

"I mean," he said loftily, "he is so big, so brusque, so outspoken——"

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"So manly," suggested Winnie.

Her lover turned languidly to her.

"So you love manly men?" he said.

"Of course I do," said Winnie. "I like a man to be—well, a man!"

Mr. Tempest rose from his chair leisurely, and curled his dainty little moustache with forefinger and thumb.

"Well," he said deliberately, "there is no accounting for tastes. Some prefer this style, some that. But it is not always the manly-looking man who is the most manly!"

He gave this axiom forth with the assurance of a learned philosopher. Winnie ran to his side, and put her pretty arms round him. She kissed his cheek.

"Forgive me, Ronald," she said; "I am afraid I was unkind to you."

"You were," said her lover, "but it does not matter!"

* * * * *

Ted Warrender did not conceal his aversion to Winnie's lover from anyone excepting from Winnie herself. He had so little in common with Mr. Algernon Tempest, and he despised him for his little affectations and fopperies, to which love had made Winnie blind. But he was too loyal to say so to her; and he cared too much for her, had he not been so, to give her pain. So he kept it from her, and hoped she would never know how passionately he loved her. He did not know of those two little incidents of which I have spoken, or perhaps they might have given him an even keener perception of Mr. Algernon Tempest's character, and a greater knowledge of how love can blind a woman to that which everyone sees but herself.

A month went by, and then there befell to Ted Warrender the task of solving the greatest problem that had ever presented itself to him. Be it remembered, poor Ted had scant reason to love "The Paragon," for he looked upon him as an interloper, and he sincerely disliked him. So that the problem, when it did come, was all the greater test of his loyalty and manliness.

He had to go to Dullingham, a big manufacturing town about fifty miles away, on business. This transacted, he found that he had an hour to waste before he could catch a return train. So he amused himself by strolling about the crowded streets, looking into the shop windows.

Suddenly a very familiar figure caught his gaze. It was that of Mr. Algernon Tempest, and he was not alone. A feminine arm was resting within his own, and a girl's face was looking up into his affectionately. And the first thought that knocked at the heart of Ted Warrender was that the lovers had come over to Dullingham together.

He looked again, and his heart very nearly stood still. For the face was not that of Winnie Bradley. Ted hesitated a moment, then he made up his mind. Stepping quickly forward, he spoke to "The Paragon."

"Hullo, Tempest, you up here as well as myself!"

"The Paragon" started, coloured, and being, in spite of his bravado, a coward at heart, drew his slight figure up stiffly and with an assumption of hauteur, replied:

"Pardon me, my name is not Tempest!"

Ted stood and looked at him straight in the face for a moment.

"I beg yours," he said, and he contrived to put a certain sarcastic accent on the words which conveyed, just as Ted had desired, the fact that Mr. Algernon Tempest had been recognised. Ted lifted his hat and walked quickly away, his heart in a tumult. What was he to do—what should he say?

Tell Winnie? He dared not; and if he did, how would she take it? If she believed him, she would question her lover, who would of course deny it; and Ted would be branded with the stigma of having tried to part the lovers! And if he did not tell her, he would by his silence be permitting her to remain engaged to a man who was, while her newly affianced lover, upon closely affectionate terms with another girl.

Poor Ted! His was a problem indeed, and the more he thought it over that day, the more difficult it appeared to solve. Look at it which way he might, he could not come to a satisfactory decision. He journeyed back to Deephurst, keeping a watchful look-out for "The Paragon," with the question still unanswered.

To make his "assurance doubly sure," he, when two days later he happened to meet Winnie, put a casual question to her, in as indifferent a tone as he could command.

"Oh, by-the-way, was Mr. Tempest here on Tuesday afternoon, Winnie?"

"Why do you ask?" said the girl, blushing a little, as she always did at the mention of her lover's name.

"Oh, for no reason in particular."

"Let me think—this is Friday. No, I did not see him on Tuesday. He told me he was very busy over something or other—I quite forget now what; but why?"

'Oh, nothing! It's of no consequence."

While, during the next few days, Ted Warrender was trying to solve the problem that perplexed him, wondering if to lay it before Mr. Bradley, Fate was preparing an utterly unforeseen solution of her own. It was a bright afternoon, and Winnie and her lover were strolling idly along the path beside the mill-weir, "The Paragon" holding forth loftily, and Winnie, as was her wont, listening to him admiringly. A little group of children were playing in the field on the other side of the mill-stream, their hands full of wild flowers they had gathered in the wood beyond.

Suddenly a piercing scream caused Winnie and her lover to look up. The "mite"—the little four-year-old whom Winnie had brought home when lost, much to the disgust of her unsympathetic lover—had overbalanced and had fallen into the mill-stream.

"Save her! save her!" exclaimed Winnie, grasping in a moment what happened. She turned instinctively to her lover. But he only stood, pitifully white, a craven, shivering with fear, and dumb.

Winnie's eyes flashed at him a glance of withering scorn.

"Then I will!" she cried, and she plunged into the running stream in an instant. With quick wit, she had run a few yards up the bank first, so as to get ahead of the little form being carried to the weir. Cumbered as she was, Winnie struck out bravely.

"Don't!" whined "The Paragon" on the bank.

"Out of the way, you cur!" said a strong voice behind him, and the shock of a form rushing past him sent him sprawling on the path. "Go and get help, you fool!"

But by the time he had reached the mill, and help had arrived, Ted Warrender was clinging like grim death to a stake in the bank, with one arm round Winnie's waist, and Winnie was clutching at the "mite's" drenched little figure.

When help arrived, it was a matter of a few moments to drag the trio, wet and exhausted, but safe, to the pathway.

"Winnie! Winnie!" exclaimed Ted Warrender hoarsely. "Thank God that I was at hand!" But Mr. Algernon Tempest had slunk away.

* * * * *

"The Paragon" had two very unpleasant interviews that evening. The first was with Ted Warrender, to whom after some tears and a poor show of bravado, he confessed that he had been at Dullingham.

"And you are making a fool of Winnie Bradley as well as of some other girl!" exclaimed Ted hotly. "Well, you will quite understand it is at an end now."

"That is for Miss Bradley to say."

"Or her father!" said John Bradley, coming into the room.

"The Paragon" fell limply into the nearest chair.

"There is your engagement-ring, and I am requested by my daughter to inform you that she never wishes to see your face again!"

He threw the ring at his feet with a gesture of contempt.

That was a year ago, and "The Paragon" has long since disappeared from Deephurst. Winnie's fancied love for him is dead. But Ted has never told her of that meeting in Dullingham, though he thinks he may do so, some day—when she has said "Yes."

Clifton Bingham.

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SPLENDID NEW SERIES. **BEGIN READING TO-DAY.**

A Striking Series of Astonishing Revelations.

Told by the Decoy Herself.

SYNOPSIS.

VIVIENNE D'ALTON, who in this series tells the story of a certain period of her life, is a young lady who has been educated in Germany.

Until the time when the story commences, she has never seen her father since he placed her at the school in Bochum, although her fees are paid regularly and she has a liberal allowance of pocket-money.

Her mother is dead, and she has no brother or sister. Hence, she seems quite alone in the world.

But one day her father sends a message to the school that he wishes his daughter to leave and to meet him at Rotterdam. Vivienne is greatly delighted at the news, and while she sails down the Rhine to meet her father, conjectures as to his appearance.

The person who announces himself as her father at Rotterdam is not in the least like the handsome gentleman she had pictured to herself, but is short and stout.

They drive to a large mansion, where Vivienne is enthusiastically welcomed by a Mrs. Sherwood, "a bosom friend of her mother," who requests Vivienne to call her "aunt."

Vivienne takes an instantaneous dislike to "Aunt Flora."

A Mr. Gilbert Graysworthy comes to dine at the house, and incidentally mentions that round his waist he carries a belt containing fifty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds.

A day or two later Vivienne is shocked to learn that Gilbert Graysworthy has been found murdered in the street! There seems no motive for the crime, for his money, his watch and chain are still upon his body.

Aunt Flora shows great annoyance that Vivienne is so concerned in the gentleman's death, and vents her spite on Susan, the maid, by dismissing her.

Vivienne, however, to show her independence, engages the girl herself as her own lady's maid, for which kindness the latter is very grateful.

She and Aunt Flora leave Rotterdam for England by the Harwich boat.

On the passage across Vivienne sees a person whom she believes is Annchen, a maid whom she greatly dislikes, talking to a man whom she has seen before under very suspicious circumstances.

She also meets a Viscount Broomville, a fellow-passenger whom Aunt Flora seems to wish to impress. He is most attentive to Vivienne, and she forms a very high opinion of the Viscount as a true born gentleman.

He announces that he is going to call upon Mr. Beverley D'Alton regarding some business affairs.

THIRD EPISODE.

The Decoy Enters Her Den.

I HAD often dreamt of London glories and had read of the splendours which money could procure. But I had neither dreamt nor read of such a marvel of beauty as my new home in Park Lane was.

The moment one entered the house one was impressed by its magnificence. The fine hall was lined with wonderful frescoes by the greatest artist of the day, and the fountain which played in the centre had its tiny jets turned into fairy rainbows by myriads of gem-like electric lights, which lurked amongst the palms and flowers banked up in lavish profusion. Rich sapphire blue velvet portières veiled the great mahogany doors leading into various rooms, and the grand staircase, which cost, so I was told, fifty thousand pounds, was a miracle of art in white and coloured marbles.

To tell the truth, I was almost spellbound with amazement at what I saw, and after I had been shown all over the house, I could well believe my father's assertion that he was the richest man in London.

"And you will have to be one of the busiest girls," he smiled, as he watched me look with shining eyes round the exquisite little boudoir which had been prepared for my special occupation.

"You seem to have quite an army of servants," I smiled back, "so I hardly know what there will be to keep me busy."

"My dear child, there is no earthly reason why you should worry about anything but your own pleasure. When I spoke of your being busy, I meant that you would have to do a tremendous lot of shopping amongst costumiers, milliners, and jewellers. Remember, my dear, that I always want you to look your best, no matter how much it costs. If you get what you want, and leave me to pay the bills, perhaps we shall both be happy."

"How good you are to me! I shall never be able to repay you!"

"Oh, yes, you will. You see, I am a gregarious animal in my own way, and the very fact of your living with me is part payment for anything I do for you. I have found it dreary work living alone while I was scraping my fortune together, and I mean to make up for all the privations of the past by surrounding myself with bright and happy faces."

"That means that you intend to entertain a great deal?"

"Certainly, though I have one peculiarity. A man of

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wealth always has innumerable applications for help from all sorts of people, and I am no exception to the general rule. But I have an office in the City to which all such business communications are addressed, and all such people as wish to be helped on in the world must seek me there.

"By way of compensation for seeing so much of the seamy side of life in the City, I want everything here to be absolute brightness and content. No man who is not rich is content, so it follows that I only want rich men about us here. And every woman, to be happy, must have either beauty or good family to boast of, so you can select your friends accordingly. But, mind—no poverty and no discontent."

"Beverley, how long am I to wait for you to let me pass you?"

I had been so closely attentive to what my father was saying that I had not noticed Mrs. Sherwood standing just within the doorway, looking the reverse of contented.

He stepped hastily aside and apologised at once.

"My dear Mrs. Sherwood," he said, "I'm sure you will believe me when I say that I had forgotten all about everything except that it was necessary to explain my wishes to my daughter, who is not yet as well acquainted with social duties as you are."

I wonder if it was fancy, or whether there was really a hidden meaning in the way in which the words "Mrs. Sherwood," "My daughter," and "duties" were pronounced? There certainly was a very curious inflexion upon them all, and the speech had the effect of producing an instant change in Aunt Flora's manner, which promptly became as fawning as it had been just now aggressive.

"You poor dears!" she exclaimed theatrically. "I can quite understand that Vivienne is perfectly delighted and that you are wrapped up in her. But you have both forgotten that lunch will be served in a few minutes, and that we don't want the servants to see Vivienne sit down at table in her travelling dress."

"To be sure! You are quite right," was the cordial reply. "I'm evidently in the way, so I'll take myself off while Vivienne gives herself up to the attentions of her maid. By-the-bye, did you not say something about having invited Viscount Broomville to call here to-day?"

This question was addressed to me, and I answered: "No, father, I didn't exactly ask him. He said he had something to see you about, and would like to call, so, of course, I said we should be pleased to see him."

"Well, dear, it's all the same, and the more friends call to see you, the better I shall like it."

A genial smile accompanied this speech, which implied that I myself was the attraction which brought Viscount Broomville to Park Lane so soon, and I was certainly very much pleased at the idea, as every girl would be who has only just been emancipated from school.

While eating my lunch, I could not help smiling at the pleasure with which I had viewed the prospect of presiding over my father's household arrangements, for I should certainly have been hopelessly incompetent to deal with the butler, and the housekeeper, and the *chef*, and all their underlings; some of them evidently thought themselves much grander personages than ever poor dear Fräulein had considered herself.

But I did not feel disappointed. On the contrary, I looked forward to a life of happy gaiety, undimmed by a single responsibility or care, and when Viscount Broomville presented himself between four and five o'clock I was as beautifully dressed and as radiant as either my father or I could desire.

Mrs. Sherwood was also magnificent, in a rose-velvet tea-gown, but I fancied she did not look quite happy when she saw me, at my father's whispered request, begin to preside over the Sèvres teacups.

Our visitor seemed to have eyes for nothing but me, and he very evidently cared to talk to nobody else. In fact, I was beginning to be rather embarrassed by his open admiration, when rescue came in the shape of a question from my father

"Did I understand you to say, my lord," he asked, "that you did good business in Rotterdam?"

"Splendid!" was the reply, "I have netted at least twenty-five thousand pounds, thanks to your directions and recommendations. But I sha'n't want to visit Rotterdam again on business in a hurry."

"Why not?"

"Because I seemed to be pursued by the most extraordinary dangers. Twice I was attacked by footpads, and only my own agility saved me from being murdered. Another time I was stepping into a cab when I happened to look into the face of the man who held the door open for me, and actually recognised him as one of the desperadoes I had fought with on the previous evening."

"How very lucky for you—yet how extraordinary!"

"Yes, rather. But the manner in which I was constantly menaced was more than extraordinary. It was significant."

I was listening breathlessly, for I recalled, only too vividly, the tragic end of that other young Englishman whom Fate had taken to Rotterdam. Aunt Flora had walked to the window, no doubt to gaze upon the ever-moving crowds in the Park. But my father seemed as much interested as I was, and he inquired promptly:

"Significant? Of what do you consider the attacks were significant?"

"Of deliberate shadowing," was the confident reply. "I feel absolutely certain that somebody must have known that I carried a lot of valuable property about with me."

"Of course. The people at the hotel knew. They have a happy knack of shadowing their guests, and if any of them saw you visiting the different diamond merchants, they could easily guess that you either had money to buy diamonds, or that you had diamonds to sell. You will remember that I warned you to be careful. However, you have luckily reached England again, and are no doubt going to invest your money to good advantage."

"I should like to ask your advice, if I may. You are the great authority on investments, and people are beginning to say that everything you touch turns to gold, so if——"

"My dear Viscount, I'll advise you with pleasure, if it will be any use to you. The fact is, I'm putting a lot of money into the 'New Barbary Land Development Co.' It is not thought much of just now, and shares are below par. But they'll fetch a huge premium in another week, and I shall sell out with a cool profit of a million. But, mind, this is in strict confidence."

Viscount Broomville became very excited at the prospect of another great "scoop," as he called it, which was thus opened out to him. But some fresh visitors were announced, and there was only just time for him to arrange to call at my father's office in the morning, ere it became impossible to talk further about business without being overheard.

* * * * *

I suppose I was not the first girl to be sprung upon Society with a tremendous flourish of paragraphs, or whose social success, by reason of the money at her command, was a foregone conclusion. But I certainly was amazed at my own sudden popularity, and could not understand how it was that half a dozen high-class weeklies sported a full-length portrait of "The beautiful Miss Vivienne D'Alton, who is just making her *début* in Society."

Later on I learnt that all this kind of thing is a matter of management. If you haven't a capable relative to blow your social trumpet, you employ an agent, and the miracle is wrought!

But even fabulous wealth is not all-powerful, and my father soon realised that the great party with which he was going to signalise my advent would be much more successful if I were chaperoned by a lady of title. Mrs. Sherwood was very angry at the idea. But "dear Beverley" was firm, and Aunt Flora found her authority on social matters superseded by the Dowager Countess of Windelmore, a lady of undoubted ready-made influence.

The Countess had but a small jointure, and when my father in his tactful way invited her to pay us a visit of indefinite

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length, with an honorarium of two hundred pounds a week "for personal expenses," she readily consented to do her best for me.

Upon the whole she found me very docile, and only too delighted to exploit fresh fields and pastures new. But the splendours with which I fell in love at first sight soon began to pall upon me. So did the perpetual supervision to which I seemed to be subjected, and I longed to be just a bit like other girls who could walk about the beautiful park and its environs instead of always being driven in a splendid carriage.

So strong did this desire become that I excused myself one evening from going to the opera, on the plea of being tired and out of sorts. My father was evidently disappointed, but, after enjoining me to go to bed, so as to be as fresh as possible the next day, he accompanied my two chaperons to the opera, and I was actually to be left to my own devices for several hours.

I might have been sleepy before, but I became wide awake at once when my somewhat foolish plan seemed easy of fruition.

Annchen and Susan gladly took their dismissal when I told them I should not want them until eleven o'clock, and I lost no time in putting on a dark cloak and the least conspicuous hat I possessed.

Then, with my face all aglow with the spice of mischief that was in me, I watched my chance to slip down the marble staircase, across the tesselated hall, and out of doors, without being seen by the big footman who was supposed to be doing his duty, but who had no doubt gone to flirt with pretty Susan.

Oh, how delightful it was to be out in the cool night air, free from the blaze of jewels and electric garishness! I was not afraid of coming to grief, for there were still any amount of people both driving and walking, and a brisk constitutional was all I meant to indulge in.

But something occurred which convinced me that my schoolgirlish escapade was providentially inspired.

At the foot of Park Lane I turned to the right, and stepped briskly along, smiling at the thought of how horrified Lady Windelmore would be if she could see me now. I had almost gained the Albert Memorial when I saw, passing by a lamp across the street, the handsome, erect form of Viscount Broomville.

Almost at the same moment I brushed against two people who were so engrossed in watching his lordship that they paid no attention to a chance pedestrian, and I walked on without appearing to have seen them

Suddenly sense and speech returned to me, and I cried out "Lord Broomville, remember Rotterdam!"

But my heart was beating furiously, for the pair were no other than the birds of ill omen who had voyaged with us from Rotterdam. The woman I knew again by her cloak and by the curious hat which completely hid her face. The man I recognised by his face and figure, which could not easily be mistaken.

But why were they here? And why were they watching Viscount Broomville? Could it be that they intended to do him an injury? And was it possible that they were concerned in the previous attacks of which he had complained? If this were so, would it not be well for me to watch them in their turn, so that I might be on the spot to utter a warning?

Fired with this idea, I walked sharply on till I was sure they could not see me. Then I crossed the road and hurried townwards again, taking care never to let my face be shown by the lamps under which I had to pass.

My heart was palpitating horribly, for I feared lest some dreadful event were impending, and I was all the more frightened because I was utterly unused to being out alone after dark.

Anxiously looking ahead, I saw Viscount Broomville, by no means in a great hurry, walking leisurely in front of me. Across the way, the woman was hurrying off alone, and the other bird of ill omen was stealthily lessening the distance between himself and the Viscount.

Did the man really mean mischief, and if so, could I be in time to intercept his purpose? Anyhow, I meant to do so, even if I had to make an outcry and thus draw to myself the unwelcome attention which I was, of course, under the circumstances, anxious to avoid.

Slowly the first man went on, apparently in deep meditation. Swiftly his pursuer followed behind. And still more swiftly did I almost overtake the latter.

Even in much frequented neighbourhoods there are always some spots which, as night grows late, are fruitful in opportunities for the intending assassin, and one stretch of the roadside, which was entirely in darkness by reason of the distance of the street lamps, struck me as so specially dangerous that I quickened my pace to a run.

But so did the bird of evil omen, and as he wore some kind of noiseless footgear, there was nothing to warn the unsuspecting man ahead that he was in danger. My own shoes were too thin to make any clatter, but I was not so swift a runner as the man whom I believed to be an assassin, and I already despaired of overtaking him when I saw him draw something out of his pocket, and raise his arm ready to strike.

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For half a second I knew not what to do, for I was dumb with horror. Then sense and speech returned to me, and I shrieked out:

"Lord Broomville, remember Rotterdam!"

Instantly, as if turned on an electric pivot, his lordship faced his pursuer and threw up the arm already descending to kill him. Then he would have grappled with the fellow, but a face-to-face encounter was the last thing the latter desired, and, cleverly dodging further contact, he ran on until a turn into the next street hid him from our sight.

After giving my timely warning, I trembled so much that I only kept myself from collapsing altogether by leaning against the garden wall near which I had stopped, and when Viscount Broomville, in a few quick strides reached my side, I was trying vainly to restrain the tears which the reaction from terrible excitement had produced.

"Miss D'Alton," he said wonderingly, "you have saved my life, I am sure, and I can never thank you sufficiently! But it is amazing to see you here alone!"

"And I ought not to have been here," was my tremulous answer, "so I beg you will not say a word about this to anybody. But I'll tell you all there is to tell."

In a few minutes Lord Broomville had heard my story, at the end of which I said:

"The man is the same man I saw in Rotterdam, the night Mr. Graysworthy was murdered. He is very likely one of those who tried to take your life there, and has come over in the boat with you on purpose to secure the wealth he has perhaps heard about."

"In that case the rascal would have been disappointed, for I have nothing on me of great value to-night. In fact, I intrusted everything I could raise this morning to your father to invest in the New Barbary Land Development Company, so my money and securities are beyond the reach of thieves."

"It is a pity that that man has got off scot-free."

"Yes, but I couldn't leave you alone here while I pursued him, so must trust to better luck the next time he tries to play the assassin. And as you will be safer at home than here, we had better lose no more time."

"You will not say a word about having seen me?"

"Not a word, of course. But I shall never cease thinking of your courage and presence of mind."

Much to my relief my arrival was as unnoticed as my departure had been, for the footman was still amusing himself downstairs, and as soon as I reached my own room, I carefully put the cloak and hat where I had found them. I also removed every other trace of having been out, and then rang for my maid, although it was only half-past ten.

Susan answered my ring.

"Susan," I said, "bring me a tray with some supper on it; I am better now, and feel quite hungry. And tell Annchen that I want her."

"Please, miss," returned Susan, "Annchen hasn't come back yet. She thought she would go for a walk, as you didn't want her."

"But surely she doesn't have permission to be out till this time of night! Who told her that she might go?"

Susan wasn't able to answer my question satisfactorily. Neither did Annchen, when she presented herself half-an-hour later. But, looking at her, I was again seized by a most uncomfortable antipathy to her, for the resemblance between her and the accomplice of the bird of evil omen was disagreeably striking.

Yet, unpleasantly reminiscent as her personality was, I could hardly hope to rid myself of her presence, for she seemed to be as great a favourite with my father as she was with Aunt Flora, and, greatly to my surprise, I saw him talking very confidentially to her immediately after breakfast next morning when I went into the library to select a magazine.

"Very well, tell him that his stupid bungling has lost him five hundred pounds," I heard my father say.

Of whom was my father speaking to Annchen? And how was it that she seemed to be so much in his confidence?

(Another instalment of this entrancing series next week.)

A Young Man's Folly.

How a Scheme to Capture a Rich Bride Ended.

HANDSOME Hugh Duchesne lay swinging in a hammock under the trees that cast a wide shade over Duchesne Place.

He had been back just two days from a two years' sojourn on the Continent, and was enjoying the rest and calm to the utmost capacity of his idle, languid nature.

Under the shadows of the same tree sat his mother, a stately matron of sixty, the only human being of whom Hugh Duchesne had ever stood in fear.

"Hugh," said Mrs. Duchesne, "I have invited the Hildreths here for the summer. They will arrive very soon."

"Have you?" responded Hugh languidly, but his tone did not betray the annoyance his face expressed. He had gone abroad to escape these very Hildreths.

"Yes," continued Mrs. Duchesne. "Yes, they come to-morrow. I want you to go down to the station to meet them. Mrs. Hildreth is always so particular about having due respect shown to her, and I would not offend her for the world!"

"How many of them will there be?"

"Three; Mrs. Hildreth, her niece, Mrs. Gray—who is a young widow, and a beauty, I am told—and Carrie, who has just passed her twenty-first birthday, and has, therefore, come into possession of twenty-five thousand pounds left her by her father, you know."

"Yes, I know," assented Hugh, wearily. He had heard of that twenty-five thousand pounds every day for a year. He had been shown a portrait also of the prospective heiress, which had hastened his departure.

"I wonder," he asked, lazily, as he rocked himself lightly in the hammock, "if Miss Carrie has any more flesh on her bones than she used to have?"

"Hugh," cried his mother, "I supposed you were a gentleman. I am surprised to hear such an ill-bred remark from you. Carrie is a most estimable girl, and has good breeding and a kind heart, and——"

"And money," interrupted Hugh, "which covers a multitude of deficiencies in a woman, always."

"You will have an opportunity to determine before long," answered his mother, "whether money is not of some use after all. Duchesne Place will be under the hammer in less than two years, unless *something* is done to save it, and you and I will be beggars."

She gathered up her work, and swept away, as she finished, and Hugh, covering his eyes with his shapely hand, almost groaned aloud.

"Oh, my God, if she *knew!*" he moaned. But, mercifully, Mrs. Duchesne did not know.

Suddenly a voice broke the silence, trilling a snatch of song:

"*I love my love, I love my love,*
I love my love, because my love loves me."

This is what the voice sang. The singer came up the orchard path, and was almost within reach of the motionless figure in the hammock before she saw it.

Then she started back with a little smothered cry, and a face grown suddenly crimson. She blushed and paled so easily, did Flossie, the old gardener's young daughter.

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"You are very happy this morning, dearie," said Hugh, putting out his hand to her. "Come here and let me look at you. I have not had a chance of more than one glimpse of your face since I came home. Why, child, where has your flesh gone—you are as slender as a reed—you, who were so round and rosy. Have you been ill since I went away?"

"Oh, very ill!"

"They never wrote me of it."

"I was not here, I went away to my sister's—you remember her, she was Mrs. Tristan's governess. She married and lives in the country. I was with her a long time, resting and recruiting."

All the time Flossie's eyes had been turned away from the eyes of her listener, and the hand he held shook like a leaf in his.

"You are not strong yet, I see," he said kindly. "You must take good care of yourself, child; for you are too young to die; too young, too fair, too dear!"

Again a wave of colour swept over Flossie's sweet face. But just then a voice from the house called to her, and she hurried away.

"How changed she is—in some indefinable way," murmured Hugh, as he looked after her. "She seems so much older, somehow—poor child!"

He had known her from her childhood, and had made a pet of her long before he went away.

The next day the Hildreths came. Mrs. Hildreth, forty in years, and a thousand in Society-wisdom and experience; and with one supreme desire in her soul, which was to marry her daughter to Hugh Duchesne.

Carrie Hildreth came also, tall, thin, sallow, with pathetic eyes, that always seemed pitying her own plainness, which was rendered doubly noticeable by the richness of her toilets, and the lustre of her jewels.

Twenty-one in years, and looking thirty-five beside the splendid beauty of her cousin, Mrs. Gray.

Had it been possible to put Mrs. Gray out of the way, save by cold-blooded murder, Mrs. Hildreth would certainly have done it before she would have brought her to Duchesne Place. But she had invited her niece to spend the summer with them, before Mrs. Duchesne's invitation had been received, and she had been obliged to inform Mrs. Duchesne, therefore, of this, and to bring Mrs. Gray with her.

Lisle Gray was, indeed, a rival to be feared. She had that rare combination, blue-black eyes, golden hair, and a brilliant bloom. She had also a warm heart, that held all its stores of passion yet untouched, for she had been an old man's darling; and though she had sorrowed for her husband as for a friend and protector, it had been no more.

Something new stirred in Hugh Duchesne's heart and pulses when Lisle's cool, fair hand first touched his. Something that made him restless, and afraid to look into her eyes; and, therefore, he was all to Carrie that Mrs. Hildreth could desire.

He turned Carrie's music at the piano, and listened attentively to her beautiful voice, which was her one solitary charm. All a woman's love and power of feeling, and repressed longings were in her voice when she sang. And while Hugh Duchesne leant over her at the piano and listened she was singing her heart away; hopelessly, she knew—but, alas! she could not hold it back. It was her doom to love him, and she knew it from that hour. He was so kind to her for days, so thoughtful and attentive, and both her and her mother's heart leapt for joy.

Only Mrs. Duchesne saw the truth. Once she caught his eyes as they rested on Lisle Gray. She had never seen that look in his face before.

"Was your niece a wife long before she was a widow?" she asked carelessly of her friend that night.

"Only a year."

"How very sad!"

"No, not sad, for he was an old man and left her wealth," Mrs. Hildreth answered, and then could have bitten her own tongue off in her rage. She did not care, you see, for Mrs. Duchesne or Hugh to know that Lisle Gray was rich as well as beautiful.

"Well, not exactly wealth," she hastened to add, "but a competence—enough to dress her, and keep her in society. But she is very extravagant. It would require a fortune to support her. Luckily, she has a wealthy lover, now in India; and I am hoping, when he returns, she will marry him. But she is a sad coquette—for ever making victims to her beauty."

"Ah!" was Mrs. Duchesne's only comment. She knew her friend well, and made due allowance for her statement. And after this she looked at Lisle Gray with renewed interest.

"If she has wealth," she said mentally, "she is a far more desirable wife for Hugh than Carrie. All the Duchesnes for generations have married handsome women!"

A day later she was alone with Carrie. Mrs. Hildreth was taking her siesta; Lisle writing letters; and Hugh smoking his cigar.

"How beautiful your cousin is," she remarked. "Like a rare picture!"

"Yes," responded Carrie, with a sigh. "I sometimes think I would give all the remainder of my life to be, only for one year, as beautiful as she is."

"That is extravagant language," said Mrs. Duchesne "One cannot expect to have everything. Some have beauty, some mental gifts, some wealth, some position. Few have all."

"But Lisle has," responded Carrie. "She is bright, and good, and beautiful; and her husband added wealth when he died. She has a hundred thousand in her own right, free of incumbrances. But do not mention it. She does not like to have it known."

Strive as he would, Hugh Duchesne found himself unable to control his real emotions. He was barely courteous to Lisle, and quite attentive to Carrie. Yet Carrie was not deceived.

One night she went to her room, and threw herself on the bed, in a passion of tears.

"It is no use—no use!" she cried. "He loves her; but he is trying to hide it—

A Reduced Facsimile of Our Next Week's Cover.

"My lost wife—will she ever return?"

A Dramatic Episode from "A Fatal Fascination," which will appear next week.

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trying—oh, my God! he is trying to love me! Such a useless effort for any man!"

While she wept there, Hugh Duchesne was in the shrubbery, with Lisle Gray's hands, for the first time, clasped in his. Lisle's face was lifted wonderingly, as she listened to his impassioned words.

"I am, perhaps, mad!" he said. "I have no right to love you—only I do. But I am tied, hand and foot, more hopelessly—more horribly bound than ever man was before. And now, to have this come upon me—this passion, so mighty, that it takes hold of nerve, and soul, and brain, and will not let me rest night or day. I could almost kill myself when I think of it! I have no right to talk to you like this—to talk at all—only that these few words save me from instant insanity. Looking at you here, in the moonlight, I knew my brain would go mad if I did not speak!"

Then he turned away, and left her.

Within, a woman near the open window had sat, and heard all. It was his mother. She smiled, and said to herself:

"It is time he knew."

Outside, another woman had heard also, and had crept off in the shadows of the shrubbery, like a wounded deer.

Mrs. Duchesne tapped at Hugh's door; but no answer came. She entered. He was lying prone upon a couch, the picture of despair.

"Hugh," she said tenderly, "I have a bit of news for you which may surprise you. I would far rather have Lisle Gray for my daughter than Carrie Hildreth. Do not fear my displeasure!"

He turned and looked at her.

"Then you must have discovered that she, too, has money," he said, with a touch of scorn in his voice.

"Well, yes, she has money," answered his mother coolly; "and you love her. She will be an honour to us all, and keep up the reputation for good taste in family beauty, which the Duchesnes have always had. I hope you will not delay long. End Carrie's suspense—and make Lisle happy!"

"God help me!" he cried.

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. Only that I would bless the hand that would put a bullet through my brain!" he said, and rushed out of the room.

For a week Hugh looked like an insane man. He ate nothing, slept little, and was as pale as death.

The ladies pitied him, and petted him; and Lisle lost flesh and bloom. She loved him with all her heart; and the mystery of his words and behaviour frightened her.

At night she sat by her window, and heard the thud of his horse's hoofs, as he rode off into the darkness alone. He would ride half the night, till his weary horse could no longer keep pace with his mad thoughts; and he would come home, to toss the remainder of the night in wild dreams.

Ah, it was a wretched household there, at Duchesne Place. At last Mrs. Duchesne grew to believe that some madness had come upon her son.

One night they were all startled by the sudden appearance of the old gardener. He was pale and trembling, and could hardly gasp out his errand.

"Flossie is ill—dying," he said, "and she asks for the young master—for Mr. Hugh. Where is he?"

Hugh was summoned, and hastened away with the old gardener to the latter's little cottage, just outside the grounds.

"How strange!" said Mrs. Duchesne, "and yet not strange. Hugh was always so kind to her when she was a child. I have no doubt she feels that he can help her. Her childish faith in him was so great."

But the night went by, and Hugh did not return. Mrs. Duchesne could not sleep. In the grey dawn, Hugh came in, pale and haggard, looking years older.

"How is Flossie?" his mother asked.

"Dead!" he answered. "And I am going away for a few days. Make my excuses to the guests. Imperative business calls me."

Two days later he came back. With him came a woman, evidently a servant, and a child—a beautiful, laughing boy, a year and a half old.

Into the presence of his mother and his guests he bade them come.

"I have a confession to make before you all," he said. "I want you all to know me as I am—a poor, weak, miserable coward. You see this child. Well, it is mine—the child of my wife, who died two days ago. I married her secretly four years ago. I admired her pretty face; and was fond of her, as one is fond of a toy, and so I married her. But I dared not confess it to my mother. When I repented of the step, I rushed away, and I never knew of this child's existence, till the night before last, when its mother lay dying. Heavens! to think of all she suffered for me.

"And I killed her. She heard my mad words to another woman, a week ago, and they killed her. She felt that she was in the way of my happiness, and she lay down and died, like a wounded lamb. And when she knew she was to die, she told me of our child, and asked me to care for it. And so I have brought it home, and you have heard the whole miserable story."

"Take the child out of my sight!" cried Mrs. Duchesne, turning fiercely upon the nurse.

"Mother!" cried Hugh.

But she silenced him.

"Do you think I will ever own it, or let it bear our name?" she cried. "The miserable, low-born child of a servant. Take it away, out of my sight!"

The nurse turned to go. But a hand detained her.

"Give the child to me," said a soft voice, and Lisle Gray put out her arms, and the child laughed and leapt into them.

"I am going away to-morrow," she said, turning with dignity to Mrs. Duchesne. "I will take the child with me."

"God bless you!" cried Hugh. "But do not go. Oh, if you will do *this* for my child—will you not *stay* for me?"

She looked into his face, before them all, the child still upon her breast.

"I will come back, if you want me," she said, smiling, "but only on condition that your mother will welcome me and this helpless little one. Otherwise you must come to me."

So Lisle went. But in due time Mrs. Duchesne thought of the mortgage on Duchesne Place, and, forgetting her wrath, sent for Mrs. Gray and the child. And even Mrs. Hildreth, when she read the marriage notice, sighed a sigh of relief.

"For, thank fortune," she said, "Lisle can't spoil more of my plans."

But as for Carrie—ah, well, she hid her hurt, as only proud women can. The bravery of a strong man is great, but the bravery of some proud women is greater.

Edward Wallbrook.

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A HUMAN BIRTHDAY PRESENT.

The Tale of a Girl who Loved and Doubted.

MRS. RAYNOR, Jack, and I, were sitting in our little sitting-room, and for the hundredth time they were telling me what they knew of my life.

"You see, Birdie," said mother, as I had always called her, "it was a stormy night and Jack had been detained at business—he was junior clerk at Cotton & Co.'s then—but just as he was running up the steps about seven o'clock he met a woman hurrying down them. She brushed by without speaking, and he, when he reached the door, almost stumbled over a basket where you lay all snuggled up in warm flannels. Ah, but you were a very nice baby, my dear."

"Pity my mother hadn't thought so!" I sarcastically observed.

"Undoubtedly you would have fared better than in our humble home," said Jack grimly.

"Why, Jack, you don't think I meant that, do you, dear?" I hastily asked. "It made me feel badly to think my own flesh and blood would abandon me and trust me with strangers, that's all."

"That was seventeen years ago to-morrow night," meditated mother, unheeding our conversation.

"Yes," I chimed in, anxious to clear the cloud from Jack's forehead; "and you have always called it my birthday, and have always made the day so pleasant for me, too. Let me see," I rattled on, "you thought I must have been about a year old, and so I am eighteen to-morrow. Have you made my birthday cake, yet, mother?"

"Yes, indeed, and that reminds me I must go out and see to the icing of it to-night. No, you stay here. Hold her, Jack, for she's not to see the cake until to-morrow."

I retreated before her laughing command, and seeing how sour Jack still looked, I determined to do my best to make him behave like his own old self again. Perching myself on the arm of his chair I leant over, trying to catch his eye.

"Cross, dear?" I asked, very sweetly.

"No," he replied in a tone that said, "Yes, decidedly so; let me alone."

But I was not to be rebuffed. Slipping my arms round his neck I drew his face round towards mine.

"You're sorry you didn't send me to the Foundlings' Home, aren't you? It's enough to make anyone cross to think how he has been troubled for seventeen years just because he was so soft-hearted over a miserable little baby whose own people didn't care about keeping it. Are you sorry, Jack?"

"Are you, Birdie?"

He suddenly straightened up, a look in his dark eyes I had never noticed there before.

"What have I to be sorry for?" I asked. "Was I not thrown into the hands of the dearest, kindest mother and brother a girl ever had?"

"Yes, dear—that is, we've always meant kindness; but still I am not your brother."

"I know it, but I love you just as well," I began, but somehow under the steady look of Jack's beautiful eyes I could not go on with my usual protestations of affection, as I had always been in the habit of doing, and I drew my arm away from about his neck.

"But I don't want you to, Birdie," he said slowly; and then he went on eagerly, "my darling, I want you to love me just as well as I do you. I want you for my very own, for my wife, Birdie."

Clasping me close in his strong arms he told me how happy I could make him by saying that I loved him. And so strongly did he argue his case that some way I was completely won over to his way of thinking, and before the birthday cake was iced Jack and I were engaged.

"I've accepted Jack as a birthday gift," I whispered to mother as I ran out.

A radiant look of surprised joy fairly illumined her dear old face as she comprehended the meaning of my remark.

"It has been the wish of my life," she whispered, kissing me softly. "Be ready for other birthday gifts to-morrow," she called after me.

"Oh, happy birthday!" I whispered when to-morrow dawned, and I, awaking,

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remembered my promise to Jack. "What better gift could I have asked than the gift of dear Jack's love?"

Several little tokens were at my breakfast plate; some very expensive, too, for, since Jack's pictures had begun to sell so well and orders poured in faster than he could execute them, he had begun to be quite extravagant.

He had gratified an oft-expressed wish of mine by having a little cameo earring, found in the basket in which they first found me, set in a ring for me for one of my birthday presents. It was an exquisite, clear-cut cameo, and it had a decidedly unique setting; so I had always indulged in the hope that some time, perhaps, I might learn through it who my parents were.

It had evidently dropped into the basket by mistake, for there was nothing else about me to identify me. There were none of the proverbial strawberry marks or moles so often found on lost children in stories, so I had only the cameo to connect me with the unknown past.

So I slipped it on my finger and when Jack told me to keep it for an engagement ring until he could procure another it became doubly dear to me.

By-and-by, as soon as breakfast was finished, much to my surprise and disappointment, my lover went up to his studio and remained invisible for two hours.

"He might have spent my birthday with me, anyhow," I pouted as I plodded upstairs feeling "blue" enough.

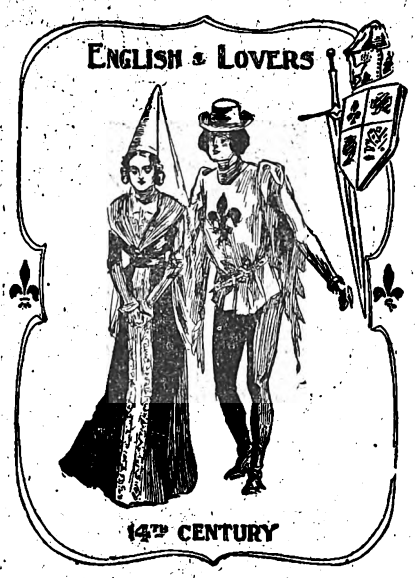
I knocked at the door of his studio.

"Not just now, dear; I'm busy," came in Jack's voice from beyond the door.

Angry and indignant, for he had allowed me to spend my mornings there for two months past, I silently went to my own room.

I was angrier still when ten minutes later his door opened to admit Miles Griffith, a fellow from the Artists' Club. Then I was ready to cry with vexation. They had always petted and spoilt me, mother and Jack, and let me have my own way, so that I could not bear even this little neglect gracefully.

Besides, we were just engaged, and Jack, it seemed to me, wasn't acting just as he ought to under the circumstances.



At last I was determined to be mean enough to listen and hear if I could what they were talking about so earnestly in the studio.

Me, I found out at once, for Jack had just spoken my name as I guiltily put my ear to the keyhole. A disgraceful thing to do, I admit, but as I mean this to be a faithful account of my birthday, and as I really did listen at the keyhole, I record it.

"I have made a great mistake," said Jack, sighing heavily.

I couldn't distinguish Mr. Griffith's reply, but, hushing my breath, heard Jack say:

"It has always been my mother's wish. I did it more to please her, I suppose. She loves Birdie dearly, and——"

With a dry sob I fell forward on the rug. I could not have stirred then had they opened the door and seen me there.

"He has found out already that he has made a mistake, has he?" I thought bitterly, when my brain stopped whirling so I could think. It was only to please his mother that he asked me to become his wife. And to think he should reveal his disappointment to that horrid old Griffith first! Oh, it was too humiliating!

I resolved to release him at once, but again I listened, having a dim hope, I suppose, that perhaps my ears had deceived me.

"It suits my mother——" began Jack.

"That's not the thing," interrupted Griffith. "You never would be suited. She lacks expression and——"

"Yes, I know—naturalness; I know the faults—for I'm better acquainted with Birdie than you are, Griffith."

"To be sure," assented Griffith. "Mouth too large; eyes very vacant, I've noticed. I advise you to give it up."

"I'll take your advice," exclaimed Jack emphatically.

Then I rushed to my room.

So through Griffith's advice, which Jack seemed so ready to take, my brief little romance was to be shattered. Well, I would never stay and let him see my heart break, too; for I felt sure I never could live through this trouble, so dear had Jack in the *rôle* of lover become to me in a few short hours.

So, somehow—now it all seems like a vague dream to me—I found myself a few hours later wandering aimlessly down a strange street, not knowing or caring where my steps tended. Some workmen obstructed the pavement and I was obliged to cross the street. I remember stepping down and advancing a few steps, of hearing hoarse shouts of warning, feeling a sudden shock, and then all was blank.

When I returned to consciousness I was in a strange room; everything was strange to me.

"Where am I?" I asked, although I could see no one. "What has happened?"

"You are with friends," said a low, soft voice near me.

Turning my eyes they fell on a sweet-faced lady, not yet old, although her hair was nearly white, sitting near me.

"How came I here?" I demanded in a weak, startled voice.

After a brief consultation with a woman, evidently the nurse, the lady decided to explain the situation.

"You are weak, but I trust to your good sense to remain calm while I tell you why you are here. About a month ago you were crossing the street and my husband I and accidently ran against and severely injured you. There was nothing about you to identify you, so we brought you home."

"And this was a month ago. Has no one been here? Did you advertise?"

"No," replied the lady. "It was reported in the papers, I believe, though there was not very much about it, but I never thought of advertising for your friends. I supposed they would go to the station, and then be directed here, if you had any in the city."

"I have none," I said bitterly. "I was only a foundling, living upon charity all my life."

I was reckless. I did not think how unnecessary it was to speak of my own history to a stranger. A whole month I had lain there and no one had called. And my pale, thin hands showed how near to death's door I had been.

As I lay looking at my wasted fingers I noticed that my ring was gone. Hastily I inquired where it was.

My new-found acquaintance blushed, and then said:

"Will you allow my husband to talk with you a few moments? He has your cameo."

In a few moments a tall, handsome gentleman accompanied her into the room.

"Years ago," he began, after apologising for being the cause of my illness, and congratulating me on my recovery, "I had a pair of cameos carved in this city. They were unlike anything ever seen here. I had them set in a pair of earrings for my wife. One night our house was robbed by a trusted servant; the cameos were taken with other valuables."

"Was anything else taken?" I asked, sitting upright, forgetting for the moment my weak state.

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The gentleman strove to control his emotion, but his wife was silently weeping near the window.

"Yes, our only child," he replied brokenly. "Now, will you tell me how you came by this cameo, for it is the same I to-day took it to the person who carved it for me so long ago and he recognised it at once, although it has been reset."

"Was it seventeen years ago that your child was stolen?" I asked eagerly.

"Yes. What do you know of it?" he questioned hoarsely.

"I know that I am your child!"

After I had told the story so often repeated to me by Mrs. Raynor they were perfectly satisfied that I belonged to them, and their joy beggars description.

Their story was that my father had given his wife a necklace of diamonds, and seeing how pleased her baby was with it she had shaken the stones before its eyes, and at last, in a spirit of fun, clasped it about the child's neck. But she did not understand the fastening, and as her husband was away from home and she could not get the short chain over the child's head, she was obliged to let the nurse put the infant to sleep with the glittering ornament about its neck. But the temptation proved too great for the nurse, so she had taken baby quietly out to a neighbouring jeweller's and had the necklace unfastened.

The theory we, my new-found parents and I, formed was, that becoming frightened at her own exploit, and not daring to try to replace the baby—I never can realise that that baby was myself—lest she be discovered, she concluded to abandon it entirely.

"Now, where do these people live who have cared so kindly for you? I must see them," said my mother.

Reluctantly I gave the address. Jack came straight to me after my mother told her errand, and he looked so old and worn and haggard that for a moment I was lost in pity for him.

Then I remembered the indelicate remarks he had made to Miles Griffith, and in trying to be frigidly cool I only succeeded in crying weakly,

"Oh, Jack, Jack!" I sobbed, unable to be anything but my own impetuous self; "why did you teach me to love you only to tire of me so soon?"

"Tire! How? What do you mean, dear?" he asked, taking my hands anxiously as if he feared I were not quite rational.

Then as I grew calmer I had to confess how I had descended to the contemptible business of eavesdropping and what I had heard.

"It was my birthday, Jack. Don't you remember you had Griffith up in the studio? And you told him you had made a great mistake in engaging yourself to me, and—and he advised you to give it up, and you said you'd follow his advice."

For three minutes Jack stared at me, and then he, with difficulty, repressing an inclination to laugh, said:

"My darling, how could you believe it? Now listen. As you know, my forte is landscapes. Well, I thought I'd make one more trial at portraits, so, while lately I have been entertaining you and mother so politely in the studio, I was slyly taking 'sittings.' You know your birthday, or the day we celebrate as yours, and mother's fall on the same day; so she had often expressed a wish to have your portrait painted, and thinking that you would like hers, I painted your counterfeits as best I could, and then before I showed them I sent for Griffith, the fairest critic in the club. He told me candidly that as a portrait painter I was a dead failure, and advised me to allow never the public to see my attempts. The criticisms you heard were of your picture, not you. Are you satisfied?"

"Perfectly," I answered, feeling as if now I could get well and strong at once. "But my poor birthday was all spoilt," I sighed.

"To-day is your birthday, my dear," interrupted my new mother brightly, entering the room with Mrs. Raynor, "and if the other was spoilt ask what you will and you may have it."

"I'll take Jack," I said gaily.

And so I did, "for better or for worse," a year from my eighteenth birthday

Muriel Greaves.

Your Editor Chats.

I GATHER that the new series, "Decoyed!" is very popular with my readers. At any rate, I am led to believe this by the unanimous verdict of all those who have written to me concerning it. I feel sure that as the revelations continue the interest aroused in them will become greater and greater. Our serial, "Dupes of Destiny," too, is fairly in the running as one of the best we have ever published, and just at the present time the story is at a very absorbing stage.

ON page 107 appears a reduced facsimile of the picture in colours that will appear on the cover of next week's *Short Stories*. Our striking cover pictures every week bring fresh readers to this paper, and I have been the recipient of many congratulations on account of them. The story which will contain the incident depicted on next week's cover will be entitled "A Fatal Fascination," and will be written by Mr. Walter J. Mowbray, whose name is familiar to you all. This tale will be a splendid one, and you will miss a treat if you do not read it.

LET me say one word in advance about our Valentine Number. This special number will take the place of the ordinary issue of February 13th, and will be an exceptionally brilliant one. It will be full of valentine stories and illustrations, and the cover picture will be a seasonable one. Three weeks from now it will be ready; next week I will tell you something more about it.

IN our Christmas Number the fifth problem appeared. "The Duty of Roger Forbes" explained how that gentleman, intending to marry on a small allowance, was suddenly confronted with the hindrance, owing to the misdemeanour of his father, of being morally bound to support his mother and invalid sister. What had he better do? Marry or not marry? This question was, in my opinion, most satisfactorily answered by Mr. Thomas Pine, 19, Cardigan Road, Kingston, Portsmouth. I have much pleasure, therefore, in awarding that gentleman the guinea I offered.

I am busily now deciding the winners in the Statue and Running Riddles Competitions, announced in the Christmas Number. As soon as I possibly can I will award the prizes.

Before I close my chat to you, I wish to make a few remarks on a subject which will interest all of you, whether you are men or women, young or old, poor or wealthy, a celebrity or otherwise. I have in store for you a very great surprise, and, I may also say, quite an unexpected surprise in every way. It is not yet time, however, for me to divulge much, but I have spoken this little foreword of advice so that you may be on the look-out for announcements of this novel scheme I have in view in forthcoming numbers of *Short Stories*. For your own sake, take my hint and keep your eyes open for further particulars of what will be an immense advantage to everyone concerned. It is a scheme that is quite novel, totally dissimilar to any idea ever published.

Your Editor.

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Miss Britman's Last Lesson.

The Tale of a Lover who Returned.

"One, two, three, four! One, two, three, four!"

It was dreary and monotonous enough sitting all day in that cheerless room beside the tuneless piano, giving lessons to dull children, and Margaret Britman heaved a sigh of relief after the last pupil departed.

After sitting still for a few minutes, just to realise that her work for the day was over, she stood up, closed the piano, put away the ragged music, and busied herself tidying the room. It was little anyone could do to make the gloomy apartment bright or cheery, but what little lay in her power Miss Britman did before the coming home of Dot.

The round table was pulled in front of the fire, and the frugal tea set out, with a good deal of show and very little substance. Miss Britman knew how to make the most of the solitary muffin Dot enjoyed so, and the tiny pot of ham and chicken paste stood like an island in an ocean of china plate. The majolica teapot was hidden under a crewel cosy, embroidered in the highest of art patterns; the spoons and forks were silver in the last stage of attenuation, and the cloth, though white and fine, was darned out of all identity of the original pattern.

The few bright little water-colours on the walls only made the darkness of the drab paper more visible, and no arrangement of the scanty furniture could disguise the fact that the walls were hopelessly crooked; still, in spite of disadvantages, there was something about the little room that struck one on first entering. Perhaps it was the air of refinement struggling with the aggressive poverty; perhaps it was the pale, patient face of Margaret Britman, with its frame of prematurely grey hair and meek, sorrowful eyes.

Very slowly she moved about, for she was weary, and her thoughts were heavy, for she was anxious about Dot. She had been out as a daily governess for a whole year, but her salary was small and her wants seemed to increase out of all proportion to her earnings. Boots and gloves wore out, hats and gowns got shabby in a frightfully short time; and Miss Britman felt that she could not relax a single effort, or spare herself a single monotonous lesson, for Dot's wants had to be supplied somehow.

Just at five o'clock she came in.

"Take off your things, dear, and have some hot tea. Here are your slippers, all nice and warm."

"Thanks, dearie. Oh, it is nice to get indoors, if you could only imagine what it's like outside, auntie. Streets three inches deep in liquid glue, fog thick enough to drive a nail in and hang your cloak on——"

"Dot!" Miss Britman interposed mildly.

"Fact, auntie. I was really bewildered at Regent Circus, and had to throw myself on the mercy of a policeman; then an obsequious young man followed me all down Oxford Street, and kept bobbing his umbrella against mine."

"Oh, my darling, that you should have to endure such things!" Miss Britman cried, and her slender white fingers were interlocked nervously. "Oh, that I could spare you this, Dorothy."

"Never mind, auntie dear; it doesn't worry me in the least. Besides, I think—but wait a minute till I put away the tea-things and turn down the gas." And having done so, Dot sat down on the rug and laid her head on her aunt's lap. "I've got something to tell you, auntie."

"Yes, darling," Miss Britman said, after waiting a few minutes, for Dot was in no great hurry to begin.

"Aunt Margaret, did it never strike you that some day or other I might have a lover?" she said slowly.

"Dorothy! Dorothy! I never thought of that!" Miss Britman cried. "Darling, I can't give you to anyone; you are all I have in the world."

"Let me tell you all about it first, auntie," Dot said gravely. "It came about in the simplest way—so simple that I scarcely know how or when it began. It seems as if Mr. Ferris always came into the schoolroom, but I never thought much about it till to-day, when he looked at me so strangely, and held my hand ever such a time; then he said, 'Miss Derwent, I want to have a little serious conversation with you. May I call on you at home?' Of course, I said I should be very pleased, only I was never there in the daytime. 'Then may I call in your absence,' he said, 'and speak to your father?' I told him I had no one but you, auntie, and he seemed surprised for a moment; then he said he'd call on you to-morrow. I suppose he wants to ask your permission to marry me. What else can he want, auntie?"

"What, indeed!" Miss Britman said, a little absently. "Tell me a little about this Mr. Ferris, darling."

"There's not much to tell, auntie. He's Mrs. Carnforth's brother, and has been in India ever so long—twenty years, I believe. He's very rich and very kind, and—that's all, auntie. Just think of my marrying a rich man," Dot continued reflectively, "and having servants, carriages, lovely dresses—everything! It seems just like a fairy-tale!"

"But, Dot," Miss Britman said, after a long silence, "my dear little one, do you love this Mr. Ferris?"

"Love him, auntie? I don't know! I haven't thought much about that yet; but if he's nice and kind and rich, don't you think we might be very happy? I do so want you to have lots of pretty things—soft, dull satin, a sealskin mantle, real lace! Oh, dear! It would be nice. You'd look so sweet in a sealskin coat, auntie!"

Miss Britman sighed gently. The time had long gone by when dress had any charms for her, if, indeed, it ever had, and Dot's visions only made her more sad.

Clearly the child was slipping away from her. For eighteen years she had cherished her, and now the first person who passed by and saw her fresh, fair, young beauty, might bear her away. It was all just and natural—palpably and practically for Dot's good—still, it was bitterly hard; and Miss Britman sat by the dying fire thinking it all over, and weeping in her unobtrusive way, long after the child had laid her sunny head on her pillow and fallen asleep.

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Far away into the past Miss Britman's thoughts wandered to a hushed and darkened chamber, where she bent down to catch the last faint, fluttering accents of one who was lingering on the threshold of eternity.

"My child, Maggie—my poor baby—my almost as helpless husband—you will not forsake them? Promise me, Maggie, that you will take care of them?"

And Margaret Britman kissed her dying sister's face and promised. All the remembrance of the dreary, dreadful days that followed rushed upon her—Dot, a helpless infant, her father, stricken with blindness, both depending on Maggie.

Then in the midst of it all came a still greater trial.

The gentleman Margaret was engaged to was offered a lucrative appointment in India, and he wished her to go with him. They had been engaged for three years, and now there was nothing further to wait for.

Here was a divided duty. Margaret loved the man she had promised to marry, but how could she forsake the helpless baby, and its equally helpless father? How could she keep her promise to her dead sister if she went to India?

Her lover left her in anger.

"A divided love such as hers was not worth having," he said.

"But they are so helpless," she pleaded, "only let me stay with them a little while."

"You may stay with them for ever for me," was the angry reply, and the next day came a little packet of letters and a lock of golden hair, and Margaret Britman's romance was hidden out of sight for ever.

A few years, and Robert Derwent died, leaving nothing but difficulties behind him. Miss Britman took a lodging in a distant part of the city, and toiled for the child for long, weary years, late and early, through trials that would have overwhelmed a less resolute and devoted woman; she toiled on to give her niece a good education, and enable her to earn her own bread when she should be called away.

"Can you—will you forgive me?" asked Philip beseechingly.

And now, here was someone stepping in—Philip Ferris returned from India—Philip Ferris who had said farewell to her in anger eighteen years before—the one love and lover of her life was coming to see her next day to ask for the child—the motherless baby who had so unwittingly separated them eighteen years before. It certainly was passing strange.

The next day was grey and gloomy, fog overhead, damp underfoot, cold everywhere, but Dot was in high spirits, in spite of the atmosphere.

"I dare say Mr. Ferris will be shocked at seeing what a hideous house and street we live in, auntie. I can imagine him saying, 'What a distinctly dreadful place!' In truth, I sha'n't be sorry to leave Berry Street. Now, good-bye, dear. Be very gracious to Mr. Ferris; and, oh, auntie darling! I do hope you'll like him, because, you know, we've got to live with him, perhaps."

"Dot, my love, do you really think that you like this gentleman well enough to marry him? He's old enough to be your father."

"So he is, auntie dear; but that doesn't matter much if he's nice and kind and ever so rich—and he is."

Nice and kind, and ever so rich. That was Dot's idea of a husband, and her aunt felt sad and sorry, and in some way disappointed; she did not know where the child had got such ideas. And then came the awful thought of losing her, for she remembered what Mr. Ferris had said about a divided love. She would have but a small place in Dot's new home and new life.

Never did a day seem so long to Miss Britman. She had put on her best black dress in the morning, and taken a little extra care with the arrangement of her still abundant hair; that was all the external preparation she had made for the visit, but her heart throbbed wildly at every ring of the bell or step on the carpetless stairs. But the morning passed—three, four o'clock, and she breathed more freely; perhaps he wouldn't come that day, perhaps he wouldn't come at all.

So she went on more patiently with her pupil, a dull, tiresome child.

"One, two, three, four!" she repeated over and over again. She did not hear the step on the stairs, nor a gentle tap at the door, did not observe it open, and when she looked up Philip Ferris stood beside her. For a moment her brain reeled, and she had to hold on to the back of the chair to steady herself; then she held out her hand in welcome.

"You may go now, my dear, and I'll give you the remainder of your lesson to-morrow," she said gently, and the child wriggled off the stool and departed joyfully.

"Margaret!" That was all he said when they were alone, with one hand holding one of hers, and the other on her shoulder: "Margaret!"

"You have come to speak to me about—about Dorothy," she faltered, feeling all the colour forsake her face.

"No; I have come to speak about myself and you—to ask you to forgive me, if you can; to ask you to let me make atonement for my cruelty and folly; to ask you if it is too late for us to be happy even now. Dear, I only learnt yesterday how true and loyal you had been; I fancied I alone was faithful. Can you, will you forgive me, Margaret?"

"There is nothing to forgive, Philip."

"Then it is not too late. We may be happy still."

"But Dorothy?" Miss Britman said faintly.

"Dorothy knows. It was her resemblance to you that first attracted me. But the child must not come between us and our happiness a second time, and we will both take care of her. She will like me better as an uncle than as a husband."

"But, Philip, she thought——"

"Yes, dear, but now she understands. Margaret, you belong to me, and you must be obedient, so prepare to leave Berry Street to-morrow."

"But my pupils, Philip?"

"Dear, I will arrange all that. My brave, patient Maggie, you have given your last lesson."

Hal Smith.

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The Curious Case of a Man who Lost his Memory.

DID I imagine it, or was I awakened by a kiss, which fell upon my forehead with the gentleness of a snowflake?

There was an interval of several moments before I could open my eyes, and when I did so there was not a soul except myself in the room.

For some time I lay in a languid state, my brain too indolent even to trouble itself about the person who had kissed me—if it were a kiss. But at length I was aroused by the opening of a door, and a moment after a woman stood by my bedside, bending over me with a look of kind solicitude. She was young, and there was an indescribable charm about her presence. Yet, even in my indolent state, I realised that she was not handsome.

"You are better?" she said in a sweet, firm voice.

The hand which she placed upon my forehead as she spoke was firm in its touch also, and I instinctively realised that the owner possessed a resolute nature in spite of her gentleness.

"I—I have been very ill?" I inquired, in a voice which somehow sounded to me as strange and new as her own.

"You had a fall and were injured," she said, adding with an eager look which I did not then understand, "but I suppose you do not yet recall your adventure?"

"I do not remember," was my indifferent response.

"I would not try. It doesn't matter at all. Here is something you were to drink when you awoke to consciousness—if you did awake. Then you were to go to sleep directly."

With her strong, experienced arm my unknown friend raised my head to drink the cordial, which I accepted submissively. Afterwards I slept, I know not how long, and upon again awakening, my plain-faced, sweet-voiced nurse was still at my bedside. Her hand again rested upon my head while she spoke in a quiet, reassuring voice:

"The doctor says you'll soon be about again, you are so much better. He is here, and wishes to speak with you."

She paused, and a short, grey-bearded man, whose presence had not before been noticed, advanced, and I felt the power of his gaze upon me. I say power because he was unquestionably a man of great magnetic force, aside from his skill in medical practice.

"Dr. Barlow," said my nurse, and then, in her quiet way, she withdrew.

"You will be all right again in a few days, sir," were his first words, spoken with an assurance that quieted the slight flutter in my mind which threatened to confuse me.

"I am glad to hear you say so," I replied.

"You are aware that your illness was the result of an injury?" he continued, speaking in a careless tone.

I contracted my brows in a sudden spasm of thought. A strange, wild flood of questions rushed in upon my mind, and I believe the doctor's cool hand laid upon my head at that moment saved me from going mad.

"You cannot recall the event, so do not try," he quietly said.

I started up in bed, but he forced me to lie down again.

"You may get up and dress to-morrow," he added calmly.

"Tell me how it happened!" I exclaimed, the impulse to know the cause of my illness growing strong upon me.

"You were found upon the road and were picked up for dead. They brought you here and I attended you."

Again I started up in bed, and this time the doctor restrained me only partially. He regarded me with deep interest, but betrayed not the slightest sign of anxiety, although he must have been intensely anxious all the while. The flood of queries which, half incoherently, had already shaped themselves in my mind, now rushed to my lips.

"How came I in the road?" I demanded.

And before Dr. Barlow could have uttered a reply, had he tried to do so, I rapidly continued:

"And when was I found there? And whose house is this? And my pleasant-voiced nurse—who is she? Doctor, tell me—who am I?"

My brain was in a whirl as I uttered these queries, and I shivered as with the ague. But Dr. Barlow listened as impassively as though it all were the most commonplace matter in the world. His persistent calmness in a measure communicated itself to me, and his answers were given with such a reassuring voice and air that the shock to me was greatly lessened. There are few men who could have conveyed the truth to one in my excited state with such tact and gentleness.

"You met with your misfortune some three weeks ago," he said in his even tones. "This is my house, and the young nurse is my daughter. It is nothing so very unusual for a person, under some violent shock, either physical or mental, to lose for a time all recollection of past events, and even of one's own identity. You will recover in time. There was nothing upon your person to give us a clue to your name, but for the sake of convenience, since we must call you something, my daughter has called you Paul Conway. If you do not fancy the name, you may adopt any other, until your memory recalls the one to which you are entitled."

Somehow his candid statement of the situation, instead of exciting, calmed me. I lay back upon my pillow, and, overcome by the exertion, I soon fell asleep.

My physical recovery from that day was rapid. Within a week I was dressed and able to walk about my room; in another week I was strolling about the doctor's tasteful grounds, listening to the songs of birds, enjoying the luxury of the fresh verdure and June sunshine. Miss Barlow was with me frequently, and I was presently puzzled by a conviction that she watched my movements, studied my countenance, and even appeared to wish to keep me under constant surveillance. And yet she was otherwise so courteous, and in all ways so gentle and unselfish in her intentions, that as the weeks passed the sweet episode of love crept into the new life I was living. For as yet the past remained as a sealed book to me.

One day, as we were strolling down the garden path, I abruptly said to her:

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"I think I am quite well and strong now, and it is time for me to go to work at something." For it had more than once occurred to me that, with other things, I had forgotten the means of gaining a livelihood which I must once have possessed.

"Perhaps you do not need to work, if you could only remember who you are. Perhaps you are a man of wealth?" said Miss Barlow, with one of her smiles which always made her plain face so beautiful.

"It will do me little good if I am, since I do not know it," I replied.

"You must remain here until you recover your memory," she said, so decisively that I looked at her in surprise.

"You wish me to stay as a charity patient?"

"No, no. You will pay my father some time. You are under under his care, you know, and he is ambitious to effect a cure."

As she said this she laid one hand in an eager, earnest way upon my arm. I felt that, looking into my eyes as she did then, she could not fail to read my heart, and in impassioned words I essayed to tell her of the deep, pure love which I felt for her. But she checked me in a hurried, anxious manner.

"No, no!" she cried.

I could see that her face had grown deathly pale, and she glanced, involuntarily as it seemed, at a ring which I had more than once seen upon her finger. I was convinced then of what I had painfully suspected before—it was an engagement ring.

"You have an attachment already?" I exclaimed, unable to keep the pain of disappointment from showing itself in my face and voice.

"Do not ask me now," was her reply, with a glance that I could not understand, while it thrilled me strangely. "Wait until you are well," she continued falteringly, "and I will tell you all. How do I know that you are free to love me? You may have a wife already. Even you do not know."

She smiled again and hurried into the house, leaving me alone to ponder upon the strangeness of my situation. As I stood under the shadow of a high-growing hedge I heard the sound of voices upon the other side.

"All I want is a good look at him," said one in a subdued voice. "I can spot him easily enough. You say this invalid guest of the Barlows is of dark complexion, and not over tall?"

"That is his description," declared the other.

"And that he came here about ten weeks ago?"

"Yes."

"You have seen him strolling about the grounds, you say? And did you notice one hand—his left one, I believe?"

"It has a red scar across the back of it. Yes; I noticed that."

"Good! Then there remains scarce the shadow of a doubt but he is the man. But I must make haste slowly. We detectives have to keep our eyes open. It is possible the Barlow girl——"

He paused abruptly, and the two men walked away, leaving me to conjecture, with my mind in a tumult, their meaning. For a long time I remained there, thinking—thinking, and gazing at my left hand with the scar across the back of it. Oh, the missing link in my memory! I began to suspect that it contained a horrible episode that would unseat my reason if it were ever recalled.

I could not quite make up my mind to tell Alice Barlow that night of the conversation which I had overheard.

Retiring early to my room, I was overcome by a sense of drowsiness, and fell asleep in an easy chair. I was awakened by a hurried knocking at my door. Flinging it open, I was confronted by Alice, who seemed clad for a journey, while her countenance was the picture of womanly strength and resolution.

"Come, Mr. Conway," she said, in low, imperative voice. "My father is at the door with his carriage, and wishes us to go with him. Hasten, if you would spare me calamity!"

"Whither are we to go?" I asked, while I obediently donned a light overcoat and hat and followed her down the stairs.

"To the railway station," was her answer.

"And thence?"

"I do not know."

I was silent until we were all three in the carriage and speeding along the quiet road.

"I suppose this is an attempt to preserve me from falling into the hands of the detectives?" I then asked.

"Then you know?" the doctor quickly asked, looking intently into my face.

"I know, from something overheard, that I am under surveillance, but why I have not the remotest idea."

"Your memory is still silent, then?"

"Yes."

"Well, well, I cannot enlighten you, except that the officers are after a man of your description. They will arrest you if you stay here, and they refuse to accept even my assurance that you have no recollection of the past. Your only course is in flight."

"But it does not devolve upon you to become a partner in my misfortunes," I remonstrated.

"You are my patient, and I shall not allow anything to happen to deprive me of the glory of curing you, if I can help it," he decisively said.

Nothing would be gained by giving in detail the particulars of our rapid flight. Dr. Barlow had shrewdly bought tickets to to a point where he had no intention or making our destination, and here he obtained others for a secluded Continental town.

Of that journey I have now only a vague recollection, for before it had ended I was again ill, and very ill. The past weeks had been fraught with a constant struggle on my part to recall past events—a struggle the intensity of which even I did not realise. And now the discovery that I was wanted for a crime I was not able to withstand. For weeks I was ill with brain fever.

* * * * *

Again in languor and weakness I awoke to a sense of my surroundings. Again Alice Barlow, calm, gentle, faithful, attended my slightest wants. What passed in my thoughts during succeeding days and weeks would fill a volume if I were to write it out. We talked of many things in a light, placid vein. Dr. Barlow told me quaint stories, and we all laughed at them, but my strength came back very slowly.

One evening I fell into a half doze, from which I was awakened by someone coming softly into my room. I knew it was Alice, and did not open my eyes, until—softly as a snowflake again—a kiss fell upon my forehead. Then I looked up into the dearest of faces bending over me, and in a moment held one of her hands in mine—the one that wore the ring. Did I say she was plain looking? Ah, she was positively beautiful then!

"May I remove that, Alice?" I asked, touching the ring.

"No, no!" she quickly cried.

"Then you still love the one that placed it there?"

She was silent, but her face answered so plainly that it was strange that I could remain so calm.

"You promised to tell me about it some day," I persisted.

"When you were well," she answered.

As she spoke her eyes met mine, and for one lingering moment she gazed, and then this strong, placid young woman was sobbing joyfully in my arms.

For days the memory of my past life had been coming back to me, and I remembered the occurrence which had caused the paralysing shock to my brain, and ended in my becoming a fugitive from the authorities. I had an enemy who, in a moment of frenzy, attacked me, and partly in self-defence and partly by inadvertence, I had taken his life. There were no witnesses, but circumstances would have convicted me of a wilful crime. In my heart, and before God, I was blameless.

"And you believed me innocent from the first?" I asked, when I had told Alice all the details.

"Yes. But I should have clung to you the same had you been guilty."

For Alice and I were betrothed before the cloud came upon my memory.

It was I who gave her the ring.

H. Kennedy.

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Easily Explained.

HE: "I'm surprised that your father gave his consent." She: "Oh, he doesn't know you as well as I do."

A Difficult Query.

MR. B. (during the quarrel): "Well, if you want to know it, I married you for your money." Mrs. B.: "I wish I could tell as easily what I married you for."

Two at a Game.

HE (who prides himself on his bluntness): "I say, Miss Newton, let's get married." Miss Newton: "Oh, all right. I'm engaged to Mr. Goodwin. Who'll you marry?"

An Inducement to Marriage.

FRIEND: "You received a good many presents, didn't you?" Bride: "Yes, and just think how nice—most of them are from married friends, and we won't have to give them any in return."

Too Broad a Hint.

"HERE'S a story of a couple who married to win a bet," she said. "I'm not a betting man," he returned hastily. Soon after he took his leave, and he didn't really breathe freely until he was three streets away.

A Cooking Secret.

MR. ECONOMIE: "Did you write to that man who advertises to show people how to make puddings without milk, and have them richer?" Mrs. Economie: "Yes, and sent him a shilling." "What did he reply?" "Use cream."

A Proposed Change of Name.

SUITOR (to German governess): "Now, Miss Baum-wollerstein-er—Miss Woller-baum-erstein—confound it! Since I shall never be able to pronounce your name, will you put me out of my misery, and take mine—plain Jones?"

The Dear Friends.

MAUD: "If that young Spoonamore had been coming to see me as persistently as he's been coming to see you, I'd have made him declare himself long before this time." Irene: "Yes, dear. I presume that's the reason why he never went to see you."

A Young Bargain Hunter.

MR. DE FLIRTE: "So you've been hiding behind the screen, and have seen me kiss your sister, Tommy? Well, I've given you a shilling not to tell, you know." Tommy: "Yes, but I want two shillings. I saw you kiss my other sister when I was hiding behind the shrubs in the conservatory."

A Perversion of the Truth.

"YES," said Mrs. Catchem; "those are my daughters over there on the sofa. They have half a million between them." It was not until they were married to those daughters that the young men who overheard the remark found out that Mrs. Catchem referred to the rich old gentleman who sat on the sofa between the girls. Mrs. Catchem couldn't tell a fib, but she knew how to speak the truth advantageously

A Recipe to Avoid Marriage.

"How is it you have kept from marrying, being such a ladies' man?" Ned: "By never being in love with fewer than three girls at once."

A Matter of Comparison.

HE: "Are you happy now that you are married?" She: "Comparatively." He: "Compared with whom?" She: "Compared with my husband."

A Young Married Couple.

"WHY, Charles, if I didn't actually see you yawn just now." "Well, dearest, you know that we are now one, and I never can keep awake when I'm alone."

A Worse Danger.

SHE: "Because I cannot marry you, do not be disheartened. You must face the world bravely." He: "It isn't a question of the world—I've got to face my creditors."

Pointed.

HE: "See the ring round the moon?" She: "Yes." After a moment's silence: "George, can you tell me what is the difference between the moon and my finger?"

The Reason Why.

MRS. KINDLER (reflectively): "I wonder why a man never pays his wife any compliments after they are married?" Kindler (briskly): "He does better, my dear—he pays her bills."

That's So.

PAPA: "I think nineteen is altogether too early for a girl to marry. Don't you?" Mamma: "Well, yes; but I remember the time when I didn't, and I remember the time when you didn't."

She was Right.

MABEL: "Did you hear that Bessie Willis was married yesterday to Tom Errol?" Maud: "Really? I thought she would be the last person to marry him." Mabel: "Well, she was, wasn't she?"

A Red Letter Day.

SHE: "Do you remember, Frank, the night you proposed to me I hung my head and said nothing?" He: "Do I remember it? Well I should rather think I did. It was the last time I saw you act so."

At a Dance.

DANCER (wandering vaguely with lady in search of a vacancy for a couple in the lancers, addressing lady friend): "Are you made up?" "Well, really, Mr. Legley, your question is extremely personal!"

Hastened Footsteps.

"WHAT are you doing there, Jennie?" shouted her father. "I'm just saying good-night to George." "Well, as it takes you so long I will say it for you. Good-night, George." George went so quickly that he forgot to reply.

Just Like a Woman.

IDA: "Walter has broken the engagement between him and Della." May: "Well, I suppose she is still grateful for the boxes of chocolate he used to bring her every Sunday?" Ida: "Quite the contrary. She says he ruined her teeth."

Conceited Hubby!

SHE (after marriage): "You told me that I was your first love, but I have found a whole trunkful of letters from all sorts of girls, just bursting with tenderness." He: "I—I said you were the first I ever loved. I didn't say you were the only one who ever loved me."

Wanted Further Particulars.

MR. SAMPSON (passionately): "I love you devotedly, Miss Chumley, but my pecuniary affairs have prevented my making a declaration until now. But I have put enough away now to feel justified in asking you to become my wife." Miss Chumley (hesitating, but sweetly): "I confess that I am not wholly indifferent to you, but—but——" "But what, dear?" "Would you mind telling me how much you have put away?"

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AVENGED.

The Story of a Flirtation that was Repaid.

THE old clock in the wall rang out five melodious chimes as Cora Smith softly closed the kitchen door and ran to the little bedroom for her blue scarf.

"Five o'clock," she said, as the last stroke died away; "he is wondering why I don't come, and I must make haste. Madge, little Madge, are you coming with me to-night? I am all ready."

Little Madge, her twelve-year-old sister, came flying through the hall.

"Auntie wants you for a little while. Never mind if he does have to wait for you; you've waited for him many a time. Come quickly, and I will help you."

So sweet-tempered Cora Smith untied the blue scarf, and tripped away to her aunt as merrily as her little sister, albeit her heart beat like an imprisoned bird's at the delay.

The west was all aflame with the autumn sunset ere the sisters closed the cottage door behind them, and ran down the garden path towards the stile, where *he* was waiting—in other words, where hazel-eyed, sweet-faced Cora Smith's lover was waiting for his lady love, as she had many a night waited for him.

Almost every evening they met there at the stile—their "trysting place," he said, just half way between her home and the house where he was lodging. He had proposed it, and she was nothing loth to accede—it was so pretty and romantic.

Then Auntie Smith was not at all pleased with this dark-eyed young stranger, and, though she had not forbidden him the house, both lovers knew she preferred "his room to his company." And so, always with dear little Madge at her side, she daily tripped down the path through the leafy woods to the halfway trysting place where she met her handsome, dark-eyed lover, Neil Rowan. How her heart fluttered to-night as she thought of him, and the warm lovelight deepened and darkened the soft brown eyes!

"Neil, Neil," she said, almost unconsciously, aloud; and little Madge clasped her sister's hand closer, and looked up in her face.

"Do you love him so very much, sister Cora?"

A swift, hot colour came into the girl's cheeks, and then she paused suddenly, holding the hands of little Madge in a fervent grasp.

"Love him! love him, Madge! better than all the world—better than my youth, my life—aye, sometimes I fear better than my hope of Heaven! And I am to be his wife, little Madge, this good man's wife, when the beautiful Spring comes I shall leave you and auntie and uncle to be all his. But this is our secret, little sister, and only you can share it."

And then her hands relaxed their hold, and drawing the light scarf over her shoulders, she tripped silently on. They were almost there—nearing the edge of the wood, and the stile was but a step away. Another step forward, and there Madge held her sister back.

"Wait!" she whispered; "I can see two men on the seat, Cora. We do not want to meet strangers there."

"No, no," she replied, drawing back in the shadow of the wood; "it is Neil's friend, Willis Dean. We will wait until he goes, for I do not like to meet him."

Even as she spoke the figure rose, and the sound of his voice came on the twilight air, distinct and clear:

"And what of this love affair, Neil? When is it to end, and how? Are you really in earnest, and do you mean to marry the girl?"

Cora Smith's hand closed upon the arm of Madge till she shrank in pain while they waited for the answer.

Neil Rowan laughed softly.

"Marry her!" he repeated. "She is just the subject for a grand flirtation, and I assure you I have done the thing well. But for anything further—bah! I am going back to town to-morrow, and this is our last meeting; so be off, old fellow, for I expect her every moment."

Just for one moment Madge Smith's heart stood still in awful fear, for she thought Cora was dying. That white, ghastly face there in the twilight, that motionless figure, those tightly locked hands, it surely was not the fair, sweet maiden of a moment before. But the spasm passed, and without a word she rose and glided noiselessly away, and Madge followed her in silence.

Neil Rowan waited until the light had quite died out of the west, and the dew lay like summer rain on the grass at his feet. His cigar was smoked down to ashes, and he prepared to go.

"She isn't coming to-night," he said, mentally; "that is certain. The scheming auntie up yonder managed to prevent it this time. Oh, well, it saves a scene. I will drop a loving farewell note, and so it ends—a summer's amusement. Well, well!" and Neil Rowan strolled homeward, singing half unconsciously, "I won't have her, I know—I won't have her, I know—I don't care a straw who has her, I know."

The farewell note came to Cora Smith the following night;

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but the fever-bright eyes never rested on the creamy page, for ere the insane light gave place to reason again—death sealed the white eyelids. To such natures as this girl's, love is life; and the rude blow that woke her from the one bright dream of her youth snapped the slender cord that bound her frail spirit to earth, and out of the depths of her awful grief the kindly hand of Death led her to the mountain top, where is built the city of the New Jerusalem.

Day by day, week by week, month by month, so sped the time until eight years were counted. Eight times the grass had grown over the little grave in the lonely country graveyard, and again the October winds rustled the scarlet leaves over the narrow mound.

Wonderful changes had the eight years brought. Side by side with this grave were two others, and the headstones bore the names of good Aunt and Uncle Smith. They had rested there six years; and every summer beautiful Madge Smith came down from her town mansion, and lingered in the old home a week, trimming the grasses and planting bright flowers on the mounds. Bright, beautiful Madge Smith, the heiress of all Uncle Smith's hidden wealth, the wealth he guarded so well during that toil-worn, weary life.

Three years before Madge Smith had left school, to reign queen of Society. Beautiful, strangely beautiful, with that cold, white, high-bred face, those wide, fathomless, glittering, amber eyes, a figure matchless in symmetry and grace, accomplished, polished, and the heiress of great wealth, no wonder that lovers, old and young, knelt at Madge Smith's shrine. Strange wonder, the world said, that all were scorned—not gently and with words of pity and apology, but spurned from her very feet with scornful lips and blazing eyes.

Madge Smith was an enigma and mystery to all who knew her. No warmer friend, no brighter companion did those of her own sex seek for.

But never were those lips seen to smile, or those wonderful eyes to soften, in response to any lover's; no glacier was more frigid than she to all men.

All? Nay, Dame Rumour had plenty of gossip just now. Only a few weeks since a new arrival appeared on the scene of action.

Neil Rowan, merchant and millionaire, entered the list of Madge Smith's adorers—not for her wealth surely, Mrs. Grundy acknowledged graciously. He had enough of his own. It was genuine love that this handsome man of Society felt for beautiful Madge.

A wonderful change had come over the fair lady since his appearance. Bright before, she was brilliant now—sparkling, witty, bewildering; and the world looked on in amazement to see the flush stain her white cheek, and the bright smile that lighted her eyes at his approach.

And did he not recognise her, you are wondering? Nay, how should he? Sweet Cora Smith and the summer in the country were forgotten things with this man. He had broken half a dozen silly hearts since then, and left them all with Time, the great healer. He had flirted with Society's queens and village maidens innumerable, and left the past all behind him. And now he came and laid the first pure, real love of his lifetime at this woman's feet. So he told her one autumn night in the beautiful drawing-room of her stately home.

How her hands trembled and her eyes shone as she listened!

"Wait," she said; "I will give you my answer to-morrow night. It is my birthday, and I shall give an entertainment. You will come; I will answer you then. Be in the library at ten, and you shall hear my answer."

And the night came, and he was there waiting. He paced the room impatiently. Would she ever come, this girl that was dearer than his life? Yes, she *was* life to him.

"My beautiful queen!" he said softly. And just then he heard the light ripple of a woman's laugh in the adjoining room. *Her* laugh; he knew it among a thousand; and her voice. She was speaking loud and clear.

"There, Mr. Maesfield, you must excuse me for a minute. Mr. Rowan is waiting for me in the library. You know I am to give him his answer to-night."

And the other's voice, speaking tenderly, said:

"And I can guess that answer, little Madge. You are going to marry this man and leave us all."

She laughed softly.

"Marry him? No, indeed, sir! He is just the subject for a grand flirtation, and I assure you I have acted my part well. But for anything further—bah! Yet, he is expecting me, so by-bye till I come again," and she tripped lightly through the half-open door.

A white, ghastly, shivering figure stood by the library window.

"For Heaven's sake, Madge, tell me you were jesting!" he cried, as brilliantly, glowingly beautiful, she glided into the room.

"Not so, my friend," she answered lightly; "I spoke the truth. If you overheard my words I need not repeat them. It is my answer."

"But you gave me hope; you led me on; you have given me reason to think you loved me!" he cried passionately. "It is the one love of my life! I have centred every hope and thought on you, Madge, and for my sake, for God's sake, do not wreck my life!"

She was very pale now, and her eyes were black and glistening.

"Neil Rowan," she said slowly, "I have prayed for this hour for eight years; but never in my wildest dreams did I think my prayer would be so fully answered. When I saw the hue of death, the white agony, on my only sister's cheek—when I saw her writhe in speechless agony at the words she heard eight years ago to-night, I vowed to avenge her, God being my helper.

"Again, when I heard the thud of the earth upon her coffin, I vowed that vow. God has brought it about even sooner, more complete, than I thought. If I have given you one hour of such agony as she suffered I am content. If you could live and suffer it for countless ages I should be better content. My work is ended. Good night!"

Two hours afterwards the sharp report of a pistol rang with startling distinctness through the crowded drawing-room.

All present sprang to their feet except Madge Smith. Perhaps her cheek paled a little—I cannot tell; but the light of her eye never changed, her smiling lips never relaxed, as she gazed upon the blood-stained body in the library.

Neil Rowan had taken his own life, and Cora Smith was avenged.

Avenged—fully and adequately.

May Harvey.

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And if you wish to learn what this is send a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope, to RANKE, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. A reliable delineation of your character will be sent in return.

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SPLENDID NEW SERIAL. YOU CAN START TO-DAY.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Eardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY ARE:

SIR CYPRIAN RUST, who has inherited the baronetcy and estates of Sir Basil Wingate, though he is not the legal heir.

MARCELLA RUST, his daughter, a very lovely girl, who is greatly in love with

PHILIP NULLIUS, the curate of Crawley Village, where the home of Sir Cyprian, Wingate Court, is situated.

LADY VIOLET FRAYNE-LENNOX, whom Marcella believes to be her aunt. She is a very beautiful woman, and loves her niece dearly, but Sir Cyprian has, for some reason, immense power over her, which he uses to further his own ends.

EDWARD DAY is an orphan whom Lady Violet has befriended. He, however, in making unreturned love to Marcella, insults her, and Lady Violet refuses to have anything more to do with him.

CALEB J. JOHNSON, a City magnate and millionaire, who marries Lady Violet, though he knows that her husband is still alive. This husband,

MAJOR RICHARD FRAYNE-LENNOX, is a good-for-nothing, who has been turned out of the Army. Lady Violet believes him dead.

TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

"Don't Send Me Back!"

"MARCELLA left the Court!" Lady Violet murmured. "*What* can it mean? What has sent her away?" Then turning to her new-made husband, she said quickly:

"Caleb, I cannot go away; I must stay and wait. I could not bear to be away from London when Marcella needs me, and I feel somehow"—her voice faltered slightly—"that she wants me badly!"

They returned to Grosvenor Place instead of going to Dover, as they had intended, and it was a strangely quiet bridal couple that sat in the brougham.

The financier was wondering as to his next move concerning his agitated bride. She had apparently forgotten that she had promised to love, honour, and obey him only a short time since; and Lady Violet was oblivious to everything and everyone except that something had happened to the girl she loved—that while she had been making preparations for her wedding with the "Gold King," Marcella had been driven to flight from the Court; and knowing what life could be made for any creature upon whom Sir Cyprian's hatred fell, Lady Violet shivered lest Marcella had incurred that bitter enmity of the man she called "father."

When she and Mr. Johnson were left alone by the curious servants, who knew that something unusual had stopped the honeymoon, Lady Violet turned to him impetuously:

"Forgive me for appearing neglectful, Caleb," she said, with a faint attempt at a smile, "but I cannot go away until I am sure of what has happened to Marcella."

"I understand," he replied soothingly, "but because the girl has had a tiff with her father, you must not imagine all sorts of wild things. Marcella is high-spirited, you know, and I daresay Sir Cyprian is not too easy-going himself."

She raised her brows. "What do you know of him? I thought you only met him for the first time here."

A slight flush stained the face of her bridegroom, and for a moment he hesitated, then before she could repeat her question, he answered quickly:

"I know of him, and am also a reader of character. I should say it was an unfortunate thing that Miss Marcella's mother did not live."

A spasm flitted across the pale, beautiful face of Sir Cyprian's sister-in-law.

"If Marcella's mother had lived, her life might have been very different. But now I am only anxious to know the worst. Marcella is not the type of girl to be hysterical because her father disagrees with her. I'm afraid—that—that——"

Before she could finish the words in her mouth, there was a violent ring at the hall-door that chased the colour from her face, leaving it a sickly sallow.

"It is Marcella," she said, clasping his hand tightly. "Please, Caleb, let me see her alone!"

As he left the room a tall, slight figure flew past him, and the next moment he heard the sound of two women's voices, one deep and tender, the other frightened and tearful.

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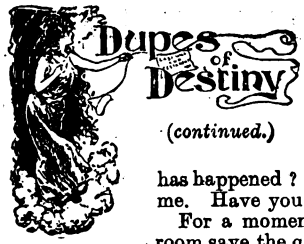

(continued.)

Lady Violet drew the girl to her with a passionate gesture. "Darling — oh, darling — tell me — what does this mean?" she said quickly. "Why have you run away from the Court like this? What has happened? For pity's sake, Marcella, tell me. Have you quarrelled with Sir Cyprian."

For a moment there was no sound in the room save the quick, uneven breathing of the two women; then Marcella raised her white face from Lady Violet's shoulder, and looked at her with a puzzled expression in her wide eyes—eyes so strangely like those of the woman whose arms were round her. But they looked hunted, as though they had last gazed upon an object of loathing and dread.

"Aunt Violet," she whispered hoarsely. "I can never go back to the Court again—let me stay with you. It would kill me to return."

Lady Violet's grasp tightened on the trembling girl's shoulders. Her face was deathly pale, and in her dress of dove-coloured *crêpe de chine*—which was a travelling dress as well as wedding garment—she presented a startling figure of daintiness, compared with the dishevelled appearance of the girl in her arms, whose tear-stained face and desperate eyes made her look haggard and worn.

"What has made you feel like this towards your home?" Lady Violet said slowly. "Has anything so dreadful happened, or is this only the result of a disagreement with your father? Have you discovered anything that makes life with Sir Cyprian impossible? Because, my darling girl," she went on pleadingly, "I am afraid, without some good reason, your conduct will be looked upon as childish and petulant."

"I have discovered nothing about my father," Marcella began slowly, and she did not notice that Lady Violet breathed a sigh almost of relief at her words, "but I have been insulted in my father's house by a man to whom I have already made plain that his attentions were odious, and instead of protecting me, my father only appeared to think that I was putting on a coquettish reserve, and he encouraged this hateful creature in his attentions. And," she went on passionately, "they both knew that I had promised to marry Philip Nullius."

Lady Violet started. "They, dear? Who, then, was the man that made you leave your father's roof?"

"Edward Day," Marcella said wearily. "I hate him!"

"Edward Day!" Lady Violet repeated. "Edward Day! Why, I did not know he had dared to annoy you again, let alone in your own home!"

Marcella opened her eyes. "Did you not receive the letter I wrote you, telling you that he was staying with us? I thought you so unkind, Aunt Violet, to have ignored my request to send for that hateful Edward Day, and make him cease annoying me."

The face of the older woman paled.

"I was not aware that the wretched young man had dared to thrust himself upon you at the Court," she said, in a low, ominous voice, "and no letter reached me from you, dear; only your telegram of the other day."

"I sent no telegram," said Marcella hastily; then the eyes of the two women met, and their faces blanched.

"Auntie—oh, I am afraid," Marcella breathed. "Why does my father insist on treating my wishes so callously? I would do anything on earth for him, if only he would not compel me to be with that hateful Edward Day."

"Edward Day!" Lady Violet exclaimed again. "How came he to be staying at the Court? I did not know of it."

"I told you in my letter," Marcella said. "You did not answer it, and I thought you had forgotten me in the preparations for your wedding with Mr. Johnson. Oh, Aunt Violet!" she said bitterly, "I was almost jealous of him when father told me about your engagement. It was wrong. I know, but I had loved to think of you only as my own property."

"So I am, dearest," the older woman replied passionately. "You come first with me always—whatever happens—always remember that, Marcella. I only live for your happiness, child, and separation from you is agony to me." She threw a hasty glance at the closed door. "Mr. Johnson is a sensible man—he will always be glad for me to have you near me, should it be impossible for you to return to the Court. I received no letters from you, darling; they must have been intercepted, and mine to you—but by whom and for what reason I cannot imagine."

"Edward Day must have known that I would write to you, Aunt Violet, and probably he stopped our letters. He knew, and so did father, that I had promised to——" She paused, and over the clear pallor of her skin, a rosy flush mantled.

"That you had promised to marry Mr. Nullius, the curate?" Lady Violet finished softly.

"How did you know?" Marcella cried in surprise. "Since you did not get my letters, who could have told you? Neither father nor Edward Day would accept what I said as being a serious truth—even Philip they seemed to laugh at, and when he went away so suddenly for his holiday, I can't help feeling that they had some secret up their sleeves, for one night I heard them laughing.

"It was when Dr. Slade left, and they were in the library after dinner. I was passing by the open door, when I heard Edward Day say: 'To the curate's pleasant holiday; may it prove as entertaining as he anticipates!'

"Then father laughed, and added: 'And as interesting as we have reason to believe it will be shortly.' So you see, Aunt Violet," she finished sadly, "something is happening that we cannot imagine; they are in league with each other against Philip and against me! Oh, it is a bitter thing for a daughter to say of her father—but I don't trust him, Aunt Violet. I am afraid of what lies in the future."

Lady Violet opened her mouth to speak, then closed it again. She was thinking about the conversation she had overheard in the train some days ago, and which she had allowed to slide into the recesses of her memory, owing to the subsequent events that had followed in its wake.

She reproached herself bitterly for having let her own affairs blot out the fact that Marcella's lover was in some danger. She had been selfish, and had only sought her own peace of mind, while the happiness of the girl clinging so tenderly to her was in jeopardy.

Every moment made it more desperate—more urgent the need for action. That Edward Day had linked his crooked interests with those of her brother-in-law, pointed too obviously to danger for Marcella and the man she loved.

But how could she stave off the evil without revealing to the girl the source from which she had obtained her information? To do that would be to betray more than was wise—more than she dared.

"Tell me what occurred at the Court that made you decide upon such an extreme step as running away, darling?" she said presently.

"It was this," Marcella replied, speaking in a low, hurried voice. "After dinner Edward Day followed me into the drawing room—and in spite of my having spoken to him of my engagement several times, dared to again make love to me. I repulsed him, and then he laughed, and said he had my father's consent, and that he intended to marry me. I tried to leave the room, but he stopped me—and then—and then——"

"Yes," Lady Violet breathed hoarsely. "What then? For Heaven's sake tell me, Marcella."

"He dared to kiss me!" the girl went on, with crimsoning cheeks, "and when I appealed to my father for protection when he entered the room, he only laughed and said that since I permitted the curate to kiss me, it was prudish to object to my cousin, who had asked his permission to pay his addresses to me.

"Oh, Aunt Violet, I don't know what I did," she cried

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passionately, "but I know I struck someone—Edward Day—and then I found myself in my room. I must have fainted. The first thought I had on regaining my senses was to come to you—to beg you to let me stay with you until Philip is able to marry me. I don't care how poor we are—I would willingly work myself rather than live at the Court."

Lady Violet's mouth had shut with a click while she had listened to Marcella's story, and her recital of the blackguardly conduct of the man who still presumed to masquerade as her nephew. She drew the girl to her with a protecting gesture.

"That man, Edward Day, is not my nephew, dearest. Acting in a moment of youthful enthusiasm, when returning from abroad years ago, I adopted the child of a dying woman among the third-class passengers. It was foolish of me to foist him upon my friends as a nephew. Most people knew that years before my half-sister had gone abroad, and they naturally concluded that Edward Day was her child.

"The morning he dared to insult you in my house, I informed him of his true position, and told him to leave my presence. That he should have presumed to follow you to the Court! I can hardly credit such impertinence. I will speak to Sir Cyprian about it. I am glad you came to me, darling. It was your father's telegram that stopped me, as Mr. Johnson and myself were going away!"

Marcella clung to her silently. "And I interfered with your honeymoon! What must you think of me for worrying you, Aunt Violet?"

Lady Violet bit her lips. In her heart she was glad that she had not gone away. She was not in love with the Gold King, but had allowed herself to be married to him through sheer lack of will to oppose him.

"Your—Sir Cyprian will be here soon," she said gently. "His telegram was sent from a station on the way up, so he has probably started."

"I don't want to see him," Marcella exclaimed. "I would rather never look into his face again, Lady Violet. I am afraid of him—there are strange things happening at the Court besides my own troubles! There is a mysterious woman in a locked corridor and the other day I saw a strange man—a man with a black beard——"

Lady Violet stopped the words on her mouth by placing her hand on it with a swift gesture. Her own face was the colour of chalk, only the vivid line of her scarlet mouth showing up the inky coils of hair, and the gleam in her brilliant eyes.

"Hush!" she whispered—and Marcella almost fancied that she heard her teeth chatter—"there is someone outside the door. I saw it moving a moment ago, and your voice carries so remarkably."

They moved apart and glanced silently at the door. Lady Violet was the first to pull herself together.

"It must be Mr. Johnson," she said with a faint smile. "I asked him to wait until I had seen you alone. He probably is tired of being out in the cold; I will open the door and let him in."

But before she could put her words into practice, the door was opened from the outside and a man came into the room. Marcella's eyes sought those of her aunt in a horror of apprehension; the man, smiling at them blandly, and stroking his silk hat with one white hand, was Sir Cyprian Rust!

TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

Between Two Stools.

SIR CYPRIAN was the first to break the silence. He put his hat on a chair, unbuttoned his coat, then bowing towards his sister-in-law, said politely:

"Ah, my dear Violet! Charming as ever, I see! The interesting widow robed in her bridal gown of pearl-tinted hues. A most refreshing sight after a long, tiring journey. I wish my naughty little Marcella looked as dainty as her more mature, but equally beautiful, aunt."

Lady Violet looked at him contemptuously, but the hatred in her voice when she spoke was apparent only to the man.

"I do not for one moment suppose that you came here, and *waited outside my door*"—with dry emphasis—"for the express purpose of complimenting me upon my appearance, Cyprian. Such Arcadian simplicity would be most foreign to your nature."

Sir Cyprian smiled and rubbed his hands thoughtfully. "Smartness was always your most salient point, my dear Violet. You really excel in crispness of dialogue occasionally. But I will acquaint you and my silent little girl over there—who has not greeted her father with that loving abandon so precious to parents—with the real object of my inopportune visit. I have come to take back to the Court my runaway daughter. She has been very troublesome lately, and given me grave cause for anxiety, but I will say nothing about that—now."

Marcella, like one roused from a trance, turned to Lady Violet, and cried passionately:

"I, can't go back, Aunt Violet. Don't let me go—let me stay with you—I cannot go back—now!"

The arms of the older woman closed round the trembling figure tenderly, and over the girl's head her eyes met those smiling and apparently fathomless depths of Sir Cyprian.

"I wish you to grant me the favour of keeping Marcella with me," she said quietly. "She may return to the Court later on if you wish it, and she feels she could be happy; but just now, in her run-down state, I fear it may be the worst thing imaginable to force her into obedience. She is utterly unnerved, and has received some severe shock to her system."

"I am sorry to appear ungracious," he replied, a certain hard note stealing into his voice, "but it is my wish that Marcella accompanies me back to-night. You are right in saying she has nerves; I have been watching for some time the increased loss of self-control and restraint, and feel that it is my duty to watch over her, since she is my daughter."

Lady Violet flashed a passionate glance of hate at him, as she said:

"And you guard her by allowing her to be deliberately insulted by Edward Day in her own home. I turned him out of my house for his ill-bred manners, and told him the truth about his obscure parentage in the hope that it might teach him a lesson in humility."

"Edward Day asked my consent to speak to Marcella," Sir Cyprian said coldly. "I gave it, and she was to blame if he imagined that, being something of a coquette in her treatment of his sex, she was not serious in repulsing him. As to his parentage, surely you are wronging your half-sister in denouncing him?"

"I must tell you that you cannot get me to believe that you are ignorant of the fact that Marcella has promised to marry Mr. Nullius," she retorted, "and now that this young clergyman has *gone on a holiday* at your instigation, you try to undermine her strength of purpose by countenancing the attentions of another man.

"As to Edward Day being my dead half-sister's child, that is an idea brought about by people whom I have never troubled to contradict; in fact, he is the child of a miserable woman who came from Australia on the same liner as myself some years ago. She died, and in a spirit of charity I took the boy and brought him up as my nephew. But now I bitterly regret it, as I see that his unknown parents left him a heritage of vice and ill-principle. So you see that the creature you have forced upon your daughter, is in no way a fit associate for her."

While she had been speaking Sir Cyprian's face had flushed, then paled, but whether with anger or surprise Lady Violet could not decide. She knew that he had winced when she had mentioned the curate's holiday, but also that he had grown almost livid when he had learnt of the obscure origin of Edward Day.

"This is no doubt very interesting," he said, after a pause, "but it in no way influences me from insisting on my daughter returning with me to the Court. Remember, I have my answer ready, should you push me too far by your opposition.

"I might also discuss a few things with Marcella and your new husband, Mr. Caleb Johnson, that would interest them

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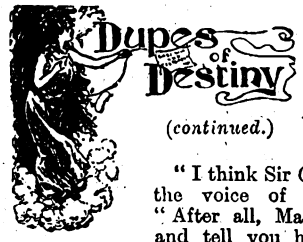

(*continued.*)

largely. You must choose now whether I take the extreme course, or you let Marcella return with me. She is utterly under your influence—it rests with you to counsel her rightly."

"I think Sir Cyprian is right, Violet," said the voice of the financier behind them. "After all, Marcella will be able to write and tell you how she is getting on; and, perhaps, when she is better, he may allow her to come and stay with us."

Lady Violet turned a haggard face towards Marcella, who had remained motionless during the conversation. "Until we may arrange something else, darling, perhaps you had better go," she whispered. "I will watch over you, and see that you get my letters.

"Don't fear, and, above all, keep brave and collected. Be careful, and don't do anything rash, or lose your temper in any way. I mean to find out a great deal, and you must not be impatient if I do not press Sir Cyprian. He is a dangerous man to thwart."

Marcella clutched her nervously. "Then I must return there where everything will remind me of past pleasures," she answered in a low voice. "Why did you not defy him to speak? He is cruel to threaten you like that."

A strained look stole into Lady Violet's face. "He has the whip hand, darling, at present. But now go back. There is nothing to fear since Edward Day begins his secretaryship with Mr. Johnson to-morrow, and perhaps when Mr. Nullius returns your—Sir Cyprian may be in a different mood."

Reluctantly Marcella obeyed. There seemed nothing else to be done, and she yielded with as good a grace as she could, under the circumstances. When she left the room with her aunt to have a little lunch, Sir Cyprian laughed slightly as he turned to Caleb J. Johnson, who had watched with inscrutable eyes the scene between his new-made bride and the baronet.

"Women are hysterical creatures," he said lightly. "I wonder at your putting your head in the noose, Mr. Johnson."

The financier laughed. "I fancy I shall not regret it," he answered drily. "You must have been very happy in your first marriage, Sir Cyprian, to withstand temptation a second time."

The Baronet started slightly. He was longing to ask Mr. Johnson what he had been doing with such a shady companion as the man with whom he had seen him in Piccadilly some days ago, but an intangible something held his tongue.

Caleb J. Johnson would be a difficult man to corner into an admission—and Sir Cyprian did not feel at home with him.

The cool, calculating eyes of the financier were like gimlets—they pierced him. But his voice was cool and even as he said lightly:

"I suppose you have many needy hangers-on to your charity now you are such a wealthy man, Mr. Johnson?"

The financier's lips parted in a strange smile. "'Needy,' yes, 'hangers-on' no. I am too busy to worry myself about failures, Sir Cyprian. I am only concerned with the successes."

"The man I saw you with in Piccadilly the other day did not strike me as being much of a success." Sir Cyprian laughed carelessly. "I thought him, in fact, the seediest-looking individual I have ever seen. He might have committed a crime; he looked so hang-dog."

The financier turned sharply and glanced intently at the fair, unconcerned face of the man opposite him. Something in the manner of his questioning warned him that it was no idle thought that had suggested it. What lay behind that smiling exterior? he wondered. Surely the man was not known by the baronet as his sister-in-law's first husband?

Aloud he said: "You are right, Sir Cyprian; he was rather a low-down sort of chap. I knew him in Australia when I was there years ago. He owed me money once—but now has paid it back in another way."

Sir Cyprian was silent. He did not dare to press the question further, lest he should appear too anxious. He longed to ask the name by which the financier had known the seedy-looking stranger.

As though divining his thoughts, Mr. Johnson said: "His name when I knew him was Dick Richards—probably not his own"—and he smiled grimly as the memory of the bloated, drink-sodden derelict of a crack cavalry regiment rose before his eyes.

"By the way," Sir Cyprian began suavely, "since we may almost call ourselves connections, Mr. Johnson, let me condole with your loss of the Mona Lisa. A very strange robbery, that only an unusual sort of thief could have thought of it. My daughter, Marcella, told me about it, and of your brilliant method of concealment. I thought it very clever at the time—and yet in spite of all that, it went shortly after. Sad pity!"

The financier's face clouded. "Thanks," he said curtly. "It certainly was a great mistake to let it go. But Scotland Yard has been following up a very slight but important clue, and I fancy we shall have the clever perpetrator of the robbery by the heels very soon."

There was a movement at the door. Lady Violet and Marcella stood on the threshold. Marcella looked more composed; Lady Violet had the look of one whom Time had touched heavily. Sir Cyprian turned as they entered. His eyes were shining, and the expression of his mouth was urbane and debonair.

"Ah, here you are at last!" he laughed, addressing Marcella, but keeping his eyes on Lady Violet. "You are just in time to hear Mr. Johnson tell us of the clue the police have found concerning the robbery of the Mona Lisa. They are on the track of the leader now, so Mr. Johnson says."

"I am so glad," Marcella breathed, clasping her hands and looking at the financier, who was now her aunt's husband. "I always felt somehow that I was to blame for that, Mr. Johnson. I brought bad luck to it."

Sir Cyprian laughed again. "It was bound to go whether you saw it or not, Marcella. But I am anxious to hear of the clue that Scotland Yard has got hold of. Is it anything to do with finger prints, Johnson?"

"No," the financier replied shortly. "It is something that was picked up behind one of the heaps of cushions and the side of the divan, over which the picture hung in the recess. It had lodged between one of the pieces of the woodwork, and might never have been noticed except for the lucky chance of moving the whole thing."

"Well, what was it?" There was a note of impatience in Sir Cyprian's voice. His interest was flattering to the financier. Only the pale, silent bride he had married that morning appeared to be as keen on the subject as himself. She was gazing with rapt eyes upon the man she had promised to love, honour, and obey, and in her eyes there lingered a look of fear and horror!

"It was a very rare coin!" the financier went on. "I am not a judge of them myself, but I know they are considered very valuable; and the police say that the man who planned the robbery, and who is, I think, a man they want badly, is identical with that notorious chief of burglars they know by the sobriquet of the 'Spade'—the coin they found was a spade guinea."

"A spade guinea!" cried Marcella. "Why—how strange, I——" A sudden crash drowned the words on her lips. A tall vase on a pedestal against which Sir Cyprian had stood, had swayed, then fallen into a hundred pieces on the ground.

"I must apologise for my clumsiness," he said in a tone of regretful dismay, turning to Lady Violet. "I can't imagine how it happened."

She returned his gaze steadily. His eyes were still smiling, but his underlip was not quite still. "I understand," she said coldly; "please don't apologise—it was an accident that was bound to happen."

When the carriage was at the door to take them back to the station, Lady Violet drew Marcella aside, and whispered:

(Continued on page 125.)

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She drew the girl into her arms and kissed her tenderly. Her heart ached to cry out to her brother-in-law: "Do your worst. Betray my secret to my husband—shame my motherhood before my child—and then let me keep her if I can"—but she knew that she would lose not only Marcella, but everything else, too; and a break from the girl now would mean needless agony and heart-wringing.

She could perhaps serve her better by hiding her secret in her own heart a little longer. So she had no other course open to her but to let the one creature she most loved on earth return to the shelter of a roof she feared and dreaded.

She sat by Marcella in the carriage, as she had insisted on seeing them off, and under the fur rug they held each other's hands tightly.

Sir Cyprian laughed and chatted gaily. He was solicitous and considerate to his sister-in-law—and tenderly soothing to his daughter. He patted her softly on her arm, and spoke about the lost roses on her cheeks with anxious care. But under his touch the girl shivered.

At the station they reserved a first-class compartment. As the train was getting up steam, Marcella put her head out of the window, and bent down to Lady Violet. "Find Philip," she whispered softly. "I want him—I love him." Lady Violet's eyes flashed with understanding.

She moved her lips, and they formed the word "Yes."

Standing behind his daughter in the carriage, Sir Cyprian caught that look on Lady Violet's face, and his mouth grew savage. The next moment it smiled.

The train snorted and the engine shrieked; they steamed out of the station slowly. Then Marcella fell back in her seat, wan-eyed and listless.

Sir Cyprian looked at her thoughtfully, then he rose from his corner at the further end of the carriage, and, leaning towards her, pulled her sharply by the wrist towards him.

"Sit here, where I can see your dutiful face," he snarled between his teeth. "I have something to say to you!"

TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.

Johnson to the Rescue!

WHEN Lady Violet Johnson—to give her her new name—arrived at Grosvenor Place, she went straight to the drawing-room, where she knew she would find the financier, Caleb J. Johnson, waiting for her. The bridegroom was waiting to take his bride on a prolonged honeymoon. She shivered and drew her priceless furs closer. They were a present from her husband.

"Ah, here you are, Violet," he said briskly. "I hope there will be no more interruptions to our wedding-day plans. We have just time to catch the evening mail boat to Boulogne, unless we stay and dine first, and go on by the midnight boat."

She noticed that his tone was that of the lord and master already. She had become this man's chattel—the law had given him the right to compel her to do his bidding, and he showed the usual want of understanding concerning the delicate fabric of a woman's highly-strung organisation.

She recognised that the financier differed in no way from the rest of his sex. It was the brute instinct—the dominant sway of the male animal over the female.

She looked at him critically. His ugly face with its fascinating smile, repelled and attracted at the same time. She wondered whether she could surprise this man—throw him off his guard, and force him to own himself beaten.

She came forward slowly, looking at him with a half-thoughtful, half-playful smile.

"I am sorry the day's happenings have been a nuisance to you, Caleb, but I am afraid there is yet another disappointment for you. I cannot go to Calais to-night—or to-morrow night either."

He started and flashed a sudden glance at her. Had she learnt anything of the means by which he had won her?

"Why not?" he said aloud. "You are not the woman to play with me, Violet. Why have you decided to leave me to continue a lonely honeymoon? Remember, I am your husband!"

"I cannot go with you," she said steadily, "because I have promised Marcella to lose no time in searching for the man she loves. He has gone away, and she fears there is danger for him. I *know* there is danger for him. I wanted to ask you to help me find him—to restore him to her in safety. Then—then we would go away together if you like."

"So you put the love-affairs of a girl like Marcella before your duty to me," he said slowly. "It is absurd—impossible that I should allow such a thing. Let the young man alone—he is probably playing his own game somewhere, and Miss Marcella had better learn the lesson of patience while she is young. If I refuse to countenance such folly—what then?"

She shrugged her shapely shoulders. All her old spirit was returning under the lash of the man's anger; she was beginning to be herself.

"Nothing can move me from my resolution to do all I can to help Marcella," she replied coldly. "And if you fail me I must find someone else. But I swear that I shall be wife in name only to you, until I see the happiness of my niece assured, and not even then if you attempt to thwart me. Marcella is the only creature I love—nothing matters so long as I can bring some joy to her!"

Caleb J. Johnson was silent. He had never before had the tables turned upon him like this. That he should win the prize for which he had planned and intrigued, only to be cheated at the last moment, was a bitter humiliation—one he could hardly believe true, had not the woman who was his wife spoken them.

"Those are strange words, Violet, from a wife to her husband," he said coldly. "I am to be put on one side for the sake of a boy and girl love affair. You make terms and conditions with me as though I were a lackey. Am I to understand that you married me only for my money?"

Her lip curled. "As you married me for my position, or title and social status, please don't attempt that tone with me, Caleb, it is rather hackneyed."

He grasped her wrist savagely in his strong brown hand. "You say the truth. I did choose you for your beauty and capacity to bring the best people to my house; but now I would not care if you were a pauper with no Society friends. I love you, Violet; I love you as I never loved when a boy!" He drew her to him roughly. "Do you understand?" he said hoarsely. "I love you, Violet, and this is our wedding day!"

She shrank from his touch, as from contact with a fiery furnace. She had not guessed that such a calamity should befall her for the financier to love her in this half-savage way.

She had been prepared for a marriage of convenience, but this! She drew in her breath quickly. A solution out of the difficulty suggested itself to her mind.

She turned her face to him. His laboured breathing showed that he was still under the influence of his passion.

"Caleb," she said swiftly. "If you would grant me the great favour I have asked—if you will leave me here and find Philip Nullius, the curate whom Marcella loves—then, if you return successful, I may greet you not coldly, as an unwilling wife, but with love for you. Yes, Caleb," she finished with a flush on her cheeks, "if you bring him back alive and well I may love you."

He smiled grimly as he released her. "You may love me! That is the bait you hold out, is it? You women have wonderful ways in turning a man to your own purposes." He looked at her curiously. "Your love for Marcella stands between us, yet it may be the means of making you love me."

She put out her hand hesitatingly. "You will go—you will look for Philip Nullius, Caleb?"

He smiled. "Have I not a reward to win? And I am fool enough to want that reward, Violet, more than the success of my new prospectus even!" Then he became once more the business man with the old inscrutable eyes

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"Tell me how and where I am to begin looking for this young man? I suppose I shall find him enjoying himself in a rectory, and he will resent being found."

She shook her head. "No, no, Caleb; there is something behind his disappearance. I did not tell Marcella for fear of terrifying her, but I will tell you what I know."

Then briefly, and leaving out her reason for being in the train with the two men whom she had followed, she told him of the scraps of conversation she had overheard about Philip Nullius, and the address they had mentioned as being the place where he would be found.

He made a few hurried notes in his pocket book; "18 Lillie Road, Leyton," and "Water Grange," he murmured. The evidence of mystery in the case began to interest him. He was fond of unravelling other people's secrets. "What was the principal man—the man who seemed to be the leader in the business—like?" he said after a pause.

"He had a black beard and wore blue glasses. I could not see much of his face," she replied nervously.

"Had he anything distinctive about him?"

She shook her head. "Nothing." For many reasons she did not wish to discuss the man with the black beard. She only wanted Philip Nullius to be rescued from any danger. There might yet be time to help him without a public scandal.

"Why not get Sir Cyprian to do this?" the financier said suddenly.

She flashed a glance of horror at him. "He hates the curate," she said coldly, "and has other plans for Marcella."

"And you object to the police taking it in hand?"

She made an impatient gesture. "That would be to disclose much that is better concealed; whereas, if you go quietly and find him, you will do Marcella a great kindness, and prevent a very nasty scandal; besides"—she hesitated—"besides winning my everlasting gratitude."

He laughed shortly. "Ah, so it has dwindled from 'love' to 'gratitude' already, has it?" He took her hand in his, and gazed at her with a cynical smile. "There is certainly no fool like an old fool," he said.

He kissed her gently on her forehead. He was putting a great restraint upon himself in leaving her in so cavalier a fashion.

"Good-bye, Violet. This is a strange honeymoon, but I shall get some amusement out of it perhaps. You will stay here, I suppose. By the way, you have told me everything about this young man, haven't you?"

She nodded. "Yes, you know everything. Good-bye, and I shall pray that you don't get there too late."

As the financier left his bride's house a quiet figure darted from under a lamp-post and followed him swiftly. The Dovermarle Hotel was soon reached in a hansom, the silent figure seated on the back rail. Then a few moments later the financier stepped into the hansom again, giving an address to the driver that made the silent listener outside smile slowly.

"The Chief was right. His wire came just in time. It would have been awkward if this had been sprung upon us suddenly. Forewarned is forearmed."

When in a first-class carriage at Liverpool Street Station the financier took his forty minutes' nap, the shabby stranger was in a third-class compartment in the same train, still smiling with the air of a man who had done his duty.

It was near midnight when Mr. Johnson arrived at his destination, and his first thought was to put up at the Station Hotel at Leyton. His unknown companion in the meantime was walking with the steps of one not a stranger to the country, in the direction of the village.

TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.
"Water Grange."

"DEAR SIR,—*Hearing that you are staying in Leyton for a holiday, I am presuming on a mutual friendship with the Rev. James Cray, of London, to call upon you this evening. I am here for a few days, and would like to be of some service to you if I could. My old friend placed the facts of your romantic history in my possession, and I take a particular interest in a man who has, through sheer force of pluck and brain, worked himself from a foundling hospital into the Church. My friend, Sir Cyprian Rust, has given me your address. I am, faithfully yours,* EDWIN BOULTER."

Philip Nullius read the letter of his unknown correspondent, who wrote from a house called "Water Grange." The letter was that of a man of culture, yet there was something about it that made him wonder as to the personality of the writer.

It was now ten days since he had left the place where the lady of his dreams dwelt, and being in honour bound not to write to her, had kept his word to Sir Cyprian, who had impressed upon him that he trusted in his word.

His object in waiting so long was to see the friend of whom Sir Cyprian had spoken as being likely to help him to a living.

And now this letter had arrived—and the time of waiting had ended.

Punctually at seven the small maidservant knocked at the door. "Please, sir, a gentleman to see you," and immediately upon her words a man came into the room.

He was tall, of great muscular strength, and his face was of a dull reddish colour—unhealthy and vicious in expression. But it was his eyes that made Philip Nullius take a sudden deep dislike to him. They were of an ugly, greenish hazel, and the lids were innocent of lashes.

"This is a pleasant surprise, Mr. Nullius," said the stranger, in a hearty tone. "I am glad to look you up, and hope we shall be friends."

Philip bowed coldly; the stranger's pale eyes were watching him with curious intentness. They noted the brown colour of his strong young neck, the size grip of his big, capable hands. They were the hands of a man who did more than preach in a pulpit.

"You are Mr. Boulter, I suppose," Philip said quietly. "I am surprised that you should have gone to so much trouble to look me up."

Mr. Boulter flashed a look at him. "Not at all," he answered easily. "I told Sir Cyprian I should be down this way. My uncle, the Vicar of the next parish, has a charming place near here, 'Water Grange.' I am staying there, and came with an invitation from my uncle to ask you to accompany me back to supper."

Philip hesitated. He felt inclined to refuse the invitation, and afterwards he wished he had. But the longing to once again talk to his equals—to discuss those things that were dear to his heart, made him yield.

Besides it had been so very lonely in his rooms, and the thought that the uncle of this unprepossessing man was perhaps the clergyman who would help him to his heart's desire, filled him with a sense of elation.

"Thank you," he said simply. "I will come with pleasure."

A slow smile crept across Mr. Boulter's rather coarse mouth. "That's right!" he said heartily. "You will have a warm welcome."

Outside they stepped into a shabby old trap, driven by a man whose face it was too dark to see.

"Home, John!" cried Mr. Boulter, and Philip fancied that his imagination had played him a trick in thinking that the coachman had chuckled softly when he replied, "Home's the word, sir."

* * * * * *

The following morning a tall man with an ugly, unattractive face played a tattoo on the door of No. 3, Lillie Road.

"Is Mr. Nullius staying here?" he asked.

"No, sir," the woman answered, "a gentleman called for 'im last night, and they went away together. He left no address."

The man turned away.

"Gone, and left no address!" he muttered. "Then I am too late! He has been lured to 'Water Grange.'"

As he prepared to turn back, and ask the landlady the way to "Water Grange," he stopped and gazed down the narrow street. A trap was dashing up at full speed, as though the driver were flogging his steed on a matter of life and death.

And the colour in the financier's cheeks paled to a ghastly green as he saw the face of the man who was driving.

(Another grand instalment next week.)

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ANÆMIA.

BY MRS. ADA S. BALLIN,

Editor of "Womanhood," and of "Baby: the Mothers' Magazine."

ANÆMIA, or bloodlessness, is one of the commonest troubles of the present age—so common, in fact, that it seems to me that quite two-thirds of the girls one comes in contact with in towns are affected with it. The complaint can hardly be called a disease in the ordinary sense of the word, but is rather a debilitated state of the body, which lays it open to the attacks of most other kinds of diseases.

Symptoms.

The condition in question is characterised by a deficiency in the number of red corpuscles in the blood. There is very often pallor of the cheeks and lips, but in some cases these may be of a natural colour, and lead even the patient to believe that she is not anæmic, when the real state of the case can instantly be discovered by examining the gums and the insides of the eyelids. These, instead of being of a good deep pink, are pale and yellowish-looking. The tongue is apt to be pale and flabby, and indented by the teeth; the sufferer is readily fatigued, troubled with breathlessness on going up and down stairs; she very often suffers from palpitation or pains about the heart, which may lead her to believe that she is suffering from some disease of the heart. She suffers frequently from headache, pains in the back, and languor, and soon becomes very tired by any little unusual exertion. She may even faint, and thus cause considerable anxiety to her family. There are frequent eruptions on the skin, which may be either of an irritating kind, or simply acne either in the form of blackheads or pimples, or both.

There are two kinds of anæmia—one the common kind of which I have spoken, and another called pernicious anæmia, which is a fatal disease, and most difficult of treatment, but is happily rare.

Pernicious Anæmia.

In such cases there is wasting, and yellowishness of the skin, which assumes an almost transparent waxen hue; but these cases, of course, demand the most skilled medical attention and nursing within reach, and do not come within the province of this paper. I may, however, remark that the best remedy to improve the condition of the blood in these cases, which is now being very largely prescribed by the medical profession, is Hæmatogen, manufactured by Messrs. Nicolay and Co., 36, St. Andrew's Hill, London, E.C., which contains, in a purified form, hæmoglobin, the natural colouring matter of the blood, rich in organic iron and albumen, as well as the mineral salts, including the phosphates of soda and potash which are found in meat. It is far better to give a preparation like this, which is a food and nourishes the blood, than to give iron in a mineral form, which so often upsets the digestion. Hæmatogen contains nothing besides what I have mentioned, except chemically pure glycerine, which is in itself nourishing, and a very small proportion of the best Malaga wine, which is used as a flavouring.

Ordinary Anæmia.

Is a condition of everyday occurrence, in which the doctor is rarely called in, or if he is, he just prescribes for the time being, and after a few weeks the patient is apt to get as bad again. Any line of treatment for ordinary cases of anæmia must be persistently applied, and, although occasional visits to the doctor, if there seems anything out of the way amiss, are desirable, the treatment can only be properly carried out at home.

The Causes.

The causes of anæmia are chiefly bad ventilation, insufficient or unsuitable feeding, want of exercise, and sedentary occupations, or that overwork of the brain just now so common in young ladies at high schools and preparing for examinations.

General Management of Health during Anæmia.

All anæmic persons should be in the fresh air as much as possible, so that the blood may become oxygenated, and an anæmic girl who is not really ill should take exercise for at least an hour twice daily. Walking, cycling, swimming (if the heart is not weak), rowing and tennis are all suitable. Eight hours' sleep is not too much, as the brain, being badly supplied with blood, needs extra rest, and in some cases even nine hours' sleep may be indulged in with advantage. The bedroom, however, should be well ventilated, and here I may mention that it is a great mistake to keep a gas jet burning, as it destroys the oxygen in the air; anæmic persons need very much oxygen, which is essential to keep the blood pure. In order to keep the blood pure also, the skin should be kept healthily active, and a daily bath is essential.

Meals should be regular, and in many cases it is desirable to take extra nourishment between the ordinary meals.—Plenty of meat and green vegetables should be taken, cocoa instead of tea, and wholemeal bread instead of white.

Iron as a Medicine.

Iron is a food to all anæmic persons, and must not be regarded by them as a medicine only to be taken temporarily, for in most cases it is necessary to persevere in taking iron for a period varying from two months to five or six years. I am strongly opposed to the ordinary methods of giving iron in anæmia, which are very frequently worse than useless, as the iron is so often decomposed, or in a form that is indigestible, when the patient takes it; while when given in a pill such as Blaud's pill, it is apt to pass through the body quite undigested, and a patient might as well swallow a bullet. As ordinarily given, also, iron is very apt to cause constipation, and for these reasons Hæmatogen, which I have mentioned above, should invariably be given in preference to other preparations. It is best to begin with a teaspoonful dose, taken half-an-hour after breakfast and half-an-hour before lunch and dinner. The object for giving it before meals is to stimulate the appetite and assist the assimilation of other food, but if taken before breakfast it is apt to prove rather aperient. In cases, therefore, where the girl has a tendency to constipation, it is a very simple remedy to take the Hæmatogen half-an-hour before breakfast, as well as before the other meals. The dose should be gradually increased to a tablespoonful. When this is taken for a few weeks the effect is really remarkable; the quality of the blood rapidly improves, the sallow cheeks grow rosy, and the pale lips red, while the feelings of languor and depression pass off, and the girl grows cheerful, bright, and fit to take her place in the world.

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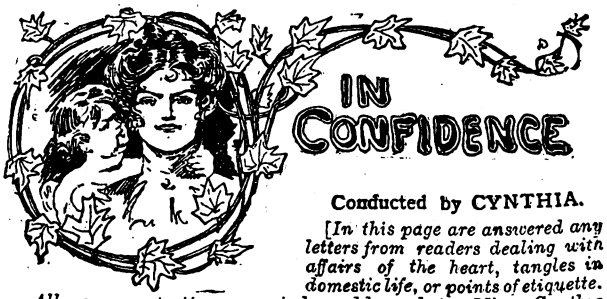

Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

The Impossibility of Loving Two Men.

"QUEENIE" writes to know if it is possible to love two young men with equal affection? —"No, QUEENIE," it is not. Either you love one better than the other, or you really are not in love with either. You merely have a liking for them. Put yourself to the test. Try to imagine that one of them has proposed and you have accepted him; think over his character generally; then ask yourself if you would like to spend your life with him. If you do this with all seriousness—as you would do before accepting an offer of marriage—you will not be long in discovering the true state of your feelings.

Differences with a Sweetheart.

"J. A. C." has a whole lot of complaints to make against his sweetheart. To begin with, she objects to his playing football, which is "J. A. C.'s" favourite hobby. She has only called him "dear" three times, and never of her own accord told him that she loves him. She holds that a girl who tells her mind to her boy means nothing. "J. A. C." wants to know if I think she really loves him.

* * * * *

Well, if she objects to your playing football, I should think she does feel a sort of ownership of you, and, therefore, I suppose, loves you. The fact that she has not called you "dear" shows nothing. It may mean simply that she is a sensible girl, who doesn't believe in mere spoken love. Again, even if she has never told you she loves you, her anxiety to have you always with her shows that she really is fond of you. If it is not her nature to gush, you should not expect her to do so. After all, surely people can love each other without telling each other of it every other minute.

Troubles of a Young Old Maid.

"AN OLD MAID."—You are twenty-six, and all your previous love affairs have ended badly. Now you feel it time that you met some man whom you could really love and marry. You are fascinating, and not a love-sick maiden, or given to worrying.

* * * * *

Well, what can I advise you? You certainly do seem to have had a lot of bad luck in your love affairs. From what you tell me I think you cannot have really cared for any of the young men to whom you were engaged, or they would not have left you in the way they did. It must be that you think too much of the opposite sex. As you seem to have attracted so many men in the past, and are still as fascinating as ever, I can only advise you to keep up a cheerful countenance, and hope that you will soon attract somebody else. When you get him hold him as fast as you can. By the way, don't start calling yourself an old maid yet. That old maid idea grows on one, and should not be encouraged.

A Reque t to Correspondents.

MAY I ask a favour of my correspondents? In writing to me, would they oblige me by stating the point on which they want advice in as few words as possible? This week several readers have written me letters of eight pages each. Though no doubt the details given me are of interest to the writer, they do not affect the point on which my advice is asked, and make matters difficult to understand. In stating the position of a love affair it is not necessary to give the ages, occupations, and family history of everybody concerned, unless they bear on the question.

An Unworthy Friend.

YOUR dearest friend, "TROUBLED ONE," is indeed not worthy the name of a friend. I must say you were indiscreet to confide in her your love of a man to whom you had never spoken. Nineteen is very young, and you will most probably meet someone who suits you far better than this man. I should let it stand as it is. To write and explain to any man that you are "passionately in love" with him, would only be to place you in a very awkward position, and as things stand you surely can carry it off as a joke. No nice-minded girl would care to be thought pushing or forward.

The Duties of a Lover.

"SAXON."—You admit that you have given the girl you speak of good cause for offence, and I should suggest your writing to her first, if you really wish to become reconciled. But neither of you seems to have acted in the past as people really fond of each other. If a man really wants to meet a girl, "SAXON," he *doesn't* miss his train, and when she telegraphs him to go and visit her, he *doesn't* have prior engagements with friends. My only advice is, decide whether or not you really love the girl, and if you do, write to her to overlook your lack of attention, and if you should come together again, don't have quite so many other friends, and keep your appointments with her, even if earthquakes intervene.

Too Sensitive by Half.

YOUR conduct, "CLAUDE," is very foolish; I will not use any harder expression. You are dearly in love with a girl who, you believe, would make you an excellent wife. She is domesticated and loving, but she has not had the opportunity of educating herself to a great extent. She is doing her best to remedy this defect, and your friends tell you that your choice is a good one. But you are afraid of what your fellow-clerks might say, so you propose to break off the engagement. Perhaps you will see how unmanly and foolish your conduct is when you read it in black and white. Trust to your mother's instinct; she, who has your welfare at heart, advises you to marry the young woman, and a mother's love makes her far-sighted.

To Renew an Acquaintance.

"HARRY" says that he passed a young lady who bowed to him, without noticing her. It afterwards occurred to him that she was none other than a girl he loved when a boy. How can he remedy his apparent slight?—I should advise you to send a line to the lady on general subjects, wishing her the compliments of the season, and mention, incidentally that it only occurred to you after she had passed the other day that the young lady who smiled so sweetly was none other than herself, your early love, and attribute it to your short-sightedness. If you word it very nicely, she may overlook your offence, and perhaps ask you to tea, in which case you will be able to resume the love-making operations you had to break off previously.

Cynthia

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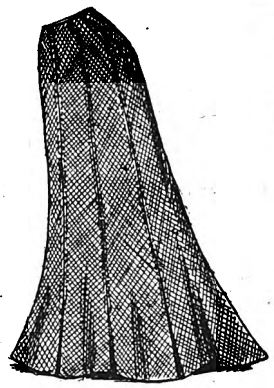

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SHORT STORIES

No. 787.] Week Ending January 30th, 1904. [One Penny.

A Fatal Fascination.

The Story of a Secret Marriage.

"Yes. My life was rather lonely until you came, Ashley. My father has always been very kind to me, and I have had few wishes which he has not gratified. But—well, there was always something wanting. I suppose, having no mother, I felt the want more keenly. A girl needs a good mother, for a good mother always understands. And I do not even remember mine."

The speaker was a tall, dark, slender girl of nineteen, with deep, eloquent eyes and rich olive complexion. As Ashley Arlington looked down at her, he inwardly admitted she had been appropriately christened—Gypsy.

Colonel Powyss—her father—was a fine, tall, soldierly-looking man of fifty. He had seen a good deal of service, particularly in India, but had lately handed in his papers and retired to his fine old estate in Warwickshire. He loved his daughter—his only child—very dearly.

But Gypsy had always felt the need of a mother. When Ashley had come into her life six months before, the old need seemed to be partially supplied, for the fine, stalwart young man by her side had wrought many wonderful changes in the warm, impulsive heart of sweet Gypsy Powyss.

"Does the Colonel ever mention her to you?" asked Ashley after a pause. "I have never seen a portrait of her at the Hall."

Gypsy sighed.

"No," she said, with a little troubled drooping of her pretty mouth, "he never alludes to her. When I began to think for myself, I asked him about her. But he seemed so ill at ease and gave such evasive replies to my questions that I allowed the subject to drop. The only thing he has told me is that she died in India when I was but a year old.

"As for her portrait, I am not surprised that you have never seen it at the Hall. Ever since I can remember, my father has had it in his own private study. As soon as we came here, after my grandfather's death, dad had the picture hung in a quiet little room on the ground floor, with a door leading into the garden.

"I wonder if he is there now. If not, I may get you a glimpse of the portrait, for the door is glass-panelled. Let us walk under the wall of the old house, and perhaps we may see it."

They got up from the low, rustic seat in the little arbour, skirted the pretty flower-filled garden, and moved along in the cool shade of the stately building. Presently Gypsy stopped.

"Look," she said, "there it is. Isn't she lovely?"

The sliding glass door was half open. Ashley Arlington looked through and his eyes fell on a picture hanging on the wall. For some minutes he never spoke. Gypsy had slipped her hand through his arm and gazed from him to the picture in pleased anticipation.

"Pity that one so beautiful should die so young," he said at last, and his voice touched a tender chord in the girl's breast. "I do not wonder that the Colonel mourns her even after so many years. But I must go now, darling. The governor wants me this afternoon. My horse is at the gate. Good-bye, sweetheart. I shall be over again in the morning."

With a tender pressure of the hand and a fond look into her eyes, he took his leave, and returned to Arlington House, the country seat of his father, Sir Hugh Arlington.

Those were happy days for Ashley and Gypsy—days that seemed all too short-lived. For what is more difficult of computation than time, or what so elastic as an hour? The sky was blue and sunny. And then, as so often happens, a cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, showed itself above the horizon and threatened to mount even to the zenith where the sun shone.

One day Ashley Arlington received an anonymous communication that filled him with vague uneasiness. It couldn't be true, of course. But there the thing was, and it wouldn't let him rest. He was a true Englishman—honest, upright, open as the day—and a few days later he presented himself to Colonel Powyss.

The old warrior received him with cordiality, for he liked the

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young man, and had already given his consent to Ashley's engagement with his daughter. But something in the young man's face made him grow suddenly silent. He felt something was coming—something he had for years dreaded and feared. But he was prepared. With a courteous gesture, he motioned Ashley to a chair.

"You wish to speak with me," he said calmly. "The truth is in your face. Can I help you in any way?"

Ashley moved uneasily in his seat. It seemed difficult to begin. Finally he drew from his pocket a letter.

"Colonel Powyss," he said unsteadily, "I have received an anonymous letter which contains some reference to yourself. I have shown the letter to no one, nor have I even mentioned its existence or its purport. You are an older man than I, and it has required some little temerity on my part to bring myself to speak of it to you. But the light is always preferable to the dark, and Englishmen should be afraid neither to speak nor yet to listen. I will read the letter to you, only remarking that I place no credence in the statement it contains, and bring it to you for no other reason than that you should know you have an enemy of this sort—an enemy who has not even the courage to append his name to his accusation."

He paused and opened the letter. Colonel Powyss straightened himself. His splendid face and soldierly figure were well under control. But in his heart there was dread—shame—bitterness. The voice of Ashley, reading, fell on his ear, and he listened.

"DEAR SIR,—*I understand you are engaged to Miss Powyss, daughter of Colonel Powyss, of Powyss Hall, Warwickshire.*

If rumour also speak correctly, your father, Sir Hugh Arlington, is a gentleman who prides himself upon his lineage and the unimpeachable purity of his descent.

It might, therefore, save you much future annoyance and humiliation if I let you into a little secret which has for years been so jealously guarded by Colonel Powyss.

The lovely woman whose portrait hangs in the study at Powyss Hall was never the wife of its present owner, and—well, you can guess the rest. You may now see that Miss Gypsy Powyss is scarcely a fitting wife for an Arlington.

"ANON."

Ashley's voice had scarcely ceased before Colonel Powyss was on his feet. There was an angry light in his dark eyes that boded ill for someone.

"Let me see the letter!" he demanded.

Ashley handed it to him without hesitation. Colonel Powyss critically scanned the handwriting, but it was evident from the first that it was quite unknown to him. He passed the letter back with a baffled gesture.

Ashley took it, quietly folded it in two, and dropped it into the fire which burnt in the grate. The Colonel watched him.

"Ashley, my lad," he said, touched deeply by the action, "you are a worthy son of your noble father. I wish I could tell you everything—everything. But I cannot do that, neither to you nor to any living creature. Can you be content if I give you my word, as a gentleman and a soldier, that this letter is a lie?"

He looked steadily into the young man's eyes. Ashley held out his hand.

"I never doubted it, sir," he said.

"Thank you."

Both men had risen, but now, as though by common consent, they resumed their seats. After a brief pause, the Colonel commenced to speak.

"It is more than probable," he said, "that your anonymous correspondent, finding you quite unmoved, may write again. If that, too, fail, he may even write to your father. I am bound to admit that, at present, I can produce no document to refute this false statement.

"I think, therefore, that I had better procure the necessary papers from India to show that I was legally married. I am rather afraid, however, that this may occupy some time, since I must also admit that my marriage was a secret one. Briefly, the facts are these: Little more than twenty years ago, while stationed in India, I first met the lady who soon after became my wife. I was only a captain then, and she—a governess.

"You start? Yes, she was a governess. But she was also the daughter of a greater house than the one in which she served. Ruin had come o that house, through the recklessness and extravagance of its male members, and she—a lovely, innocent girl—was sent out penniless into a world that cares little for the fate of such human sacrifices. What wonder that she dropped the name that spelt disgrace and adopted a better and a purer—the name her dead mother had borne!

"And I—well, it is an old story. Love is quick to grow, and in less than three short months, she had promised to become my wife. But my father was a man of strong prejudices. Blood was the one essential in his strict code. I knew him well enough to feel convinced that to marry a governess, even though that governess were a lady, would be to excite his anger and probably involve me in disinheritance.

"Do not misunderstand me. Had there been no other way, I would willingly have relinquished my expectations in that quarter. But I should spend many years in India, and I argued that a secret marriage might serve to link us together until such time as I could overcome the scruples and prejudices of my father.

"So one lovely morning, we went separately to a little English church among the hills in that land of many races, and were quietly married by an old priest. His own fee and that of the witnesses was sufficient to insure the secrecy of the ceremony. In one house there was some speculation as to the mysterious disappearance of a governess, but conjecture was always wide of the truth and the subject lost its interest before the orthodox nine days were half over. We had a pretty little cottage in one of the lovely valleys among the hills, and no one guessed the truth until our little Gypsy was born. And even *him* I pledged to secrecy. So the time went by, till Gypsy was just a year old. And then—then—I lost her."

A grey shade came into the Colonel's face as he uttered the last words. It was plain that some strong emotion was stirring within him. Ashley Arlington felt touched. Rising from his seat he went softly over to the Colonel's chair and took one hand in his.

"Colonel Powyss," he said, "I esteem you above all men. Thank you for your confidence. Good-bye."

A moment later and he was gone. Colonel Powyss heard his departing footsteps and a deep groan escaped his lips.

"Would to God that were all!" he said hoarsely. "How can I tell him that the truth—the truth—is worse, if possible, than the lie he has heard?"

He bowed his head upon his hands and let his thoughts go back to that far-off time when his little daughter was born. Yes, someone had found out his secret then. A brother-officer—one, Rupert Rivers—while strolling among the hills, had stumbled upon him as he came out of his cottage in the valley.

He had always disliked Captain Rivers, and it galled him to prefer a request of any kind. But many things were involved, and he did it. Rivers acquiesced readily enough, and, for a time, matters went on as before. And then, one day, when his little Gypsy was just a year old, he received a blow that well-nigh bereft him of reason.

Picking his way along the valley one dark night, he found no light in the little window to welcome him. No footfall responded to his knock, no soft words fell on his ear. The cottage was as dark as the valley, and a great fear came into his heart.

Forcing the door he went in, groping his way to the little sitting-room that had been to him a very paradise for nearly two years. A little baby-girl softly sobbing on the floor. And a letter.

Yes, a letter—stained and blotted as though with many tears. She had brooded long over his unwillingness to boldly proclaim her his lawful wife, forgetful that this very unwillingness was for her sake as much as for his. And brooding had bred suspicion, and suspicion distrust. He was ashamed of her. She would go away.

Someone had been kind to her, had sympathised with her

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in her loneliness, and she was going away with—his brain reeled as he read the words—with *him*. Could it be true? Oh, why had she not told him she was lonely? The hours he had spared her were few, he knew, but she had not realised how difficult it was for him to slip away from headquarters and come to her. With whom had she gone? She had not said. Was it Rupert Rivers?

He must find out. Early the next morning he went to the railway station. Yes, a lady, accompanied by a gentleman, had left the day before. They thought the lady answered to the description he gave, but they couldn't be sure about the gentleman. Then, with white drawn face, he went to the barracks. Lieutenant Fernley was the first officer he met. Captain Powyss put his question and received the reply without flinching. Captain Rivers had obtained leave of absence for a week. Then it was he. But who was this coming in at the door? Rupert Rivers himself! Captain Powyss looked bewilderingly into the other's smiling face. Then, without a word, he drew him out of earshot.

"My wife!" he demanded, in a hoarse whisper, "Tell me—what have you done with her? Tell me, or, by Heaven, I will kill you as I would a dog!"

And Rivers had slowly taken the cigar from between his lips and had looked in blank amazement into his accuser's face.

"Powyss," he said, "what on earth do you mean? Is anything wrong, old chap? Tell me! Don't look like that."

"Then it wasn't you?"

Once more Powyss looked searchingly, dully, into the other's face. Then he turned away with a groan. He could think no more. Back to the little cottage in the valley, to his pretty little baby-girl. And the sight of her, innocent, helpless, motherless, had wrung the tears from his eyes. Snatching the frail form in his arms, he sobbed over it as only a strong man sobs. And then he grew calmer and quieter.

It was not difficult to find a good ayah for the little girl, and the cottage in the valley was still kept on. But his wife never came back. Once, when on a visit to England, he had confessed the whole miserable story to his father. At first the latter had been very angry, but the realisation of his son's sorrow and humiliation soon touched a tender spot in the old man's heart, and he had forgiven him.

It *was* a miserable story. But, at least, they had been legally married, and this anonymous letter was an infamous lie. It was his duty now to prove it such, if only for his daughter's sake. Her mother had carried with her the certificate of their marriage, and, hitherto, he had seen no need to supply himself with a copy. But he must do so now. The next day he summoned his solicitor, and communicated his wishes in the matter. Cable messages were dispatched, and, later, a trusty agent. And when, at the end of six months, the latter returned, he brought with him—nothing. The little church among the hills had been burnt down five years before, and all its registers destroyed.

Search as they might, no trace could be found of the two witnesses, and the old priest had long since been dead. Plan after plan had been resorted to, effort after effort made, but Colonel Powyss' marriage was without record, save for that old-time certificate that his wife had carried with her on the day of her flight. What had become of her? Was she alive? He did not know, but, even if she were, she would probably be the last person to come within his reach.

And then another anonymous letter came for Ashley Arlington, and, with it, a covert threat that, should he still disregard the matter, the writer would appeal to Sir Hugh.

Almost in despair, the Colonel went from one place to another, finding nothing, yet always seeking for what he did not find. And then a new and unforeseen event occurred that changed both retrospect and prospect and sent a shaft of light streaming through the darkness of the years that had gone between.

It all happened in a few minutes. A dark night and the heavy tramp, tramp of men who carry a burden coming through the garden. Colonel Powyss opened the sliding door of his private study and looked out. Seeing his tall figure, silhouetted in the doorway, the bearers made towards him.

"A gentleman, sir—thrown from his horse and dragged along the road. We don't think he's dead, sir, so thought you'd let us bring him in here, while we fetch the doctor."

The Colonel opened the door wider and stepped back. There was a couch in the room, and upon it the men put their burden. Colonel Powyss looked down on the white face. The eyes slowly opened and looked up into his.

"Good Heavens!" he gasps. "Not here—not here—anywhere but here!"

"Rivers!"

"Go away. Where are the men? Tell them to take me away from this house. Oh!"

Colonel Powyss needed no doctor to tell him the man was dying.

"Rivers, old fellow," he said gently, "I'm afraid your time's come. Meet it like a man and a soldier. Remember how we fought side by side in the old days. Remember——"

"Stop! I wish to God I could forget! I remember—I remember how I tempted that innocent young wife of yours, till I even made her believe that wrong was right and right wrong. I remember how she ran away with me, and how, before the train had reached its destination, the horror, the revolting horror of what she was doing, came upon her and made her strong again. I remember how she spurned me when she alighted on the platform, and bade me go back to my regiment. She could never return, she said. She had forfeited all in her weakness, her folly. She must go back to the life she led before she met you. And she did go back, as pure as she was then—I swear it!—and for aught I know she is a governess to this day.

"Once I saw her, quite by accident, and renewed my old fascination. But she treated me with contempt.

"Then I told her of you and of her daughter, and threatened to ruin her daughter's happiness if she did not come to me. But still she spurned me. And then—then I wrote those anonymous letters. I can't say much more. She made me mad when she left me standing like a fool on that station platform. I went back to the regiment, and met you. She had made a fool of me, but I hid it from everyone. I don't know where she is now. I don't—I can't see you, Powyss. The light's going down or something. Give us your hand before I go.

"Say you forgive me, old comrade. They're calling the roll, and my name comes next. Stop the drums. I can't hear your orders, Colonel. Your hand—quick!"

The struggle in the Colonel's breast was only a little less prolonged than in that of the dying man. His hand met that of his enemy and rested there. A grateful glance, a penitent sigh, and the soul of Rupert Rivers went to its account.

It was a week later, and Colonel Powyss was sitting on a chair in his little study. The day was warm and bright, and the door into the garden was slid half open. Many things were in the Colonel's mind, as he gazed up at the lovely,

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girlish face that looked down at him from the painted canvas. She had realised in time. Thank God for that! Oh, that he might find her. The eyes seemed to implore him as he looked into them.. How like her the picture was! He had had it painted from a photograph ten years before, and seemed never to tire of gazing at it. And since Rivers had made that confession to him, the face seemed to have become even more beautiful in his eyes. In a rush of tenderness, he stretched out his hand to the sweet face.

"My lost wife!" he said, as if imploring her. "Will she ever return?"

There was a sound behind him. Turning quickly, he saw, standing in the doorway, a woman, pale, grief-stricken, ill-clad, repentant. Speechless, he gazed at her, and she seemed to droop before him as though with shame. The lovely eyes filled with tears, and the head sank slowly on the thin breast. And then both speech and action returned to Colonel Powyss. With a cry he sprang towards her, and, sharply closing the door, folded her in his arms.

"Ruth," he said, "you have come back to me?"

"Do you want me after—after——"

"Hush, dear. After to-day is all the after we need think about. I know all I need know, and I desire to know no more. Want you, Ruth? Of course I want you."

The woman laid her head on his breast and began to cry.

"I don't deserve it," she sobbed. "I wouldn't have come back now, only *he* threatened my little Gypsy."

"He is dead." The Colonel spoke the words slowly.

"Dead?"

"Yes, he died in this very room no more than a week ago. He told me all, and—and I forgave him."

For some minutes there was silence, and then she said:

"I managed to get along in my old occupation as governess until a year ago. And then I had a severe illness, and grew very poor—dreadfully poor—and——"

"Hush, hush, Ruth! Let us talk no more about it. Come upstairs with me. I think I can manage it without your being seen. And then, when you have changed your dress and removed the traces of travel, we will go and see Gypsy."

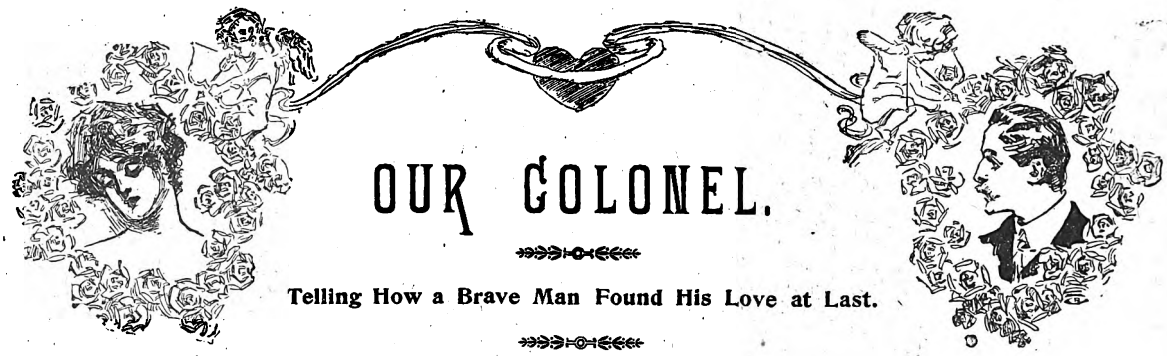
And, an hour later, Gypsy's arms were clinging about her mother's neck, and the Colonel could do nothing but gaze at the two with undisguised affection. He told Gypsy that he had been mistaken, that her mother had not died as he had imagined, but had suffered many things in the years of their enforced separation.

But of Rupert Rivers and his fatal fascination, he told neither her nor any living creature.

And when Gypsy Powyss and Ashley Arlington stood together at the altar and voiced the vows that were to unite them for ever, the Colonel's long-lost wife formed a conspicuous figure in the group.

For returning loveliness had come with returning happiness, and many were heard to declare that she was "a finer woman at forty than most women at twenty-five."

Walter J. Mowbray.



OUR COLONEL.

Telling How a Brave Man Found His Love at Last.

"OH, here comes our colonel! Isn't he splendid?" Thus spoke my wife.

"Whose colonel?" said I; and, without awaiting a reply, added: "What! this fellow?"

My tone was a little contemptuous; for, though Agnes and I are so secure in each other's affection that not the slightest taint of vulgar jealousy has touched our lives, all the world knows how it grates a little on a certain one of our constituent parts—self-love, perhaps—when the fact is revealed that the contemplation of our image, as the one big image, and the acceptance of our perfections as the sum of earthly excellence, do not shut out from that somebody's eyes other images, with their attendant attractions.

Thus, my wife's complimentary adjective "splendid" prompted the derogatory tone of my remark regarding the gentleman who was approaching, though the brief survey I made of the object himself certainly did not justify any word of slight.

As the colonel passed, his eye rested momentarily on my wife's face with the well-bred glance of interest an appreciative man is apt to give to female beauty—for Agnes is very handsome, coming of a handsome family—I summed up his outward presentment as well as the short time would allow.

Not over medium height, a somewhat spare, but compact, sinewy figure, erect and soldierly walk, quiet, dark grey eyes—a face that looked young, despite touches of grey in the hair. In the brief glimpse some other look in the face struck me—that of a man of force, of nerve, of one who had suffered, who had met boldly, or would so meet, if called upon, trouble, danger, death.

"He looks like a gentleman. Who is he? Whose colonel?" said I, breaking the silence.

Agnes laughed.

"I don't know who he is. Helen and I call him our colonel, because he looks so much like a soldier. He lives in the next street, I think, as he passes every day. We have made a guess that he is a soldier. I don't know why, except that he seems different from other people. Perhaps he is a general."

Here the subject dropped, our conversation turning to the more personal and practical matter of birthday presents for the children, the search for which had brought us out together.

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No further mention was made of the colonel, and, in the absorption of business, he had passed from my mind, when, several months after my first view of him, there was a second meeting which brought him into closer relations.

Just in the dusk of the Spring evening my wife, her sister Helen, and myself, were standing on a street corner awaiting a tram to take us homeward. Agnes and I were in close conversation about some domestic matter, Helen a foot or two from us.

Suddenly there was a slight scream. Turning, I saw Helen's face, white in the growing shadow, a rough-looking man quite close to her, then—what was it?

"Good Heavens!" cried Helen, "the Bible is John's."

Something shot between them, and the man went down with a thud, as if a thunderbolt had struck him. Then a flash in the dim light, a smothered "Oh!" and my startled senses told me that a knife had been driven home somewhere.

This was all instantaneous. Instinctively I sprang forward and struck with all my force the man who had the knife, with the satisfactory result of seeing him go down. Then a rush of people, a closing in on the group, hurried words, a rough seizure of the prostrate men, and, in course of time, an elucidation of the mystery.

Two drunken roughs had crossed the street, and in passing, purposely or otherwise, one had rudely pushed against Helen. At the same instant, a gentleman coming the other way was abreast of the party, and had promptly knocked the ruffian down. The latter's companion, with the murderous instinct of his class, immediately drew a knife and struck full at the breast of the intruder, who, fortunately, by a quick drawing back into a defensive attitude, received the thrust in his arm.

The stranger stood quietly, clasping with his right hand his wounded left arm, until the assailants were in process of being carried off by the police, when he asked if someone would be kind enough to tie a handkerchief tightly round the arm "Above the wound," he said, in as self-possessed a tone as if the cut were a mere scratch.

Helen sprang forward first, and then I saw clearly the gentleman's features. It was on my lips to say "It is the colonel," for he it was.

There was a gleam in his eyes, a look, weak as his paleness showed he was becoming, of the man ready and accustomed to face danger.

And Helen's eyes—they were literally stars, soft, glowing stars. Helen admires true courage, and the colonel's introduction in this heroic guise brought the colouring of romance.

The result of our exciting meeting was that, finding the gentleman was only temporarily boarding with strangers I insisted on taking him to my own residence, where, duly installed, the medical attendance and nursing necessary in what proved an ugly and troublesome wound ensued.

On reaching the house we made a formal introduction of ourselves to each other, he handing me his card, on which was written in a bold hand "Roger Markham."

While the doctor was dressing the cut I noticed several scars, one on the shoulder, evidently from a gunshot wound; and a reference to them as indicating military service brought out the quiet answer that he had been in the Army as we had supposed.

"That scar you see there was received in one of the skirmishes that were scarcely battles but more a series of hand-to-hand fights just before the surrender. It was from a pistol-shot fired by a mere boy, whom, in a second, my horse trampled down. It is a sad memento to me, the boy looked so young and bright and handsome; but the shot made my bridle arm useless, and I could not check my horse. I would have saved him if I could. His face haunts me as of one uselessly sacrificed on the very threshold of peace."

In subsequent conversation, during our guest's convalescence, we gathered many interesting incidents of raid and battle and siege, though so modestly given, so far as any part he himself had taken in scenes of daring and blood, one might have supposed him a mere spectator. In answer to questions as to his rank, we learnt that he was colonel in the 71st Lancers.

"Didn't I tell you so?" said Agnes to me that night. "Mark the infallible instinct of woman."

As time passed this unerring feminine insight elucidated another fact. It was that our colonel—for we felt that he was "ours" now, weak and wounded as he was—had fought another fight, and had lost, and yet conquered.

In the battle royal, a woman's beauty and tender care had proved weapons strong enough to subdue the bold heart that had made its way into the very citadel of her own breast.

The situation became patent, and a month before the colonel left us to resume the routine of boarding-house life, the fact that he and Helen loved each other was tacitly accepted by our circle, and it pleased us.

After he left us, his nightly visit was regarded as a part of the course of life.

Now, what demon of circumstance possessed me I know not, but one night I remarked that such and such a battle was one of the fiercest in the whole war.

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"Ah," said the colonel, "I don't like to think of that time. It brings up that young, gallant face—strangely familiar it grows, too. And, by the way, I have the boy's Bible at my rooms; it came into my hands after the skirmish. I wish so much I could find his relatives!"

"Has it no name in it?"

"It had, but the name is partly obliterated by a splash of blood. The leaves are cut as by a sabre, and I judge the stroke that cut them wounded the boy also. You can see 'John,' and underneath, 'from his mother,' that is all."

I noticed Helen's face pale a little as she asked in a low voice if he wouldn't bring the book down some time.

"Certainly," he said.

On the next night, after some little conversation, Markham, rising and going to where Helen sat, took a seat beside her, remarking:

"I brought this memento with me, Helen."

He unloosed the wrapper carefully, and in a reverent manner, as though it were something from a grave, handed the volume to Helen.

From my absorption in the financial column of the paper, I was startled by a sound that was a wail and a shriek combined—the cry of a breaking heart.

"Heavens, Roger! there is blood between us! It is John's."

The colonel caught the fainting girl as she fell. Mechanically I picked up the book, and Agnes and myself stared at the page with its smear of blood and handwriting of the dead mother, so familiar to both.

The situation was dramatic—utter silence broken at last by Markham, who, in a strained voice, suggested that we should remove the unconscious girl to her room. We carried her up, and stood silently until the restoratives Agnes applied began to show their effect, when I took Markham by the arm and led him downstairs.

"This is unutterably horrible!" he said.

In a few words I explained to him that John Bernard, whose name blood—his own, perchance—had blurred, was the only brother of Helen and Agnes, who, but six months before the war ended, getting involved in trouble reflecting on his honour, had joined a Boer regiment at the front, and that, in spite of persistent inquiry and search, nothing had been heard of him since his last letter in March.

His fate was a tender subject with us, and almost unconsciously we had hoped he might yet report to us. We had heard of such cases. But this awful token settled the matter. That the circumstances had not been mentioned sooner was because family pride shrunk from revealing the cloud which had been brought on it, hence all that had been said was that a brother had been lost in the war.

In a few moments the colonel, pale and agitated, took his leave.

In the morning he called. He and Helen had an interview in which we afterwards learnt, while heroically confessing that her heart was entirely his, she told him that with the ghost of her dead brother between them, and the feeling that through him, though unavoidably, the death-blow may have been given, there was nothing for them but to part.

Within a week I read aloud from the list of passengers on a Liverpool steamer the name "Roger Markham."

Helen, just a shade paler, said:

"He has gone, then. He said he would leave as soon as he could settle some affairs. He——"

Here her voice broke as she realised that the severance which would be for all time was actually accomplished, and with an agonised cry, "How can I bear it?" rushed from the room.

What the poor, gentle, torn, but stout heart went through in the lonely hours of that night none but Heaven can know.

The doom of parting had been fixed, but while one city or one continent held them, a word, a tick of the telegraph wire, would have brought him to her side, or her to his—at least in that hour when Death should come to bridge the chasm and lay the ghost that barred their communion in life.

But Helen was strong and brave, and fought a gallant fight with herself, no trace showing to the world of the terrible strife. To us there was an added gentleness, a paler cheek, a deeper look in the soft, dark eye, but there was also that constant activity, an increasing devotion to the daily duties of life that both showed the true, brave, healthy woman, and took away all fear that she would fade beneath the blow which might have crushed a more fragile nature.

What of him—the wanderer?

No tidings reached us to tell how his high spirit and gallant heart fretted and chafed; only at intervals there came, in packets addressed to me, with no scrap of writing within, a curiously-shaped leaf, a shell of exquisite tint, a lustrous stone, a quaintly-carved fan—tokens that his restless feet had touched the far-off shores of India and China, and trodden through African wastes.

Once a huge lion-skin was sent to me, and we knew whose hand had laid the forest king low.

Outwardly these tokens moved Helen but little; we could only read in the glow of her face a sort of loving satisfaction in the knowledge that *he* yet lived and—remembered; and later, after an event which I am about to mention, we saw an occasional gleam of something born of the whisperings of Hope to her hungry soul.

* * * * *

Two years to the very day after the colonel's departure in the hot June afternoon, the door of my private office was quietly opened and closed, and I heard a man's footstep approaching my desk, which was in a corner of the room.

I sat with my back to the door, thinking in a dreamy way of the drama of whose closing the day was the anniversary. As the noise of the steps ceased I turned with a start, and there surely stood a ghost.

Gaunt, with unkempt hair and beard, in a foreign, half-ragged costume, the handsome face hollowed and haggard, but a live, proud look in the dark eyes, by all that was good or bad, it was John Bernard, or his ghost.

My eyes must have expressed my mental uncertainty—never a word could I say.

A smile spread over the worn features, and my visitor, moving to the desk, said, in a quiet, repressed voice:

"Don't be scared—it is John."

Putting his hand into his breast-pocket and producing a package, which he laid on the table, he continued, in tones with an intense ring in them:

"There is the paper they said I stole, and with it the confession, signed, sealed, and witnessed by the American Consul at Rio, of the man who did steal it. I got on his track just after peace was declared, and I swore to myself that never should word be heard from me at home, living or dead, unless it could be with honour restored. And here I am, worn out, dirty, ragged, but with my name clear."

Here the poor fellow, weak and nervous, burst into tears.

I, who had as yet uttered no word, jumped up, threw my arms round him, and am ashamed—no, *not* ashamed—to say, strong, big, hulking fellow as I am, that I could not speak a word for the next five minutes.

But we recovered our equanimity, and after a free and divided use of my handkerchief—an article John was temporarily short of—got ourselves more into the appearance of men.

As may be imagined, I was moved by more than the mere return of John and the fact of his redemption from disgrace.

A thousand bewildering possibilities loomed up, and John, the colonel, and Helen, were so tangled in my thoughts that I was in doubt which to do first—go home, or start for the Continent. I startled the clerk in the outer office by calling out to him to run down quickly and get me a ticket for Paris.

"A what, sir?"

"Oh, a cab, I mean."

The day was not late, and John expressing a wish to drive first to Mr. Selwyn's, if that gentleman still lived, and give him the papers, we went there at once.

"I have brought you something, Mr. Selwyn," I said.

The banker glanced over the stolen paper, read the other intently, and, though he was evidently shocked to see the signature that of his former confidential clerk, the pleasure he

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felt in John's clearance and return was unmistakable, and the rough, hard-featured man of the world came near disgracing himself as badly as I had.

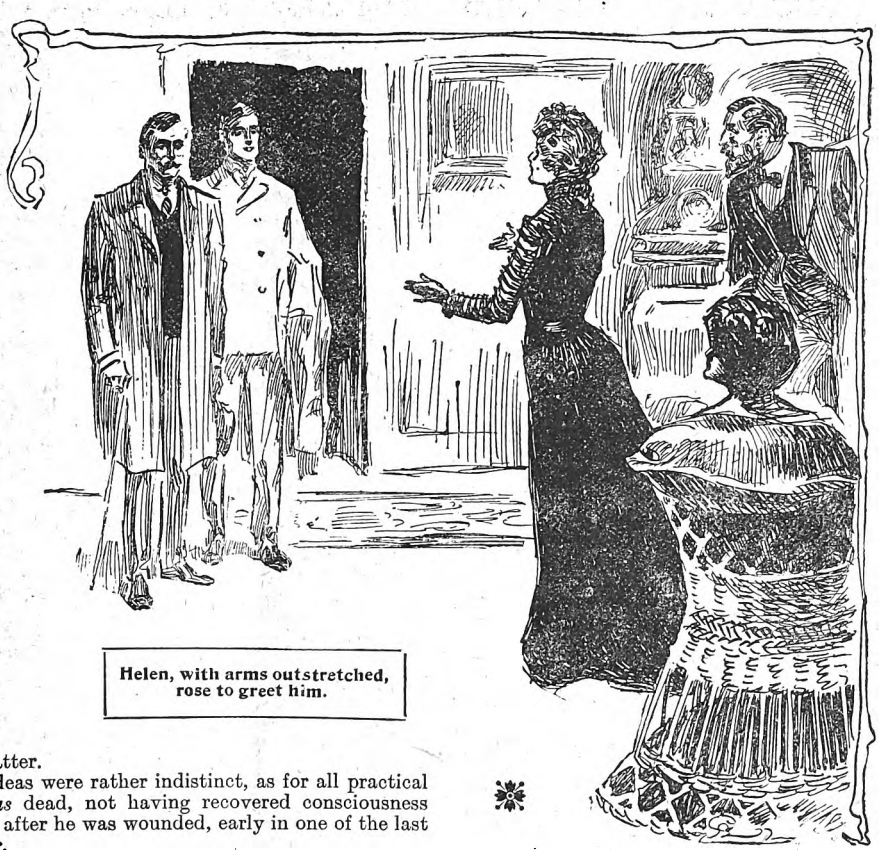
As fast as the cabby could take us home we went, and then ensued a scene not to be described.

My impression is that both Agnes and Helen swooned, while John and I demeaned ourselves in a very unmanlike manner.

Tempests, whether of Nature or of the human economy, cannot last; the reaction comes, and in due course we quieted down and listened to John's story.

Naturally, the part which was of most personal interest came first, and he told us how, by accident, as he lay in a small farmhouse, recovering slowly from wounds, he learnt who it was that, to shield himself, had wronged him; how, when scarcely able to drag himself along, he had struck the trail; how through weary days, which grew into months, he had followed the doubling tracks of his enemy, who, as though conscious of the sleuth-hound behind availed himself of every disguise and expedient to help his flight. At last, in Brazil, he had run him down.

After hearing this part of his story, handing John his Bible, which he recognised with open-eyed astonishment, and telling him that its return had convinced us he was dead, I led him to talk of his fighting career, and especially the closing portion of the latter.



Helen, with arms outstretched, rose to greet him.

He said his ideas were rather indistinct, as for all practical purposes he *was* dead, not having recovered consciousness for many hours after he was wounded, early in one of the last fights of the war.

"But!" broke in Helen, excitedly, "you remember just before you were wounded, and you saw who wounded you, did you not? And didn't you shoot somebody, and didn't somebody ride you down?"

"Why, you weren't there, were you?" said John, glancing inquisitively at his sister. "Yes"—turning round and showing his left cheek—"there's a mark of a hoof; somebody did ride me down. The fact is that, while the incidents of that day were most bewildering to me, there were some pictures stamped on my memory, never to be effaced. But among them all, when I try to recall those scenes, as I have hundreds of times in the lone night hours, comes up the figure of one man. He embodies all my ideas of a soldier—of war—and his face, as I saw it that day, haunts me. I am troubled with the thought that he was killed. I hope not; and if what I hope is true, I would give years of my life to know it."

Agnes and myself exchanged glances, while Helen's eyes had an untranslatable gleam—pride, hope, love, brightened, dimmed and softened them all at once.

In a low tone, she said, "Tell us of that day."

"Well, our men were posted behind a stone fence facing one of the country roads, along which the British were expected to march in an attempt to flank our forces. Behind us was a brigade, on which we were to fall back if attacked in force, or which would be thrown forward to help us.

"After waiting several hours, listening to the roar of artillery in the distance, suddenly a picket dashed in, calling out, 'Cavalry!' In a few minutes a cloud of dust rose on the road facing us. Our commandant ordered us to lie flat down, and thus hidden by the wall, the commandant posting himself behind a tree for observation, we waited.

"Nearer rolled the dust, and soon could be heard the sound of iron hoofs, then of voices, occasionally a careless laugh. I remember the merriment jarred on me, and I could not help feeling how much more like straight-out war it would be to stand up and let them see us. I suppose something must have attracted attention, for clear, sharp, and stern came the word 'Halt!'

"Immediately we were ordered to rise, aim, and fire. There before us, perhaps a hundred yards off, was a small body of horsemen, somewhere from fifty to a hundred, evidently a reconnoitring party. As the fire of three hundred Mausers belched on them one would have thought they would be swept clear away; but on the instant we were greeted with a return fire from carbines, and, amid the din, the order 'Charge!' rang out clear and distinct.

"Before we could reload they were upon us, over the low fence, slashing with their swords, and cutting their way right through us. I was back some twenty yards from the fence, excitedly trying to reload.

"Everything was in confusion—the confusion of hand-to-hand fighting. The time was only a few seconds, and one couldn't make many observations; but in that brief space I could not help noticing the officer in command of the enemy—I don't know his rank. He was the first over the fence, mounted on a splendid horse, and as he called to his men to follow him, his sword sweeping like lightning, his eyes aglow with the fire of battle, he reminded me of a picture I had seen of the god of

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war. In even that moment I was fascinated, and it flashed through my mind that a leader like that I would follow anywhere.

"Plunging, rearing, the rider sweeping his blade, bayonets flashing and pistol-shots rattling all about him, the horse came straight towards me.

"Instinctively I fired my pistol, without aim; the next instant the steed had trampled me down. Almost as I fell, I felt myself seized by the jacket and dragged along, and knew nothing more until I awoke in a small room in a farm house.

"I learnt afterwards that when the skirmish was over, our men had been hastily withdrawn, leaving the dead and wounded on the field.

"The kind people who cared for me told me that I had been carried there the night before, accompanied by an officer with his arm in a sling and suffering from several wounds. He didn't think I would recover, and had tried to find out my name, but there was nothing about me to indicate it. By-the-way, where did you get my Bible?"

Helen, incapable of speech, silently drew a little case from her breast, and handed it to John.

"Heavens, that is the man! He brought you the Bible—did he? Where is he?"

"I will tell you all about it in your room, John."

And I told him.

"Why, this is like a novel," said John. "The colonel—Helen, confound the man who kept me wandering over a continent to try to redeem my name, and thus separated two such noble souls! But you must fatten me up and get me well now. I have another mission."

The aspect of affairs was certainly improved; but with the fading out of the blood-splash that had separated her from her lover there came across Helen that shade of restlessness, that touch of unquiet, that betokens a mind ill at ease—a chafing against the decrees of silence and absence, which, bravely submitted to while they seemed just, were doubly hard to bear when the circumstance that enforced them no longer existed.

Many a consultation, in our anxiety about Helen, did Agnes and I hold as to how to discover Markham's whereabouts. To write to every British consul, to telegraph to every European hotel, to employ trained detectives—schemes without number did we devise and discuss, reckless of the financial ruin the expense would have entailed.

One night, towards bedtime, John, who had in his few weeks of rest recovered his condition and good looks, remarked, in a quiet voice:

"Well, I will bid you good-night and good-bye. To-morrow morning I leave for the Continent," stooping over Helen and kissing her tenderly. "Keep up your spirits, sister; I will bring him back to you."

"Why, John," I say, "how will you find him—where will you look for him?"

"I don't know," the young man responded; "but I *will* find him—my tracking experiences will serve me."

* * * * *

So on the morrow John went, and we settled down to our old life with this new disturbing element—waiting for news. Letters came regularly, but one after another summed up "no clue yet, but be patient."

At intervals came too, those reminders, anonymous but with no shadow of doubt as to their sender, from far-off climes. The wrappers were duly sent to John; but as the postmarks were sometimes months old and never the same, they were mere tokens of where the wanderer had been.

Ah, here was one from Algiers!—that was getting nearer—and I forthwith cabled John, "Algiers, September 5th," nothing more. In a week I had a wire which I didn't show even to my wife, from Algiers, "Left here a month ago; no trace yet."

On that very day a dainty little sketch of a face like an angel's came, and the postmark was "Rome." I cabled again, "Rome, September 28th."

The scent grew warmer, and even across the ocean I felt the hunter's blood astir in my veins. But this waiting was dreary.

Time rolled on. Not a message from John, except that, in a letter from Rome, whither he had gone on receiving my last dispatch, he said that he had struck a trail which was "very wide," and therefore uncertain, but which he hoped would sooner or later narrow down to success, and that he was about starting for Vienna first and Paris afterwards.

A month or so later—it was early in December—on entering my office, I saw a cablegram on my desk.

For the first time I was afraid; something told me this was a message of life or death. But I tore off the envelope.

"*Found. Ill, but recovering. No danger. Start home in a week. Will write.*"

Had a thousand electric needles been stuck in me, I couldn't have been more excited than I was by that message of life. Did I jump or knock over the chairs, or what? I don't know.

I was in a whirl of excitement, and the clerks were assuredly justified in the belief they may have had of lunacy, intoxication, or similar explanation of lost equilibrium in the usually staid head of the concern.

I couldn't bring my mind to business. I must have time to think how to break this news to Helen. She is strong against grief; perhaps joy may overcome her.

I took a day's holiday, planning over and over what I should say; and, after all, when I entered the house at the usual hour, at the very first glance at my face, Helen's greeting was:

"You have had news. What is it? Don't be afraid to tell me."

I simply handed her the message. She read it.

"From Paris? I knew it would come sooner or later."

Retaining the paper, she looked at me with such a look as can come only in the eyes of a true, brave woman, fed with the food of undying faith.

There is no creature made of God stronger than a good, hopeful and trusting woman!

There was nothing now but to await the end. The wanderer was ill, but there was the assurance "no danger." "Start in a week." We counted the days, the hours. "Will write." A letter would come first.

The letter did come, and this is it:

"DEAR RONALD.—I wrote you from Rome in October, just before leaving there, but too hurriedly to give you any details. From what I learnt during my stay, the colonel must have left on the very day I arrived. I could find no trace in my wanderings about day after day, and was feeling very desperate, when accidentally I strolled into the rooms of young Wiswall—you know he is there, and he is doing some good work, too. We were glad to see each other, and talked for hours about—well, everything, almost.

"Just as I was about going, he said, 'By-the-way, there was a good fellow here a week or two ago—though you don't know him, I expect—Markham, of London.' 'Markham—Roger Markham! The one man in all the world I want to see!' 'Well, he is gone, left—let me see—ten days ago for

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Vienna, or Paris, I don't know which, and I don't think he did himself; and, come to consider, I doubt if he cared. He said he was just passing away the time—intended strolling over the Continent a while before returning to England.

"The next day I was off to Vienna, where it is only necessary to say I met with no trace whatever, though I spent several weeks in the search. To Paris next, reaching there on November 21st. That is one of my calendar days hereafter.

"I felt very sick at heart, though, when I thought of the wilderness of civilisation I was about to try to penetrate, for I had learnt that this search for anybody in big cities isn't like my old trailing experience. How should I start? Ah, the police—they keep track of strangers! Accident, or Providence, solved the difficulty sooner than gendarmes or a system of espionage.

"On the very night of my arrival, restless and disinclined to sleep, I wandered out, strolling listlessly along. The clocks were striking twelve, when suddenly there was a rumbling sound, a glare, the sound of rushing feet, cries of 'Fire!' The excitement stirred me; I would see how they managed such things in Paris. I ran swiftly through the nearest streets in the direction of the light, and on turning the corner, there burst on my view a sheet of flame—a tall building all afire, only a row of windows at one end visible—several hundred people moving about aimlessly, or staring helplessly at the blaze—policemen shouting orders, women and children half dressed, evidently awakened just in time for escape; not an engine near, though there were sounds of rushing wheels in the distance.

"I stood excited and fascinated. Suddenly a scream—a woman's voice crying out that her child, her little Viola, was left behind. Almost as she speaks a child's face appears at a window in the far end of the burning building; a lovely little scared face framed in curls, with the fierce flames scarcely three feet off. A thrill of horror goes through the increasing crowd—no human help seems possible. Oh, for a ladder, but before any can reach the spot, even if only minutes, hope would be gone.

"All at once, from the fascinated, frozen crowd—frozen with horror, in face of the burning heat—a figure springs forth—flies, it seems to me, towards the narrow, unburnt space of wall at the end—the one yet untouched row of windows, across which in a few seconds the blaze would sweep. Then swiftly climbing, seizing on every projection of balcony and cope, drawing himself up with incredible agility, this figure—man it must be, and yet what being of mortal mould could climb by the side of that seething flame without literally roasting—moved, almost seemed to glide up the wall, and amid breathless silence hurls himself in through the open window.

"Then cries break forth. Of what use? It is two lives instead of one. In a moment the man appears at the window. Heavens, as I live, the face I saw on the battlefield, the look of daring no danger could daunt, the light of battle in the eyes, but nobler, higher, as this fight to save was grander than the fight to kill! That face, the colonel's, as it showed from the window, I shall never forget. I find him, but only to see him die, for the fire already licks the lower windows, and no ladder, no rope, no help.

"Remember this all takes place in seconds.

"The colonel throws a swift glance towards the ground, as though measuring the chances for a leap, then disappears. What ages of horror the seconds seem! He comes again; steps out of the window backward, takes hold of the sill with his hands, and feeling his way with his feet, deliberately, as it looks, commences the descent step by step.

"The people, now swelled to a multitude, hold their breath, gazing with strained eyes at the spectacle, expecting momentarily to see the brave man succumb to the terrible pain and drop to the pavement with his burden, for he comes not alone—he has a child with him. With a sheet snatched from a bed he had fastened the little one close to his side that would be unexposed to the heat, with her face towards him.

"But he gallantly endures the frightful heat. Now his feet touch the top of the first-storey window; below him all is ablaze—his clothing is on fire!

"With a quick motion, throwing one arm round the child, and putting his left hand before his eyes, he makes a backward spring, lands fairly on his feet, clear of the blaze, totters, falls.

"A dozen hands seize him, coats are thrown over his burning clothes he is dragged out; strong arms swiftly but gently carry the double burden away from the blistering heat; the child is loosened and snatched to her mother's arms unhurt, not a hair of her head scorched; while he, with hair singed, face blistered and blackened, the flesh showing raw and red from shoulder to finger-ends, and down to his very feet, all along his left side, where the clothing was burnt off, lies giving directions calmly and quietly.

"And what a scene it was! After the first simultaneous shout that burst forth as the saver and the saved touched the ground, a hush of awe settled on the multitude, broken only by the sobs of women and the husky voices of men praying to the good God and all the saints that the life of the brave man might be spared.

"The engines, now arrived, had all the space near the fire to themselves, and when the maimed form was lifted into the ambulance, a thousand feet followed reverently to the hospital, and there, until the sun rose, men and women waited to hear the tidings of life or death.

"I accompanied the ambulance, and on mentioning that the gentleman was an Englishman and a friend, I was admitted. I stood silently while the surgeons dressed the wounds, trying to gather from their faces the decree of Fate. When the work was completed, the colonel asked in steady tones if his injuries were serious. 'Fear not to tell me,' he said. 'Death and I have met too often for him to have any terrors for me.'

"A few whispered words between themselves, and one, a man grown venerable in practice, leaning over, said: 'In nine cases out of ten I should say death, but your nerve and self-possession are in your favour. You must have held your breath, as no signs show of internal injury. Are you a soldier, sir?' 'I have seen service.' Impulsively I sprang to the old surgeon's side. 'Will good news hurt him?' 'It may do him good.'

"Turning to the cot, I knelt down and said, 'Colonel Markham, I have come to take you home. I am Helen's brother. She is well and is waiting for you.' Not a word, but in his eyes 'the light that never was on sea or land.'

"The next morning the old surgeon said, 'He will get well, I think, because he has willed it; but it will take all his strength to stand the shock.' I determined to say nothing until I knew certainly the best or worst. To-day it is announced that in about a week he will be in a condition to travel, and, if we get him home safely, and you want to see a hero, I will show you one. "JOHN."

* * * * *

On Christmas Eve a hansom stopped at our door. The bell rang. Two men walked in—one, a handsome youth, with exultant tread; one, scarred, with stiff, slow step, but erect in mien. From our circle a woman rushed forth with a face as of one transfigured.

Albert Allen.

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A MARRIAGE - - AND A WILL.

The Story of a Misunderstanding.

"THE young scoundrel!" shouted Uncle Philip, waving the sheet of notepaper frantically in the air. "Not one penny of my money shall he have! I'll send for my lawyer this instant, and alter my will! Confound it! I'll send for Ethel, and see."

He sat down and rang the bell violently.

"My niece," he said shortly to the servant, and buried himself again in the letter.

Happily, at this moment, the desired personage floated in, a jaunty hat set back on her wind-tossed curls, and her fair young face all aglow with good spirits and healthful exercise. It was not an easy task—even for old Uncle Philip—to dash all that bloom and brightness aside, perhaps for ever.

"My dear," he commenced feebly, "I—I—confound the young reprobate! He was not worthy of you."

The young girl put a pair of soft arms round his neck, and murmured some cooing words, meantime letting one white hand wander slowly but surely towards the letter. A moment later she held it triumphantly out of his reach, and, with a merry laugh plunged into its contents.

Uncle Philip watched her, half curiously, half despairingly, as she read, but when she turned the page, he turned away with a heart-felt groan.

"It's come!" he gasped, wiping the perspiration from his brow. "For goodness' sake, Ethel, don't faint!"

Ethel did not faint, but all the bloom vanished from the sweet face, and the letter fell from her shaking hand.

It had only one brief paragraph:

DEAR UNCLE.—*I married the daughter of your old friend, Mr. Richards, yesterday; and I can truthfully say that I have never seen a fairer or sweeter bride.*

That was all, but it was enough, when, not two months before, the writer had placed, with his own hands, a sparkling engagement-ring on little Ethel Stringer's finger! It glittered there now; but Ethel drew it off, with a look like a wounded animal in her brown eyes. She sent it to him with her congratulations and not one word of reproach. But not so with Uncle Philip. He gave his nephew a piece of his mind, and the next day called Ethel into his library and showed her his new will.

"Everything goes to you, my dear," he said, chuckling complacently. "And for that dishonourable rascal of a nephew, let him take his fair bride to his sanctimonious father. I wash my hands of them both."

"Oh, Uncle!" faltered poor, tender-hearted Ethel imploringly; and then she stopped, stifled by her tears.

"Well, what now?" queried Uncle Philip, resignedly. "Women never are satisfied. Speak up, my dear, speak up."

"If you would only forgive him," said Ethel, pleadingly. "Perhaps he loved Mr. Richards' daughter——"

"Love be hanged!" broken in Uncle Philip explosively. "I beg your pardon," he added, "but love is no excuse for dishonour. He talked to you of love when he was here."

Ethel winced perceptibly.

"He can never get along without your help," she continued.

"I know it," said the old man grimly; "and I am glad of it."

"He is your only brother," pleaded Ethel piteously.

Uncle Philip blew his nose with savage emotion.

"I told him that I'd wash my hands of him if he adopted the ministry as a profession," he growled, "and I kept my word."

"But you'll forgive his son," said Ethel coaxingly.

"No, I will not!" replied the old gentleman emphatically. "My money goes to you—I'll not leave him a penny."

Ethel drew her graceful figure up to its full height. Her dark eyes were flashing ominously.

"Do you think I will take your money?" she asked. "I—your niece by adoption—rob your own brother's son? If you will not leave it to them, you cannot leave it to me; for I refuse to take it. I thank you for all that you have done for me; but, when you are dead, I will not have your money. I would sooner die than touch it!"

That night Uncle Philip died—"of heart disease," the doctor said, "caused by too much excitement."

About a week after his death, the chief mourners gathered in the great, oak-panelled library, to hear the reading of the will. The lawyer rattled the papers on the desk with nervous fingers, and a dead silence had fallen upon the anxious-faced group. It was evident that they were awaiting someone. Suddenly a tall, determined-looking young man rose. With a brief apology he left the room and inquired of a servant for Miss Stringer. He was told that she was in her boudoir, and hastened there, but, for a moment stood petrified in the doorway. Ethel was standing, with her face half turned towards him, by a secret panel that she had just slid from the old wainscoted wall. In her hand she held a sealed document, to which she was about to apply a lighted match.

"It is the safest way," she murmured. "He is gone, and they will never know."

Suddenly the already scorched paper was snatched from her hand. With a low cry, she turned and saw her false lover, Walter Clifton.

For a moment he stood looking at her in horrified silence, and then he broke out in a torrent of passionate, angry words.

"So this is why you sent me my ring!" he said hoarsely. "You feared the old man might disinherit me, and you forgot your honour in your greed for gold. Take the will," and he flung it at her feet, "and the gold if it will serve to satisfy you."

He turned on his heel and was about to leave the room, but, on second thoughts, came back.

"I came here to make an explanation," he said coldly, "and even your falseness shall not deter me.

"Knowing my uncle to be opposed for some reason to my father's profession," he continued, "I never thought it necessary to mention the fact that I was following the same calling. In my last letter to him I thoughtlessly remarked that I had married the daughter of his old friend, meaning that I had read the marriage service over her. I hope you understand."

He would have said more, but the girl's white face alarmed him. This last startling announcement had been too much for her; clasping her hands, she swooned away.

The young man rang peremptorily for her maid, and then, not daring to trust himself in her presence, rushed away.

"Miss Stringer is ill," he explained to the impatient assembly in the room below.

But a moment later the brisk little maiden rushed in, her cap all awry, and the scorched document held tightly in her hand. The lawyer's eyes sparkled as he took it.

"It is the missing will," he said, and then he checked himself and sent orders for Miss Stringer to make her appearance, if it were possible for her to come. Ten minutes more and the trembling, white-faced girl was almost carried in.

The lawyer stood up, with a preliminary cough that was echoed by an impatient murmur all through the room.

The old gentleman had left all his personal property, excepting a few trifling legacies to distant relatives, to his adopted niece, Ethel Stringer.

There was a dead silence for a moment after the sonorous voice of the lawyer ceased.

Then a tall young fellow rose and made his way through the mourners to the side of the newly-made heiress. "Ethel," he said, "I've been a brute. Can you ever forgive me?"

And Ethel hid her happy face on his shoulder; and, not long after, the young minister was married in reality.

B. Jephson.

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SPLENDID NEW SERIES. **BEGIN READING TO-DAY.**

A Striking Series of Astonishing Revelations.

Told by the Decoy Herself.

SYNOPSIS.

VIVIENNE D'ALTON, who in this series tells the story of a certain period of her life, is a young lady who has been educated in Germany.

Until the time when the story commences, she has never seen her father since he placed her at the school in Bochum.

Her mother is dead, and she has no brother or sister. Hence, she seems quite alone in the world.

But one day her father sends a message to the school that he wishes his daughter to leave and to meet him at Rotterdam. Vivienne is greatly delighted at the news, and while she sails down the Rhine to meet her father, conjectures as to his appearance.

The person who announces himself as her father at Rotterdam is not in the least like the handsome gentleman she had pictured to herself, but is short and stout.

They drive to a large mansion, where Vivienne is enthusiastically welcomed by a Mrs. Sherwood, "a bosom friend of her mother," who requests Vivienne to call her "aunt."

Vivienne takes an instantaneous dislike to "Aunt Flora."

A Mr. Gilbert Graysworthy comes to dine at the house, and incidentally mentions that round his waist he carries a belt containing fifty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds.

A day or two later Vivienne is shocked to learn that Gilbert Graysworthy has been found murdered in the street! There seems no motive for the crime, for his money, his watch and chain are still upon his body.

Aunt Flora shows great annoyance that Vivienne is so concerned in the gentleman's death.

She and Vivienne leave Rotterdam for England.

On the passage across Vivienne sees a person whom she believes is Annchen, a maid whom she greatly dislikes, talking to a man whom she has seen before under very suspicious circumstances.

She also meets a Viscount Broomville, a fellow-passenger whom Aunt Flora seems to wish to impress.

He announces that he is going to call upon Mr. Beverley D'Alton regarding some business affairs.

He does so, and relates how he was attacked in Rotterdam by persons whose evident intention was to rob him of the diamonds he carried about with him.

He is advised by his host to invest a large sum of money in the New Barbary Land Development Co., in which Mr. D'Alton is interested.

Some days later, Vivienne takes a surreptitious walk in the evening. She is amazed to see Viscount Broomville shadowed by the two birds of evil omen she had seen on the Harwich boat. The man is about to strike the Viscount when Vivienne utters a timely shriek of warning and thereby saves the Viscount from being murdered. The man is able to make his escape.

FOURTH EPISODE.

The Decoy Spreads her Net.

I BELIEVE all London was talking about our forthcoming reception. At least, Aunt Flora said so, and, judging by the wonderful amount of viands and flowers that were ordered for the occasion, it is certain that a good many tradesmen would be discussing it with pleasure.

Lady Windelmore spent most of her time in taking me to call upon her aristocratic friends, and my father certainly did a great stroke of business when he thought of invoking her aid, for I am sure that it was due to her influence, rather than to his money, that so many titled people accepted the invitations sent them, thus putting the stamp of success upon my *début* as a hostess.

Aunt Flora was less happy than she ought to have been, seeing that she was being kept in such luxury as many a princess might envy. She did not venture to be openly antagonistic to Lady Windelmore, but she never lost a chance of sneering at my social chaperon, and as I liked the Countess much better than I liked my putative aunt, it often happened that the latter and I did some verbal sparring, in which I always took her ladyship's part.

"I suppose it would be too much to expect such an aristocrat to take her *déjeuner* with us," was a remark made by Mrs. Sherwood when she joined my father and myself on the morning of the important day to which we had all looked forward with some anxiety.

"Her ladyship breakfasted with us yesterday," I retorted. "And if she wants to keep herself fresh for this evening, why shouldn't she?"

"Very true," put in my father. "Flora, you are not the sweet-tempered person I imagined you to be when I arranged for you to be my daughter's daily companion."

"Oh, father, please don't find fault!" was my hasty interjection. "You cannot expect anybody of Aunt Flora's age to be absolutely amiable, nor even congenial. Now, if you would get me a companion just fresh from school, like myself, I daresay Aunt Flora would be glad to be relieved of the worry I must be to her."

If I had wanted to pay Mrs. Sherwood off for being ill-natured, meddlesome, and sneering, I was certainly successful, for she was simply furious. But I was not prepared for the retaliating attitude she assumed

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Turning to me with a face which was absolutely livid with mortification, she said, in tones which showed she was putting a greater restraint upon her voice than upon her words:

"I suppose, Miss D'Alton, you intend that remark to be a veiled threat of dismissal. But be good enough to understand that nothing you can do or say will insure my departure from this house until I am ready to go. And perhaps it will be just as well to inform you that you will find it vastly to your own advantage to be civil to me."

Knowing that Mrs. Sherwood was no relation of ours, and that, therefore, she had no claim upon us, I considered her speech more than impertinent, but was both vexed and surprised when my father hastily added:

"And I think, Vivienne, that if you accept Flora's information as final, it will save considerable future awkwardness."

I certainly could not understand why my father permitted this woman's vulgar domineering, until it struck me that perhaps he was in love with her, and intended to make her absolute mistress of his hearth and home as soon as he had seen me married to the titled husband he was anxious to secure for me. However, if one stopped to worry over every inexplicable thing which occurs in our lives, one might always be worrying, and I resolved to concern myself no more about Mrs. Sherwood and her vagaries than was absolutely necessary.

To tell the truth, I was glad to escape from the breakfast-table, for I feared lest something should transpire about my last night's adventure, and, apart from my own objection to discovery, I had been urged by Lord Broomville to say not a word about the attack upon him which I had frustrated, as he thought there would be a better chance of discovering his pursuers if he showed no signs of being on the alert.

"Oh, by-the-bye," said my father, probably by way of changing the subject to a pleasanter atmosphere, "did I understand that you were going out with her ladyship this morning?"

"Yes, father," I answered brightly. "We promised to call upon the Hon. Mrs. Rogers. She is not well enough to come here this evening, but some visitors of hers are coming."

"Oh, indeed, who are they?"

"Just the kind of people you like me to invite. The two young ladies are both pretty and smart, and their brother has just inherited a huge fortune from an uncle whom he never saw."

"Well, I expect you will be able to make things pleasant for the young people, and if they are strangers to London, I daresay they are glad to be invited."

"They are simply overjoyed. In fact, Sophie and Maude, the two sisters, have never been to a really big party in their lives. The brother, Mr. Melrose, has seen a good deal of the world, but he was quite pleased when I asked him to come back to lunch with us."

"Clever girl! You do my hospitable instincts all the credit I expected. So we are to expect Mr. Melrose to lunch, eh?"

"Yes, and while he is here, I wish you would give him a little advice about investments. He said something about wishing he knew what you would think about him selling a lot of shares which only bring in three per cent., and I told him I was sure you would help him."

My father was really phenomenally kind, I thought, for he positively beamed at the idea of being able to do a good turn to an absolute stranger, and even Mrs. Sherwood looked so sweet over it that I was ready to forgive her former peevishness.

* * * * *

Alan Melrose quite won Lady Windelmore's heart by his buoyant spirits, his devotion to his sisters, and his unaffected courtesy. He wasn't exactly handsome, but he was much more manly than an insipidly perfect specimen of masculine beauty would have been, and, besides being good to look at, he was such a capital talker that when he sat down to lunch with us, he soon had us all laughing at one of his witty sallies.

I had never seen my father in such a good humour, but I could not help noticing that he seemed curiously anxious to please this stripling, whose fortune of £200,000 was quite a small one compared with his own.

I also observed, with a little inward mortification, that he was not content to offer his guest the best of what there was on the table, but that he indulged in the very parvenu-like habit of mentioning the most expensive viands in a most ostentatious way.

"You'll take one of these pigeons, won't you?" he urged presently, with a benevolent smile. "I can recommend them as better than any others you could get in London. My chef prides himself upon pigeons *à la* Moselle."

The remark brought a certain conversation back to my memory, and I inquired:

"Are they some of Kaspar's pigeons?"

Considering what an absolutely unimportant question I was asking, its effect was nothing less than marvellous. Mrs. Sherwood had a sudden fit of coughing, which compelled her to cover her face with her handkerchief. But I was sure that she brought on the coughing for no other reason than to hide the flaming colour which betrayed most unaccountable agitation.

My father, on the other hand, turned lividly pale. His knife dropped from his nerveless fingers, and he glared at me as though he thought I had levelled either a threat or an insult at him. He also did something else. He banished for the time being all the love and gratitude which had been accumulating ever since he spoke so kindly to me in Rotterdam, and it seemed to me that I caught a momentary glimpse of the man as he really was.

But it was only momentary, for, by what appeared to be an almost superhuman effort, he regained his composure, and, heaving a sigh of relief, said faintly: "There! Thank goodness, it has left me again. But I got a fright when my old heart pain came back so suddenly. I had hoped I was rid of it for ever."

Of course we all expressed regret to hear that my father apparently suffered from a dangerous malady. But, though it may sound unfilial to say so, I believed no more in his sudden attack of heart pain than I did in Mrs. Sherwood's attack of coughing, and I was exceedingly puzzled at the disturbance I had caused by merely mentioning Kaspar Krause's pigeons.

* * * * *

Our reception passed off with great *éclat*, and, much to my secret surprise, my personal success was phenomenal. I have learnt to put its true value upon the share of beauty with which Nature has blessed me, and I know now that the splendour of my surroundings and the well-advertised announcement that I was one of the richest heiresses of the day, had much to do with the fulsome attentions of many of my admirers.

But none of the latter could be accused of being mere fortune-hunters, for, in conformity with my father's strict injunctions, not a man was invited to our house who had not either present or prospective riches.

Yet, amid all the glitter and gaiety, I felt a certain amount of uneasiness which I found it difficult to conceal.

Why did not Viscount Broomville put in an appearance? He was invited. And he accepted the invitation with a great show of pleasure. Yet he neither came, nor sent an apology. Could it be because he thought the service I had rendered him the other evening was not sufficient to exonerate me from the charge of having behaved like a girl of no social training at all?

Of course I knew that I shouldn't have gone out late at night by myself. But I could not see why Viscount Broomville should take such a high and mighty view of the case, so I frankly told myself that his lordship was both priggish and ungrateful, and I tried, but without success, to forget all about him.

Mrs. Sherwood was not inclined to be confidential with me. But Lady Windelmore was very communicative, and when we were talking over all that had happened at the reception, it

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seemed perfectly natural to ask her if she had heard anything about him.

"I read in this morning's *Post* that he had suddenly gone abroad," she answered. "But no matter what his hurry was, he ought to have found time to apologise for not coming, and I am so cross with him that I shall tell him so when next I see him."

"Well, never mind him. We have a lot of people coming in this afternoon, and one more or less does not matter."

I said this with a great assumption of carelessness. But I kept returning, in my thoughts, again and again to Viscount Broomville. For, after all, I could not reconcile my personal impressions of him with his apparently cavalierish behaviour, until it suddenly occurred to me that the pursuit by "the bird of evil omen," as I always mentally called the big Dutchman, might have had something to do with the matter.

It was somewhat disappointing to think that he would run away rather than take steps to catch his enemy while he could. But as "he who fights and runs away may live to fight another day," it might be mere worldly wisdom that was at the bottom of it all.

There were other people to amuse me, too, notably Alan Melrose, whose ingenuous admiration was very flattering, and to whom my father seemed to have taken a great liking.

The latter, with his usual kindness, gave the youngster all the advantage of his own ripe business experience, and I incidentally overheard them discussing the wonderful prospects which awaited the New Barbary Land Development Co.

"I'm afraid it's too late to get you in," said my father; "I've given the tip to several old friends, and they will resent it if I allow them to be forestalled by a young fellow of no commercial experience whatever."

"Now, look here, Mr. D'Alton," was Alan Melrose's coaxing rejoinder, "you can't go back on your word with me. Only last night you said you thought you could squeeze me in, and there is nothing to stop me from investing this minute, if there's half a chance."

"But the share list closes to-day."

"Why, it has never been advertised!"

"Of course not. We don't believe in over-capitalising, to begin with, and we have had to keep the whole thing as dark as the grave, or there would have been a positive bombardment for shares. As it is, we have kept the business in the hands of a few, and those few will make their money ten times over, if they choose to sell out within a month from now."

I am not sure that my father or his companion had noticed that, after fetching a book, I had quietly sunk into the depths of a luxurious lounge chair. But their talking prevented me from paying much attention to my book, and as it did not seem to matter whether I heard the conversation or not, I did not trouble to interrupt it.

When Mr. Melrose spoke again, his voice betrayed keen disappointment.

"It will be really hard lines if I am floored over this," he said; "for after what you told me the other day, I rushed round and realised everything I had, with the result that I have sought you this afternoon, prepared to invest eighty thousand pounds in the Development Co."

"What a rash youth! Suppose things go wrong?"

"They won't. Everybody says you are the greatest financial genius alive, and that anything you back is bound to succeed."

"Ah, well, I suppose wilful youth must have its way! But don't forget that I have done my best to dissuade you from speculating."

"And you will really help me in this?"

"I can only do it in one way. I had intended reserving a certain number of shares for myself. But, as you are so anxious to join us, I will let you have my reserve stock and——" He stopped suddenly.

"Please, miss, this lady is very anxious to see you."

With these words Susan handed a card to me, and, even as it still lay on the silver salver, I caught the name "D'Alton" on it.

The visit was a bit ill-timed, as it prevented me from hearing the issue of the interesting conversation between my father and young Mr. Melrose.

In fact, they became suddenly silent, but not before the former had uttered a sharp exclamation of annoyance.

Still, I was interested to know that somebody of the same name as ourselves had called to see me, and immediately fell to wishing that she might prove to be a relation, for it seemed

I caught a glimpse of my father's face. It wore the same horror-stricken look as it had a few days before.

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to me that in spite of our wealth, my father and I were a curiously isolated couple.

"Miss Helena D'Alton," I said aloud. "Yes, Susan, ask the lady to come up here. Father," I continued, as Susan went off to do my bidding, "do you know this Miss Helena D'Alton?".

I had risen from my chair and looked round the alcove behind which I had been sitting. But my father had evidently not been pleased at being disturbed, for he was already taking Mr. Melrose out of the room by way of a door which led towards his own private suite. Just as he turned to close the door behind him, I caught a glimpse of his face, and was concerned to see that it wore the same ghastly look which came to it when he had the heart attack a few days ago.

He was evidently in a rather alarming state of health, and I was feeling considerable anxiety on his account when Miss D'Alton was shown into the drawing-room, which, by-the-bye, was much less frequented by either my chaperons or myself than the smaller room which we called the morning-room.

Miss D'Alton proved to be a sweet, white-haired old lady of dignified carriage and handsome presence, who looked at me with fast gathering tears in her eyes.

"Her mother over again," she whispered, as if to herself, and a sudden rush of tears came to my own eyes as I noticed the yearning look of affection she bent on me.

"Pray sit down, Miss D'Alton, and tell me why you have come," I said impulsively. "Did you know my mother?"

"My dear child, I was her godmother. We D'Altons and the Collingwoods were neighbours, and nothing delighted the two families so much as to notice the dawning affection between my nephew, Beverley D'Alton, and my godchild, Helena Vivienne Collingwood. Well, they married, and lived happily together until your mother fell ill, while you were just a baby. Beverley took her abroad, to see if the change would restore her to health, but without avail. Since her death he has never communicated with any of us, and my letters to him have always failed to reach him. The only letter from any of us which did not come back was one in which my housekeeper, who is also my friend, wrote to say that I was dying, and that as I was the last of the old family, she hoped my nephew would come to the funeral. He neither answered the letter nor came to the funeral, and we were both so upset that we never wrote to tell him that I made a miraculous recovery."

"Perhaps," I said somewhat shamefacedly, I must admit, for this narrative did not put my father in a very good light. "Perhaps your letters never really reached my father, for he was always travelling about."

"He got the letters right enough, or rather, he might have done if he had not sent them back, for they were all sent through the solicitor who did his business affairs for him until he realised his English property, and transferred his patronage to somebody else. However, that is neither here nor there. When I heard that he had come to live in London, I made up my mind to call and see you, and here I am."

I was enchanted with the dear lady, and insisted that she should dine with us.

"I am sure that both father and Aunt Flora will be delighted to see you," I added.

"Flora? Who is Aunt Flora?" was the puzzled rejoinder.

"Why, Mrs. Sherwood, my mother's old schoolfriend."

"Humph! That's funny. I never remember hearing of her. Still, I should like to see the lady, and I hope Beverley will feel as kindly towards me as I do towards him."

But, much to her disappointment and my vexation, the coveted meeting did not take place that day, for it transpired that my father had had a sudden business engagement which would keep him from home till after midnight, and that Mrs. Sherwood had such a frightful headache that she could see nobody.

My new-found relation left me at seven o'clock, saying that she would dine with us another day, and when I gave her an affectionate kiss, I little guessed all that was going to happen before I saw her again.

(Another instalment of this exciting series next week.)

Coming! Coming! Coming!

In a few weeks' time there will be announced in this paper a competition which will be of boundless interest to every individual reader of *Short Stories*. It will appeal to all and sundry. It is of quite a unique description, and its novelty will be one of the chief reasons for the tremendous success I am confident it will prove to be. Very likely you are all making wild guesses as to its nature, but I should be greatly mistaken if any of you hit the idea on the nail. Tell your friends about it; tell them to keep their eyes fixed on the succeeding numbers of this paper, for it will be to their advantage to do so. An opportunity lost is seldom regained, and I have in store for you an opportunity which none of you can afford to lose.

Result of the "Statue" Competition.

The Prize of £2 has been awarded to the competitor who sent in what the Editor considered to be the neatest and most nearly correct solution, and is therefore sent to:—Miss Florence Moore, 111 Bordesley Green Road, Birmingham.

The five splendid hand Cameras, with complete photogr phic outfit, have been awarded as follows:—Mrs. Emmeline Bright, Bryn Hafren, Newtown, Montgomery; Mrs. May Darling, 13 Hancock Street, Rusholme, Manchester; Miss Hogg, 15 Mid Street, Fraserburgh, N.B.; Miss M. A. Tyler, 77 John Clay Street, South Shields; John Stackey, Summerdale Villa, 24 St. James' Park, Tunbridge Wells.

The competition was a by no means easy one to judge, as all competitors seemed to have taken very great trouble in arranging the various pieces. I must congratulate the winners, and especially Miss Moore, on the exceptionally painstaking way in which they put together their picture of the waltzers.

About Our Valentine Number.

The week after next will appear our grand Valentine Number. This will be, without exception, the finest penny number of *Short Stories* ever issued.

Do you want to send your lover a valentine? If so, the best one you can send him or her, the one that is most likely to be appreciated, is a copy of our Valentine Number! Everything in it will be appropriate to the season. Don't forget that it will take the place of the ordinary issue dated February 13th. I should advise you to place your order for it in the hands of your newsagent at once. Give him special injunctions to retain for you as many as you require.

The Eighth Unsolved Love Problem.

Next week I shall publish the eighth Unsolved Love Problem. A guinea will be offered to the reader who, under the conditions to be published, sends in what I consider to be the best solution to the query put forth.

I shall announce as soon as I can the name of the winner of the seventh problem.

Your Editor.

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The Romance of a Thirty-Guinea Watch.

LIONEL STAFFORD sat before an easel in his modest little studio and regarded the face on the canvas before him. Brushes and palette were in his hand, and the paint upon his fingers told of a long day's work.

His inspection appeared to afford him some satisfaction, for his eyes rested lingeringly on the fair, girlish face that shone from the canvas. But the expression on his face was not wholly due to artistic triumph. There was a queer light in his eyes that told another and a different story. Months past he had fallen hopelessly in love with the daughter of a great London financier.

It had all happened while he was engaged in painting her father's portrait. A friend of his had recommended him—a comparatively unknown artist—to the financier, and he had obtained the commission. It was there he had met beautiful Ida Crossley, and from that hour his heart had gone out of his keeping.

Strangely enough, the girl seemed to be attracted towards him also, and they found many little opportunities for closer intimacy while the obscure young artist waited the leisure and convenience of the prosperous city magnate.

Thus it came about, as it so often does, that love—unsuspected by all else—crept into the house and took his throne in a girl's heart after having secured the same lofty position in that of a man—and that man our friend, the artist.

And now he was painting from memory the portrait of his beautiful love, Ida Crossley. It was a gloriously lovely face, full of sweetness and tenderness, from which two deep violet eyes shone out like pansies through the summer mist. It was small wonder that he loved her, or that, loving her, he found pleasure in painting so lovely a face.

But he was dreadfully poor. That was the drop of wormwood in the love-cup that embittered the whole draught. To approach the great financier as a prospective son-in-law would have been madness. True, he was a rising man, but the process was a slow one—a painfully slow one—and he chafed against the bonds that held him, as most of us are prone to do at one time or another.

Ida was more philosophical. That was all right, she said with confidence; he was making a name for himself, and—well, she could wait.

She seemed very calm about it all—too calm, Lionel sometimes thought—and went on with her life in precisely the same way as before, showing no sign, pretending to be exceedingly happy and satisfied with her surroundings. There were even times when a vague, unworthy suspicion entered Lionel's head that she was almost callous. He had yet to learn that beneath the mask of indifference many a woman may hide a heart that longs and yearns for what it has not—that the eyes that look so calm and clear often shine the brightest when tears lie trembling just beneath the lids.

* * * * * *

A year had gone by, and Lionel Stafford was slowly but surely gaining ground in his profession. But he still had a pretty severe time of it, for there were many others in the field who, like himself, had set their faces fameward, and thus became his competitors.

For some time he had been putting an odd sovereign or two by whenever he could spare them from his still modest earnings. To-morrow was Ida's birthday, and it was for her he had thus scraped together this little heap of gold. To-day he went to his little hoard, and counted the shining pieces one by one. Thirty-one! That would buy her a present suitable to her position.

He could ill afford so large a sum; but love often overleaps discretion, and who among us can throw the first stone of reproof at such an offender? Just thirty-one. Then it only needed an extra half sovereign to make up the thirty guineas he had to pay for the present he had ordered.

Putting the money carefully in his breast pocket, he went out of his studio and turned into the Strand. A short walk brought him to his destination. Yes, the work had been done, and Lionel Stafford yielded up his precious thirty guineas to a prosperous firm of jewellers for a tiny morocco case containing a little gold watch.

When he got home he unfastened the case, and looked at the pretty trinket within. The inspection pleased him for the jeweller had carefully followed his instructions. On the back of the watch three letters shone out in tiny diamonds. The stones, though small, had been set close together, and the three letters formed the name which of all names he loved best—Ida.

The next morning, by some mysterious law of attraction, which we do not feel ourselves called upon to explain, Lionel Stafford and Ida Crossley made an early morning call (quite casually, of course), upon a mutual friend—a Mrs. Lennox, whose husband was an intimate friend of the great financier.

The amiable lady saw well how matters stood with the young people, and, with astonishing disregard to the laws of social equality, winked (if so charming a lady could do so vulgar a thing) at the secret love-making that took place under her roof. Discretion, therefore, is not always the attendant of perception, but again we leave the casting of the first stone to him who is without sin. Anyhow, here they were—all three chatting in the cosy sitting-room of Mrs. Lennox's house.

Presently that lady excused herself for a few moments, and the lovers were left alone. Lionel immediately went over to Ida, who rose from her chair as he approached. Taking her in his arms he kissed her, and wishing her many happy returns, handed her the precious little packet he had brought. Unfastening the case, she gazed at the gift within, and took it in her hand to look at the name—her name—on the back. Her deep violet eyes were swimming in happy tears as she lifted them again to his face.

"Oh, Lionel!" she exclaimed. "How good of you, dear! But you must have denied yourself many things to get this for me."

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The young man laughed gaily as he again kissed her sweet face.

"Not I," he said lightly. "You don't know how I'm getting on. I shall be an R.A. in three years' time. Sovereigns are not so precious as they used to be, darling. And I am determined to win fame and fortune before I've done with the world."

Poor Lionel! It was not quite true. Yet what else could he say? What man would have admitted that he *had* denied himself to purchase his gift? And how could Lionel know that these very words of his—born of the thoughtful delicacy that comes of loving—would one day weigh heavily in the balance that was to measure out his first great sorrow? How strange it is that words which give us untold pleasure when they are uttered revive in after years to add to the bitterness and humiliation that an unkind Fate has brought us!

* * * * * *

It was three months later, and Lionel Stafford sat alone in his studio with his head buried in his hands. Things had been going very badly with him of late. The very progress he had made seemed now to have deserted him. He knew he possessed talent, though he was no egotist; but it was, or seemed to be, almost hopeless to gain recognition.

Two years before an artist friend of his had gone to America, where he had succeeded beyond his most sanguine expectations. His letters to Lionel were full of tempting inducements to follow his own example, and Lionel had almost begun to think that he, too, might find in the new world the success that seemed out of his reach in the old.

And then had come that last cruel blow, that had left him almost without hope in the world. It had just fallen. A brief, tear-stained little note that had cut into his heart like a surgeon's knife. Once more he picked it up from the floor, where it had fallen, and read it through. His face was very white now, and his lips twitched pitifully.

"DEAR LIONEL," he read. "*My dear father has just died suddenly. Just before his end he called me to him, and had a short conversation with me about his business. As you will soon learn, my circumstances are now greatly altered. And I think, all things considered, my only course is to release you from your engagement. It pains me greatly to do this, but I have no other alternative. Good-bye. Your old-time* "IDA."

That was all. Altered circumstances! Yes, he supposed they were altered. She was the heiress of the wealthy financier—a prize which nobler suitors than he might win. She had had a conversation with her father "about his business." Yes, that was it—"business." He rose from his seat, and, with set face, paced up and down the floor of his studio. Ida—his Ida! He had never dreamt she could be so cruel, so heartless, so mercenary.

Perhaps she had thought him mercenary. A deep flush dyed his pale cheek—a flush that made him pause in his walk. Could that be so? It looked very much like it. Once more he sat down and tried to think collectedly. Should he go and see her? At first he thought he would.

But the wound he had received was aching, and he shrank from a scene which, in all probability, would but deepen it. No, he would go away—to America—hugging all that was left of his idol to his heart, and set himself to work with grim determination. Yes, he would go the very next day.

He took up a pen to write a reply to the girl who had so heartlessly cast him off for the sake of her "altered circumstances." But, after two or three unsatisfactory lines, he tossed down the pen, threw the paper into the fire, and determined to make no sign. He could not even show her how deep had been the stab she had given him.

For, in spite of her desertion of him—in spite of the low value she put to his love for her—he knew deep down in his own heart that he loved her still.

Two days more, and he stood on board the great Atlantic liner *Orpheus*, and turned his back on the land that had given him birth. A new life was before him—a new life and a new world—and he must forget all that had been left behind. Work was before him—hard, persistent, dogged work—and, perhaps, fame!

* * * * * *

It was a bright, sunny day in June, two years later, when a traveller alighted from the Liverpool express at Euston Station, and made his way through the streets of the busy Metropolis.

Two years had made a difference in Lionel Stafford. There was an air of prosperity about him that contrasted favourably with his old days of struggling poverty. But success had not changed him except in appearance. He was just the same impulsive, generous, kindly Lionel as he had been of old.

And his heart? No, that had not changed either. Often had he reproached himself that he had not seen Ida before he left England. She might have loved him all along, and a few words, kindly spoken, might have broken down the resolve she had so hastily formed.

How different the world would seem if we all anticipated these "might have beens," and acted so as to avoid them. But the thought of Ida never occurred to him in any other form than as the wealthy and beautiful heiress of Adam Crossley, the great financier. He had never even inquired into the circumstances attending his sudden death.

He had read little on the voyage out, for he had had little inclination even for that most harmless pastime. And when he had landed in New York, he found little leisure for anything but his work. So she was always the rich heiress, and he wondered as he walked along the busy streets whether she had married some titled aristocrat or some great city magnate like her father. Conjecture is often wide of the truth, as he was soon to discover.

A sudden idea came to him. Hailing a hansom, he directed to be driven to the house of his old-time friend, Mrs. Lennox. No letters had passed between them during his two years of absence, and he smiled to himself as he anticipated the pleasant greeting which was in store for him. But he miscalculated his reception. Mrs. Lennox was polite to a degree, but all her old warmth of manner seemed suddenly to have frozen up. In vain Lionel Stafford tried to break through the ice. In vain he endeavoured to fathom its cause. And then, when he had despaired, it all came out. They had been silent for some few minutes when the lady suddenly asked:

"Do you know, Mr. Stafford, where Miss Crossley is?"

Lionel started.

"I? No. Why, don't you? I should have thought all London knew where so wealthy an heiress lived."

There was a note of bitterness in his tone, which was quite lost on the astonished Mrs. Lennox.

"Wealthy—heiress!" she gasped. "Whatever are you talking about, Mr. Stafford? Surely you are not ignorant of the unhappy circumstances connected with Adam Crossley's death?"

It was now Lionel's turn to evince astonishment.

"Mrs. Lennox," he said, "believe me, I know literally nothing of the affair. As I presume you know already, Miss Crossley wrote to me immediately after her father's death, voluntarily breaking off our engagement, and giving as her reason for so doing her 'altered circumstances.' Of course, I saw at once what she meant. She had suddenly become a rich heiress. I was a poor, struggling artist. I——"

"Stop! Oh, for pity's sake, stop!" The voice of Mrs. Lennox checked him ere he could proceed. "Oh, what a dreadful mistake! And I—I must tell you the truth. Poor Adam Crossley died a ruined man. No one suspected it, not even his most intimate business acquaintances. Nor was that all, for strange rumours got abroad concerning his sudden and unexpected death. The papers took it up, the medical certificate was called in question, and a post-mortem disclosed the fact that death had been due, not to heart failure, as had been believed, but to a powerful narcotic. Poor Ida was penniless, homeless. These were her 'altered circumstances.' Oh, Mr. Stafford, why did you not go to her?"

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There was a dead silence. At the first word of the sudden revelation, Lionel Stafford had caught his breath. His face was very white, and as they had done that dark night in his old studio, his lips twitched with the effort of self-control. Presently his voice broke the silence.

"Where is she — now?" he asked hoarsely.

But Mrs. Lennox only shook her head. She was crying now—crying at the memory of that sad-faced, desolate girl whom she had seen two years ago.

"I wish I knew," she said. "We offered her a home here with us, but she would not accept it. She said she meant to earn her living as thousands of other girls had to do. Still we tried to persuade her, until one day she disappeared altogether. Mr. Lennox has sought everywhere for her, but without success. I tremble to think what has become of her. She was so unfit to fight with the world. Yet she was too proud to do anything else."

Ten minutes later a remorseful and almost despairing man staggered from the house, out into the big, pitiless city, to seek the girl he loved and whom he had in his ignorance deserted.

Taking her into his arms he kissed her passionately.

* * * * *

Of the thirty days which Lionel Stafford had allotted as the duration of his stay in England, five-and-twenty had slipped by without the discovery of the smallest clue to the whereabouts of Ida Crossley. She seemed to have disappeared from the very face of the earth. Yet she was close at hand all the time. So great is the mysterious gulf that separates rich and poor.

Almost in despair, Lionel trudged through street after street, made endless inquiries of likely people who stared at him curiously, but could offer no help. And then, one day, he stumbled upon something that set his pulses beating madly, though his heart grew sick within him.

He had listlessly picked up a copy of *The Exchange and Mart*, and was idly looking down the closely-packed columns of advertisements. Suddenly he stopped. One brief paragraph had caught his eye.

"To be sold. Lady's gold watch. Name of 'Ida' in diamonds on back. Must sell. Will take £5. Urgent. Address No. 23,907."

The words swam before his eyes as he read them again. "Must sell. Will take £5. Urgent." Could anything be more pitiful than that? In a fever of excitement, he wrote a brief note to the owner of the watch, adopting another name, and directed it to No. 23,907.

How he got through the remainder of that day, and more than half that which followed it, he never knew. Hour after hour he hung about the offices of the great advertising medium, worrying the officials with his persistent inquiries and hoping to see her come herself for the letters.

But she never did. The letters were removed by a messenger, and, returning the following afternoon to his hotel, he found a reply awaiting him. With a great choking sensation in his throat, he wrenched open the envelope and ran his eye down the letter within.

"*Yours truly.*—IDA CROSSLEY."

Ah, it was she then! He looked at the address. "97 Harley Street, Bow, E." In an instant he was out of the hotel and in a hansom. Rattling along, quivering with pent-up excitement, remorse, hope, longing—and then—and then—he was face to face with a sad-faced, violet-eyed girl, whom he only dimly recognised as the happy, light-hearted maiden of long ago.

"Lionel! Oh!"

But she was in his arms. Her head was on his breast. Once more the glorious violet eyes shone like soft pansies through a summer mist.

"Ida," he breathed penitently, "can you forgive, darling? I thought you were rich—that it was your riches that had come between us—and I went off to America two days after your letter reached me. And—and all the while you were poor! Oh, is there—is there forgiveness for me?"

Ida Crossley drew his face shyly down to the level of her own and kissed him lovingly.

"Poor old boy!" she murmured. "We have both of us suffered much—you in your loneliness—I in my two years' fight as a music-teacher in this dreary, unappreciative, unlovely old parish of Bow. There is nothing to forgive. I, too, was wrong to let my foolish pride dictate so cold a letter to you. Let us try and make amends for all that has gone by."

Again he kissed the face so close to his own.

"Will you come to America with me?" he pleaded.

"If you wish it—yes."

"I am making a name out there, darling."

"I knew you would do so one day, Lionel, wherever you were."

"I sail in four days, sweetheart."

"Oh!"

"And a special license is obtainable in three," he added.

There was a pause. There was a blush on Ida's cheek when she lifted her eyes to his.

"I suppose you must have your way?" she said.

So, in three days' time, it was, for both of them, once more a case of "altered circumstances."

M. J. W.

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Imperious Miss Chalmers.

Telling How a Girl Chose Between Love and Social Position.

MARGARET CHALMERS was a tall, well-built, handsome girl, just twenty years old, but by her conversation and manners she seemed to be ten years older.

Her regal pose and figure were the envy of most of her girl friends, and the desire of many of her male friends.

Muriel, her sister, was the greatest contrast possible. Of slight build and demure manner, she seemed always in the shade when Margaret chose to shine. Sweet is the adjective I think I should apply to Muriel.

However, you would have to go a long way before you would find a girl possessed of such beauty, or of such a queenly figure, as was Margaret Chalmers. So thought Harvey Jefferson, who was passionately attached to Margaret.

Now there was a very warm corner in Margaret's heart for Harvey, but she was not going to let that warm corner get any warmer if it were possible to prevent it. Her reason being that Harvey was only an underpaid clerk in a Government office, which position, Margaret concluded, was not nearly good enough for her.

Harvey Jefferson was a great friend of the Chalmers family, although they one and all knew his would-be secret. In her heart of hearts Muriel sympathised deeply with Harvey, for she knew her sister as he could not with his eyes blinded by love.

And now I am going to tell you another secret, but this is a real secret, although it is a sad one. Muriel loved Harvey. Nobody knew it but Muriel, and she pretended that she did not, but she did; she knew it only too well, as her aching heart would often tell her.

How deeply it pained her nobody knew, to see Harvey gazing at Margaret with an expression which she, Muriel, would have given so much to be able to inspire. Her heart was full to overflowing with repressed feeling, and all the time she smiled gaily.

Harvey had always treated her like a sister, and had confided in her his love for Margaret, little thinking that every word was a stab. And now he had come to her to say that that very evening he was going to ask Margaret to marry him.

Then he had come from the drawing-room where he had been alone with Margaret, with a look of abject agony in his eyes. How she had longed to take him in her arms and comfort him. How dearly she would have loved to have been able to have smoothed out those lines of pain from his troubled face. And all the time Margaret's voice could be heard rising high in song, apparently he was forgotten already.

And this was what took place in the drawing-room.

As Harvey entered Margaret knew what was coming, and forced that warm corner far from her. Wealth and position must be hers, whatever the cost may be. She must enjoy life, surely 'twas for that she had been created. She did not understand the perfect happiness and enjoyment that true love would bring, no matter what the position might be.

"Margaret," said Harvey, "I have come to tell you I love you. I want you to be my wife, dear."

He blurted out the words as quickly as possible, and then stood still, waiting for the answer to issue from those full, rich lips.

"Oh, Harvey, now you have spoilt everything. Whatever did you want to say this for? I like you, in fact, I am fond of you; but I could not marry you."

"Could not marry me?" Harvey repeated the words in a dumfounded kind of manner.

"No, I could not," she cried petulantly. "Why should I, you have nothing to induce me to?"

"But I love you," he said simply.

"Pshaw!" she ejaculated, and then speaking very rapidly she cried: "You say you love me, Harvey, and I think you do. But what I mean is that you surely do not imagine that we can be married and live in an exceedingly quiet manner such as your position would enable you to?"

A pained expression crossed his face, but he said nothing. He stood as one in a dream.

"Go away, and do something great," she cried. "Make a position, get to the top of the tree, then come to me again."

Very sound advice, no doubt, but was the inducement offered sufficient alone?

Harvey stood watching her, unable to speak. He could not understand. He offered her love, she asked for position.

"Well, then," he said eventually, speaking very slowly, as though he thought over each word before he uttered it. "If I can come back to you with a good position you will marry me?"

"Yes, Harvey."

"Then you do love me?" he cried eagerly.

"I like you very much, Harvey," she replied. "And I will marry you when——" She did not finish her speech, but expressively shrugged her shapely shoulders to indicate her meaning.

"Very well, Margaret. I was going to tell you that I have an appointment offered me in the Embassy at Paris, which may prove a stepping stone to a great position. I will endeavour to make one. I shall leave London very shortly, and I will say good-bye now."

He watched her intently as he spoke, and paused, seemingly waiting for some response. But none came, and he continued:

"I would rather not see you again before I go. You understand, Margaret, don't you?"

"Oh, quite," she cried, relieved to find that he was taking things so calmly. Naturally she was unaware of the tumult of feelings that existed beneath his placid exterior.

He stepped towards her, as though he would have taken her in his arms, but she held him away.

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"No," she cried. "Not till you come again."

Then he went out, leaving her alone, and she devoted her attention to a new song.

"Oh, Muriel," he groaned, for they met outside in the hall. "She seems heartless. I believe she cares for me, but she cares more for position than love."

"Poor old boy," cried Muriel, sympathetically. "What shall you do now, Harvey?"

He briefly outlined his plans.

"Going away?" she cried, with wide open eyes.

"Yes," he muttered mechanically.

"To make a position for Margaret?"

"Yes," he repeated, gazing somewhat curiously at Muriel, who was still regarding him with those sorrowful blue eyes.

"Oh, I hope you will be happy, Harvey, I hope you will be happy." And then she fled from him up the stairs.

He gazed after her retreating form somewhat surprisedly before going in to make his adieux to the Chalmers family.

He said nothing of his interview with Margaret to either Mr. or Mrs. Chalmers, but simply told them that he would be leaving England for Paris very shortly.

One and all wished him the best of luck. He did not see Muriel again, but sent her a short note of farewell, which she tenderly placed, bedewed with her tears, with a few other relics of Harvey which she had accumulated; and they were sacred to her.

"Oh, she's not worth it, she's not worth it!" Muriel wailed again and again, as she lay face down on her bed, drenching the delicate coverlet with her tears.

She took his photo and passionately kissed it ere she locked it away with the other things.

"Why should he care for you," she said to her reflection in the mirror, "when he sees Margaret every day of his life? Oh, why was I not beautiful that he might have loved me?

"No one shall ever know," she cried. And somehow she seemed comforted with the pain of her sorrowful secret.

Time went by; the Chalmers family heard from Harvey occasionally. Margaret had more letters from him than anyone else. How carelessly she took them and read them, much as she would have taken up a newspaper, and how Muriel grudged those written words.

But with Margaret the coolness was only at first. After Harvey had been away some months that warm corner seemed to spread all over her heart, and she longed for him. But she repressed these feelings, and would not admit of them even to herself.

It is possible to be hypocritical with one's own self, and this was the state of affairs with Margaret Chalmers.

She became more than ever the belle of her particular set, and indeed wherever she visited. She was more than ever admired and envied, but the admiration and envy seemed to have lost its pleasure; to be envied was a pleasure to her before she knew the real state of her feelings towards Harvey.

In his last letter he had said that he was getting on, but very slowly. Promotion was very difficult to obtain, but still he did not despair; he would make it come to him.

And now as to Harvey Jefferson. He had gone away with his heart seemingly torn in shreds. He felt that life without Margaret was not worth living.

In Paris he threw himself heart and soul into his work, and speedily earned the commendation of his chief. Thus a very favourable report of him was forwarded to headquarters, although he knew it not. His chief was well aware of Harvey's desire to return to England if possible, and was even then using his influence to obtain an appointment for Harvey.

Occasionally a letter would come from Margaret, but most of his knowledge of her since his departure was gleaned from letters from Muriel, who was proving herself a most indefatigable correspondent.

Thus he found himself looking very eagerly for Muriel's letters, and she kept him very well informed, although it cost her considerable pain in doing so.

But one day a letter came from her which caused his face to blanch, and the veins to stand out on his forehead. But let us hurry back to England, in order that we may better understand.

About six months after Harvey had gone away, a family by the name of Devereux had taken a large house near to that of the Chalmers, and the families speedily became intimate.

There were two daughters and one son in the family, but it is with the latter that we are more concerned. His name was Reginald, and he was possessed of considerable wealth besides being the heir to his father's large estates and riches. Also, Reginald Devereux was a good fellow, and the possessor of equally good looks.

Almost as soon as he met Margaret Chalmers he fell deeply in love with her, but he managed to keep this knowledge to himself, until one evening at Margaret's home the two were left together, and then he told her of his love.

Even Margaret was somewhat taken by surprise, so well had he kept his secret. She thought for a few moments, whilst he waited anxiously. She quickly reviewed the position and prospect, and then put her hands in his, and said that she would marry him.

And that was what Muriel's letter to Harvey had said. And that was why he spent the evening in the Champs Elysées without one thought of dining. He wanted to think.

Why was he not more upset at the news? He reproached himself when he discovered that he was not stricken down with the sudden blow. Could it be that he did not care so much for Margaret as he had thought, and her absence had brought this truth home to him? Was that the reason?

It never occurred to him that his idol had been shattered that evening in the drawing-room when Margaret had preferred position to love.

Her letters, which had been carefully worded, had unconsciously enhanced the dormant feelings. And now she had not even written to tell him of this decision.

Pshaw! What did it matter? This Devereux had wealth and position, and that was what she wanted, so why need he worry?

That very same day his chief acquainted him with the fact that he had been appointed to a Secretaryship in the Foreign Office in London, the result of his good services in Paris. And that estimable gentleman went away wondering why the dickens young Jefferson did not seem so gratified as he expected.

Harvey was not to leave Paris for a month to come, he was informed. In the meantime he would still be attached to the embassy.

Why, he asked himself, why did he immediately sit down and write to Muriel, telling her of the good news?

If you had asked him, he would probably have replied that he always told Muriel everything.

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But then, again, why was he so impatient to get her reply? This I do not think he could have answered so readily.

Her letter came, a long, warm letter, with tender sympathy and congratulation both expressed in her own sweet, womanly way.

"Dear old Muriel," he muttered.

The month rapidly passed by, and Harvey was back again in London. Before proceeding to his old home, he had reported himself at the Foreign Office.

He found his new chief to be a most affable man, who gave him all the information that he was seeking. Lord Harbury, who had obtained the appointment for him, had not been able to tell him much concerning it, beyond the fact that it would be a very good thing for him.

He was now gratified to find that he would commence with a very handsome salary, and that his prospects were of the brightest.

Then he hurried down to his home, or, at least, where his home had been in days gone by.

He came quite unexpectedly, for no one knew of his return. He called on the Chalmers and found that only Mrs. Chalmers was at home. She cordially welcomed him, for she had taken the place of his dead mother as near as it is possible for another woman to do.

He acquainted her with his good news, and she was as pleased as if he had been her own boy.

"Were you surprised to hear of Margaret's engagement?" she asked, for the understanding between Margaret and Harvey had been kept a secret, and only Margaret, Harvey, and Muriel shared it.

"I was rather," said Harvey, but ere he could say another word, the door opened and Margaret herself swept in.

Immediately Harvey commenced to tremble, and a dark flush spread over his face. But Margaret was not in the least nervous, although a strange feeling of joy crept over her.

They shook hands in the commonplace manner, and gradually Harvey regained his composure and chatted affably with Margaret.

In a few moments she saw the difference in him, and strove to reassert her influence over him with many winning ways, but to no purpose.

Then she endeavoured to make him jealous. She spoke of her future husband, showed Harvey his photo, but in all Harvey seemed only glad that she was apparently happy.

"If only he were in a better position," she murmured to herself as she gazed at Harvey.

She felt in her heart of hearts that the nearest approach she had to love was all for Harvey. But he was poor, or, at least, he was not opulent. Neither could he put her in the position that Reginald Devereux could.

Harvey had said nothing to her of his promotion and bright prospects, knowing that Mrs. Chalmers could tell her, if she were desirous of hearing.

Muriel, he learnt to his disappointment, was not expected back until after tea, she having gone to a bazaar.

"She will be delighted to see you," said Mrs. Chalmers.

After tea Harvey went out, saying that he would call back again later on in the evening. He went straight to the building where the bazaar was being held, to wait until Muriel should come out. One by one, in couples and groups, people issued from the hall, and then, at last, came Muriel.

That same little figure, with its sweet, winning face. He watched her standing in the light of the lamps in the doorway. What was this strange feeling that came over him as he gazed at her? Why was he so intensely glad to see her? And why did he press so eagerly forward as she came out into the dark, tree-lined road?

"Muriel," he said.

She gave a little start of surprise, and then she looked up into his face, and immediately her eyes lit up with pleasure.

"Harvey!" she cried. "Oh, it is good to see you again."

She stood holding his hand and devouring his face with her eyes. Then she suddenly blushed at her eagerness, and released his hand.

"Shall we go on home?" she said in rather shy tones. "You are coming to see us, are you not?"

"I have been already," he replied. "And then I came along to meet you, Muriel."

"To meet me?" she cried quickly.

"Yes, Muriel, because I felt I wanted you. Oh, my dear, I loved you all the while and did not know it! What I mistook for love I offered to Margaret. Muriel, dear, dare I hope?"

He quickly read his answer in the lovelit eyes that were turned up to his in shy eagerness; the next moment he was raining kisses upon her.

When Harvey had written from Paris to tell Muriel of his promotion, he had not been able to give any details, and had only said that he had obtained a better appointment in London. Thus, she was quite unaware of the great lift up the ladder that he had been given.

"We shall not be able to make a great show, shall we, Harvey?" she asked softly.

"Why, little woman, I forgot to tell you all about my new appointment." And then he told her of all the good fortune that had come to him.

Now comes the sad part of my story.

That same evening, before Harvey had said anything to either Mr. or Mrs. Chalmers of his desire to become their son-in-law, Margaret had manœuvred matters so as to be alone with him.

"Mother told me of your promotion," she said, standing close to him, and placing her beautiful face near his own.

"Did she?" he muttered lamely.

"Yes, Harvey, may I congratulate you?"

"Why, of course," he replied.

"Don't you remember, Harvey, what we agreed upon before you went away?" She stood so close to him that her heaving breast pressed against him, and her hair was soft against his face.

For one mad moment his arms were raised to clasp her to him, whilst she looked into his eyes with a triumphant fascination, and her breath fanned his cheek. She threw her arms about him, and clung closer to him in wild abandon, whilst she passionately whispered her intreaties in his ears.

He stood half dazed with the awful temptation, almost yielding, and then the vision of Muriel came before his eyes, and he thrust the temptress away from him.

"And this is your trust to Reginald Devereux?" he said scornfully. "And would have been mine, too, I suppose, if I had been in his place."

"No, no, Harvey!" she cried. "It is you I love, and always have loved. Oh, don't leave me, Harvey!"

"You love position more, Margaret, and I have learnt what true love is," was his stern reply.

And then he left her.

In less than two months' time Muriel and Harvey were married, and if there are any who doubt about choosing between love and position, let them just call on either Mr. or Mrs. Harvey Jefferson, or Mrs. Reginald Devereux.

E. Newton Bungey.

To Those About to Marry.

DON'T let the knot be tied without knowing something about the character and disposition of each other. This you can find out by sending a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope, to RANEE, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. In return an accurate delineation of your character will be sent. If you both obtain these delineations, and then compare them, you will be able to decide whether a happy marriage is likely to result.

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£500 IN CASH PRIZES

1st Prize, £250.

2nd Prize, £100. 3rd Prize, £50.

AND 100 PRIZES OF £1 EACH.

SPLENDID NEW WINTER EVENING CONTEST.

Below you will find twelve sets of letters, numbered from 1 to 12. What you have to do is to find the longest word entirely composed of the letters in each set, *not necessarily using all the letters.* In each case, you must write (in ink), in the space left for that purpose, the longest word you can make. The word containing the greatest number of letters will be the correct solution. If two or more such words of the same length can be made from a set of letters it is only necessary to put down one of these words. Only one word may be written on each line.

When you have filled in your solutions, get a copy of next Friday's PEARSON'S WEEKLY, in which you will find the full conditions and another Coupon.

The first prize of £250 will be given to the competitor from whom the Editor of PEARSON'S WEEKLY receives the best list under the published conditions. The second prize of £100 will go to the person from whom the Editor of PEARSON'S WEEKLY receives the next best list, and the other prizes will be awarded in order of merit.

Every member of a household may compete, but no competitor may send in more than one complete set of pages.

Example:
ECCJLUZ: JUGGLE (The Z is here an unnecessary letter and is ignored.)

FIRST LIST.

1. AELP .....
2. GIKN .....
3. EHOPK .....
4. ACFNY .....
5. AABDLORR .....
6. ADEHRT .....
7. ORRWY .....
8. DEINPS .....
9. FGHIT .....
10. EILNNT .....
11. EILLMR .....
12. EGLN .....

Name .....

Address .....

.....

The full conditions, together with the second list appear in PEARSON'S WEEKLY, published on Friday next, Jan. 29.

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Stuff and Nonsense.

SAID he, "Matilda, you are my dearest duck." Said she, "Augustus, you are trying to stuff me." She was too sage for him.

The Best of Many.

HE: "And what do you think of the engagement ring I sent you?" She: "Oh! it's splendid. I have never had such a fine one before."

Time Changes Things.

TED: "Tom is engaged to the prettiest girl in town. He takes all his friends round to see her." Ned: "That's only natural. As soon as they are married he won't let one of them come near the house."

A Cautious Lover.

ETHEL: "I know he is a financier, but he is not a speculator." Maude: "How do you know, dear?" Ethel: "He didn't buy our engagement ring until he was quite sure that I would accept him."

They Fell to Arms.

MISS BUTEE: "Newspaper work takes in almost everything, doesn't it?" Spacer (moving up closer to her): "Well, yes, our profession does embrace a great deal." Then the light got so nervous it went out.

Used to It.

ELLA: "How long did it take Fred to propose to you?" Stella: "He talked about twenty minutes." Ella: "That's an awfully long time." Stella: "I know it seems so; but, then, you must remember he is a lawyer."

He Hadn't the Courage.

SHE: "Mr. Trotter has been sitting over in that corner all the evening; I wonder why he doesn't come and talk to me." He (Trotter's rival): "I told him that his trousers bagged at the knee, and he dare not walk across the room."

Why She Refused Him.

THE IMPECUNIOUS EARL: "Surely, you cannot think I would marry for your money?" The Heiress: "Certainly not, my lord, but everybody else would think so, and it would break my heart to have you regarded with unjust suspicion."

How Small He Felt!

"Do you think, Miss Fanny," he said, "the time will ever come when women will propose to the men?" She lifted up her beautiful eyes and looked him squarely in the face. "Never, Mr. Smith," she replied, "if they are anything like you."

A Reason for her Request.

WIFE (to husband): "Arthur, love, I want you to give John a good scolding to-morrow morning." Husband: "What for? I am perfectly satisfied with the fellow." Wife: "Well, you know, he has to beat the carpets to-morrow, and he strikes ever so much harder when he's in a bad temper."

Surely.

HE (indignantly): "I hope I know my own mind!" She (sweetly): "Yes! You surely ought to know as much as that!"

Uncomplimentary.

MR. STUCKUP: "Why, it's years since I've seen you, Miss Rood. I haven't altered much, have I?" Miss Rood: "No, I'm sorry to say."

Quite True.

"Do you love me?" said the paper bag to the sugar. "I'm just wrapped up in you," replied the sugar. "You sweet thing!" murmured the paper bag.

No Cause for Alarm.

CHAFFEE: "Miss Goldielocks asked me what I thought of you last night." Brann: "Is that so?" Chaffee: "Yes. But don't be alarmed, I didn't tell her."

Proof Positive.

MISS SINGER: "I wonder if that rich uncle of mine remembered me when he made his will? I used to sing to him." Mr. Law: "I'm sure he must have. He hasn't left you anything."

A Small Share.

KATE: "And so you are married? Keeping house, I suppose?" Maud: "Not exactly. There is a lady from Ireland who keeps the house, but she allows us to eat and sleep in it."

A Soft Answer Turneth Away Wrath.

POLLY (to her *fiancé*): "Tom, you danced four times with that girl Jenkins and only twice with me." Tom (slyly): "Well, it takes quantity, you know, to make up for quality."

He Wasn't Very Happy.

NEWLYWED: "Why, I never thought of saving until I got married." Bachelor: "And do you now?" Newlywed: "Oh, yes, indeed! I'm continually thinking how much I might save if I wasn't married."

A Likely Reason.

WINKERS: "Why is it that women always dislike a prominent man who is an old bachelor?" Blinkers: "Because they can't say that he would never have amounted to anything if it had not been for his wife."

She'd Trouble Him No More.

MOTHER-IN-LAW: "It is so kind of you, Harry, to take the trouble to drive me home." Son-in-Law: "Don't mention it. It is no trouble at all. On the contrary, it is the most delightful drive I have had for some time."

Preferred to Have Witnesses.

LIGHTLOVE: "At last, dear Sophia, we are alone, and I can tell you that I lo——" Sophia: "Oh, please, no, Mr. Lightlove—don't tell me here." Lightlove: "Why not? There is no one to see us or overhear us here." Sophia: "That's just it."

He was Exceptionally Original.

MISS CAUSTIQUE: "So you are engaged to that Mr. Atkinson, are you? Now, tell me honestly, what can you see in him that distinguishes him from all other men in the world whom you have ever met?" Miss Passee (with unlooked-for frankness): "He asked me to be his wife."

An Effective Remedy.

"I HOPE," said Mrs. Allkrect to her daughter Jennie, "that you did not allow your cousin John to kiss you on the cheek when you bade him good-bye at the station last night?" "No, indeed, I didn't, mamma." "Well, that's one of his habits, kissing girls on the cheek. How did you manage to prevent him from kissing you on the cheek?" "Easily enough. I held up my mouth for him to kiss."

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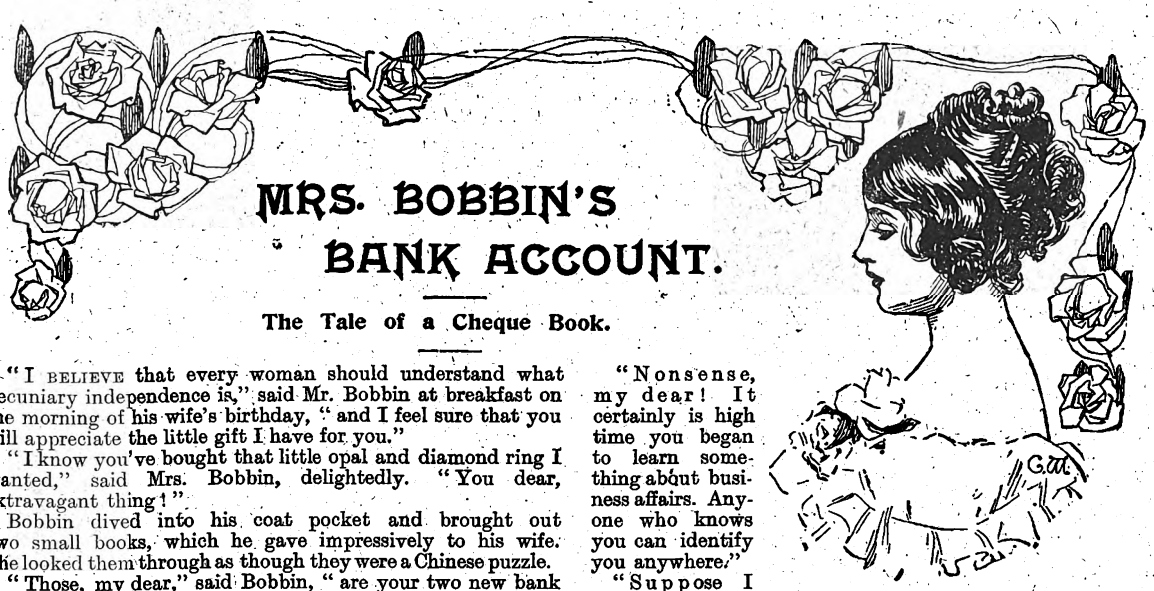

MRS. BOBBIN'S BANK ACCOUNT.

The Tale of a Cheque Book.

"I BELIEVE that every woman should understand what pecuniary independence is," said Mr. Bobbin at breakfast on the morning of his wife's birthday, "and I feel sure that you will appreciate the little gift I have for you."

"I know you've bought that little opal and diamond ring I wanted," said Mrs. Bobbin, delightedly. "You dear, extravagant thing!"

Bobbin dived into his coat pocket and brought out two small books, which he gave impressively to his wife. She looked them through as though they were a Chinese puzzle.

"Those, my dear," said Bobbin, "are your two new bank books. I have deposited for you at the Rattlethem Bank the sum of fifty pounds as your birthday gift, and hereafter I shall give you your monthly allowance also in the shape of a cheque, which you can deposit and draw against in due form."

"Oh, isn't that lovely!" said Mrs. Bobbin, trying to conceal her disappointment about the ring. "Do I simply show these at the shops when I want to buy anything?"

"The small book," said Bobbin, "is your deposit book, in which will be recorded any amounts which you may wish to—er—save. You will find that having a bank-book will cause you to save money almost unconsciously. This long book is your cheque book, on which I have had put your monogram in gold."

"And pink leaves, too!" said Mrs. Bobbin. "Just my colour! What do I do with this? Oh, isn't it sweet!"

"They get those things up very nicely at the Rattlethem Bank," said Mr. Bobbin. "I believe they have more ladies among their depositors than men, and they have clerks specially selected for their politeness and their courtesy in explaining matters. These cheque-books are rather a pretty idea. When you want to draw a cheque you tear out one of these and enter the amount on the counterfoil."

"And spoil the book!" exclaimed Mrs. Bobbin.

"That's what it is made for. See, these perforated lines show where you tear it off. This place is for the number of the cheque, and this for the date. Here is where you sign your name, and on this line you write the amount of money you wish to pay out."

"But I'm not going to tear out one of those pretty cheques!" exclaimed Mrs. Bobbin. "I'll get money from you whenever I want it, or else I'll have things charged!"

"That is not exactly the idea, my dear," said Bobbin, looking a trifle uneasy. "I want you to learn to take care of your own bank account and your own money. Of course, you'll have to draw cheques."

"But I never, never could draw, Albert, it was always my very worst lesson at the convent—it was——"

"Ha, ha, ha! You don't understand; to draw a cheque is to write it out—to fill it up—see?"

"And I can go anywhere and spend a cheque?"

"Well, if you're known it will be all right, otherwise you'll have to be identified."

"Oh, how perfectly horrid! I am sure I never can do that. Why, Mrs. Sniffington had to go to the police-station to identify her purse. That's where you have to go to be identified, Albert!"

"Nonsense, my dear! It certainly is high time you began to learn something about business affairs. Anyone who knows you can identify you anywhere."

"Suppose I want to pay my fare on the car or pay a cabman. Will he be able to identify me?"

"Oh, you don't use cheques for such small amounts as that. You just ask me about it any time you want to draw a cheque, and I'll let you have the benefit of my advice."

"Well, just let me have twenty pounds this morning," said Mrs. Bobbin, "for I've got to go to town and get some things. I don't want to spoil the book until I have had it awhile, anyhow!"

So Bobbin gave his wife the money and she started for town. Looking out of the bus she saw the Rattlethem Bank, and she decided to go in and see what it was like. It was a beautiful white marble place, with young men clerks at work behind plate-glass partitions. Then there was an inviting little carpeted inclosure, where she saw several women sitting at small desks writing or counting money.

Mrs. Bobbin walked in and said to the young man at the nearest window: "Will you be kind enough to let me have some notepaper and envelopes? I have a few letters to write."

He looked at her strangely. "We have nothing but the official paper, madam," he said, "and it is against our rules to use that even for our own correspondence."

"I think that is very odd," said Mrs. Bobbin, "my husband told me that you were specially courteous to ladies here."

"Are you a depositor?" asked the clerk.

"I beg your pardon. Am I what?" said Mrs. Bobbin haughtily.

"Have you an account here?"

"I am a member here," said Mrs. Bobbin, drawing out her books and confronting him with them triumphantly.

"Oh, a new account!" said the clerk, smiling. "I see. Are you Mrs. Bobbin?"

"I am Mrs. Albert Hollingway Bobbin," said Mrs. Bobbin, drawing herself up. "Do you wish to identify me?"

"Oh, not at all! Not at all!" said the clerk. "Is there anything I can do for you, Mrs. Bobbin; would you like to meet our cashier, Mr. Knockem."

"Certainly not, sir," said Mrs. Bobbin grandly. "I should like to—to—draw a cheque!"

"Very well, madam, you will find a table and chair opposite, with writing materials upon it. When you have made out your cheque you can give it to the cashier, fifth window to the right. He will let you have the money."

"What money?"

"The money your cheque calls for."

"But I don't want any money. I simply wish to draw a cheque."

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"Oh, very well! I beg your pardon. Be seated, madam. The small table opposite."

Mrs. Bobbin sat down and took out her new book, toying affectionately with its pink pages. Then she tried one of the pens. In the date line she wrote "Thursday afternoon," in a sprawling, angular hand. Then she signed her name with a flourish.

"Is this correct?" she inquired of the young man at the window. He looked it over with a carefully suppressed smile.

"Er — you've got the things in the wrong place, but if you just write the amount and the name of the person you wish to—"

"Dear me, I shall never understand it!" said Mrs. Bobbin desperately.

"Shall I fill it in for you?" asked the young man politely.

"If you will be so kind," said Mrs. Bobbin.

"To whose order?" asked the clerk.

"Oh, it really doesn't matter," said Mrs. Bobbin.

"To the order of bearer, shall I write?"

"That will do very nicely."

"Now the amount—what shall it be?"

"I don't care," said Mrs. Bobbin. "You see, I have twenty pounds that my husband gave me this morning. If you'll just draw the cheque I'll be so much obliged. I have an engagement with the dressmaker at twelve."

"Then I'll leave the amount blank?"

"Just as you please," said Mrs. Bobbin, graciously. "I'm so much obliged. Good morning!" and she turned to go.

"Here's the cheque," said the clerk, waving it through the window.

"Oh, do I take it with me?" inquired Mrs. Bobbin. "I thought I left it here."

"Not unless you wish to draw some money."

"Oh, thank you so much! Good morning."

That evening Mrs. Bobbin had a lesson in drawing cheques from her husband, when she had shown him the fruit of her morning's interview in the Rattlethem Bank, which document he carefully destroyed. For the first time he made his wife understand that she personally had some money at her disposal in the bank.

Next morning she visited her dressmaker and then proceeded to do some shopping. She explained at the grocer's shop where she was a frequent customer that she wished to pay her bill with a cheque, and the manager filled it in for her and had her affix her signature.

"Now, you'll send these things home just as though they were paid for?" she said to the manager, who had dealt with ladies who had bank accounts before.

"Precisely the same, madam," he said smilingly. The bill was for five pounds, and he knew that Bobbin was good for it. Mrs. Bobbin felt so elated over her success that she went to her milliner's and bought two hats for four guineas, and then found that she had no money for luncheon. She had given the milliner a cheque for the hats, and she told her of her predicament.

"I will cash a cheque for you with pleasure," said the milliner.

"Can you make it out for me just as you did for yourself just now?" asked Mrs. Bobbin.

"Certainly," said the milliner, "how much would you like?"

Madam thought that ten pounds would be sufficient, and when she received the crisp notes she felt effusively grateful.

"I shall pay you this to-morrow!" she exclaimed as she went out of the shop, putting the money in her purse.

A few days later Mrs. Bobbin had a visit from one of the bank clerks. He told her that she had overdrawn her account, but she indignantly denied it, and showed him that her book still existed as a proof of her financial soundness.

"You can see for yourself that it is quite full of cheques!" she said indignantly. "I never heard of such a thing! Certainly I have money in the bank!"

"On the contrary you owe us money, Mrs. Bobbin. You have overdrawn. Can't you understand?"

"I shall certainly tell my husband about this!" exclaimed Mrs. Bobbin.

"He may be able to explain it to you, and please make the amount of the overdraft good as soon as possible."

When Bobbin came home there was a stormy half hour, tears, and much explaining. As a result of it all, Mrs. Bobbin never renewed her bank account. She says that money is good enough for her, and that when she paid people with cheques it always seemed as though she still owed them the cash.

"Besides that," she said to her husband, "I never had any pocket-money, and as for that birthday present, I never saw it! And I had nothing but trouble all the time. But those pink cheques do make the loveliest curl papers you ever saw!"

Harry Richardson.

A New Magazine Is Coming

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SPLENDID SERIAL.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Eardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY ARE:

SIR CYPRIAN RUST, who has inherited the baronetcy and estates of Sir Basil Wingate, though he is not the legal heir.

MARCELLA RUST, his daughter, a very lovely girl, who is greatly in love with

PHILIP NULLIUS, the curate of Crawley Village, where the home of Sir Cyprian, Wingate Court, is situated.

LADY VIOLET FRAYNE-LENNOX, whom Marcella believes to be her aunt. She is a very beautiful woman, and loves her niece dearly, but Sir Cyprian has, for some reason, immense power over her, which he uses to further his own ends.

EDWARD DAY is an orphan whom Lady Violet has befriended. He, however, in making unreturned love to Marcella, insults her, and Lady Violet refuses to have anything more to do with him.

CALEB J. JOHNSON, a City magnate and millionaire, who marries Lady Violet, though he knows that her husband is still alive. This husband,

MAJOR RICHARD FRAYNE-LENNOX, is a good-for-nothing, who has been turned out of the Army. Lady Violet believes him dead.

TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Secret of the Letters.

As the trap drew nearer it gradually slowed down, and at last came to a standstill in front of the financier, who had gazed with fascinated eyes upon the face of the man driving.

It was not what would be termed an ordinary face, but the expression on it was the first thing that arrested the onlooker. It was daring, defiant, and yet curiously humorous, as though in his secret mind the man knew himself to be a hopeless scamp, yet had sufficient grace of humour to be eternally a jest to himself.

In figure he was largely made, cast in a slighter mould than the financier, but more sinewy than the latter, and he was burnt to a deep tan that showed like black against the gleam of two rows of even teeth.

Such was the man whom Caleb J. Johnson, Lady Violet's bridegroom of a day, stared at, as though he were a ghost risen from the dead past.

The stranger sprang lightly from the trap, and glanced carelessly at the door of No. 3 Lillie Road, then, after a moment's quiet cogitation, he removed his glance to the figure of the financier, and for a wild moment Caleb J. Johnson hoped that he was not recognised—that the years had so changed him as to make him appear a man apart from what he had once been when he had worked side by side on the gold claim with the lithe-looking man whose cool eyes pierced his secret, as they ran quickly up and down him, to eventually meet his own in a long, steady glance of recognition.

"So," drawled the stranger slowly, "they talk of truth being stranger than fiction, and by gum, it's true! Of all the spots in the world where I one day hoped to renew our friendship, the village of Leyton is the very last where I expected that most enjoyable re-union to take place, Mr. Jerningham."

"Hush!" replied Caleb J. Johnson, finding his tongue loosened by the mention of the name he had cast aside for ever. "I won't pretend not to know you, Rayne, although the years have changed you less than they have me—but it's no use our quarrelling in a village street over what took place more than twenty years ago."

He held out his hand—that slow smile, which his shareholders pronounced so irresistible, touching the corners of his mouth.

"Come, Rayne, let bygones be bygones! We were young in those days and our blood was unruly, but now we are men of the world!"

The man Rayne laughed sardonically, yet a glance of unwilling admiration shot from his eyes as he gazed at the well-to-do figure of the man he called "Jerningham."

"You can't carney me, Jerningham," he laughed. "I'm not the man to forget; you wronged your friend as you did your wife. We both trusted you in those days, and how did you treat us? You robbed me of my share of the money we made together; and you robbed your wife of her happiness and life.

"Ah!" he exclaimed passionately, "she, that beautiful woman who left everything for you, and refused to be comforted by other people who knew her value—now you talk of

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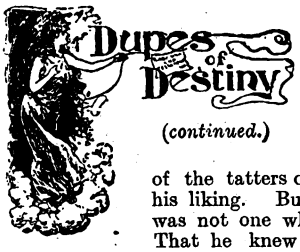

(*continued.*)

letting bygones be bygones!" He laughed bitterly. "Have you ever troubled to find out how Helen died?" he asked in an altered voice.

The financier coloured slightly. This raking-up of the tatters of a cast-off ghost was not to his liking. But the man in front of him was not one whom he wished to provoke. That he knew him still as "Jerningham" argued well for his dual *rôle* as the Gold King and financier of several companies. He must see that he did not betray himself to Rayne as Caleb J. Johnson. Then the fat would be in the fire.

"Helen died in England—so I learnt," he said quietly. "I have often reproached myself for having failed in my duty as a husband to her. But—well, I was a rough, jealous brute in those days, Rayne—and——" he paused significantly—"you were a handsomer chap than myself."

A dark flush mounted the tanned cheeks of the man who listened to him with such bitterness in his eyes.

"You mean to insinuate," he burst out suddenly. "Why, Good Heavens, man, she was an angel! I reverenced her as one. I even went to the length of tracing her after she left you, or rather after she was *deserted* by you. She did not die in England, but on board a liner among the steerage passengers and she gave her life for your son."

"My son! What do you mean?" Caleb J. Johnson said, paling strangely. "I have no son!"

"Helen—your wife died," repeated the man doggedly, "and left a son. I learnt so much, and then lost all trace of them. Of course, it never occurred to you, Jerningham, to look for a possible son, did it?"

The financier was silent. His thoughts had flown back to the woman whom he had so recently married under the name of "Caleb J. Johnson." Did she learn his secret, he could see the scorn and loathing in her patrician face.

"I knew nothing of this," he said hoarsely; "believe me, or not, as you like, Rayne—it is the truth. I will seek out my son now, unless he is dead."

"Unwanted children always live!" returned the other sullenly. He was beginning to feel the influence of the financier's personality and his anger was melting.

"I will also pay what I—I—borrowed from you," continued Caleb J. Johnson, following up this advantage. "I have made just a little money, enough to live quietly on—and you shall have your bit back. I will see to it when I return to town? What is your address?"

Rayne hesitated. "Write to 'R,' c.o., Post Office, Leyton," he said evasively. "That will find me."

"What are you doing here?" said the financier abruptly.

"I drove over from the country to get something a friend of mine left in his rooms at No. 3 Lillie Road here."

The financier started. That was the address where the curate lived in whom his bride took such an interest. "What did this backwoodsman want with him?" he wondered.

"Ah!" he said carelessly. "I came down here to call on a young chap in this street about—about some work I intended getting for him—but I'm afraid I made a mistake in the address. I must return to town and wire to him."

"Well," said the other hastily, "I won't stop now. I have a lot to do, and will drive in later and do my friend's commission. You are returning now, aren't you?" he went on anxiously, "and that money—the money you *borrowed*"—with a sarcastic grin. "On second thoughts you had better send it to me at my address. It is 'Water Grange'—don't forget.

"I have not much faith in your word, Jerningham, but if I find the money is not returned, I shall trace you to your London home, where there is probably a second 'Mrs. Jerningham.' She would be interested in her husband's treatment of his first wife!"

He drove off smartly, before Caleb J. Johnson could do more than note the address, which he did with a thrill of satisfaction.

The taunt about the second wife he could afford to ignore, since he was glad to find that his identity with the Gold King, Caleb J. Johnson, was not suspected by his old mate, who in the past had worked with him on the claim that had made the fortune he had stolen from his partner afterwards. Once the money was paid back, he would be square with Rayne.

In the meantime he must try to save that poor chap, Philip Nullius, from the fate of which he seemed in danger.

Rayne had carelessly told him his address as "Water Grange." Then he was concerned in the concealment of the curate; it was at his room that Rayne had intended calling for papers, but had decided to wait, fearing that his old enemy should watch him.

He would see that this time he outwitted the man who had sprung such a surprise upon him. It gave Caleb J. Johnson a sense of glee that in a way he would get his own back!

He knocked at the door of No. 3 Lillie Road, and, telling the landlady that he had called for the papers of his young friend, went into the sitting-room that Philip Nullius had lately vacated. He was interested in the curate, since he was Marcella's lover, and a special *protégé* of his bride, and it was with a feeling of curiosity that he opened a small case containing papers, letters, and one or two memoranda.

"I wonder what kind of a chap this Nullius is!" he murmured. "If you want to know a man's character, it is always safe to read his letters."

With that cynical speech, he undid a packet of letters. They were from Marcella—only a few girlish notes, and two letters that breathed a deep tender love.

The financier's eyes softened. He liked Marcella. She was a good sort of girl—well plucked too, to bolt from that slimy baronet as she did. Another bundle of papers attracted him. They were tied up with strong ribbon, and on the outside wrapper were the words, written in a clerical hand:

"These are the only papers relating to the obscure parentage of Philip Nullius, the foundling, born on board the liner from Australia, twenty-five years ago. The name of the mother is unknown, but her only possession at the time of her death was the few letters found sewn in her dress."

"So these interesting documents are supposed to throw light on the poor lad's birth!" Caleb J. Johnson murmured. "I'm afraid he is no one of any importance, poor chap. The heirs to titles are not usually born in the steerage of Australian liners."

He opened the packet with gentle fingers. After all, they had once been cherished by some woman who had thought well of the writer, who in turn had probably cast her off. He was not so sure that the curate was a fit match for the only child of Sir Cyprian Rust.

In one envelope there was a cutting from a paper. He drew it out curiously. It was torn across and one half was missing, but the financier read the words "living child—heir—if a boy. Address Samuel——" Then it broke off suddenly.

With a new interest he drew out one of the letters. It was old and very yellow with age. There was no date, or address, and no beginning except the words: "My darling!" he turned to the signature; he was now intensely interested, and a strange idea seized him that he was looking back, as it were, into his own past. A foolish thought, but it gripped him for all that.

Then, as his eyes fell on the name at the foot of the letter, the room seemed suddenly to whirl round and round the Gold King's head, and his heart began to throb so loudly that he was afraid lest it would suddenly stop altogether.

The name scrawled at the bottom of that poor little love-letter was one he knew well. It had been a nickname of his own. It was "Cabel," the word "Caleb" slightly altered. His first wife had always called him that for fun, and he had stuck to the name in the first days when he had cared for her.

And this letter—what did it mean by being in the possession of a friendless boy! *He* had written it—*he*, the Gold King, to his dead wife. *Whose* hand had dared pass it on to a stranger?

He stared round the room, a new wonder dawning in his eyes.

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A stranger—he had said—a stranger! But the wrapper said "the woman gave birth to the boy"—then—oh, Heaven! the curate—the foundling—were one and the same as his lost son! The neglected sea-waif whose father's behaviour had killed his mother!

He fell into a chair. His limbs were trembling and the moisture stood on his brow in drops.

Suddenly he started up with a cry:

"'Water Grange'! He is there—perhaps hurt! Perhaps——"

Then with a hoarse shout he seized his hat, and tore out of the room.

TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Philip Finds an Ally.

WHEN Philip Nullius woke the morning following his invitation and acceptance of the same, the evening before, to visit the vicar who lived at "Water Grange," he sat up and gazed round him with puzzled eyes.

He was not in his dingy bedroom at 3 Lillie Road, and he wondered whether he had dreamt the proceedings of the night before. His head ached, and somehow a sensation of heaviness seemed to lie upon him.

As he grew more accustomed to his surroundings he saw that he was in a large, bare-looking room, with little furniture in it, and any there was had an old, worm-eaten appearance.

The bed on which he was lying was strangely built, being a large four-poster, with heavy brocade curtains that smelt of an odour of long ago. The one window, though large, was strongly shuttered, both inside and out, the only light in the room coming from several ventilation holes.

Philip frowned and sprang out of the bed. He was puzzled as to his presence in the strange room, and meant to find out what had happened that he had not left "Water Grange" when he thought he had.

He remembered meeting several men who had all been most agreeable and pleasant, and though he had not liked them particularly, he had had no cause to complain of his welcome not being hearty. In fact, once or twice it had struck him that there was an ironical ring about the congratulations and greetings.

Even the white-headed vicar—the uncle of the man he had distrusted—had not entirely satisfied his idea of what a clergyman of the church should be. There had been a veiled levity throughout in his manner, despite his courtesy.

"This must be a stupid joke," Philip muttered. "I'll very soon get those shutters open, then I shall see what time it is by my watch."

He made several futile efforts to let in the light, but in spite of exerting all his strength, the shutters remained firmly closed.

Thoroughly alarmed by his failure, Philip turned away to seek his coat, where he knew he had put his watch on going to bed.

"This might be a prison," he thought. Then paled a little. It was an odd coincidence his having said that, for it grew more and more like one, as his eyes pierced the dim light for the place where he thought his clothes were.

After a few moments he realised with a flash of horror that they had gone, to the very last particle of attire he had had, together with his watch, and in their place was an old dressing-gown.

"What's the meaning of this?" he thought. "Surely theft can't go on in a clergyman's house in this wholesale manner—unless"—he paused for a second to recover from the shock the sudden thought gave him—"unless I have been lured into a trap, and this is really the house of a gang of thieves! But surely there is nothing they can get from me! Why, even if it should be so, should they imprison me?"

No, there must be some awful mistake; probably lazy

How to Become a Millionaire.

There are as many recipes for the performance of this trick as there are for the making of cakes. "Practise all the virtues," says one. "Deny yourself," advises another; "fight against every instinct of your nature which costs either money or time; work and save; and when you are very old and about to die you shall have the gratification of being envied for your riches." Another man who has amassed more than a million by trade and is still under fifty, says: "Never manfuacture anything; buy cheaply, sell dearly, and give no credit." A Chicago millionaire attributes his success to his habit of regarding every man as a thief until he has proof of his honesty—a cynical perversion of the older and more charitable plan of regarding every man as honest until he proves himself the reverse. Clearly, the wise ones who would teach us how to become millionaires are very numerous, and no two of them tender the same advice.

All these teachers may be right, though it is more probable that all of them are wrong. But one thing is sure—no man ever yet became a millionaire as a result of following advice, however good that advice might be. Another thing equally certain is that no dyspeptic has ever been known to acquire a fortune; his headache, weariness, and depression make it impossible. It would seem, therefore, that a good first step towards success is investment in a bottle of Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup, and so insure freedom from indigestion.

"For sixteen years I suffered from indigestion, at times so severely that I could not work." Thus writes Mr. Joseph Mullens, of the Post Office, Tatsfield, Surrey, on October 16th, 1903. Mr. Mullens continues: "Whatever I ate was sure to cause me great pain. I was much troubled with violent headaches and dizziness. As if this were not enough for me to endure, I suffered from frequent attacks of biliousness, which badly affected my sight. Some medicine prescribed for me by a doctor having failed to do me any good, I was induced to try Mother Seigel's Syrup, and very soon found relief. The pain after eating, the headache, and dizziness all left me. Soon I could enjoy my food as I had not done for years, and a very few bottles were sufficient to make me as well as ever I was in my life. I would not on any account be without some of the Syrup at hand in case of need."

Many people are prevented from acquiring wealth only by ill health, while some who acquire it lose their health in its pursuit, and so derive no benefit from their success. The remedy is to act as Mr. Mullens did.

Domestic Friction.

"The longer I live," writes "A Countess" in the *Outlook*, "the more convinced I am that breakfast is the cause of more domestic friction than can be accounted for by mere incompatibility of temper. It is not in human nature," she adds, "to be amiable in the early morning." Why it is so, is easy to understand when we remember that nine people out of every ten suffer from indigestion in one form or other. To awake in the morning fagged and worn out, dull of head and weary of limb, and with a taste in the mouth that makes breakfast a mockery, is certainly not conducive to good temper and geniality. The fault is not with the breakfast, but with the stomach that should call for and digest it. Thousands of dyspeptics have proved the power of Mother Seigel's Syrup to cleanse and tone the stomach, liver and kidneys, sharpen the appetite, assist digestion, even the temper and invigorate the system. Says one of them, Mrs. Holloway, of 3, Church Street, Henley-on-Thames: "I used to suffer such dreadful agony from indigestion. For years my life was a misery. After doctors' treatment had failed, my son's wife made me try Seigel's Syrup and gradually the pain subsided. All the other ailments followed, and soon I was as well as ever.[12]

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Dupes of Destiny

(*continued.*)

servants who had taken his clothes out to brush—but again, why had he stayed here at all?

He remembered that, contrary to his usual custom, he had been prevailed upon to drink some wine! He began to see now that the wine had been drugged, but why?

Feverish to find out the worst, he rang his bedroom bell, then went to the door to open it, but it was locked.

"Very well," he said with firm lips. "There is to be trouble, is there? Then I shall not go under without a fight!"

He went to the bell and pulled it again several times; then slipped into the dressing gown and waited.

His nerves were strung to an unusual pitch of excitement, and as the moments went by and no answer came to his repeated ringing of the bell, he went to the door and kicked it with all his strength; he had been left his boots, and he used them to good purpose, for soon after the key turned in the lock, and two men entered. They were the "cleric" of the night before, and the man who had called for him at 3 Lillie Road.

Philip looked at them haughtily. "I wish to know the meaning of this extraordinary proceeding," he said haughtily. "I came here as a guest last night, thinking I was in the company of gentlemen—and now on coming to my senses—after the *drugged* wine you gave me—I am absolutely without any clothing, and the windows are locked and the shutters made fast, also the door. Will you kindly tell me the meaning of this poor jest?"

"Don't be alarmed, Mr. Nullius," said the "vicar" gently. "No harm is intended you, and you are only detained here to sign a paper promising to keep a certain bargain. I am sorry you are frightened, but it is my strict duty to carry out my orders concerning you."

"Orders from whom, and why this secrecy?" demanded Philip.

"I am to ask you to sign a paper saying that you will never return to Crawley, or attempt to see the daughter of Sir Cyprian Rust; you must also resign your curacy at Crawley. Miss Rust is engaged now to her cousin, Edward Day, and if you sign that paper I am to see that your expenses are paid wherever you wish to go, provided it is not in England."

"And if I refuse to sign such rubbish, and refuse utterly to relinquish my right to Marcella Rust's hand, what then?" said Philip hotly.

He had not anticipated such a proceeding on the part of Sir Cyprian; he had, in fact, trusted him implicitly. But now, even Marcella, his loved one, they wished to make out false! He laughed the idea to scorn. His beautiful love to be anything but true and noble! Still, in his heart there rankled a soreness that Marcella had not attempted to write to him, and find out his address.

He looked steadily at the man who had posed so successfully as a clergyman the night before, and said:

"What if I refuse to put my name to such a paper, and instead demand my liberty? How will you prevent my getting it?"

The man laughed softly. "Why, Mr. Nullius, you will be kept here till you arrive at a more reasonable frame of mind. We don't mind how long we keep you here. But very soon you will find this basement getting very damp, and it will not be so comfortable as a cosy vicarage."

"Oh, but this is nonsense!" Philip said. "I shall be missed, inquiries will be made, and what then? It is impossible to hide people in this way!"

"Nothing is impossible to a determined man, Mr. Nullius," laughed the other. "I regret that you should be placed in such bad quarters, but it is the best I can do for you—will you sign that paper or not?"

"Never!" returned Philip hotly. "I will never sign away my liberty or my happiness for anyone; and if you think you can bully me you will find you have got hold of the wrong man. I can fight—and I will, too; you will not conquer me."

"*We* may not conquer you, Mr. Nullius," said the "vicar" sarcastically, "but *this* room might; the damp is fearful, it soon—kills—and bodies would rot in no time down here."

Philip made a sudden leap to the door. His brain was on fire, and he longed to get out, to fight his way so that he could come face to face with the smooth-tongued villain who was Marcella's father. As he grasped and flung the second man out of his path, the other cried roughly:

"Look out, Boulter! He's a sharp one, worse luck. I'll soon settle him in a way he won't like."

Boulter made a plunge towards the daring curate, but as he raised his hand to clutch Philip back before he escaped, the latter turned and dealt him a stinging blow between the eyes. It was utterly unexpected, and Boulter, with a muttered oath, fell back into the arms of the man who had watched, with keen eyes, the encounter between the curate and his hireling.

Philip, once outside, pulled the door to quickly and locked it, then stood in some hesitation as to his next move. He did not know in the least where he was, and to attempt to get out of the place in that wretched dressing-gown would be an act of madness. Yet, on the other hand, if he stayed where he was, he would be subjected to probably far more stringent treatment by his captors.

As he stood straining his ears to catch a sound from the room within, and to be prepared for an attack from the passage from where he knew the other men of the strange company would come, a light step broke the stillness, and as it drew nearer Philip guessed that it could not be that of a man. Yet how should a woman be living in such a place as "Water Grange" unless she were a party to what went on within its walls?

Yes, it was a woman, and as she came nearer Philip saw that she was young, and her face was pretty in a fair, baby-style, but her blue eyes looked moody, and a petulant expression lurked at the corners of her mouth.

When she saw Philip—a somewhat startling figure wrapped in a dingy dressing-gown and crouching against the wall, she uttered a stifled cry.

"Goodness! Who are you? What are you doing there?" she demanded, her voice trembling in spite of her effort to keep it calm.

"Please don't betray me," Philip whispered. "If those men in that room hear you they may stoop to any outrage. I came here as a guest last night—and now——" he finished bitterly—"I am a victim to a piece of black villainy."

While he had been speaking, the girl's face had slowly changed from fear to an expression of intelligence, and understanding.

"I see," she said slowly. "Now I know why they wanted to get me off to bed last night! They are up to some of their pretty tricks again."

Philip's face cleared. "Then you are not one of them?" he said in a tone of relief. "Thank Heaven!"

"Me—one of *them!*" ejaculated his fair companion. "Not much! I only came here myself yesterday morning. The beauty who runs this charming place is my honoured and respected father!"

The irony in her voice was not lost on Philip. He looked at her incredulously. "Your father! But surely you are not—not——" His voice trailed off into a murmur as he read the increased expression of hate in her large blue eyes.

"No, I'm *not!*" she said shortly. "I am glad to say that I don't often honour my parent with my presence, but when I do it is because I am on my last legs for a penny, and this is better than the workhouse! But tell me," she went on quickly, "what happened in there," with a nod at the door, "and who are the men, or the man?"

Philip listened for a moment; no noise came from the inside, but down the passage along which the girl had come, he heard a low, peculiar whistle.

TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.
The Man who Passed.

THE girl heard it, too, for her face blanched, and she cast a hasty look behind her.

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"Ah! they are on the look out!" she murmured. "There is a way of communication with the front of the house from any room. Look here,——" Turning to him suddenly, with a flush on her cheeks. "I'll stand by you. I don't know who you are or what they are doing with you, but I am pretty sure that they are in the wrong, and you in the right. Follow me as quietly as you can; I'll hide you."

Without daring to speak his gratitude to his imperious young benefactress, Philip followed closely on her heels. She led him down a few steps, then pushed a door that opened on to a flight of stairs, that when mounted led into a small room, plainly but comfortably furnished.

"Stay here," she said in a low voice, eyeing critically his strong, handsome face, which not even his incongruous garb could conceal. "This is my own particular room; no one ever dares to come into it, not even the manservant. I tidy it myself, and always keep the key in my pocket, so you need not fear an interruption."

Philip put out his hand. With the exception of Marcella, his own dear love, he had never felt such a wave of admiration for anyone, save this strangely free and easy, yet haughty girl, with the bitter mouth and wistful eyes.

"I can't thank you," he said gratefully, "but, believe me, I feel your kindness awfully, Miss—Miss——"

A sudden flush stained her creamy skin. "My name's Lottie!" she said carelessly. "You may call me that if you like. And you don't owe me any thanks," she went on hurriedly. "It's lucky I happened to be out of an engagement—my tour broke up rather suddenly.

"I'm on the stage," she explained in answer to his look of bewilderment, "and had I kept on tour, I would not have been obliged to come to this hovel, but my money was all used up, and so I came to my natal place. I'm glad I did now!" She finished with a vivid smile. "I have been of some use at last. Tell me who the men were in the room you got out of, and what happened. It will help me to find out where your clothes are likely to be."

Very quietly and briefly Philip explained what had taken place, and how he managed to knock down the man called "Boulter;" they had turned the key in the lock.

She listened with an intent look on her face, her mouth dimpling suddenly as she learnt of Boulter being knocked down.

"Well, the 'Vicar,' you will be interested to hear, is my adoring, and adored father," she said calmly. "What he's doing out of prison I don't know! He ought to have been there years ago—and Boulter is his right hand—or in this case his *left*.

"They are birds of a feather, and I'm glad that for once he's got what he deserved. He's a dangerous man, and I wouldn't give much for your life if he could find you after that. Now I'm off. Don't make the slightest attempt to stir out of the place or show yourself at the window. I won't forget you!"

With a brief nod she went out of the room, and closing the door, locked it; then slipped the key in her pocket, and ran down the front staircase—not that by which she had brought her *protégé* up from the underground passage.

In the front room she came face to face with the "Vicar" and the man Boulter. They both looked furious, and were speaking in an undertone to another man:

"He's in the place somewhere—a man can't escape in the open clad in a dressing-gown, and when I get hold of him, Mr. Philip Nullius shall pay for this little joke! I was inclined to be lenient to him at first, but now—I wouldn't give much for Miss Marcella seeing her lover again."

Lottie paused in the doorway. "Marcella"—it was a name not easily forgotten; one that she had taught herself to hate, because of what it had meant for her.

A woman of that name had encouraged her lover, afterwards her husband, and finally won him by her beauty from the woman who had married him! It was a strange coincidence that the name of the woman the handsome stranger loved, should also be "Marcella."

"Has anything happened to upset you, 'Vicar'?" she said aloud, coming forward leisurely to the table. "You look as though you had not had a pleasant morning."

The man turned on her with a snarl. "Mind your own business, Miss," he retorted, then stopped abruptly. The man Boulter had touched him with his elbow.

"Oh, Lottie," he said in a changed voice. "I have been wondering whether you have seen anything of a gentleman who is staying with me now. He is a bit of an invalid, and I have promised to look after him until he is stronger. He slipped out of his room this morning, we find, and is nowhere to be found. Have you been anywhere near the spare room?"

Lottie shook her head. She was watching him keenly, for all her apparent nonchalance. "The spare room—that's rather vague, isn't it? There are so many spare rooms here, 'Vicar'—Water Grange is full of them."

The man flushed angrily, and bit his lip. He dared not say it was the room in which no guest would stay willingly for half an hour, and Lottie knew the cause of his discomfiture, and was secretly amused at it.

"It doesn't matter which room," he said sharply. "It's enough to know that he has escaped—I mean gone away—and I am quite certain the man is in one of the rooms in the Grange. Already Wallis and Mouser are searching for him."

Lottie yawned. "Oh, well, you don't want the whole household to turn out and look for an old fogey in a dressing-gown, do you, 'Vicar'? Why don't you get the police to help you?" she added maliciously.

"You little cat! Get out of the room, or I'll throw you out!" shouted her irate parent.

Once in the hall with the door shut, Lottie's face relaxed into a smile of irony. "So the whole house is searching, eh, 'Vicar'! I don't fancy they will touch my room. It will be quite a pleasure to do an honourable, decent action towards a poor wretch who has fallen into your unholy hands!" Her face flushed, then paled with a sudden thought.

"Yes—I'll get him safe away, then go myself. He seems a good sort, and he's handsome, too. I wish Fate had intended me to meet such a man earlier, instead of that craven cur, Edward."

She bit her lips as the face of the man she had once loved so dearly rose before her. Now the scales had fallen from her eyes she knew that the object of her love was only after all a poor, pitiful wretch with feet of very indifferent clay.

But such is the strange perversity of a woman's heart, that despising, hating, and loathing, as she did, Lottie knew that did Edward Day come to her, and, putting his arms round her, beg her to take him back, she would forget the past ignominious neglect and deceit she had suffered at his hands, and welcome him with an open heart!

As she went softly up the stairs she met the old manservant, Wallis, with a bundle of clothes in his arms.

"What's that, Wallis?" she said good-humouredly. "Getting your trousseau ready?"

The man grinned. He was a rough, surly specimen of humanity, but he always unbent a little under Lottie's careless banter.

"No, missie; it's the master's two suits of clothes I'm taking to his room; they needed brushing badly."

Lottie noted the old man's heavy breathing, and said:

"I'm going upstairs, Wallis. Those things look too much for you. I'll take them in less than half the time."

Before he could stop her she had seized the bundle from his arms, and ran lightly upstairs with it.

On the landing she paused, and a slow smile parted her lips.

"A very good idea," she said softly. "I have not learnt the art of making-up for nothing. You have suggested a very clever trick to me, Wallis. I thank you most heartily! For once in a way the 'Vicar's' vestments will be used in the furthering of justice."

Some time between the hour of twilight and night a tall distinguished looking old man, with white hair and clad in clerical dress, strolled along the road that led into Leyton village. He was deep in thought, and did not note a man, large of frame and haggard of face, who passed him with unseeing eyes, and halting steps.

(Another grand instalment next week.)

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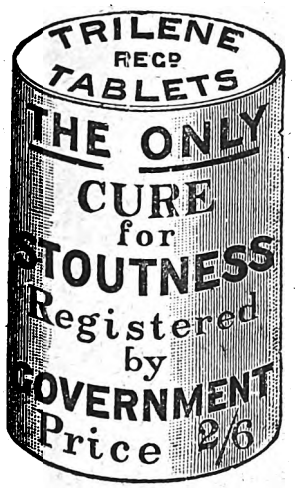

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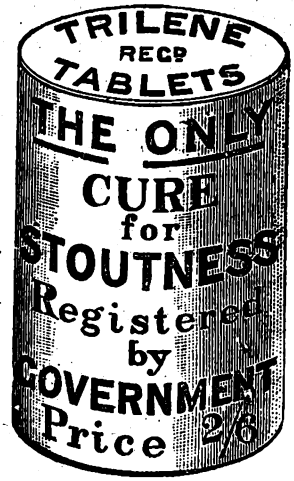

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"37 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.
Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.
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COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

MRS. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

MISS NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."
"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

MR. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

MR. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Liatorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure.

MR. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

MRS. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

MRS. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

MRS. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

MRS. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st. and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

MRS. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

MRS. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 28. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

MRS. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st.. You may use this if you like."

MRS. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

MISS JANE CARTER of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

MR. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

MISS F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

MISS PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

THE TRILENE COMPANY, 66 FINSBURY PAVEMENT, LONDON.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Renewing an Acquaintance.

I AM glad, "HARRY," that my advice brought about the happiness of your friend. As to your own case, if the young lady agreed to go out with you when you asked her before, why should she not be agreeable to do so again, if you liked each other? The fact that you have not seen her for some time does not prevent your writing. She would, in fact, be rather pleased to hear that you have not forgotten her. It would be nicer if you knew her parents. Perhaps she will ask you to go and have tea, or something of the kind, so that you will have the chance. Write to her, and leave it to her to decide whether she wishes to see you again, and if so, how the matter can be managed.

A Leap Year Chance.

THE young man who won't propose comes along once more this week. "SNOWDROP" has been going out with him for three years, but he has said never a word about engagement, though they are both very fond of each other, and their parents are quite willing. What is "SNOWDROP" to do?

* * * * *

Well, "SNOWDROP," this is the first Leap Year for eight years. Though I do not believe in ladies taking advantage of that superstition, which says they may propose to the men, it might be a very good opportunity in your own case, as you are both such old friends. In any case, you might hint to him that it *is* Leap Year, and that you feel rather inclined to avail yourself of it. Then who knows but that he may not save you the trouble?

Faint Heart Again.

"ROBERT" says he is in an awkward position. At the place where he works there are several girls employed, and he is much in love with one of them. He is afraid to tell her this in case his love is not returned, which, he says, would make things uncomfortable for him, as they work very near to each other. On the other hand, if he does not do so, somebody else may step in. The girl is at present free from sweethearts.

* * * * *

Be bold, "Robert," but discreet. Seek an opportunity for a quiet conversation with the girl, either by asking her out for an evening or in some other way. Then see how the wind blows. You should soon be able to judge whether or not the girl is interested in you. If she is, then ask her permission to see her more often. I quite understand that you do not like to blurt out that you are in love with her without ever having seen much of her. That certainly would make a man look foolish if the girl happened to be attached in another direction. But you had better be quick about it, or certainly somebody else will come along. Remember the proverb about "faint heart."

Two to Make a Quarrel.

"IRISH LASS" tells me that she and her young man have quarrelled over the photo of another man. I am sorry to hear it, for I must say that quarrelling over so trivial a matter speaks badly for them both. Remember a breach is very easy to make, and very difficult to heal. I should either see him or write to him, and tell him you are lonely and miserable, and, if he really cares for you, he will be glad enough to be friends again.

A Very Contemptible Man.

YOU tell me, "ANXIOUS ONE," that you were introduced to a young man at a bazaar, and went out with him several times, and then you found out that he was going out with other young women as well. You said you would have nothing more to do with him if he was going to treat you like that. He now seeks mischief with everyone you go out with. You ask if I consider it is a right spirit for any young man to have. No; I think he must be a very mean, despicable young man. You were quite right to give him up. Your letters are by no means a trouble; write as often as you like. I am only too pleased to be able to help you.

The Girl and Parents Problem.

"DAVID" is worried over the question of introducing his loved one to his parents. While they are willing that he should marry, the girl's parents are not, so that the two are not yet engaged. In this case, would it be advisable for "DAVID" to introduce her to his own family?

* * * * *

I think it would be a most admirable thing for "DAVID" to do. The fact that the girl knew his people, and that they approved of her, might be the very thing needed to make her parents consent to an engagement. I know a girl who was engaged to a young fellow, and the sole objection her father had was that he knew nothing of the young man, or his family connections. The young man's answer was to invite the girl and her mother to his parents' home, which turned out to be a very nice one indeed. This at once satisfied the stern father, who, seeing that the young man was well connected, gave his consent. This example might apply in "DAVID'S" case.

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* * * * *

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Cynthia

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"MY LOVER!" SHE GASPED.

(A Dramatic Incident from the Story, "A Thief in the Night." See inside.)

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Short Stories

No. 788.] [One Penny.

Week Ending February 6th, 1904.

A Thief in the Night.

Telling of a Case of Self-Sacrifice.

Containing the Incident depicted on the Cover.

"Do I love Cousin Gerald?"

Madge Hargraves was looking at her reflection in the mirror during the delicate process of setting that dainty hat on the well-poised head with its luxuriant growth of dark brown hair, when this thought flashed across her mind. A rich crimson wave swept quickly over the lovely face; it seemed like a wave of fire passing over it, so hot was it, and she retreated involuntarily from the mirror.

"Do I love Cousin Gerald?"

She sank into a chair and pressed her cool hands to her burning face, trying to hide herself from herself. The fleeting vision of her crimson face had imprinted itself on her brain with marvellous vividity and she could not shut it out.

Gradually her face became cooler and the rapid beating of her heart gradually steadied into the regular pulsation. She uncovered her face and stood once more before the mirror, surveying her reflection with a fixed gaze.

"Yes, I *do* love Cousin Gerald!" she murmured determinedly. "But does he love me?"

This last inquiry brought a troubled expression to the lovely countenance. For the past fortnight Gerald Hargraves had been in the old country house which was commonly designated "home" by three persons—Madge Hargraves, her cousin, and his father, Robert Hargraves. Madge had been left an orphan at an early age, and the custody of the child, with the care of the large estate to which she was heiress, was left to her father's brother, Robert Hargraves. The latter, with his son, had taken up his quarters in the old house and had ruled as master.

It had been a good thing for Robert Hargraves, for he was comparatively poor and had not had the same "luck" (as he termed it) as his elder brother.

The two children had grown up together for a few years, but as Gerald was five years older than Madge (her father having married later in life), the lad went away to school while she was still a small girl, and afterwards he went into the world to make his own way.

From one cause and another the cousins had not seen each other for five years, and that meeting had been, as events were proving, a fateful one. Madge had looked eagerly for Gerald's coming this time, but his behaviour had mystified and vexed her. At one time he would be all attention, as if—yes, she could say it now!—as if he loved her, and then he would change suddenly. It was through pondering over this fact while adjusting her hat that Madge had unconsciously asked herself the all-important question and had received her answer.

All-important question? Was it? Was it not equally important, perhaps more so, to inquire whether Gerald loved her or not? Madge felt her face grow as cold as it had become hot a few minutes earlier, and her lips trembled.

"Perhaps he has given his love to—to someone else!" she told herself, and the sun seemed to hide itself behind a cloud. "And perhaps I have unwittingly shown my own feelings to him."

It was humiliating and she felt inclined to take off her hat and plead a headache in order to avoid the promised walk with Gerald.

"That would be cowardly," she said, drawing herself up proudly. "The Hargraves are not cowards! Their history is full of heroic deeds and sacrifices; they have fought for their country, and they have suffered torture and death rather than betray a son or a father. And even in modern times their records are not void of instances of self-sacrifice."

Three minutes later she was on the lawn in the front of the house where Gerald was to await her. He was not there when she appeared, but she saw him approaching at a quick walk from the farther end of the mansion. How noble he looked! In Gerald Hargraves the girl saw all the noble qualities of the ancestors of whom she had been thinking, and it was with difficulty that she could repress the delight which his coming aroused within her.

"How I envy a man, whose privilege it is to show his affection while a woman must remain without emotion, though her heart be breaking, till the man she loves makes his——"

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, Madge," cried the young man. "I fear that I am not the most punctual of mortals."

"It is my fault, Gerald. I must have taken longer than usual in putting my hat on."

"The result justifies the delay," he remarked, bowing gallantly. His eyes shone with such a light of admiration that Madge was forced to lower hers.

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"I think that this is a lovely day for a walk," returned Madge, uttering a commonplace to hide her pleasure at the compliment. "It is years since we went to the White House, and I shall be delighted to see the old place again, with all its associations of Charles I. and other well-known personages! Let us go at once and make up for lost time—my lost time," she added with a laugh.

"Which *I* have to help to make up," he remarked, his eyes twinkling. "Well, I am willing to do anything—for you."

Madge's heart beat violently against her side, but she was prevented from giving any reply by the arrival of a telegram, brought to him at that psychological moment by a footman. Gerald opened the envelope hastily and read the contents; he looked perplexed for a second, and then said abruptly: "There is no reply."

"Is there any bad news, Gerald?" she asked him anxiously, as the footman retired.

"No, Madge, not that I can understand," he replied somewhat absently. "I don't comprehend the message exactly, and I fancy it has reference to a letter which has been sent to me but which I have not received. Perhaps the letter will arrive by the evening post—got delayed somehow. Now, off we go!"

Madge perceived that her cousin was a little worried in spite of his attempt to appear gay, but the exhilaration of the walk and the companionship of a lovely, vivacious girl had their effect in time, and he chatted freely.

Madge Hargraves was delighted; it seemed that the old, vacillating behaviour of her cousin had disappeared, and her pulse quickened as the thought came to her that Gerald might take advantage of some shaded nook to declare his love.

She had heard and read how these critical moments come to some women, and she was as romantic as most of her sex; she longed for it with that curious, timid shrinking from the possibility of the realisation of that blissful moment for which she was, with human inconsistency, ardently awaiting.

And, as is so often the case, it came when least expected; and it terminated as she could not have anticipated.

She had ascended a low bank in order to obtain a view of the lower country that stretched away on the other side. "Oh, it is a splendid view, Gerald!" she called out, as she turned to look at him. To her surprise, he was gazing at the telegram with a white face and an anxious expression. At the sound of her voice he folded the paper and made as if to spring up the bank in order to stand by her side.

It all happened in an instant; in half turning, her foot slipped and she staggered and fell. Madge uttered a little cry as she felt herself going, but a second later she fell full into the open arms of Gerald, who clasped those arms about her.

She felt that there was a stronger pressure than even the exigencies of the case warranted, and her eyes lifted swiftly in order to look into his. Their faces were close; he bent slightly and kissed her passionately.

"Madge, Madge!" he cried hotly. "Oh, Madge! You are safe and in my arms, and I wish I could always have the right to hold you thus!"

Madge hid her face against his shoulder. All her doubts and fears had vanished; he loved her, and she was passing through that ecstatic time when a woman hears the declaration of love from him whom she loves and admires as the best and noblest of men.

And then came the bitterness of disappointment; in the midst of her ecstasy she was driven to the opposite emotion. Surely, but few women pass through such an experience.

Gerald stood her carefully on her feet and released her. His face was fully evidence of his agony.

"Forgive me, Madge. I ought not to have said it," he stammered. "I have no right to speak words of love to you."

The flush of shame mantled her cheeks; she was tortured by the remembrance that she had shown her sentiments plainly to Gerald, who was now disclaiming her, as it were.

"What do you mean?" she gasped, with trembling lips.

"Forgive me, Madge," he begged brokenly. "I have placed you in a false position, and I am to blame, but my love gained the mastery, and I forgot myself!"

"I do not understand it," she said dully, passing her hand over her eyes as if to clear away the obscuring mist. "That you love me, and yet——"

"I love you, but I cannot ask you to be my wife," he cried. "I have no right to do so. Nay, by every right I ought to go away and never see you again. Yes, I love you—how can I help it? But you must forget that and try to act as if I had never lived."

"How can I do that?" she burst forth passionately "You have won my heart and now you reject it. Oh, Gerald, to think that you, *you*, should have brought this humiliation upon me."

"No, no!" he shouted, raising his hand with the action of one who is warding off a blow. "I have been wrong; I cannot ask you to be my wife. I cannot explain; you must forget me. Oh, if I had not come."

"It would have been better for both of us." Almost as soon as the bitter words were uttered she regretted them. "No, Gerald, I am glad," she added, placing her hand on his arm and saying the words with ineffable sweetness. "You know that I love you, and a woman gives her *love* only once. Whatever happens, I shall love you. If you are in trouble, let me help you, Gerald. Yes," she urged, as he turned his head to hide his emotion. "Let me help you, Gerald, for the sake of old times, and—and the present."

He did not answer, and she continued:

"What is it, Gerald? It is"—she spoke fiercely as the thought came to her—"is it my money? Are you placing that as a barrier between us? You must not do it; I will give it all away rather than let it be an obstacle."

"That might have presented itself as an obstacle, Madge, had there not been others. No, I have not given myself to another woman. I am free, and I love you, but that must be the end of it. I cannot tell you more."

"Is it that telegram?" she persisted, with the tenacity of one who sees happiness just beyond her reach and is striving to grasp it.

"Partly," he said briefly. "I cannot tell you. You must think what you will of me."

"Let us go back now," she requested warily. "The sun has gone in; it is going to rain."

Yet the sun was still shining brilliantly, a fact which she noticed as they retraced their steps, but which she did not realise, so deep was the sorrow that filled her soul.

They parted in the wide hall; Madge went to her own room, and Gerald made his way to his father's study. The girl flung herself on a couch, and, burying her face in her hands as she lay flat on the piece of furniture, sobbed bitterly, her one thought being: "What parts Gerald from me?" If she could have witnessed the interview between father and son, which was taking place while she wept, she would have

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had the reply; but she knew nothing of it, she did not hear the father's parting words: "That is the last chance, and it is that or ruin!"

The cousins did not meet again that day, for Madge kept to her room on the plea of a severe headache. Heartache would have been a better description. On the following day they met just as Gerald was going out, and a formal "Good morning" was all that was said. Gerald avoided her gaze.

"I must try to get my colour back by this evening," Madge murmured, as she stole away to the picture gallery. This place had exerted a strange fascination over her of late. "The tenants are coming to-night for the annual rent dinner, and as I shall be the mistress on the next occasion when they pay their rent, I ought to be with them to-night."

She went into the gallery and passed an hour in studying the pictures of former Hargraves. There was one upon which her eyes rested longer than upon any other; it was the portrait of a young Hargraves who had taken the side of the Lancastrians against the Yorkists in the war of the Roses, and the record of him was that he had preferred death to the betrayal of his father.

"It is like Gerald," she mused, clasping her hands. "He looks brave and noble, and would be incapable of any mean or wicked action. So it would be with Gerald. Yes, I must trust him, and this mystery will be cleared one day."

She felt comforted, and left the gallery with a somewhat lighter heart than when she had entered it.

The rent dinner was one of those customs which are gradually dying out. The farmers and tenantry generally paid their rent once a year, after Michaelmas, and when the harvest was garnered or sold. The old-fashioned farmers put their money in the bank at the market town, but they seldom had a cheque-book. When they had a large bill to pay, they went to the bank, signed a form of withdrawal on the spot, and received the money wherewith to pay the debtor or his representative when necessary. When the rent was to be paid, these honest folk made a journey to the market town for the express purpose of drawing the £60, or £100, or £150 in notes or cash, instead of using the new method of handing over a cheque to the landlord. They had very little faith in cheques; notes and gold were what they recognised as valid, and it was usually gold.

The tenants trooped into the Hall and filed into the room where Mr. Hargraves sat in a big arm-chair at a table, and received their money, while Madge performed the task of entering the receipts in the cash-book. This was a new duty for her, and it was undertaken at the express wish of her uncle and guardian. After the payment of rent, the tenants made their way to the dining-rooms where their wives awaited them, and prepared to do ample justice to the good things which they knew awaited them.

Madge and her uncle remained behind in the apartment with the money. It was carefully placed in a strong cabinet which had been made on purpose for such occasions during her father's lifetime. It was strong inasmuch as the doors were of sheet iron incased in wood, and the sides and other parts of the cabinet were similarly constructed. The style of the cabinet was that of Louis Quinze, mingled with Buhl. It was scarcely a pure design of any period, and for that very reason it was an attractive article.

"I wonder how much money that cabinet has had within its doors since it was first placed here?" observed Mr. Hargraves, as he locked the door. "Now, my dear, make yourself pretty, and then come with me into the dining-room to do the duties of hostess."

"Make myself pretty?" echoed Madge, in laughing inquiry.

"Ah, that's where I made a mistake and betrayed that I am not a young man," laughed her uncle in reply. "I ought to have said, 'make yourself even prettier, if you can.' That's it."

"Do you think that the money is safe there, uncle?" asked the girl hesitatingly.

"Safe!" cried the old man, opening his eyes widely. "Why, no one but a timid girl would express the slightest doubt. You will learn, my dear, that the people of rural districts are honest. They do not lock, bolt, and bar their houses as town people do. At the seaside, do not the house-holders leave the doors open, although there may be thousands of town visitors in their borough? Nobody would attempt to rob us. And suppose that someone did make the attempt? This is an inner room, with little chance of being entered save through the door, and to reach that door the robber would have to pass through a large part of the house. Then, without the key, that cabinet wants some opening. No, you may rest easy. I wouldn't have thought of such a thing, and I declare you will make me nervous. Come!"

Feeling rather ashamed of herself, Madge ran to her room, performed a little act of embellishment here and there, and descended to the dining-room.

Gerald was there and he seemed to be in high spirits; this shocked Madge at first, but later on it stimulated her to fresh activity. The tenants and their wives were a good-natured, jolly class of people, and the evening was full of enjoyment for them. They trooped off merrily, with various presents for the children, who were not permitted to share the entertainment given to the elders.

Madge Hargraves felt worn out when she retired to her own room; her uncle had given her a glass of wine to assist in the process of inducing sleep, but instead of taking off the effects of over-fatigue it really excited her. She partly undressed, slipping on a dressing jacket, but she felt that it was useless to go to bed for a short time. She picked up a book and began to read, and the next thing that she remembered was awaking with a start to find that she had been dozing in the chair. It was two hours at least since she had retired.

It seemed more impossible than before to go to bed and rest; she felt nervous, excited, and paced the room uneasily. Suddenly the thought of the cabinet came to her, and she recollected, too, that she had heard half of a remark passed by one of the farmers as he had left the Hall. Some rough-looking fellow had been seen, so she now understood, not far from the Hall, and the farmer had congratulated himself that he had not met the fellow by himself or he (the farmer) might have lost his rent money! Suppose that man should have got into the house?

The dog would bark, she decided; and yet the man might be able to silence the animal. Madge could not rest; she must go downstairs to the apartment.

She descended the stairs noiselessly, if her uncle heard her, he would laugh immoderately in his good-humoured fashion. The dog? The creature was silent, somewhere. Was her surmise correct?

She reached the corridor and the door of the apartment, and her heart almost stopped beating as she gently tried the handle of the door and found that it yielded. She pushed it cautiously open.

There was a light in the room. She pushed the door open farther. The

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light showed her the figure of a man, who was trying to wrench open the doors of the cabinet with a crowbar.

He was dressed roughly, and the farmer's remark darted across her mind. Near him was a bag—a burglar with a burglar's outfit!

In her excitement Madge made a movement which caused the man to turn hastily. The light which illuminated his features also fell on hers, and there came into that man's countenance an expression that was something more than the fear of an ordinary housebreaker caught red-handed. Madge also felt that the face was not strange to her, although she could scarcely recall it for the moment, but in an instant the truth came despite her incredulity, and the name of her cousin came from her palsied lips in a low wail.

"Gerald! My lover!" she gasped.

She tottered into the room. Gerald Hargraves, for it was indeed he, rose and stood motionless before her; his garb was strange, his face even had been made up to some extent. A thief, caught in the very act!

"Gerald, oh, Gerald!" wailed the girl, pressing her hand to her heart as though she would prevent it from breaking. "Why did you do this? If you wanted money, why did you not ask me? But to do this—*this*, is too dreadful."

Gerald's face twitched with the intensity of the mental agony he was suffering, but he did not speak.

"You want money," she said feverishly. "You cannot get it like that. I have a duplicate key; I will get it."

She hurried from the room. Gerald remained motionless till he heard her coming again, when he aroused himself by a violent effort, picked up a bunch of keys that lay at the back of the bag, and dropped them into his pocket.

Madge ran into the room, opened the cabinet, and pointed to the gold that lay inside.

"Take what you want—it's mine!" she commanded. Her voice was hollow. "I will explain it all to uncle."

Gerald hesitated for a moment. "I may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb," he remarked with a hoarse, mirthless laugh, and he tumbled most of the money into the bag.

He dared not look at her; he picked up the bag, heavy with the weight of the ill-gotten gold, and passed out of the room. Madge stood like a statue, her unseeing eyes fixed on the door through which he had passed, and so she remained till Mr. Hargraves, pale as death, hurried in.

"Madge, my child, what is this?" he cried. "I could not sleep, and I fancied that I heard a noise. I hurried—I saw a light from this room in the corridor—I—Oh, Madge, what is it? Housebreakers?"

"It is nothing!" protested the girl, coming to herself. "I found him—I mean, I wanted the money. I would have done anything for Gerald. No, no, I don't know what I am talking about! I wish——"

And she fell into the old man's arms in a swoon.

It was twenty-four hours before Madge recovered consciousness, and it was nearly a fortnight before she could leave her bed. She had asked questions of the nurses, but they soothed her and said that she would know all in good time. Had they rightly understood, they would have told her sooner. She asked for her uncle, and they said that he was ill; she cried as she thought of the blow to the old man to learn that his son was—Oh, no, no! She could not bear it!

When she was seated in a chair, they said that someone wished to see her, and the good old country doctor told her gently that it was Gerald and that he had news for her. She braved herself to see him, and the doctor retired to a discreet distance, so that he might be out of hearing and yet within call if he were wanted.

Gerald came forward and knelt by her side. "Don't shrink from me, Madge!" he intreated. "It was not I who was the culprit, but the story is a shameful one for me to tell. Listen quietly while I tell it."

It was his father who was to blame; the old man, as trustee, had spent certain moneys belonging to Madge, and he was being dunned for another sum, hence the telegram. The only way out of the difficulty, and to avoid disgrace, was to steal some of the rent money and make certain marks that would indicate that a housebreaker had been at work. In that way the money would go into Mr. Hargraves' pocket and the guilt would be fixed upon some unknown person. The old man could not do it himself, he contended; it required a younger and more active man to buy the outfit, to make the marks on the doors of the cabinet, and generally to do all that was necessary to create an *alibi* and fix the guilt on the unknown. He asked Gerald to help, and so acted upon the young man's affection that, in order to spare him the disgrace, Gerald weakly consented to do it. He never intended to break open the cabinet; he had the keys ready.

"Can you forgive me, Madge? It was weak, but I did it for his sake, and I felt that I could afterwards return the money to you secretly. I was weak, but my punishment has been great! I have come to clear my character, for I can do so now, to all. My father is dead! The shock brought on a fit, from which he recovered shortly before his death, and in that conscious interval he insisted on making a full confession of having hired someone to rob the cabinet."

"Did he mention who it was?" asked Madge suddenly.

"No, and nobody knows save you and I now."

"I am glad for both our sakes," she murmured. "I am so sorry, but I forgive poor uncle. Let him rest. It was noble of you."

"I don't think so," he returned mournfully. "I was weak."

"You sacrificed yourself," she answered in her feeble voice.

"I am glad that you forgive me," he said quietly, a glad light shining in his eyes. "I can go away happy now."

"But *I* shall not be happy if you go away," she pleaded.

Their eyes met. She held out her hand, and he took it. And he was holding it an hour later, when the doctor protested that he really must interfere now, he couldn't allow it any longer.

Geo. Day.

A Twentieth Century Brigand.

In the Spanish mountains, beyond the reach of the arm of the law, there lives a brigand, Don Q. by name. Many tales—strange tales, blood-curdling tales—are told of him and of his doings.

Don Q. is not a petty pilferer. He holds captives to ransom, and it is his boast that, once he has fixed the sum, he never lets a prisoner go till it has been paid in full.

Patriotic to the backbone, Don Q. is capable of the deepest cunning. He never forgets an insult, never trusts a stranger, and rarely makes a friend. He will sacrifice a dozen lives without scruple if it be necessary to do so to secure a desired end, but on occasion he can be courtly and chivalrous. To do a woman in distress a service he is ever willing to risk his life.

A series of stories about this awe-inspiring person by K. and Hesketh Prichard is now appearing in *Pearson's Magazine*. In the February number the most exciting story yet published appears, entitled, "How Don Q. Paid for his Cigarettes." His method will be found very unusual.

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A Wandering Fortune.

The Tale of a Plucky Girl and an Honourable Man.

"Oh, of course! Everybody is down on me because I didn't choose to cringe to a capricious old grandfather. A girl mustn't show any independence of spirit nowadays," cried the girl vehemently, her lip curling scornfully as she surveyed her uncle and aunt.

"He was unjust all the way through. He wouldn't associate with his own daughter, my mother, because she married the man she loved; he was unjust to my father, because dad—dear old dad—was not rich; and he has been unjust to me, because he had me educated so as to become a worthy heiress to Lexworth Hall, and then he cuts me off!"

The girl's eyes were flashing, her bosom heaving; she had drawn herself up to the limit of her medium height, and her hands were tightly clenched.

Mrs. Warner, her father's sister, glanced at the girl and then at her own inferior half; Mr. Warner shuffled his feet uneasily and said nothing. Mrs. Wynne, the girl's mother, sat trembling in a corner; she was a timid little woman, quite the opposite of her daughter, and most people marvelled how such a weak, yielding creature could have so bold and outspoken a daughter.

"It's your own foolishness that has done it," cried Mrs. Warner, rather angrily. "You were the heiress to a magnificent property and a handsome rent-roll. You had the thing in your own hands. You knew that the old gentleman was a crotchety person, and all you had to do was to put up with his whims till it pleased Heaven to take him from this wicked world! Yet, what do you do? You contradict him and fly in the face of Fortune; he threatened more than once to cut you off, and this time he sent you home. You refused to give in or pretend to give in, and he is seized with a fit of apoplexy and dies. Unfortunately, he had altered his will, and the fit took him before he had time to repent, so here you are, almost penniless, when you could have avoided it all."

"I don't care," retorted the girl defiantly. "He was a tyrannical old man, who simply tried to force me to do things because he knew that I didn't want to do them. That was all. He wouldn't let anyone have a mind of her own; it must be just as he desired. And I couldn't yield to that. No man should have it in his power to act so arbitrarily. There wasn't one person who had pluck and independence enough to cross him, except me, and my nature couldn't stand it."

"See what your daughter has brought down on you, Dora," sneered Mrs. Warner, turning to her sister-in-law. "You began wrong, my foolish brother and you, when you named her Chris. It's a boy's name, and she has been a boy ever since in reality, and you two encouraged her. Well, who is to earn the living now? There is no more money coming. Will you do it?" she asked sarcastically, turning to Chris Wynne, who still retained her defiant attitude.

"Yes," declared the girl boldly. "I know what you are thinking about, aunt! Mother has been living with you, and has been able to pay her own expenses; but now you are afraid that you will be asked to keep her free of charge. Don't worry about that. We shall not stop here, and if we cannot earn a living, you will not have to support us. Do you know," she added, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, despite the gravity of the situation, "there is at least one thing we can do."

"What's that?" demanded Mrs. Warner sharply, falling into the trap.

"Starve, auntie, dear!" said Chris, with a demure air.

She bowed with mocking courtesy, but there was a world of determination underlying the words. Timid Mrs. Wynne rose and followed Chris out of the room, while Mrs. Warner sniffed contemptuously and tried to smother the uncomfortable feeling that had struck her somewhere in the region where most people keep a heart.

"And she'll do it rather than ask us for anything," ventured Mr. Warner uneasily. "Weren't you rather sharp, Louisa?"

"Don't talk nonsense!" snapped Louisa, trying to smother her own fears by answering shortly. "It's a great pity that she wasn't a boy. You see," she continued, telling him the story as if he were a stranger, "Mr. Lexmore was as irascible as you can imagine; he was angry because he had no son, and he crushed the spirit out of his wife and daughter. I'd like to see the man who would do that to *me*!"

"Exactly, my dear," ventured Mr. Warner again. "Then why are you so down on Chris?"

"Don't interrupt with foolish remarks," said Mrs. Warner, glaring at him. "You don't understand. Well, when his daughter grew up, he determined that she should marry a title, and she went and fell in love with my brother and plucked up just enough spirit to defy the old man in that way. I am not surprised, for my brother was as handsome and lovable a man as I have ever seen.

"Old Lexmore was furious and cut her off, but when he found that there was a probability of his having a grandson, he came round sufficiently to see his daughter and make promises. Then another disappointment fell on him; the child wasn't a boy, but that girl who has just gone out of this very room. Old Lexmore was furious and wouldn't have anything more to do with them.

"They decided to name her Chris; that was because her grandfather's name was Christopher, and there is a girl's name Christine, and both are often called Chris for short. So they had her christened just 'Chris,' and they seemed to delight in developing her independent nature and her boyishness.

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"And then, one day, old Lexmore nearly ran his horse over a girl of six. He growled at her that she should have got out of the way, and the little girl looked fearlessly at him, and boldly told him that he had no right to ride his horse just how and where he liked, and that she would call a policeman.

"The child's behaviour touched his flinty heart in some unaccountable manner; he asked her name, found out that it was his own grandchild, and finally took her in hand, thinking that she would carry out his wishes, if her mother didn't. He wouldn't see the mother or father, and they gave up the little one for her own welfare.

"And so it went on. They often quarrelled as she grew up, but it always ended all right. I am sure that it was a good thing for Dora after my brother died. But this time things went farther than usual, and that unfortunate attack of apoplexy spoilt everything. The old gentleman altered his will, leaving everything to a son of an old college friend, although he hadn't seen that friend for years. And Chris has the mortification of knowing that by her foolishness she had rendered her mother and herself penniless.

"She doesn't care, she says. Well, she will learn to care. She should have given way and been all humility, and cringed to him, as she calls it. Isn't the fortune worth all that? Confound the man!" she continued, looking up; "if he hasn't gone and left me talking to the air!"

It was perfectly true; her husband had heard the story so many times that he was tired of it, and had slipped out unobserved.

In another room of the same house, Chris Wynne and her mother were talking gravely. The girl had her arm round her mother's waist, as if to protect her, and the elder woman was glad to lean, figuratively, on her tomboy of a daughter.

"I don't blame you at all, my dear," said Mrs. Wynne, in answer to a question from Chris. "If you don't wish to do a thing, say so, and don't be hypocritical. Be as true as your father was, Chris, dear, and you will find me quite ready to bear the consequences. My father's action was unjust, but we must not judge others too severely, Chris, as we hope for mercy ourselves. Let us try to forget the past, or the disagreeable part of it, and think of the future."

Chris kissed the sweet-tempered, meek little woman lovingly.

"I am not so much concerned about the future, mother," she said. "When I was in London three years ago, with grandfather's cousin, Lady Hartfield, she warned me that something like this might happen, and said that she would help me, if I wanted help. She is poor, as peeresses go, and, what is more, I wouldn't impose on her good nature; but she can assist me materially in getting a post as companion. I am more fitted for that than anything. So I can earn enough to keep us both."

"But——" began Mrs. Wynne, and then her remonstrance was cut short by a kiss.

That very evening Chris wrote to Lady Hartfield, and she went to bed to dream many things, prominent among which was the brief love affair of that London visit three years ago. What had become of Captain Hamilton? She had never heard of him since then. She told herself that she had not loved him, and yet why was it that life had not been so bright during those past three years, and why did she have that strange pain at her heart sometimes? She awoke at that juncture and was angry with herself when she found that her eyes were wet with tears.

Chris had to wait more than a week for a reply, and then she found that Lady Hartfield was in Switzerland; however, she was able to say that she had recommended Chris to a wealthy lady who was just returning to England. An appointment was arranged, and in less than a month Chris had entered upon her duties, and her mother was comfortably lodged in rooms away from her sister-in-law.

Chris Wynne had an agreeable position with Lady Braxton, who, growing to like the girl, treated her more as a daughter than as a paid companion. Lady Braxton lived a retired life, generally speaking, travelling a great deal, and usually seeking places where the majority of wealthy people did not go. As the months passed, and winter came and went, she began to think that it might, after all, do her good to see a little more society, and that it would be better for her companion.

"She is a dear girl," she mused one day; "high-spirited and beautiful. She bears the loss of that money with great bravery, and I am becoming really fond of her. I'll go about a little more in Society."

She was as good as her word, and thus it came about that, during the approaching summer, she accepted an invitation to spend a few weeks at Gorseton Park, the residence of an old friend, and Chris went with her.

There was a houseful of guests, among whom were several young ladies, and there was a constant round of visits. There were several good families in the district, each having its numerous visitors, and the exchange of courtesies and invitations was continual. Owing to Lady Braxton's influence, Chris was well treated everywhere and by all except a very punctilious or snobbish person here and there, so that she was spared the common experience of being constantly reminded that she was "only a companion." Life was bright, and Chris was happy, except on infrequent occasions, when the haunting memory of three years ago came back with special vividness.

Chris was seated in a window, behind a loose curtain, reading Tennyson, one lovely morning about a week after their arrival at Gorseton Park. She was deep in "The Princess," when her attention was distracted by the abrupt entrance into the room of Miss Bertha Ross, whose none-too-musical voice made itself heard and felt—as another guest unkindly expressed it—as soon as she was well inside.

"I say, have you heard? There's a party coming over this afternoon from the Manor, and I understand that Captain Hamilton is one of the guests. You remember him, Bella, don't you? Oh, ever so handsome! He has been away for a long time—should say it was close on three years, in India, so they tell me, fighting the border tribes. What a nuisance those tribes always are, whether in India or elsewhere. Well," she rattled on volubly, "Captain Hamilton is there, and he has expressed his determination to run over here. He knows Sir Richard Gorseton, it seems. Now, ladies,—unmarried ladies, I refer to—here is a chance for you. Young, handsome, rich, noble, and a bachelor!"

Some of the ladies laughed; the others did not look approvingly on Miss Ross' conduct. There was a general chatter among the various groups, to one of which Miss Ross attached herself, and Captain Hamilton was forgotten by all save one. Chris had felt her cheeks burn at the remarks of Miss Ross, and Tennyson had no more attraction.

Captain Hamilton was coming! Chris turned hot and cold alternately. The incidents of three years before came back to her with affrighting vividness, and she placed her hand over her heart as if to steady its tumultuous beating. She sank back on the couch and closed her eyes.

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Captain Hamilton had told her that he loved her; she had accepted his love and had said that she loved him. And then—ah me!—her happiness had turned her brain, it must have been so! She had been so excited and so glad, but her old independence had gained the upper hand and she had resented his natural, lover-like objection to her accepting so much attention from others. Yet he was right to an extent, she admitted it now; where he erred was in attaching so much importance to the acts of a high-spirited girl.

To punish him, she had flirted violently with another man; she had grown reckless and had carried the flirtation to the extent of giving him every waltz on her card on that fateful evening, almost ignoring her lover. She had retired with Arthur Macey to an alcove after the last dance but one of the evening, and there Captain Hamilton had found them, just as Chris was pinning a flower into Macey's coat.

Hamilton, in his mad rage, had not noticed the expression of regret and fear on Chris' face as she listened to the mad outpourings of this man whom she had so thoughtlessly and so unintentionally encouraged. He saw only the scene, and, with words of scorn, he had turned on his heel and left them. Chris had not seen him since.

Lost in her reverie, Chris was aroused by an increase of the clamour of conversation in the room from which she was screened by the gauzy curtain. She sat upright and then bent deeply forward over her book. Someone had entered the room with Sir Richard and Lady Gorseton, and that someone was being introduced as "Captain Hamilton"!

He knew some of the guests, so that the necessary introductions were soon over. Captain Hamilton had walked over, hoping to catch the male guests most of whom were out, however.

Poor Chris did not dare to look up; she waited in agony for someone to call her and introduce her, but Miss Bertha Ross, who had taken the task of introduction upon herself, as an old acquaintance of Captain Hamilton, ignored "the companion." She was no friend of Miss Wynne! At first Chris did not realise that she was to be passed over, but when Hamilton sat down and began to talk, the truth burst upon her. The bitterness of her position stung her. Of course, she was not entitled to the honour of an introduction; she was only a hired companion!

A moment before, Chris was hoping that something would happen to prevent her from being brought face to face with Captain Hamilton, and now that the wish had been realised, she was angry. She shut her eyes to prevent the tears of mortification from welling to the surface, then she rose quietly and passed out through the open window.

Captain Hamilton had seen the figure behind the curtain and had wondered who it was. It struck him that there was something familiar about the poise of the head. He kept a look-out from the corner of his eye, and when the form rose to its full height and passed out of sight through the window, he started.

During the rest of that brief visit, Captain Hamilton was a little absent-minded, and he breathed a sigh of relief when he had said "Good-bye." He looked about for Chris; he knew it was she; but he could see no trace of her.

How terribly unhappy Chris was all that day! She complained of a headache in the afternoon, and kindly Lady Braxton ordered her off to bed. She did not know whether Hamilton came again in the afternoon or not; she only knew that she was miserable with the double experience of that morning, and she wondered how she could avoid him in future.

"He will triumph over me politely!" she cried. "It will be his revenge for three years ago, and I am now altogether beneath him in social standing!"

There Captain Hamilton found them, as his betrothed was pinning a flower into Arthur Macey's coat.

Her heart told her that she was wronging the man, but another paroxysm of perversity had taken possession of her, and she refused to listen.

In the morning a change came. Chris had regained her usual equanimity and was prepared to meet Hamilton with perfect self-possession, but that was not all. A letter was brought to her, the envelope of which bore the die of the solicitor who had conducted all her grandfather's business, and that letter contained the most startling news. She had to read it three times before she could properly grasp the contents.

Her grandfather's property had been left to Mr. Geoffry Boyd; this gentleman had been away, but now that he was back again, he had declined to accept benefit from an act of injustice; he had enough money of his own, and did not want that which belonged of right to Miss Wynne. With sublime ignorance of legal formalities, he had instructed the solicitor to tear the will up and so undo the wrong; and on being informed that this could not be done, he had ordered the solicitor to prepare the necessary documents for signature in order that he might make the property over to Miss Wynne!

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Then she was an heiress again? An heiress in spite of herself, it seemed! Who was this Mr. Boyd and how could she thank him? But ought she to accept the gift?

The news of this romantic turn of affairs created a sensation at Gorseton Park, and the two or three persons who had snubbed her now declared that she was indeed a charming girl. Chris had become attached to Lady Braxton, and decided to stay with her for a time. The Gorsetons made her very welcome, and the future seemed very bright once more for Chris. That was what outsiders thought, but the brightness was marred for Chris by a cloud that would not vanish.

If Chris had had to attend to the formalities, she would have been busy, but the solicitor attended to all and came down to Gorseton Park when it was necessary to consult her or to get her signature. She had such confidence in the elderly gentleman, who was so extremely delighted at her good luck, that she did not trouble to read the documents and contented herself with adding her bold, flowing signature to such papers as were presented to her.

Only one thing puzzled and vexed her; Mr. Boyd did not wish her to write and thank him. He seemed to be a gruff sort of a man to do things in so off-handish a style. So Chris had to transmit her expression of gratitude through the lawyer.

It was a fortnight later when she saw Captain Hamilton again; he came unexpectedly to her side while she was walking in a secluded part of the grounds of Gorseton.

"Pardon my intrusion on your privacy, Miss Wynne!" he said politely. "I could not resist the temptation of renewing our acquaintance, of making an apology, and of conveying my congratulations! I was not aware that you were at Gorseton Park till—till after you had vanished through the window. And I am glad indeed to learn that an act of injustice has been rectified."

"Thank you!" she said frigidly. "It is very good of you. I hope you are quite well?"

She could have bitten her tongue the next moment for this cold speech. Hamilton paled slightly under his bronze, but he answered with perfect equanimity:

"I am quite well, thank you, Miss Wynne. Are you walking about the grounds? May I come, too, and enjoy the pleasure of a chat?"

"I am sorry, but I am going in now." Why would this perverse spirit gain the upper hand and make her say things which she regretted immediately? "I expect you will find more agreeable company, Captain Hamilton!"

And with a cold bow she left him. In the house she found the solicitor awaiting her; there was a document to sign and some instructions to be obtained.

"I think that will be the last thing to be done in order to complete the transfer of the estate, the stocks, and the money from Captain Hamilton to you, Miss Wynne," observed the solicitor absently, as he searched among his papers for one that he missed. "What has become of it now?" he continued, puckering his brows. "Oh, here it——"

"Who did you say was transferring this property to me?" interrupted Chris in a strange voice. "Captain Hamilton?"

"Eh? Er, bless my soul!" gasped the elderly gentleman in his vexation. "Oh, dear, he *will* be cross! He has been most particular that you should not know! However came I to be so foolish as to betray the secret?"

"Please explain this to me, Mr. Gower!" said Chris peremptorily. "You ought not to have kept me in ignorance of it. How was it I did not see his name on the documents? Why has he been called Boyd?"

In a great state of agitation, Mr. Gower explained. Hamilton's name was originally Boyd, but he had inherited a fortune from his mother's brother, who had stipulated that he should take *his* name of Hamilton, so the nephew was now Captain Geoffry Boyd Hamilton. (Chris remembered now that the first name was the same, which had not occurred to her previously.) Hamilton had made the property over to her. Chris had not troubled to read the documents, and, where it had been necessary for both to sign, Hamilton had taken care that she should sign first. Old Lexworth had not heard that this young man had changed his name, so he had called him Boyd in his will.

Chris was consumed with remorse; how good, how noble he had been, and how shamefully she had treated him. She left the solicitor abruptly and hurried out in search of Geoffry. She saw him and hastened after him; and it was not till she had caught him up and stood facing him, her cheeks aglow, her breath coming quickly and making an irresistible picture, that she realised exactly what she had done. She was throwing herself at this man!

"Well?" he inquired, fixing his keen eye upon her. "Have you decided that I cannot find better company? I cannot, that's a fact!"

"Oh, why did you do it?" she burst out. "I don't know how to thank you—I—oh, I believe I shall hate you, there!"

"And as for me," he said deliberately, restraining himself only by a great effort, "I am certain that I shall love you more every day. Oh, Chris!" It sounded like a wail. "Have these three years tortured you as they have me?"

She tried to withstand his piercing gaze, but her eyes drooped; in a moment he had sprung forward and was clasping her convulsively to his breast.

"I'll never let you go again!" he said with fierce earnestness. "And I won't let you get away from my grasp till you name the wedding day. No! I don't care who is coming. I'll hold you till you name it."

"Next year, then," she cried, trying to escape, so that her blushes might not be seen.

"Next fiddlesticks," he cried. "I say the end of next month; that's time enough for you to get ready and I won't wait another minute!"

And she had to consent.

F. Brewster.

To Those About to Marry.

Don't let the knot be tied without knowing something about the character and disposition of each other. This you can find out by sending a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope, to Ranee, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. In return an accurate delineation of your character will be sent. If you both obtain these delineations, and then compare them, you will be able to decide whether a happy marriage is likely to result.

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SPLENDID NEW SERIES. **BEGIN READING TO-DAY.**

DECOYED!

Told by the Decoy Herself.

A Striking Series of Astonishing Revelations.

SYNOPSIS.

Vivienne D'Alton, who in this series tells the story of a certain period of her life, is a young lady who has been educated in Germany.

Until the time when the story commences, she has never seen her father since he placed her at the school in Bochum.

Her mother is dead, and she has no brother or sister. Hence, she seems quite alone in the world.

But one day her father sends a message to the school that he wishes his daughter to leave and to meet him at Rotterdam.

The person who announces himself as her father at Rotterdam is not in the least like the handsome gentleman she had pictured to herself, but is short and stout.

They drive to a large mansion, where Vivienne is enthusiastically welcomed by a Mrs. Sherwood, "a bosom friend of her mother," who requests Vivienne to call her "aunt."

Vivienne takes an instantaneous dislike to "Aunt Flora."

A Mr. Gilbert Graysworthy comes to dine at the house, and incidentally mentions that round his waist he carries a belt containing fifty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds.

A day or two later Vivienne is shocked to learn that Gilbert Graysworthy has been found murdered in the street! There seems no motive for the crime, for his money, his watch and chain are still upon his body.

On the passage across to England Vivienne sees a person whom she believes is Annchen, a maid whom she greatly dislikes, talking to a man whom she has seen before under very suspicious circumstances.

She also meets a Viscount Broomville, a fellow-passenger, who announces that he is going to call upon Mr. Beverley D'Alton regarding some business affairs.

He does so, and relates how he was attacked in Rotterdam by persons whose evident intention was to rob him of the diamonds he carried about with him.

Some days later, Vivienne takes a surreptitious walk in the evening. She is amazed to see Viscount Broomville shadowed by the two birds of evil omen she had seen on the Harwich boat. The man is about to strike the Viscount when Vivienne utters a timely shriek of warning and thereby saves the Viscount from being murdered.

Vivienne's *début* into Society is a phenomenal success, as at a reception given by the D'Altons many of the aristocracy are present.

A young gentleman named Alan Melrose, with his two sisters, visits the D'Altons. This youth announces his intention of investing £80,000 in the New Barbary Land Development Co. While he and his host are discussing financial matters, Miss Helena D'Alton is announced as wishing to see Vivienne.

Mr. D'Alton's face turns to a ghastly hue, and he hurriedly shows Alan Melrose out of the room.

Miss Helena D'Alton tells Vivienne that she was her mother's godmother, and that she has never heard of "Aunt Flora."

FIFTH EPISODE.

Fraud and Ingratitude.

I saw neither Mrs. Sherwood nor my father until we met at breakfast next morning, and a glance at the latter showed me that he was certainly far from well, for his face was pale, his eyes were bloodshot, and his appetite was *nil*.

Nor was "Aunt Flora" in much better case. But with unusual unselfishness, she insisted that her haggard appearance was merely the result of last night's headache, and concentrated her attention upon "Dear Beverley's evident indisposition."

"You really must see a doctor to-day," she said. "Such an attack as you had last night must not be permitted to occur again."

"It will not occur again, take my word for it," was the reply. "I will go to a specialist to-day, and it will be strange if he cannot devise an effectual cure."

Fräulein used sometimes to tell her pupils that the exercise of strong will would, in many cases, cure us of all sorts of ideas concerning one's feeble health, and I thought of her when I heard my father assert that his heart attacks would not be allowed to trouble him again.

But there was a peculiarity in his facial expression, and a significance in the tone of his voice which struck me as rather remarkable, for it was as though he were speaking of a person, instead of alluding to a form of illness.

However, the fancy was but momentary, and was banished by my own anxiety, for I had seen for myself that my father was certainly ill on the previous evening. So I said solicitously: "Father, if you can really have yourself cured, pray do it at once, before your condition becomes worse! You looked absolutely ghastly last night, just after Miss D'Alton came to see us."

"Miss D'Alton!" echoed Lady Windelmere. "Is she a relation?"

"She is my father's aunt," I was explaining, when Mrs. Sherwood hastily interrupted me.

"She is nothing of the sort," she said. "She is a vile impostor, who has already swindled no end of people on the strength of her relationship to the great millionaire, Mr. Beverley D'Alton."

"And," added my father, "I am afraid that, if she ventures to show her face here again, I shall be compelled to hand her over to the police."

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"But," I protested, greatly distressed at hearing all this, "she knew my mother! She was her godmother, and seemed to know all about us."

"Not all," was the reply, given with one of my father's deprecatory smiles. "What she does know could be easily learnt by anybody taking the trouble to inquire. The real Helena D'Alton died several years ago, and the fact that I was lying ill with rheumatic fever, and therefore unable to attend the funeral, put it into the head of her companion, Florence Grantham, to try and personate her, in order to enjoy the annuity which I allowed my aunt. In this fraud the woman was helped by her cousin, who acted at the time as my solicitor, and it was actually successful until I met the vicar of our family church when he was taking a flying holiday through Italy. He assured me that my aunt, the last of her generation, was really dead, and he gave me such information as made me stop the annuity, and change my lawyers forthwith."

I was dreadfully disappointed, for I had taken a great fancy to the old lady, and I was quite able to second his opinion when my father continued:

"Unfortunately, the old impostor is possessed of most fascinating manners and appearance, so that she easily imposes upon people. But as soon as ever they begin to question her deeply, she flounders in a maze of inaccuracies, for she knows absolutely nothing of my early youth, except that the Beverleys and the Collingwoods lived on neighbouring estates. Indeed, I doubt whether she ever heard even of your mother's inseparable school-friend, Flora, for she had only lived a short time with my Aunt Helena."

"Oh, well, don't bother any more about the stupid old woman now," interrupted Mrs. Sherwood. "I don't suppose she wheedled anything out of Vivienne, and——"

"She never attempted to wheedle anything out of me."

"Perhaps not. That was only because she was short of time. Very likely her principal object was to be observed coming here, and I think you may take it for granted that you have seen the last of her. Beverley, you will not delay about going to that specialist?"

"Certainly not," was the prompt response. "I shall go now, and the whole business will be settled in a few hours. By-the-bye, Vivienne, I think your friend, Viscount Broomville, has behaved very shabbily to me."

I felt my face flush scarlet at this speech, and said hastily: "Oh, father, I hope not! He seemed to be such a perfect gentleman."

"Just so, my dear. But it doesn't do to trust to appearances; not in this case, at all events."

"But what has Lord Broomville done that he can be called 'shabby'?"

"He has served me a very nasty business trick. After inducing me to go out of my way to afford him a good investment, he has broken my confidence, and turned his shares over, at a big profit, to a third party, in whom I take not the slightest interest."

"But isn't that the essence of smart business?"

"It is. But I didn't think that it would be brought into play here. As I have observed already, I expected my confidence to be kept sacred until I gave the word to let others into the secret of the great scoop I looked forward to. By withdrawing his money almost as soon as he had invested it, and by selling his shares to somebody else, Lord Broomville has broken the law of commercial integrity, and his premature action will very likely cost me half a million."

I was glad that Lady Windelmere had excused herself, and gone to her own room before this conversation took place, for I felt as humiliated by it as if I myself had been guilty of the breach of trust of which the Viscount was accused. Of course I did not know much about the flotation of shares. But I had it from his lordship's own lips that he had invested his money in the New Barbary Land Development Company, and even I realised that it was not nice for him to have behaved as he had done, especially after the great service I had been able to render him.

"Perhaps," I faltered, "he will have a good explanation to give you when he calls again."

"My dear child, if there is one thing upon which you can feel sure, it is that Lord Broomville will do all in his power to avoid meeting us again. If he were an old hand he would brazen it out. But, being a fresh recruit to the ranks of chiselers, he still has a bit of conscience left, and won't show up till he's forced."

So my ideal of noble manhood had proved himself as fictitious in value as had the sweet-looking old lady whom I would so gladly have welcomed as an aunt. Of course my father could not be mistaken. But my disappointment was none the less bitter on that account, and as soon as I could reach the seclusion of my own rooms, I indulged in the first fit of weeping I had felt the need of since the terrible fate of Mr. Graysworthy first brought me face to face with life's tragedies.

* * * * * *

"Vivienne, you have made another conquest. Mr. O'Connell is wildly in love with you."

"Oh, Aunt Flora, how can you say such a preposterous thing? Mr. O'Connell is old enough to be my father."

"Which means that he is in the very prime of life and vigour."

"Yes, he is like a prime ox at Christmas."

"I don't suppose he can help being so stout."

"Oh, yes, he can. He should eat less, and exercise more. Then he would be more presentable."

"There is no need for him to worry about being presentable. He has money enough to outweigh all other disadvantages."

"Money doesn't make up for his pronounced vulgarity. And I must confess that I think more of good family than I do of wealth."

"What better family could you have than the O'Connell's? All Ireland thinks well of them and their doughty deeds and speeches."

"Then they must have spoken very differently from your friend, who has certainly learnt his Irish accent on the Continent."

"His father had a very good appointment in Berlin, and the children naturally acquired a German accent."

"I was brought up in Germany, too, but my English was too well looked after to permit me to forget my native tongue."

"Upon my word, you would try the patience of a saint."

"If ever I meet one, I shall try what I can do in that direction. Meanwhile, be good enough to remember that I consider it no compliment for a man like Mr. Emil O'Connell to gaze covetously at me."

"In other words, miss, you are off your head with vanity and flattery. But be good enough to remember, in your turn, that Mr. O'Connell is a man whom lots of your superiors would be glad of."

"Very likely. There's yourself, for instance. I don't suppose he would come amiss to you, and I should be very pleased to see you provided with another husband."

By this time, Mrs. Sherwood ought to have known that she was no match for me in an argument, and I ought to have known that it was dangerous to provoke the antagonism of a woman whom I credited with many malignant qualities.

But there was one thing which was already impressed

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upon me too unpleasantly to be forgotten, and that was the security of Mrs. Sherwood's influence over my father. Nothing could shake that. And though all my wishes in other respects were granted, I knew that so long as I remained unmarried I should have to endure the daily companionship of a woman whom I almost hated, as well as that of the maid who was on such strangely intimate terms with both her employer and his lady friend.

But I could see no reason why I should endure the attentions of Mr. O'Connell, until my irate parent, prompted by Mrs. Sherwood, told me plainly that I must treat the man as smilingly and as courteously as I would treat a younger and handsomer man.

"Whether you are inclined to marry him or not," he continued, "I insist that you neither say nor do anything to lessen his pleasure in coming here."

"You surely wouldn't expect me to marry a man like that, even if he were richer than yourself?"

"Of course not. I have far higher views for you. But there is no need to hurry over finding a titled husband for you. Enjoy yourself to the full, my dear. But, remember, you are to do me a great service in return for all I do for you."

"Nothing will delight me more! What is the service to consist of?"

"Civility to my friends and obedience to my wishes. Surely that is little enough to ask of you?"

With these words my father left us, and the sneering smile bent upon me by Mrs. Sherwood was the outward indication of her triumph, for both she and I knew that she was one of the people to whom I was ordered to be civil.

Some days passed by, and my father's prophecies proved correct, for neither Miss D'Alton nor Viscount Broomville came to see us again, and I was forced to the conclusion that I had been woefully mistaken in my estimate of their characters.

This conviction helped to reduce me to a more subdued frame of mind, and Mr. Emil O'Connell found me so outwardly tolerant of his unwelcome attentions that they became alarmingly demonstrative of his desire to honour me with a proposal.

"Vivienne," said my father just as I was about to go out for a drive with Lady Windelmore, "I want you to be very careful in your treatment of Mr. O'Connell to-night."

"Oh, father," I remonstrated, "I positively loathe the man! And if you strain my obedience too far, I'm afraid I shall shock both him and you!"

"It won't be much of a strain to prevent him having a chance of proposing to you this evening, will it?"

"Oh, no!" was my delighted answer. "I shall be only too glad to circumvent such a proceeding!"

"Very well. Your best plan will be to absent yourself to-night. Plead a headache, or whatever you like. He is going to dine with us. But if you keep out of sight, I will give him his *congé*, and I don't think he will want to visit here again."

I was very thankful to fall in with my father's views, although I was rather amazed at his sudden change of front. However, there was always something strange cropping up, as there probably is in every phase of life, and I soon forgot all about Mr. O'Connell in the pleasure of the undoubted sensation which reigned amongst the onlookers as our splendid equipage drove round and round the Park.

Presently, Lady Windelmore expressed a wish to call at a big jeweller's shop in Bond Street, where she was having some old jewels reset, and the coachman turned the horses' heads eastwards. Of course I already possessed numerous pieces of beautiful jewellery, but I was none the less interested in the display which greeted my eyes in the Bond Street shop, and I took the opportunity of ordering one or two articles to be sent home to me.

"What a magnificent parure!" exclaimed Lady Windelmore suddenly, as she stopped in front of a heavy, padlocked case, which was used to display a suite of the most wonderful diamonds I had ever seen.

Seeing how we both admired them, the jeweller volunteered a little information.

"Such suites as this," he said, gazing at the glorious gems with pardonable pride, "such suites as this have a very limited chance of purchase, and are rarely made except to order, for only royalties or millionaires can indulge in them. This set is intended for the Empress of Russia, and will be handed over to the Tsar's envoy this very afternoon. Oddly enough, Mr. Emil O'Connell, a gentleman who made a terrific lot of money in Westralia, saw one or two of the pieces, and ordered a duplicate set exactly like this, including tiara, necklace, pendant, brooch, stomacher, bracelet, and a wonderful single-stone finger ring. He has paid a fabulous price for them, and fetched them only a few minutes before you arrived."

I couldn't help being interested to hear of Mr. O'Connell's magnificent purchase, especially as I had more than a suspicion that the costly adornments were intended for me. But I did not hint this suspicion, even to Lady Windelmore. In fact, I had not mentioned my obnoxious suitor to her that day for several reasons, and I was glad that she had to go out later to a dinner-party to which she had accepted an invitation, as she was thus not likely to notice what happened at our house when the poor man received his *congé*.

I should also be free to do almost as I liked, for, with the approval of her ladyship, I had declined the invitation to accompany her, on the plea that there would be no youthful guests to lend congenial brightness to the affair.

"I'll have quite a nice evening to myself!" I thought, after I was once more in my own boudoir. "Her ladyship has gone out, and both father and Aunt Flora will be occupied with Mr. O'Connell. I have a good mind to have a tray brought up here, and then I will dismiss both Susan and Annchen till eleven o'clock. Nobody will take any notice of me

A Reduced Facsimile of Next Week's Cover.

A Dramatic Episode from a Splendid Story which will appear in the Valentine Number, published next week.

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for hours, and I can have another little constitutional, but I hope there won't be any mischief afloat, like there was the last time I went out alone."

This plan was duly carried out, and at half-past nine I was feeling happy and exhilarated at the prospect of indulging in what I considered a thoroughly innocent half hour's amusement, though I knew perfectly well that I was defying conventionality.

I enjoyed my solitary walk immensely, clad in the same old cloak and hat in which I left Bochum, for they were less conspicuous than the expensive things which had been lavished upon me ever since my father had sent for me.

On nearing our own house, at a few minutes past ten 'clock, I was dismayed to see two persons come into the light of the portico, and I instinctively stepped inside the gates of the adjoining house.

For the two gentlemen were my father and Mr. O'Connell, and I did not want either of them to see me. They came down the broad path together, and into the street. Both walked rather slowly, but I noticed that Mr. O'Connell's gait was extremely unsteady.

In fact, each step seemed to make him worse, and as I peeped through the trees, I could see that he began to lean heavily on my father's arm.

I was but a yard or two away from them, and could both hear and see what was going on without being observed myself.

"Come, come!" said my father. "Keep yourself straight, man."

"I don't know what has come over me," was the slow response. "I feel as if I were going to sleep."

"Well, you had better try to wake up. Ah, here comes a crawler. Let me help you in. Where shall I tell the man to drive to?"

"The Cecil. Tell the driver to hurry up. I feel half dead!"

It took a few minutes to get Mr. O'Connell into the cab, for by this time he was absolutely helpless. But the task was accomplished with the aid of the cabman, to whom my father tendered some money, saying in a loudish voice, apparently for the benefit of one or two people who lingered to see what was going on: "I'm afraid the gentleman has had a glass too much. The Cecil. Here's your fare."

Then, much to my amazement, he continued, in a much lower tone: "Lose no time. You'll find all serene at the office."

The cabman made no reply, but drove off with his insensible burden, and my father, with a curious chuckle, turned to go into the house again, leaving me thoroughly unnerved by what I had seen.

Perhaps some girls would not have been upset quite so much as I was at the sight of a drunken man being sent home alone in a cab. But I had seen very little of the seamy side of life, and I could not help connecting the degrading spectacle with myself.

I remembered that this man had probably allowed himself to be overcome by drink through disappointment, for my father had assured me that he meant to give him his *congé*. I also recollected that he probably carried a huge fortune, in the shape of a suite of diamonds, and though I did not like the man himself, I dreaded lest mischief should come to him through being left at the mercy of a strange cabman, who might, or who might not, be able to resist the temptation of rifling the pockets of his insensible fare.

I managed to reach my own room again without being noticed. But I felt strangely uneasy. My uneasiness was, however, destined to deepen into horror by the news that reached me next morning.

(*Another long instalment of this series will appear next week.*)

"I wish, sir, to ask for the hand of your daughter in marriage." "But are you in a position to support a family?" "Oh, I think so, sir!" "Yes; but you must consider the matter pretty carefully, for there are ten of us!"

Your Editor Chats.

Shortly to be Announced.

The time is now drawing near when I shall publish the full particulars of the new gigantic competition that I have in preparation for you. Before finally announcing the exact details of this novel scheme there is a terrible amount of work to be got through so as to be quite sure that there will be no hitch whatsoever in the working of it. I am pushing on as fast as ever I can with the final stages of this work, and at the very earliest moment the idea will be announced to readers of *Short Stories*. I cannot positively say when the announcement will be made, but at the most it will not be longer than two or three weeks, and possibly even before then. So, if you don't want to miss the chance of a lifetime, be quite sure to obtain next week's and the following issues. They will tell you more and more about the coming competition.

Next Week—Our Valentine Number.

Our next issue is the special Valentine Number. A reduced facsimile of the cover, which will be reproduced in colours, will be found on the previous page. The inscription to the picture, "He handed her the fateful valentine—the death-warrant of her happiness," is sufficient guarantee that the story it illustrates will be of enthralling interest. It will be written by one of the most popular authors of the day. Besides this story there will be many others of equal interest, in addition to our usual features. If you wish to send anyone a suitable valentine, you cannot do better than send them a copy of the Valentine Number of *Short Stories*.

A Guinea for a Reply.

"The Difficulty of Hugh Chester" is the title of the Eighth Unsolved Love Problem, which appears on pages 181 and 182. I will offer a guinea to the reader who sends in what I consider to be the best advice to Hugh Chester under the circumstances. My decision as to the winner will be final. Replies must be written on one side of the paper only, and should not exceed one hundred words.

Replies should be addressed to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.," and must have "Eighth Love Problem" marked in the top left-hand corner. The very latest date on which I can receive manuscripts is Friday, February 12th. None arriving after this date will be considered.

Competition Results.

I hope to announce next week the names of the winners in the Running Riddles Competition and of the Seventh Unsolved Love Problem.

Your Editor.

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REFUSED AND ACCEPTED.

The Tale of a Fortune Hunter.

"No, sir!"

That was what she said.

I rose up, trying desperately to appear unconcerned and careless. Pooh! It was of no use! Marjory Cheswick saw through me as if I had been a pair of spectacles. She knew that I would have sold myself for a postage-stamp just at that moment, and considered it a bargain. I got out of the room somehow, not in the most graceful style, I am afraid—and went home to ruminate on my dismissal.

"If Marjory Cheswick had not been an heiresss!"

That was the cry of my bruised heart during all the weary days and weeks that followed. Somehow I could not divest myself of the idea that Marjory had confounded me with the herd of fortune-hunters that had always surrounded her. There was no help for it now, however. Ah, *no* help for it!

"Charley's going thin—I hope he isn't going into a decline," said my mother dubiously, shaking her head. "I wish he'd consent to a tablespoonful of cod-liver oil morning and night."

"Hang cod-liver oil!" said my father, adjusting his glasses magisterially. "Charley only needs a little change. What do you say to a run on the Continent, my boy, eh?"

"Indeed, dad, I don't need any relaxation. I would rather remain quietly at home."

My father looked at me keenly. He was a man who never changed his mind; and the upshot of the matter was that on the Continent I went. An only son is always more or less spoilt, and I belong to the class of *more* spoilt.

Cod-liver oil! Foreign travel! What good would they effect so long as I couldn't take a tablespoonful of Marjory Cheswick twice a day, nor carry her across the Channel with me?

Once away from home I extended my route of travel considerably, and two years crept away almost before I knew it. I had not forgotten Marjory Cheswick, and the silvery "No, sir!" was as plainly imprinted on my memory as if it had been spoken yesterday.

"Cheswick! Cheswick!" People had almost forgotten the very name in the fashionable circles whose star Marjory had once been, when I returned to my native land.

"Cheswick!" said Uncle Brownson, who knew everybody and went everywhere. "The fat old man with a daughter who had property and flirted a good deal, hey? Heard he was dead; s'pose the daughter's married and gone."

"Married and gone!" I should have liked to have knocked off Uncle Brownson's rusty old wig; but, after all, the old man wasn't to blame.

I was strolling one evening through one of the principal streets leading out of the City, when I paused a moment at a brilliantly lighted corner, where three golden balls hung over my head. There was a dead-lock among cart-wheels and screaming drivers, and I mechanically turned to look at the display in the pawnbroker's window.

Surely I could not be mistaken! I rubbed the raindrops off my eyelashes, and looked again. No—I was *not* mistaken.

There, among battered violins, paste diamonds, and all the incongruous medley that collects in such places, hung a green-plumed canary, straining his small throat in a pagoda of tarnished gilt wire! Marjory Cheswick's pet bird! I should have known it among all the feathered denizens of the Canary Islands! But how on earth came it there?

I hastily stepped into the shop and confronted the man behind the counter.

"That cage? It's been here these six months. Redeemed—no, of course not. Fourteen shillings we lent on that cage—'tain't that sort of person redeems things. Can't tell, I'm sure, who left it here."

I slipped a gold piece across the dingy counter with trembling hands.

"Perhaps you might ascertain, by reference to your books, if——"

"Certainly, sir—certainly," said the man, clutching at the coin, while his whole visage relaxed into smiles. "Anything to oblige a gentleman. Let me see—let—me—see! Oh, here it is! January 17, Marjory Ches—Ches——"

I caught the dog's-eared volume and eagerly read the name, followed by an address entirely new to me. It was enough. I had discovered the missing link, and before the astonished shopman had recovered his presence of mind, I was once more pressing through the rain, the mist, the darkness. The mere idea of Marjory Cheswick in want—perhaps in suffering—drove me wild!

"Does Miss Cheswick live here—Miss Marjory Cheswick?"

At any other time my fastidious senses would have revolted from the reeking atmosphere of that dismal house; now I scarcely heeded the noise and squalor.

"Artificial flower maker—upstairs—top floor—back!" growled the voice of someone behind a partially open door, and I had the satisfaction of knowing that I was being thoroughly scanned by unseen eyes belonging to the voice.

Up the narrow, creaking stairs I passed.

My heart seemed almost to stand still as I tapped at the door, beneath which I had distinguished a faint, yellow line of light.

"Come in!" responded a low voice, and I obeyed.

It was a narrow room, whose sloping roof would scarcely permit a person to stand upright in any part of it—with a rusty, fireless grate, and a table where one tallow candle faintly illuminated heaps of half-finished artificial flowers upon which bent a weary, slight figure. As my step sounded on the threshold she looked up.

Ah, how changed—how faded! Yet, how beautiful still! The same golden masses of hair, braided now, instead of hanging in curls; the same blue eyes that had haunted me for ten long years.

"Marjory! Marjory Cheswick!"

She shrank back with a low cry, covering her face with her hands. Had I sought her so long to be discouraged *now?*

I cannot tell how it happened, nor what we said; but the first distinct recollection I have, beyond that dizzy, uncertain moment of recognition, is of Marjory sobbing with her forehead upon my arm. My life's precious jewel! I had found her at last—my constant love had met its reward.

"Oh, Charley, the only friend who found me out in adversity—the only one whose love outlasts grief, and sad, sad troubles! And I had fancied that—that——"

"That I was a fortune-hunter? So I am dearest, and I have found a fortune in your love!"

Pshaw! What is the use of going into details? Doesn't the reader know just what happened afterwards? If he doesn't I shall be very happy to see him any evening in *our* bright little drawing-room, where the green canary sings just as sweetly as if he had never hung under the "three golden balls," and my beautiful wife nourishes the delusion that her husband is a sort of hero.

A hero, indeed! As though any man wouldn't have passed through twice my ordeal to win such a precious treasure.

"Isn't it true, my own Marjory?"

And Marjory hides her face in her baby's neck, and says:

"Nonsense!"

Charles Malcolm.

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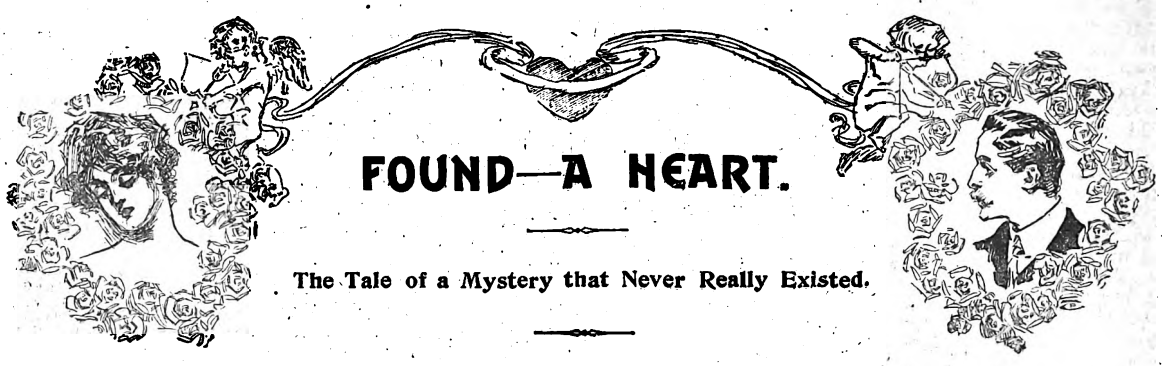

FOUND—A HEART.

The Tale of a Mystery that Never Really Existed.

I FOUND Dolly seated on a sofa in her bedroom surrounded apparently by the whole of her worldly possessions—and they were many.

"Good gracious, Dolly," I exclaimed, as I gingerly removed a muslin dress and two hats from a chair and placed them on the already heavily laden bed. "Whatever are you doing? Preparing for a siege?"

"No," said Dolly solemnly, "I'm packing."

I looked at the motley collection and smiled.

"Why don't you take dress baskets instead of those flat things? They are much easier to pack," I said practically.

"Because," returned Dolly in disgusted accents, "I am going to stay with Aunt Dorothea and she *will* drive in to fetch me herself in a horrid cart, and if I arrive with a lot of luggage she fumes and scolds all the time, so I was trying to get everything in those instead, but it seems quite hopeless." And she ran her fingers distractedly through her fluffy hair, which stood out round her small face like a golden halo, and looked at me pathetically with a pair of helpless blue eyes.

Dolly Trevelyan was a spoilt child, a spoilt girl, and now that she is married to an adoring husband is more spoilt than ever.

As a child Dolly was what is called in nursery parlance "a handful," keeping the house in a fever as to what she would do next, and when she grew up and was launched into Society she developed into the most incorrigible flirt, and her unfortunate aunt lived in a state of panic that she would make some undesirable marriage, so when Dolly suddenly and unexpectedly at the end of her fourth season announced her intention of marrying the Hon. Jack Trevelyan, everybody connected with her heaved a sigh of relief.

Their engagement was a short one and lasted only six weeks, and their wedding was celebrated without a hitch. As they drove away, Miss Villiers sank into the nearest chair and said with heartfelt thankfulness in her voice:

"Thank goodness, she is safely married at last."

Personally, though I did not say so, I thought Jack far too good for such a frivolous little minx as Dolly, and it was with grim foreboding as to the future that I departed for a long visit to America. It was a year before I returned to London during which time I heard occasionally of the Trevelyans and their movements, and no hint of any pranks on Dolly's part reached me.

Although Jack's family is all that is to be desired and his prospects excellent, at present he is not very well off, and as Dolly has only what her aunt allows her, the young people's means are limited, so they are "economising" in a flat. When I heard this word in connection with Dolly I smiled, and now as I looked at her and her surroundings, I thought of it again and this time I laughed aloud.

Dolly looked at me reproachfully.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," she said with an injured air. "You might help me instead of sitting there laughing. What am I to do with all these things?"

I was about to offer some advice when a maid entered and asked if "the master" would be in to lunch. On receiving a negative reply she retired and I said:

"Where is Jack, Dolly?"

"Oh, I sent him out and told him not to come back to lunch. He is so big, he gets in my way when I am busy. You may stay, though," she added generously.

"Thank you," I answered a trifle sarcastically, "and do the packing, I suppose?"

"Well, you might help," she said. "I shall never get finished. I have to catch the four o'clock train, and it is nearly lunch time now, and I have done absolutely nothing."

"What are you going to travel in?" I asked.

Dolly looked puzzled.

"What a fortunate thing you thought of that," she said, "I had forgotten all about it, and the dress I want to wear, I *think*, is down at the very bottom of that"—and she pointed to one of the boxes—"I can't go like this, can I?"

As "this" consisted of a frilled dressing jacket and a silk petticoat, I told her not to be silly rather impatiently.

"Well, it must all come out again, I suppose," she said, getting lazily up from the sofa and, kneeling down on the floor, she began to drag out the contents of the box.

"Dolly, Dolly, really you are making an awful lot of trouble and crumpling everything disgracefully—you ought to be ashamed of yourself," I cried.

Dolly stopped and laughed.

"I can't pack," she said, "it's no use. Warren must do it."

"Don't talk nonsense," I said crossly. "Of course you can pack as well as anybody else, only you won't take the trouble. Here, get up and let me do it."

For once in her life Dolly obeyed with alacrity, and, returning to her seat on the sofa, she watched me as I gradually reduced the room to order—putting in desultory remarks and instructions from time to time.

As I gathered up the things that were flung on the floor, a flat leather case dropped out of the folds of a skirt and fell down. I made a movement to pick it up, but Dolly suddenly sprang at it and snatched it away before I could reach it.

"Never mind that," she said hastily, "I will put that in my dressing case."

I looked at her in some surprise—the usually cool, nonchalant Dolly looked flushed and excited as she hastily put the case into a drawer. Naturally my suspicions were roused by her evident desire to prevent me seeing what the case contained, and a hundred ideas immediately flashed through my mind. Dolly had always been a terrible flirt, and, of course, it was not unlikely that she would continue to be so even though she was married, for no one had ever given Dolly credit for much affection for anyone except herself and her own whims. And if my fears were correct, did Jack know? Poor Jack, whose devotion to his wife had been the subject of many remarks among his friends—in all probability he was quite ignorant, and I shuddered to think what would be the result when he did find out, as, of course, he would.

I determined at all costs to wring the truth from Dolly and find out whose portrait it was that she kept concealed among her things—for I felt sure that the case contained a portrait. At any rate I might be able to say something which would make her pause and think before she broke Jack's heart.

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"Heartless, wicked little flirt," I said to myself indignantly, and then aloud, with all the sternness I could put into my voice:

"Dolly, whose portrait is in that case?"

"Why should you think there is a portrait in that case," she answered, "and if there is, I don't see that it is any business of yours. You should not be inquisitive."

"I am not inquisitive," I replied, swallowing my annoyance at her insolence. "But I know how thoughtless you are, and I am afraid that it is some man's portrait that you don't wish me to see—and I really do think, Dolly——"

"I don't see why you should jump to the conclusion that it is a man," said Dolly, two wicked dimples forming at the corners of her mouth, "it might be auntie's, or yours, or——"

"Don't talk nonsense, Dolly, you know perfectly well that it is neither your aunt's nor mine—now, confess, is it not a man?"

"Well, since you are so positive about it—yes."

And to my horror a distinct blush crept up into her cheeks and over her neck.

"Then let me see it."

"Certainly not, I should not think of doing so," she said in a tone of great decision.

I began to feel desperate.

"Dolly, have you thought seriously of what you are doing—of what trouble you are going into—suppose Jack were to find out——"

"Perhaps he knows already," put in Dolly.

"Then it is worse than ever, and I insist on your telling me how far this affair has gone—you have only been married a year, and yet already you have got tired of Jack—and—Dolly, I don't know what to say to you—how can you have the face to stand there and smile—you must be absolutely heartless."

"Really," she said coolly, "you are getting very excited about it. I shall begin to think you take a very great interest in Jack if you take his happiness so much to heart."

It was my turn to blush now, for inadvertently she had hit rather close to the mark. She saw her advantage at once and continued:

"Jack and I are quite old enough to take care of ourselves and our own affairs without any help or interference from outsiders, I should think."

"Dolly, I wish you would tell me how far this affair has gone. Is it really serious or only play?"

"It is really serious, *very* serious," answered Dolly gravely. "The most serious affair that has ever happened to me, and it has gone so far that it is quite impossible to ever draw back."

I made a movement to pick the object up, but Dolly suddenly snatched it away.

With a horrified exclamation I made a movement to open the drawer, but Dolly put her hand on it.

"I did not mean you to know about it," she said, "but since you are so anxious and have found out so much, perhaps it might be as well if you knew more—I always carry that case with me wherever I go, and I do not intend ever to part with it—I shall be buried with it—so that no one else shall ever be able to touch it—if I show it to you will you promise never to breathe a word to anyone—not to auntie, Jack, or anyone?"

"Very well, I promise, but I think you are doing very wrong, Dolly."

"Do you?" said Dolly with a curious little smile as she unlocked the case with a tiny golden key that hung on her chain amongst a lot of charms. Then she put it into my hands.

They trembled a little as I took it from her and raised the lid. Then a stifled exclamation fell from my lips.

Smiling up at me with the brave, honest eyes I knew so well, was an exquisitely painted miniature of Jack Trevelyan.

"Well," said Dolly, "go on with the lecture."

"Dolly—I—I don't understand. Why should you make all this mystery about it?"

"There is no mystery at all—I simply did not want you to see the portrait because no one but myself ever does. You made the mystery yourself by your beastly suspicions——"

She took the case away from me and looked at the picture.

"My Jack," she said softly, and in a voice that I had never heard before. Then she raised her head and looked at me—all in a moment something had come into it which changed her from a frivolous little Society butterfly as I knew her, into a woman who could love and suffer as deeply as the gravest of us—and I realised that I need have no further anxiety on Jack's account—Dolly would not break his heart for she had found her own.

For a few minutes we stood looking at one another, then, as usual, she was the first to speak.

"Now that you have found out my secret perhaps you will be satisfied. It is odd that you should never have considered it possible that I might possess a heart and a conscience as well as you yourself—and that I might love—my husband."

"I beg your pardon, Dolly," I said meekly. "I have misjudged you horribly, but I shall be wiser in future."

Dolly shut the case with a snap and returned to her normal light-hearted manner.

"Do you know," she said with a laugh, "I would have married Jack if he had been a chimney-sweep, and you know how I loathe smuts. And now let's get on with the packing."

B. M. Studdy.

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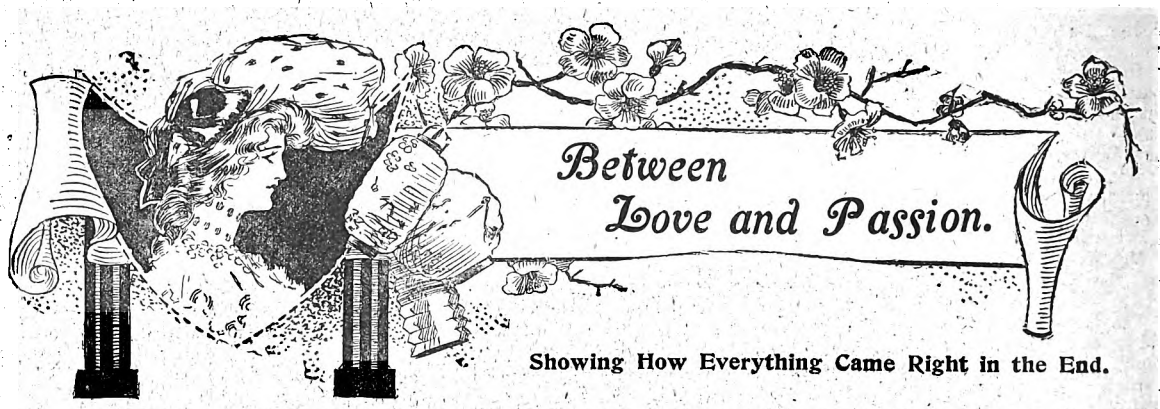

Between Love and Passion.

Showing How Everything Came Right in the End.

My earliest recollections—the saddest and the happiest memories of my life—are centred round the little church of St. Clement's.

My father, who was rector of St. Clement's, died when I was a baby, and five years later my mother married a rich widower with one child, a boy.

Guy Vernon was three years older than I, but he had few playmates of his own age in the quiet little village in which we lived, so we became close friends and constant companions.

Many an hour we spent together in the old graveyard, deciphering the quaint, half-obliterated inscriptions on the moss-grown stones. We were full of the strange fancies and queer conceits of children who are much alone, and in our ways we were rather sober and old-fashioned, as such youngsters are apt to be.

The silence and the gravity of those earlier years always clung to me, but Guy lost much of his when he went to college, and mingled with the world. As for me, I stayed at home, as women used to do, and sometimes I felt myself akin to the fungous growth on the old stones.

We were very fond of each other, Guy and I; we quite forgot for years that we were not brother and sister. But, after awhile, Guy went away to college, and, when he came back, it was different. I began to have admirers, and I mentally compared them all with Guy—greatly to their disadvantage. He had his flirtations, too, I suppose; but I don't think they were ever anything more than the merest flirtations.

Mamma died just before Guy first left home, so papa—as I always called Mr. Vernon—and I were left alone in the big house all through the long, dull winters. The little church was my greatest consolation then; I spent hours there, playing on the organ.

Guy always came home during vacation, and we were very happy together. He was my constant attendant at the various mild festivities, such as picnics and garden-parties, with which the neighbourhood was gay, and days when nothing was going on we would stroll over to St. Clement's, and he would sit and watch me while I played the organ, or talk to me in the intervals when my fingers rested on the keys.

It was a very quiet courtship, if courtship it could be called, for we never said one word about loving each other—never uttered any pledges. But at last Guy began to see that this was what his father wanted, and it aroused all that strange obstinacy which seems to be a part of human nature. I did not blame him, for I, too, resented the calm appropriation of myself, the complacent taking for granted, which Mr. Vernon made too evident.

At last Guy came home permanently to assist his father in the management of his various business interests. The health of Mr. Vernon had been breaking for some time, and I felt very anxious about him.

I don't think Guy saw it so clearly as I—men seldom do see things as quickly as women; but I thought Mr. Vernon perceived it himself. At any rate, he handed over most of his affairs to Guy's superintendence, and I fancied that he had even hinted to his son his wish to see us married while he lived.

The only effect of all this, of course, was to widen the breach between us—that is, if you can call it a breach. It was hardly a coolness, either—simply that difference which only lovers can feel; nor was Guy altogether to blame for it. I knew I had altered, too; but I could not help it.

In the autumn it was decided that some landed interests of Mr. Vernon's in Ireland demanded immediate personal attention, so Guy made his preparations for departure.

Then, somehow, things returned to their former condition between us, and I was very happy, even though he was going away and had not yet said one word of love to me. I felt the difference—that was enough for the present; I was quite content to let the future take care of itself.

Guy went away in the evening, immediately after dinner, so I had to relinquish the hope I had secretly cherished of driving him to the station. He stood, all ready for departure, by the library fire, exchanging a few parting words with us, while he waited for the carriage to arrive.

"It's too bad you have to go, my boy," said Mr. Vernon, in a deprecating tone.

"Oh, I don't mind—it won't be so very bad; you know, I have some pleasant acquaintances there."

"Well, don't let them persuade you to stay too long," answered my step-father, glancing furtively at me. "Are there any fascinating ladies among them?"

"I believe not," responded Guy, laughingly.

"I should think you would be able to finish your business before Michaelmas," continued Mr. Vernon.

"I should think so," agreed Guy. "I'll try to be back as soon after as possible." Then, glancing at his watch, he added: "It's time for me to go."

"Good-bye, my son, and God bless you!" said the old gentleman. "You may go to the door with him, Rachel, but you mustn't watch him drive away—it's bad luck."

I am not sure whether I went myself, or was led by Guy, to the wide, stone vestibule which opened on the porch.

"You must not come any further, dear; you will take cold," he said gently. Then he stooped and kissed me.

For a moment he took both my hands in his, whispering:

"You will not forget me, Rachel?"

A gust of wind blew in my face and I was alone. A branch of the tall plant at the back of me swept across my face, and the rose in my hair—I had given him the one at my throat—fell to the ground. I picked it up. and laid it away in my prayer-book. As if I could forget!

The long weeks of Guy's absence lengthened into months. Michaelmas came and passed, but he did not return. He sent us affectionate letters, saying the business was not yet settled; but I could see his father was annoyed. In February he wrote that his work was finished, but the friends with whom he was staying wanted him to remain and see a little of the country, which he had been too busy to do previously.

Mr. Vernon was angry, but he left the decision to me, and, of

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course, I urged Guy to stay—I had no right to call him to my side, no claim upon his duty.

In March, however, my step-father had a slight stroke of paralysis, and I summoned Guy home. He came; but the instant I saw him I knew he had changed, and then my chief anxiety was to conceal the alteration from his father, who was not, I knew, strong enough to bear any disappointment.

With Guy came his friend, Will Marston, whose home was in Glenlough, but who had been travelling in Germany during my step-brother's long absence, so that the two had seen nothing of each other.

Mr. Marston had returned just two days before Guy left, and the latter had insisted on a visit from his friend, with whom he had been very intimate during their college days.

The doctor did not think my step-father dangerously ill, nor did he recommend us to avoid society. He warned us, however, against any excitement, anxiety, or thwarting of the invalid's wishes, and knowing the one supreme desire of old Mr. Vernon, and how little probability there was of its being fulfilled, I lived in constant dread.

In spite of his friend's presence, I could see that Guy chafed under an almost uncontrollable restlessness, which he managed to hide pretty well from the two men, though not from me. Was he longing to get back to Glenlough?

Afterwards I knew he was. Of course, it was impossible for him to go; for, as his father grew better, and became more like himself, there was a good deal of business to be attended to, which had been necessarily somewhat neglected during Guy's absence and his father's illness.

Mr. Marston's presence was a great boon to both Guy and myself during those trying days, for it enabled us to avoid uncomfortable *têtes-à-têtes*. Besides, he was an exceedingly agreeable man, and enlivened us very much. Indeed, if I could have got rid of the miserable sensation of living over a volcano, and in momentary expectation of an explosion, I should have enjoyed the young man's society.

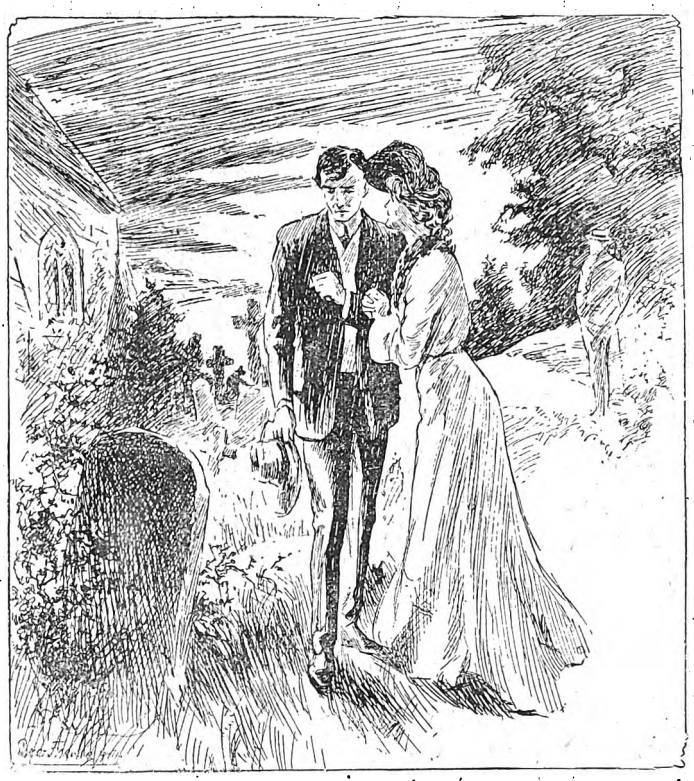
In spite of a cordial liking for his son's friend, I fancied that my step-father would have been glad to see him go; for, as his health improved, Mr. Vernon once more became anxious to see things settled between Guy and myself, and, of course, this could not be expected while the visitor remained. The invalid clearly saw that his days were numbered; and he longed, I felt sure, with what was to me a pitiable longing, to see his two nearest and dearest safely united before he left us. To die with one's heart's desire, the latest desire of life unfulfilled, seemed to me hard then—it has seemed so ever since.

If it had not been for Guy's sake I think I could have borne, to make my step-father happy, that hardest of all lots—to be the unloved wife of a husband I loved.

That Mr. Vernon had hinted to Mr. Marston his hopes and belief regarding Guy and me, was evident from some remarks the young man made a few days before his departure.

It was a perfect Spring morning, and we were walking towards an old wood that lay between us and the little church. It was a favourite walk with all three of us; but Guy had been called to attend to some important business, so we two had started off without him, he promising to join us later, if possible.

Oddly enough, that very morning's post had brought a letter in a strange hand, and, feeling that it must contain bad news, though I could not explain why, I put it in my pocket unopened. It was lying there now, and I was wondering when I should have courage to open it. You see I was peculiar.



Guy stopped before an unpretentious stone whereon was written: "Hope Anstice, aged eighteen."

To my dying day I shall never forget how beautiful the old wood looked in the soft Spring sunshine, for it never looked quite the same again.

"This is a lovely spot," said Mr. Marston, in the half-meditative, half-regretful tone one uses in speaking of a place one is soon to leave.

"Yes," I answered dreamily.

"I envy you and Guy, I believe," he went on, laughingly.

The evident coupling of our names annoyed me.

"Unfortunately, it may not always be my home," I replied with a rasped note in my voice.

"But——" began Mr. Marston, then stopped embarrassed.

"Mr. Vernon cannot live many years longer," I said sadly, "and, of course, as you know, Guy is not any real relation. Perhaps he will soon bring home a wife; but even then I could hardly stay."

"I thought there was no expectation of his bringing home a wife," replied my companion.

The young man ventured the remark rather hesitatingly, but the emphasis on the "bring" was too evident.

I frowned.

"Has Guy been taking you into his confidence? Surely I have not given you any reason to suppose such a thing?"

I tried to keep the anger out of my voice, and keep it unconcerned.

"Oh, no; but Mr. Vernon——"

"Has been telling you what he wished," I interrupted, not trying to conceal my anger now. "Unfortunately, Guy's wishes and mine do not coincide with his."

"I beg your pardon," said the young man humbly; but he gave me a side glance, and I had a wretched suspicion that he was keener sighted than most of his sex.

Of course, we talked of other things during the rest of the

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walk, in which, after all, Guy did not join us; but I had an unaccountable feeling that my revelation had annoyed Mr. Marston, though I could not imagine any reason why it should. I was the one to be angry.

Before we finished our stroll, however, anxiety for my step-father forced me to make a request of my companion.

"You will not mention to anyone what I have told you this morning?" I said. "It would be a great disappointment to Mr. Vernon to know it, and, coming suddenly, would be almost more than he could bear."

"Oh, certainly not," Mr. Marston made answer briefly; but I could scarcely help fancying that he disapproved of our reticence.

When we got back to the house, I went to my room, and read my letter—I might as well have all the disagreeables over in one morning.

Then I burnt it.

No one should know anything about its contents, not even Guy.

"You look tired, Miss Rachel," said Mr. Marston, at luncheon; "I'm afraid you walked too far this morning."

"Oh, no; it is only a headache," I answered smiling.

Was that all the difference it made to be heart-broken? Well, I was glad of it, for my step-father was looking at me anxiously.

I glanced over at Guy. How pale and thin he was!

In two days Mr. Marston was gone, and then I began to wonder how much longer we could temporise. Not much longer.

I was coming downstairs one morning, when I heard voices in the library. The door was ajar, and I saw my step-father sitting at his desk, speaking to good Mrs. Dent, the housekeeper, who had helped me to nurse him so faithfully during his illness.

"Send Mr. Guy to me at once," he said. "And where is Miss Rachel? I want her, too."

"Here I am," I answered gently, going into the room, while Mrs. Dent departed, looking rather scared at the unwonted severity of her employer's tone.

"I have tried to bring Guy to the point often enough—I am tired of this shilly-shallying," commenced my step-father. I trembled within me, for I knew the storm must break now. "Sit down," he continued almost impatiently.

I obeyed him, and then Guy entered. He came straight towards me.

"Please go out, Rachel," he said. "I have an important communication to make to my father."

"But I want her to stay," thundered Mr. Vernon. "Is she not your promised wife?"

"No," answered Guy sadly. "Will you go, Rachel?"

I rose at once with the words.

"When Guy has finished what he has to say, you can send for me if you want me."

Then, approaching Mr. Vernon, and obeying an irresistible impulse, I stooped to kiss the wrinkled forehead, and immediately left the room.

I went upstairs and waited, I do not know how long, but it was not very long. I opened my door and sat and listened with bursting heart and feverish anxiety for some sound.

At last it came. There was a fall and a cry.

I flew downstairs to the library. It was as I had feared—my step-father had had another stroke.

My strongest feeling was for Guy kneeling by his father's side, ghastly pale, and moaning:

"I have killed him! I have killed him!"

"Hush, Guy," I said, laying my hand gently on the poor boy's shoulder; "help me to lift him."

By this time Mrs. Dent and the servants, hearing the noise, had appeared, and I sent at once for a physician. He soon arrived, but shook his head when he looked at the sufferer.

Mr. Vernon lingered several weeks, part of the time unconscious, but clinging to his son in a way that was pitiful. It almost broke my poor darling's heart.

At last the end came, and I did my best to comfort Guy. When all was over, I tried to rouse him by calling his attention to a pile of letters he had neglected for days. He opened them mechanically, and looked at them, then he gave a low moan and gasped out:

"It seems to be my destiny to kill people, Rachel; I must go away at once."

I asked no questions, but helped him to make his preparations.

"God bless you, Rachel," he said, as he bade me "Goodbye"; "I am not worthy of your kindness."

He went to Glenlough, of course. He wrote to me affectionately from there, but he did not tell me why he stayed. So, when a widowed friend asked me to accompany her to Florence, I willingly consented. I informed Guy of my intention, and he urged me to carry it out. He did not come to see me before I went, though he sent me many kind farewell messages.

Leaving the house in care of Mrs. Dent, I put the old life behind me, and spent two happy years abroad. It was the calm after the storm. I felt that life, youthful, passionate life, was over for me. I had gone through my keenest joy, my keenest sorrow. I could never know either again; but I had won peace and content out of the struggle, and, perhaps, these were the best.

Guy did not write to me, and I was glad of it—it would only have stirred the embers of the past. I heard occasionally of him through Mrs. Dent. He was living quietly at home, alone—why, I knew. Six lines in a Tipperary paper, sent to me soon after I left England, told me.

At the end of two years' sojourn, my friend decided that she must return home. Accordingly we made our preparations.

Just before our departure I received a letter from Guy, telling me he had learnt, through Mrs. Dent, ofour intended coming, and begging us to spend a few days with him.

After a little hesitation I decided to accept the invitation if my friend were willing. I longed for a sight of the dear old house and my beloved St. Clement's, and I knew I must meet Guy some time, so I might as well get over the pain at once.

My feverish impatience during the long journey told me that the past was not as dead as I had believed it to be, but I tried to hope that a glimpse of the old things would quiet me.

When we reached our destination we found Guy waiting to receive us. He was somewhat changed—older and graver-looking—but still the same Guy to me. His greeting was cordial but not demonstrative.

Two days went by without awkwardness, thanks to my friend, who was unaware of any hidden current. Guy made himself very agreeable to her, and, when I could, I stole off by myself to spend hours filled with memories, sad and joyful, in the little churchyard.

On the third day I was sitting in the shadow of a great tree, alone with my dead, when I heard footsteps, and, looking up, saw Guy approaching. He came close to where I sat, and looked down at me sadly.

"You have a right here," he said bitterly.

I took his hand and pressed it—I could not find words to answer.

Perhaps my action emboldened him, for he went on in a less bitter tone:

"You were always very good to me, Rachel, in the old days. Will you do one thing more for me now?"

He was looking down at me and I thought I should choke—my heart had got up into my throat, and I could only answer him with a little inclination of the head.

At his next words my heart returned to its usual place and my voice came back.

"I want you and your friend to take a little journey with me; will you?"

"Yes," I answered, rising to go back to the house, and nothing more was said.

My friend was surprised when the proposition was made to her, but she readily consented; and, two days later, we were in Glenlough.

In the afternoon Mr. Marston came over to see us. He was to leave on a journey by the early evening train, and brought all his travelling paraphernalia with him.

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Just as twilight began to fall, Guy asked me to take a walk. My friend declared she had a headache, and preferred to lie down, but insisted on my going; so we started, accompanied by Will Marston, prepared to take the train on leaving us. I had noticed that the railway station was beyond the church, so I was not much surprised when we turned our steps in that direction.

When we reached it, instead of going past, Guy drew my arm within his, and led me into the quiet graveyard, more quiet in the twilight stillness than ever. Mr. Marston had fallen behind, and I think we both forgot his presence for the moment.

Guy stopped before an unpretentious stone, whereon was written: "Hope Anstice, aged eighteen."

That was all.

"Rachel," he began, "I have something to say to you."

I was going to interrupt him; then I remembered that sometimes confession is almost like baptism for sin, and I simply clasped my hands pityingly over his arm.

"I don't know whether you can ever forgive me or not, dear," he went on; "but I must tell you all now. I ought to have told you long ago, but I had not the courage. Here by her grave I will confess everything.

"Once upon a time, Rachel, I believed you cared for me; perhaps I was mistaken, but that did not make my sin any the less. When I left you that night I thought we belonged to each other.

"Then I went to Glenlough, and met Hope Anstice. It was a brief and sudden passion, very unlike my love for you; it carried everything before it, and, when she told me she returned my love, but that there was a kind of engagement with a distant cousin—a sort of family affair—I begged her to put an end to all difficulties by a secret marriage.

"She consented, and the day before I went away it took place. I did not then know who this distant cousin was, but I learnt afterwards. Can you guess, Rachel? It was Will Marston."

I glanced back with a start, but Mr. Marston was strolling about some little way off, and did not seem to see us.

"Well?" I whispered, turning to Guy, who continued slowly:

"You know now why I was so changed when I came home, Rachel, and what it was I said to my father when he insisted on my asking you to marry me. It was the truth, and I could not help telling him; but the shock killed him. I was not brave enough to let you know, for I had found out my mistake; I had learnt too late the difference between love and passion. In my father's dying hours I neglected everything, even my wife, and the first news I learnt was that Hope was going into a decline. Of course, I thought it was my fault—that I killed her, too—and I hurried to her side. But the doctors said it was a foregone conclusion—an inheritance; and, indeed, she had not been very unhappy.

"When I saw her, I would have made our marriage public; but she compelled me to secrecy. That was one of the penalties I had to bear.

"'It will hurt Will,' she said, 'and he has always been the kindest friend I ever had.'

"You see, my punishment has not been light."

There was a pause, then Guy added:

"She only lived six weeks afterwards—it was what they call 'galloping consumption'; and poor Will was with her nearly all the time—she told him everything. Can you guess why I have made this confession here and now, Rachel? Can you forgive my falseness and cowardice?"

"My poor Guy, I have known this for a long time," I said gently.

He looked at me in a bewildered way, and I went on:

"Mr. Marston wrote and told her that you and I were engaged, and she sent me a letter"—I did not add "a bitter one"—"disclosing the truth."

"And you have known this all the while, my Rachel?"

For answer, I hid my face on his breast, and there, by her grave, we pledged our solemn, chastened happiness. Then I led Guy away.

"Don't you understand?" I whispered, pointing silently to Mr. Marston.

He was standing, oblivious of our presence, in the place where we had been, and I heard him murmur, as Guy and I turned away:

"She is all mine now."

Anne Chambers.

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Charming Girl!

SHE: "Why didn't you warn me you were going to kiss me?" He: "Why?" She: "I would have made it easier for you."

Two Birds with One Stone.

HE: "Will you marry me?" She: "No." He: "Then will you marry my cousin Tom? He requested me to ask you while I was about it."

A Fact.

SHE: "Yes, this is Mr. Gamboge, the artist. He is wedded to his art." He: "Judging from his appearance I should say that he didn't marry for money."

A Friend's Advice.

ENGAGED YOUTH: "Well, how am I to know whether Dora has any faults or not?" Friend: "That's easy enough. All you have to do is to ask some friend of hers who is jealous.'

All That was Left.

YOUNG TUTTER: "Did you get that box of chocolates I left here last night, Miss Clara?" Miss Pinkerly: "You left it with my younger brother, did you not?" Tutter: "Yes." Miss Pinkerly: "I got the box."

He was Proud Though Poor.

"I WANT you to understand, sir, that my pride forbids me to accept anything from you after I marry your daughter." "How are you going to live?" "Well, I thought you might make some kind of a settlement beforehand."

The Worm Turned.

"OH, Mr. Childer, you are really too young to know anything about love," said the old flirt, after she had listened to his proposal. "Yes," said Childer, smiling weakly, "but I knew you were old enough to teach me." Score even, and she never forgave him.

Silly Idiot!

HE crept stealthily to her side, and, in an agitated whisper, asked: "Can you keep a secret?" With a yearning look in her eyes, she replied: "Why, of course. You ought to know I can! What is it?" "Oh, nothing at all. I just wanted to know, you know." And as she turned away, the congealed look she gave him put ice in his veins.

She Longed to be Ashore.

"AND what are we doing now, Fred?" "Only hugging the shore, Louie, dear." "Fred,"—and she looked at him in a far-away manner—"Fred, I wish I were ashore." "Why, Louie, darling, you are not feeling ill, are you?" he asked, in a tone of alarm. Then he looked at her again, and thought he discovered a ghost of a twinkle in her downcast eyes, and the shimmer of a smile playing round the corners of her mouth. He looked once more, he was sure of it. The next moment Fred was enacting the part of the yacht, and Louie was impersonating the shore.

In Doubt.

GEORGE: "I will be a true husband to you, Mabel." Mabel: "No, George, I can't believe it. You are too good to be true."

True to Her Word.

SUE: "You said you were going to marry an artist, and now you're engaged to a dentist." Flo: "Well, isn't he an artist? He draws from real life."

He Had Expectations.

SHE: "I trust, Jack, our marriage will not be against your father's will?" Jack: "I'm sure I hope not. It would be jolly hard for us if he should change it."

The Wane of the Honeymoon.

FRIEND: "So the romance has faded already?" Young Wife: "Romance? There is nothing of the kind left, except my husband's excuses for coming home late from the club."

The Result of Short Sight.

"YOUR marriage was the result of love at first sight, wasn't it?" "Yes," replied the near-sighted friend. "I never shall forget that day. It was the only time in my life I was ever known to forget my glasses."

He was in a Terrible Plight.

BANKS: "When are they to be married?" Rivers: "Never." Banks: "Never! And why not?" Rivers: "She will not marry him until he has paid his debts, and he cannot pay his debts until she marries him." Banks: "Oh!"

He Came.

"MY love," said he, when they had just returned from their wedding trip, "if I'm not home from the club by—er—ten, love, you won't wait?" "No, dear," replied the wife of his bosom, with appalling firmness, "I'll come for you!" He was back by 9.45, sharp.

Indeed She Was.

YOUNG HUSBAND: "Now, love, which will you have—the watch, the bracelets, or the necklace?" Young Wife: "We must avoid unnecessary expense, dear. I'm sure if you buy all three the man will give you a reduction on them. I'm your own saving, economical little wifey, aren't I?"

Comforting for the Old Chap.

ELDERLY FIANCÉ: "I hope you are not impressed by the silly sentimentalists who hold that because you've been married once you ought not to marry again." Pretty Widow: "Don't let that worry you, dear. I've no such prejudice. My own dear mother was married three times, and I only hope that in all things I may follow her example."

Her Reason.

HE: "I believe you cared for me the first time we ever met." She: "Why, what makes you think so?" He: "Because you kept looking at me so steadily. Every time I glanced in your direction your gaze was riveted on me." She: "Oh, but it wasn't because I had fallen in love with you. I was thinking what a pity it was there was no one near and dear to you who could tell you what wretched taste you had in neckties."

In a Dilemma.

"I HAVE come to see you, sir, on a delicate mission," said the young man. "What is it?" the old gentleman asked. "Well, sir, you have two beautiful daughters," explained the young man. "I proposed to one of them last night, and I —I——" "Which one?" interrupted the old gentleman. "Don't you know?" asked the young man aghast. "Certainly not. I've seen you with both." The young man sighed and reached for his hat. "I thought you might," he said. "I've been very attentive, and I was sometimes in doubt myself, seeing they're twins; but I got on all right till I proposed. And now—now—— Hang it all, sir, if you don't know which one accepted me, I don't! and now I've got to begin all over again!"

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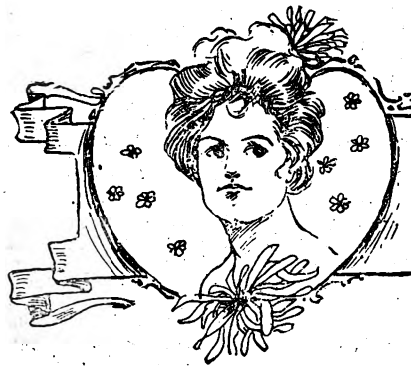

Unsolved Love Problems.

A Prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

No. VIII.—THE DIFFICULTY OF HUGH CHESTER.

In a long chair, in the coolest of garments, with a glass of something refreshing at his elbow, Hugh Chester lay, puffing cigar smoke lazily from his lips as he dreamily gazed away from the shade of his cool verandah into the luxuriant tropical vegetation that bounded the small clearing in which his house stood on the high mountains above Colombo.

Hugh was a successful coffee-planter, and he had not become that without energy and hard work, and it was only during this hour of heat, when man and beast must rest if they would live, that he allowed himself to dream, even over the letters of the young girl who was now on her way to Ceylon to marry him.

The one he held in his hand ran as follows:

"Dear Old Hugh,—*After all I am coming out by the 'Palawan' instead of the 'Somali,' which will get me out a fortnight sooner than you bargained for. I hope you will not be sorry; if you are, you will have to disguise your feelings, for I shall have started by the time you have got this. The reason I have changed my adamantine mind is that I have arranged to go out with my old friend, Kathleen Bertram, who must go by that boat to join her father. He will meet her at Colombo and take her on to Calcutta. We shall both be under the care of the captain, so you need not be anxious how I shall behave.*

"*You funny old thing! Why should you think I might not love you when I saw you? If you only knew what a dull, miserable life you are taking me from here! You may be sure I should find anyone charming after the loving kindness of my step-mother. And then, if you saw my clothes! Father has been quite generous. I suppose he is so delighted to get rid of the element of discord, and is anxious at the last to make up for years of miserliness. Well, you know he really has been miserly, and I have never had even decent clothes to wear before. You may imagine, therefore, how much I love you already for procuring me freedom and clothes, and even some fun, I hope.*

"*I'm sorry my photo will not be ready in time to send you, but I hope you will know me. If I should chance to miss you I will go straight to the house of your friend, Mrs. Grimley. That will be all right, I suppose? I am tremendously excited. No time for more.—Your ever loving,* Kit."

It was more like the letter of a child going away on her first visit than that of a woman coming across the ocean to marry the man of her choice, and Hugh could not repress a feeling of disappointment that there was no hint of anything deeper, but he checked a sigh, and said half aloud:

"How ridiculous to expect her to really love me, whom she has not seen since she was a child of nine!"

And a smile came to his face as he conjured up the image of his pretty little, hot-tempered cousin throwing her doll at his head because he had suggested that her treatment of it was rather drastic for a loving mother.

Somehow he had always felt an affectionate interest in the untrained, motherless girl, so easy to lead, but so impossibe to drive; and when her father married again, and she was packed off to a boarding-school, he began a desultory correspondence with her, partly to cheer her and encourage her to work, and partly to cheat himself into the belief that he, the lonely one without father, mother, sister, or brother, had home ties in that England to which his heart still turned.

A lonely man at thirty, finding his pleasure in work, and old beyond his years by reason of his early struggle with the world, he had, after long deliberation, and in reply to miserable letters from her describing her constant quarrels with her step-mother, written her an offer of marriage, which she had accepted without a moment's hesitation. There was no need for delay, just the time for her to get the necessary outfit, and she started immediately.

Truth to say, his heart sank at times at the thought of his bold stroke for happiness, and he wondered whether he had done wisely. It was ten years since he had seen her, and beyond her school-girl letters, he knew nothing of what she might have grown into. Suppose she should find it impossible to love him? This was the thought that troubled him the most. There would be no sweet period of courtship in which he might teach her to love him; she, a mere child, would be straightway plunged into the cares and responsibilities of married life.

Then in the great stillness of the mid-day, when all the world seems sleeping, a thought came to him which made him start up with unwonted animation.

"Bravo! The very thing! I'll go and join her steamer, under an assumed name, at Aden, and make love to her till we reach Colombo. I'll see about it at once." And he summoned his bearer, and began to give him the necessary instructions about his clothes.

Under all his gravity and staidness, Hugh Chester was at heart still youthful and romantic, and the flavour of adventure and romance about this idea recommended it strongly to him, therefore it was with a light heart that he boarded the steamer at Colombo, a week later, to meet the *Palawan* at Aden.

The first evening that he took his seat, under the name of Hugh Chichester, at the dining-table in the huge electric-lighted saloon of the great liner, he let his eyes wander curiously amongst the guests, wondering in an amused manner if he would be able to pick out his *fiancée* in the crowd of ladies present; for beyond a vague remembrance of a child with a

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shock head of brown hair and rather light eyes, either blue or grey, he had no idea of her personal appearance, and he could not picture to himself what she might have become as a woman.

At last his eyes rested on the girl seated on his left, and a wish was immediately formed that it might be she.

She was tall and slender, with the pleasing slenderness of a girl's half-developed figure. Her face, fair and delicately tinted, was lighted by a pair of large grey eyes, with sweeping lashes, that added a mysterious depth to their colour; while the dark brown of her wavy hair gave a distinction to her appearance that was a charm in itself.

Hugh, however, sternly told himself there was only one person for him to fall in love with, and he must feel no interest in anyone till he was sure it was the right one.

Nevertheless, his heart gave a bound of joy when, as she rose from the table, the card that had marked her place fell to the ground, and he read on it, "Miss Burton." However, to make sure, he approached the captain and questioned him.

"Why, yes," he replied, "that is Miss Burton. She is under my care till we reach Colombo, where, I believe, she is to meet the man she is coming out to marry. Lucky man, I say! I wish her friend were more like her; 'pon my word, I shall be glad to hand that young lady over to her father!"

After this it did not take Hugh long to get an introduction to her, and before the next day was over they were well on the way to become friends.

The more he saw of her the more deeply Hugh fell in love with her, and the more the piquancy of the position struck him the more he congratulated himself on his lucky inspiration. As the days flew by he could see that she was far from disliking him, but he was convinced she was too unversed in these matters to see whither their friendly intercourse was leading them; and he pictured his awakening her to the true state of the case at the same time as he should reveal to her that he was her real *fiancé* and no stranger.

Despite, however, their intimate footing, he was always met by an invincible reserve whenever he tried to ask about her home relations and her future in India. He felt it was the one thing that made her perfect. The childish outspokenness in her letters was for him alone; for others there was a dignified reticence.

"Is that young lady a friend of yours?" he asked, when he had been on board a couple of days, as an exceedingly lively girl with merry blue eyes nodded gaily and waved her hand as she moved nearer the band with her attentive escort of chosen young men.

"Yes," replied Miss Burton, "we are old school-friends, and are now both going out to Colombo under the care of the captain."

"Oh, then she is Miss Bertram," said Hugh, without thinking, and then saw what a mistake he had made.

His companion looked at him in surprise. "Do you know her, then?" she asked.

"Oh, no," he cried hurriedly; "only I heard the captain had a Miss Burton and a Miss Bertram under his care as far as Colombo, and I guessed that must be she," and then, to turn her attention from his confusion, he added: "She seems to be having a good time," alluding to her train of young men, and her open flirtation with one of the ship's officers, which he had already noticed was the cause of much amusement to the other passengers.

Miss Burton flashed an indignant glance at him from her frank grey eyes.

"She is such a child, and has had such a dull life at home."

Hugh was pleased at her loyalty, and longed to say, "So have you, but you don't behave like that," but he recollected that she had an additional safeguard in that she was engaged, and would think it wrong to flirt. His ideas were somewhat old-fashioned.

"I beg your pardon," he replied, "I ought not to have criticised your friend's conduct, which cannot concern me. All the same, if you will excuse my saying it, as having so much more experience of the world than either of you, it would be as well if you warned your friend that she is causing remark among the passengers."

"She is going to someone who will know how to take care of her," she answered, "and I do not like discussing my friends behind their backs."

Two evenings later he was leaning over the ship's side with Miss Burton, and a silence had fallen upon them at the sight of the glorious tropical moonlight on the heaving ocean, a silence that showed an intimacy that was full of sweetness. She, feeling the balmy air laden with unspoken love, found the silence fraught with too much meaning, and said:

"Is it not beautiful?"

Hugh, however, answered with seeming irrelevance:

"To-morrow we shall be in Colombo."

For some minutes they said nothing, but at last she remarked:

"It has been a very pleasant voyage," and her voice broke over the commonplace words.

"Since Aden——" he prompted, taking her slim white hand in his, and he folded her in his arms.

Suddenly she drew herself away, stopping the very words on his lips.

"Oh, stop, Mr. Chichester, before you say one word more; I must tell you the truth about myself; I cannot keep up the deception any longer. You think I am Kit Burton. I am not. I am Kathleen Bertram."

"Good God!" cried Hugh, recoiling in horror.

"I suppose," she went on hurriedly, "you think I am very wicked to be travelling under an assumed name and telling so many lies, but it was only to please my friend Kit. Now do listen to me before you judge either of us," and she put her hand on his arm as he leant heavily on the ship's rail with averted head. His horror seemed to her rather disproportionate to her offence, yet she felt she was fighting for what was more to her than friendship.

"Kit was a dear friend of mine," she continued, "and I was delighted to hear she was going to be married and get away from her unhappy home. When we arranged to travel together she begged me to change names with her. She said she had never had any fun or freedom in her life, and was now going to be married to a man much older than herself, and she wanted to have her fling first. You must not blame her, she is such a child, and she will no doubt make him all the better wife for it. She did not want to go out labelled 'engaged,' she said, she wanted to have fun without the captain and everybody crying 'fie!' upon her. So I consented. I did not like it, but she says she has had a splendid time, *the* time of her life; and, after all," she added defiantly, for she began to resent his continued silence, "it has done no harm to anyone."

Hugh repressed a groan. No harm!

Then Miss Kathleen Bertram grew angry with him. What difference could it make to him? Why did he not reassure her with the words of love that she had only checked through an exaggerated idea of honour? And she cried indignantly:

"I suppose *you* have never got yourself into a mess through trying to oblige a friend, Mr. Chichester; and since you evidently think I have sinned past forgiveness, I will cease to trouble you with my presence. Good evening," and she sailed away with a dignity that only lasted till she reached her cabin.

Shaking off at last the icy feeling of despair that seemed to cause a physical numbness, Hugh turned and stretched out his arms to her with a gesture of love and longing, but she was gone, and he let his arms fall again to his side with a groan. What had Kit done in her wish for fun and flirting? What had he done in his romantic attempt to gain the love of his bride before they were wedded? How could he blame the girl when, after all, it was his little plot, so innocent in intention, that had turned the comedy into a tragedy?

And how was he to unravel the tangled skein? Was he bound to the young girl to whom he had practically confessed his love, and whose heart he had so successfully set himself to win, or to the light-minded little flirt who had journeyed across the ocean to marry him, and from whom he turned with a real dislike?

L. Hughes.

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LORD POLLYPOD.

The Tale of a Postponed Marriage.

"Well, mum, if I had been hung for it I couldn't have helped laughing, Miss Roper was so set up about that *lord*. He wasn't much to look at; a slim little man, with tow-coloured whiskers; but as soon as he came along she began to feel as if the world was turned topsy-turvy.

"My Lord Pollypod was a-sayin' so and so to Maria last Sunday. My Lord Pollypod admires that flower of Maria's so much. My lord and my lord this, that, and t'other, until I was sick of it. You see, I waited at table, and showed folks their rooms, and was always doing something or other upstairs, so I knew more of it than cook and Bridget, and I took a dislike to him at once.

"He was so prim and solemn—and he took such airs, and then I did like to see Mr. Thomas Tallman go about with Miss Maria. He was a fine man if you wanted to see one, and as good as he was handsome.

"But you see, missus having come into property when her uncle, the great soap man died, got stylish, and forgot all about the Tallmans; and missus thought Maria ought to do better for herself; and when my Lord Pollypod was introduced she broke off one match and made another. I don't know how she did it; by sheer scolding and nagging, I expect. Miss Maria was awfully afraid of her mother, and she thought Mr. Tallman took his defeat too easily, as perhaps he did, and she let pride get the better of her love.

"Rich! Well, they said he was so rich that he could buy up half the country if he wanted it. It couldn't be money he was after if that was so, and if he loved her, why, that was all you could expect. And as the wedding-day came on, why, his presents showed his generosity.

"'Really, you are too generous,' I heard missus say to my lord.

"'Madam,' said he, 'these few little things are not worth mentioning between people of our wealth,' and missus laughed.

"'Certainly I have a hundred thousand pounds,' said she, 'but you must think me poor with your millions.'

"'Oh, of course not!' answered he, 'but, pray, never speak again of the few pounds I have spent; a trinket or two, a fan, some lace—bah!'

"But, really, there was a splendid bracelet—all diamonds; rings, pins. The engagement ring blazed! Such lace! Why, a queen couldn't have had finer, though poor Miss Maria hardly looked at anything.

"Every now and then some present came from a jeweller's, newer and finer than the last, and Miss Maria got paler and thinner all the while.

"At last she asked her mother if she could go down to Oakwood to see her cousin Ellen, who had a deformity in her back, poor thing, and couldn't, or wouldn't, go out much, and her mother said:

"'Yes, if you don't go to the Tallmans,' and she answered:

"'Mother, I should be ashamed to see them,' and I went with her to the station.

"'Take care of yourself, miss,' said I, as I left her in her seat in the train.

"'Nothing will happen to *me*, Sally,' said she. 'Things happen to those that want to live.'

"After that I hadn't much heart in helping with the wedding preparations.

"She was to come home on the fourth of the month. December it was. On the eighth the wedding was to take place. Minister was told, and company invited. Cards were out for the ceremony in church and for the reception; but, on the fourth a message came from Miss Maria. It was snowing hard, and I remember the boy shaking the snow off his hat and coat before he came into the hall. The message was this:

"'Trains stopped by the snow; cannot come to-day.'

"'Provoking!' said missus, as she read the words, and she looked worried all day. The next, and the next—the fifth and the sixth—there was no news at all. On the seventh another message came:

"'Snowing still. Impossible to come till the storm is over.'

"And on the wedding-morning another, with these words:

"'Storm over. Will come on Friday.'

"Now Wednesday was the wedding-day, and how my lord went on.

"'Postpone the marriage?' he cried. That could not be. Could he not go for her? Was it impossible? He went to the station, and found that it was. He came back in a fury, but that did no good. The church was closed. The minister went home. The guests were notified in a great hurry and my lord was in a fearful fury. He looked more than angry. He looked frightened. And it is unlucky we know to postpone a wedding.

"However, Friday came, and with it Miss Maria. She looked a little better than when she went away, and the first thing she asked was how Lord Pollypod took the delay.

"'You may have lost him by it, Maria,' said missus solemnly. 'He is in a dreadful rage.'

"Miss Maria looked as if she didn't care about his temper, and wouldn't mind his loss, but she said nothing.

"'I've sent for him,' the missus said. 'He'll come, I suppose, but the nobility are not used to such conduct.'

"'The weather behaves to suit them, I suppose,' said Miss Maria.

"And just then back came the footman.

"'My lord's compliments, and he'd drive over at once.'

"And I looked at Miss Maria and saw something in her face that made me feel like saying:

"'Oh, what is it, Miss Maria? What is it?'

"Lord Pollypod did come in less than no time; and

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Miss Maria took him away into the conservatory—to explain matters, she said; she that hated so to be alone with him always. And then there came a ringing of the bell, and I went to see who it was, for though the man opened the door, I always took the card to miss or missus.

"'A bill for missus,' said Peter.

"'I should like to see Mrs. Roper,' said a young man with an envelope in his hand.

"And I showed him into the reception room, and called missus. After that ring, not one but twenty; one young man after another, one after the other, and then missus' voice, so loud that I could not help going to the door.

"'Bills for me?' I heard her say. 'I owe nothing. What does this mean? Is it a conspiracy? I've always paid cash for everything.'

"'The lady must be very forgetful,' said one of the young men.

"'Certainly we know that Mrs. Roper has always bought for cash,' said another.

"'And we liked to have an account with so rich a lady, so responsible a lady,' said a young Jewish man.

"'Perhaps if I mention that Mrs. Roper's future son-in-law, Lord Pollypod, ordered the things to be paid for to-day, Mrs. Roper will understand.'

"'Lord Pollypod!' cried missus, turning white. And she took the bills and read them aloud—bills for the rings and brooches he'd given Miss Maria; for the bracelets, the fans, the lace; bills for clothes and jewellery for himself—for everything you can think of; a bill for board at a great hotel, another for carriages and horses—all to be settled by Mrs. Roper.

"'I see how it is,' said the man from the hotel, turning to the others, 'this is a swindle, and Mrs. Roper is swindled worst of all, if her daughter is his wife. He told us, madam, that you, like many rich Americans, were glad to pay for a title in the family, and that we were to come to you the day after the wedding.'

"'Which ain't come off, thank goodness!' cried I, jumping up and down with joy.

"Just then came another ring at the bell—a gentleman, very fine and elegant, who bowed low to missus, and said:

"'Can I speak to you alone?' and offered his card.

"'LORD POLLYPOD,' was on it.

"Missus, bowing and walking into another room with him, said:

"'Lord Pollypod! I don't understand.' And he answered:

"'Madam, I fear that you have been deceived by an impostor—a servant of mine who robbed me and has travelled in this country under my name. I am George, Lord Pollypod, and the only living person who has a right to the name.'

"And then missus, with such a look, goes off into hysterics, and I see a kind of struggle in the hall, and there is the man who has called himself Lord Pollypod in the hands of the police officers.

"He had expected to be married, and off with everything three days before; and no wonder he was frightened at the delay of the wedding. But to think of how it all came about! How poor Miss Ellen, Maria's invalid cousin, who hadn't been out of the house for years, should have read in the papers at what hotel the real Lord Pollypod stopped, and that he was married, and had guessed this one was a swindler, and had got Thomas Tallman to investigate. And how Miss Maria had known it all when she came home, and had made it up with her old sweetheart, as if there had never been a quarrel. It was like a play; and I say again, I laughed heartily.

"Missus had to pay some of the bills, to be sure, but she had lots of money; and my Miss Maria is happily married to Mr. Tallman." **H. Jarvis.**

HER ADORER: "No, sir, it is not for the sake of your daughter's money I love her; it is on account of her sweet temper and charming manners." Her Father: "If it is not for money you wish to marry, I can let you have my niece; she has a much sweeter temper and no money whatever."

A NEW MAGAZINE.

"The Rapid Review."

EVERYONE wants to be—*has* to be—up to date nowadays. The man or woman who cannot talk intelligently on whatever subject his or her companions are discussing is the person who soon has no companions. As the Americans put it, he "gets left."

But the point is, that keeping well informed on topical matters takes time, takes trouble, and takes money. Few people have time or money to spare—no one goes to more trouble over anything than he can possibly help.

There is a solution of the difficulty. If you want to be thoroughly well posted up in a subject there is nothing like going to someone who knows all about it and getting him to talk to you for five minutes. He will leave you with a grasp of the whole affair which you could never possibly have attained merely by plodding through dreary yards of newspaper matter.

Why? Because he gives you only the essentials, and puts them clearly.

Now, on February 12th, the publishers of *Short Stories* will produce the first number of a new sixpenny magazine, THE RAPID REVIEW, which, like the well-informed friend, will give the essentials of things—of all matters of topical interest—and will give them clearly, concisely, and entertainingly.

Politics, literature, science, art, women's work and interests, country life—all these things will be found in THE RAPID REVIEW, treated in a style which will save time, money, and trouble, and which will enable you to talk intelligently on all of them.

Bright extracts will be given from all the newest books; the magazines, reviews, and periodicals "just out"—in fact, when you have read THE RAPID REVIEW you will have read all the current literature, and will know what magazines and books to buy and what not to waste money on.

Women will find a special interest in this new magazine. In the feature entitled "Women's Work and Interest" the sayings, writings, and achievements of women all the world over will be brightly chronicled, keeping women in complete and direct touch with their sisters and their sisters' advancement.

Finally, in political troubles and foreign "complications," THE RAPID REVIEW will make a point of explaining how things began, and then will put you right up to date in them.

In exactly the same fashion—the giving of bright extracts and concise essentials—will be treated the drama, music, art, country life, scientific work—everything. THE RAPID REVIEW is, in fact, a magazine which no one can possibly afford to miss.

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SPLENDID SERIAL.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Eardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY ARE:

SIR CYPRIAN RUST, who has inherited the baronetcy and estates of Sir Basil Wingate, though he is not the legal heir.

MARCELLA RUST, his daughter, a very lovely girl, who is greatly in love with

PHILIP NULLIUS, the curate of Crawley Village, where the home of Sir Cyprian, Wingate Court, is situated.

LADY VIOLET FRAYNE-LENNOX, whom Marcella believes to be her aunt. She is a very beautiful woman, and loves her niece dearly, but Sir Cyprian has, for some reason, immense power over her, which he uses to further his own ends.

EDWARD DAY is an orphan whom Lady Violet has befriended. He, however, in making unreturned love to Marcella, insults her, and Lady Violet refuses to have anything more to do with him.

CALEB J. JOHNSON, a City magnate and millionaire, who marries Lady Violet, though he knows that her husband is still alive. This husband,

MAJOR RICHARD FRAYNE-LENNOX, is a good-for-nothing, who has been turned out of the Army. Lady Violet believes him dead.

TWENTY-NINTH CHAPTER.

The Writing in the Diary.

MARCELLA had not long been back in durance vile at the Court before she noticed a subtle something in the atmosphere of her father's home. Life went on just the same, with a difference, but a difference so slight, so as to be perceptible only to the most keenly sensitive nature.

Sir Cyprian was suave, courteous, and attentive as usual, but beneath the velvet glove of his polished manners Marcella knew that there lay ready for an emergency the iron hand Sir Cyprian knew so well how to wield. She had once before been brought face to face with it.

Edward Day had left the Court, and also the kindly Dr. Slade whom Marcella had liked so much; so life dragged on drearily, while she waited patiently for news of Philip Nullius.

His month's holiday was nearly over, and yet not one line had come from him—not a sign by which she might comfort herself that he was well and thinking of her.

Only one ray of comfort had she in all her secret doubts and fears. It came from her aunt, Lady Violet, who had contrived to send her a letter under cover to her maid. It had assured her of her aunt's love and devotion, and that Mr. Johnson had gone in search of her lover to bring him back in safety.

The letter had concluded with the expression of Lady Violet's constant thought and prayers for her darling's future happiness. The postscript rather puzzled her. It was: "Be careful not to wilfully annoy your father, and don't go for long rambles without your maid. Keep her always near you, wherever you are; don't be *alone* anywhere."

She was puzzling over the postscript one morning while turning the leaves of some book she had brought up from an old, disused cupboard. She had fancied that one or two might prove interesting. She picked up a small, old-fashioned volume, something like the neat diaries of thirty years ago; it had once had a lock and key, but the lock had long since been broken off.

She opened it curiously. The pages were stained, and a faint, old-world perfume emanated from its musty binding.

On the fly leaf was written in a dainty, effeminate hand, the words "Laura Rust."

"My mother!" Marcella murmured with a tremor in her voice. "My dear, dead mother!"

She touched the book with reverent fingers. Her girlish thoughts had always dwelt tenderly on the unknown mother.

The little jottings of every-day life were instinct with a new meaning and interest for her. They revealed the workings of a simple mind, satisfied with the solid gifts the gods gave her.

One pencilled line appealed to her passionately. It was:

"March 12th. Baby girl born. Life will begin anew for me in living for her."

"Mother—mother!" she murmured brokenly. "Had you only lived now!"

Then on through the pages of fresh maternal utterances, she came upon a line that puzzled her. It was: "Hope is killed in me—only shame and horror live! God spare my darling girl from my sorrow—shield her from learning what I have learnt. I feel at times that I cannot bear it—my brain burns and I can't think."

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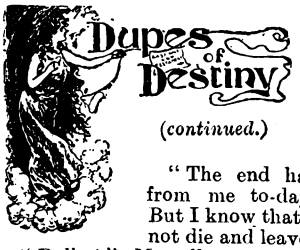

(*continued.*)

Wonderingly and fearfully, Marcella turned the pages a little further, and came upon the last notes in the diary.

As she read it, she uttered a cry of astonishment. It was:

"The end has come. They took baby from me to-day. They say she is dead. But I know that must be false. Dolly could not die and leave me!"

"Dolly!" Marcella exclaimed. "I must have had a sister then! And I was never told—oh, how cruel—how cruel! My poor, dear, sorrowful little mother!"

A sudden thought struck her. She had heard someone else speak of a child called "Dolly." Who was it?

Why—as a flash of memory returned to her—the woman in the forbidden corridor spoke of a baby called "Dolly"! How strange! She had forgotten that half-witted, gentle creature, but now all returned to her with a vivid sense of regret.

She sprang to her feet with an exclamation. As she did so there was a sound at the door, and before she could either say "Come in" or "Who's there?" it was flung open and Sir Cyprian stood on the threshold, his usually serene blue eyes fixed upon her with an expression of malicious hate.

And behind him came a tall, lean-faced man, who looked at her with a peculiar intentness that made her shrink instinctively from him.

Marcella looked in amazement from her father to the stranger with the glittering, dark eyes, whose gaze never left her face.

"Did you want me, father?" she asked slowly. "I could have joined you in the drawing-room had you sent for me; but I will go now, if you will take—your friend," with a slight emphasis on the word—"downstairs. This is hardly the place in which to receive visitors."

Sir Cyprian closed the door behind the man who had accompanied him, and it struck Marcella that something must have gone wrong with the latch, for it gave a little "click," as though the key had been turned.

"Let me introduce my friend, Dr. Winter, Marcella," her father said, ignoring her speech, and fixing his blue eyes, now so strangely cold, upon her white face. Since that day when he had brought her back to the Court, he had taken little trouble to conceal his dislike of her, even his voice, though always perfectly courteous, was chilly when he was obliged to speak to her.

Marcella bowed coldly. The face of the man with the bull-dog jaw and sinister eyes made a slight shiver run through her. She wondered to what this strange, unceremonious visit was the prelude.

"I am pleased to make Miss Rust's acquaintance," Dr. Winter said in an oily voice, which, coming from such a coarsely-built man caused Marcella to look at him in astonishment. Which was natural, she wondered, the voice or the cruel, greedy eyes?

"You have not been looking very well lately, my dear," Sir Cyprian went on, "and I thought it my duty to see a medical man about you."

"Yes," added Dr. Winter unctuously. "I can see at a glance that Miss Rust is, what shall we say—unstrung and inclined to be hysterical."

Marcella flushed angrily.

"I am perfectly well, thank you," she said curtly; "and, father," turning to Sir Cyprian, "had you desired to consult a doctor about me, I would prefer that you had asked my old friend Dr. Baxter, who has seen me before. I hate strangers."

Dr. Winter smiled, and his smile was even more oily than his voice.

"Quite so, my dear Miss Rust," he murmured, "we all hate strangers sometimes, especially when we think they will discover too much about our ailments. But I will try to take Dr. Baxter's place in your estimation."

Marcella's big brown eyes flashed haughtily as she looked at the ill-bred man before her.

"That would be impossible," she retorted. "Dr. Baxter happens to be a gentleman."

Instead of replying instantly to her, Dr. Winter looked at Sir Cyprian with a swift, interrogatory glance. His face was just a little more pasty in colour, and his beady eyes sparkled ominously.

"Come, Marcella, don't be foolish," her father interrupted quickly. "Dr. Winter is only willing to be your friend. You must not thwart him because he is not so old as Dr. Baxter. I wished for the best medical advice about you, and sent to London for it; these country doctors are no authority on illnesses like that with which you are threatened."

A little frightened at the serious tone in which her father addressed her, and somewhat ashamed of her snub, which had been received so silently, Marcella said gently:

"I am sorry I was annoyed, but you know I dislike a fuss made about my health. I am perfectly well, really; you must not think that because I don't grow rosy faced and fat that there is anything the matter with me."

Dr. Winter put out his hand. It was a white, dimpled hand, and the filbert nails were polished and well trimmed. Marcella's eyes rested on them thoughtfully.

"Let me feel your pulse, my dear," he said gently. "I am of another opinion concerning your health; but we will soon see which of us is in the right."

She drew forward the hand that had remained concealed behind her back. It still held the little diary belonging to that dead mother, whose story had touched her so keenly.

Sir Cyprian's eyes had followed her movements, and as they fell upon the book clasped in her hand his face grew suddenly ashen, and a terrified expression leapt into his blue eyes.

"Where did you get that?" he said sharply. "Give it to me!"

Marcella looked at him, startled by the sudden tone of anger in his voice.

"It is an old diary of my mother's," she faltered. "I was reading about the death of my little sister Dolly. You never told me that I had had a sister, father!" she said, reproachfully.

"Give me that book and don't talk nonsense," he answered in a shaky voice.

Something in the way he spoke made Marcella draw back her outstretched hand.

"Then since I am talking nonsense, there is no necessity for me to give up my mother's diary," she retorted. "It is mine. You could not have loved her. I have read of her sorrow between the lines she jotted down at odd intervals. My poor mother was unhappy. I know it—I feel it."

Sir Cyprian bit his lip, but the fleeting expression of terror had left his face—only his upper lip quivered.

"I don't understand, my dear child, what you are talking about," he said slowly. "That diary was a constant amusement to your mother. She used to romance in it—as you are now doing about it. Again I must request you to give it to me."

Still Marcella hesitated.

"Please let me keep it," she said in a low voice, conscious that the twinkling eyes of Dr. Winter had closely observed each gesture. "I, at least, recognise my mother's sorrow; it will be the only possession of hers that I have."

A steely look flickered in Sir Cyprian's eyes at her opposition.

"Then you don't believe me—your father?" he said coldly.

An idea suddenly seized Marcella, and she acted on it, without considering the wisdom of such a proceeding.

"I will give it to you if you promise to take me to Dolly's grave," she said quickly. "I see she died here at the Court, the diary says so, and I at least have the right to visit my own sister's grave."

Sir Cyprian was silent, then he turned to the man by his side, whose glittering eyes had never left Marcella's white, excited face.

"You hear her," he said, with a shrug of his shoulders.

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"This is the way she goes on whenever anyone contradicts her or wishes her to do anything she herself does not desire. She continually worries me with these outbursts. I see she is now on the verge of one."

Marcella looked at them in surprise. She was flushed, and still angry at what she guessed instinctively to be her father's denial concerning that dear mother's sorrow, and the existence of the sister of whom she had never before heard.

Dr. Winter smiled gently. "Yes, yes," he said in a pitying tone. "I see that you have sent for me in time, Sir Cyprian. They always behave in this passionate way when opposed, and it is the usual thing for them to have hallucinations and imagine that something is being concealed."

THIRTIETH CHAPTER.

"That Way Madness Lies!"

Marcella listened to him in amazement. The audacity of speaking *at* her, as though she were not capable of appreciating a personal appeal, was insupportable to her proud, independent nature.

She turned to her father suddenly.

"Why do you permit that man to speak of your daughter in that way?" she demanded hotly. "Surely you will at least protect me from being insulted?"

A slow smile flickered in Sir Cyprian's eyes as he said softly:

"Dr. Winter is quite right, Marcella; you need careful nursing and guarding from all excitement; you must be a good girl, and obey those who are in authority over you. I am afraid your temper grows more and more uncontrollable every day, and the fact of your jumping to such wild conclusions about your mother proves that, as Dr. Winter says, you are suffering from a form of hallucination."

Marcella listened to him in silence, her eyes searching his face for some meaning he had not put into words. As she watched him she remembered the postcript at the bottom of Lady Violet's letter, bidding her beware of letting herself be thrown into a temper by anything that was said to her!

Had her aunt anticipated that she would be in danger of losing her temper if provoked, she wondered; and then another thought confronted her—had her father purposely brought this rude, ill-bred stranger into the house, with the object of rousing that high-spirited temper he knew her to possess?

She drew in her breath sharply as the idea took firm hold upon her, and she realised that by speaking as she had intended, she would only be playing into the hands of the man whom she had begun to fear more than anyone on earth. The man who was her father, and natural protector, but at whose very touch she recoiled as by instinct!

She raised her head, and, instead of the passion of invective and scorn Sir Cyprian and the Doctor had expected, said with a slight smile:

"Of course you know best, father. I don't feel at all ill though, and as for hallucinations, of which Dr. Winter fancies me possessed, I am afraid he is labouring under one himself in imagining me so afflicted. Perhaps, now that he has seen me, you will allow me to leave the room," she added calmly, "and if Dr. Winter is staying at the Court he will be able to watch my convalescence under his attention. I am sure he considers me an interesting case."

The delicate irony in her voice, and the steady dignity in her intelligent brown eyes, caused a dark red flush to mantle the cheeks of both men.

They were for the moment nonplussed by the sudden change in her manner and speech, having congratulated themselves upon the ingenuity with which they had roused the girl's warm blood and impulsive nature to passionate revolt and reckless denunciation of themselves.

An ugly look stole into Dr. Winter's narrow eyes as he took in the strength and pluck of the girl who could pit her wit against their cunning.

"I think it will be better if you came to a sanatorium,

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THE TREATMENT OF OBESITY.

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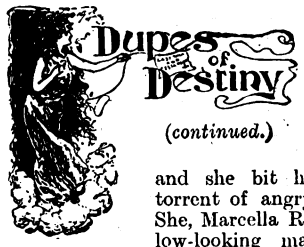

(*continued.*)

Miss Rust," he said slowly. "You then would receive every attention, and a more speedy cure would be effected — mental cases always require special care."

Marcella's eyes flashed, and she bit her lips to conceal the hot torrent of angry words that rose to them. She, Marcella Rust, had been described by a low-looking man as "a mental case!" What would Lady Violet and Philip say to such a slander? At the thought of those two she loved best, she kept down her wrath, and answered sweetly:

"It is most kind of you to suggest it, Dr. Winter, but although I am sure I should, as you say, receive every attention at your hands, I prefer to stay at the Court, where, if I require it, I will ask you to attend to me."

"Come, no more nonsense of this kind, Marcella," Sir Cyprian broke in harshly, after a quick exchange of glances with Dr. Winter, who had shrugged his shoulders expressively. "What is being done is entirely for your own good. I won't have this foolish opposition—or you will regret making an enemy of me."

She looked at him coolly. "An enemy, father! Well, I am not sure that you are not right—you were also my mother's enemy!"

Sir Cyprian started as though a hand had struck him in the face, and looked at her with a white heat of passion in his eyes. Heedless of the presence of another man in the room, he strode quickly up to her, and grasped her wrist savagely.

"You dare to speak like that to me!" he hissed. "Be careful, Miss Marcella—I have let you off easily in the past—but don't go too far. In fighting me, you little fool, you dig a grave for others."

He let her go, and flung her from him. His breath was rising in short, quick gasps to his lips, and his face was livid. Marcella looked at him curiously. She did not feel the bruise on her soft, white wrist; she was too interested in watching the ungovernable rage of a man who had hitherto been the outward semblance of dignity and good breeding.

As though regretting his outburst, Sir Cyprian gave a little metallic laugh, and raised a trembling hand to his moustache.

"So you see, Marcella, it will be better for you to obey me, and do as I wish. Dr. Winter here will be your medical man, and in his care—" he paused, and a strange smile flickered across his mouth.

Dr. Winter moved closer to the shrinking girl. He also was smiling, and the expression in his eyes made Marcella's blood run cold; it was as though a creeping, slimy reptile had trailed across her hand.

"Don't touch me," she said in a loud, clear voice. "If you choose to stay here I cannot stop you—but I have at least the control of my own wishes, and I will not allow you to come near me. You hear!"

Sir Cyprian flashed a look of hate at her, as he said slowly: "I suppose your precious Aunt Violet has encouraged you to oppose me, but let me inform you, my dear child, that unless you obey my orders, and instantly do what you are told, I can make it very uncomfortable for Lady Violet.

"A certain little secret of hers is in my possession, and if you give me any further trouble, I shall consider myself free to reveal what I know, and you will have the satisfaction of feeling that it was your fault that your aunt is cut by Society. So unless you obey Dr. Winter and consent to go to a sanatorium for your health, which is all that is asked of you, I shall speak what I know."

Marcella, divided between her love for her aunt and her loathing for the man into whose care her father wished to place her, was silent.

The two men watched her curiously. How would she decide?

She opened her mouth to speak, when there came a loud, imperative knocking at the door, and the handle was turned as though whoever was outside had an urgent reason for desiring to enter.

"Who's that?" Sir Cyprian said angrily.

And to Marcella's surprise and delight she heard the voice of her own maid say:

"A telegram for Sir Cyprian—reply prepaid."

Sir Cyprian hesitated—the woman had evidently not recognised his voice. "Slip it under the door," he said, after a pause. "I will see Sir Cyprian gets it."

"But the master is in here," the woman continued, as though puzzled by the order. "I was told that he and a gentleman had come down this passage."

Marcella seized her chance. It would be awful if she heard her faithful maid going back, leaving her to the tender mercy of she knew not what.

"It's all right, Jane," she called, wrenching away the hand her father had suddenly tried to force across her mouth. "Sir Cyprian is here with his friend and myself; he will open the door, and you can then give him the telegram."

Livid with rage and baffled design, Sir Cyprian unlocked the door and flung it open.

Marcella sprang towards Jane with a hysterical laugh "Wait for me, Jane. I have finished my hunt among the old books—I—" and she shivered, "I shall not come here again."

The words on her lips trailed into a murmur as a hoarse cry from Sir Cyprian made her turn sharply to glance at him. His face was ashen, and in his eyes, which were fixed upon the orange-tinted telegraph form in his hands, was an evil look that changed the expression of his face into that of a satyr.

Then realising suddenly that the two women were staring at him curiously, he pulled himself together, and turning to the man by his side, he whispered a few words in a hurried undertone, that also had the effect of making the sickly cheeks of the doctor a yet more unhealthy hue.

Marcella sprang forward. Her father's face frightened her.

"Aunt Violet!" she gasped. "Is that telegram from her?"

Sir Cyprian looked at her as one in a dream, then with a harsh laugh he brushed past her and went quickly out of the room, followed by Dr. Winter.

Marcella stood motionless until the sound of their steps died away down the passage, then she turned to the servant, who had been looking at the unusual scene with puzzled eyes. She had been Marcella's maid for some time, and was devoted heart and soul to her young mistress.

"Tell me, Jane," and Marcella grasped the woman's arm feverishly. "Do you think that I am in any danger of going—mad?"

"Mad, miss? Why, whatever put such an idea in your head?" And Jane glanced anxiously at the tall, beautiful girl, whose face was full of fire and life.

"I don't know," Marcella answered evasively, "but I wondered whether I struck others as being the sort of person who would be likely to have hallucinations—led away by their own imaginations, you know," she explained.

"Lor' miss, what an idea to get into your head," the woman said soothingly. "There's not much like that the matter with you, though they do say"—and she paused abruptly, colouring hotly, as though conscious of having said something she could not explain.

"What do 'they' say?" Marcella demanded, with whitening lips. "You must tell me, Jane, now; if you are my friend, keep nothing from me that I should know."

"Well, miss, they do say," began the woman slowly and with evident hesitation, "that—that a relation of Sir Cyprian's did once die mad, but it was a sudden shock that brought it on, it not being inherited—so you must not think of such things, miss," she concluded, "they don't need to trouble you."

Marcella was silent. Her maid's words had frightened her more than she dared say. Suppose then that a specialist

(Continued on page 190.)

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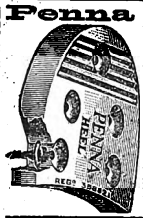

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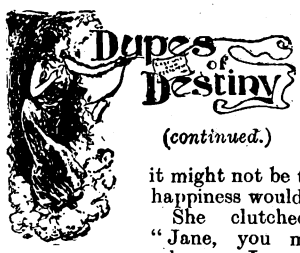

(*continued.*)

like that rough-looking man, Dr. Winter, had recognised the fateful signs of that unknown relative's disease. She would be debarred from ever becoming the wife of the man she loved. She prayed that it might not be the case, for then the gates of happiness would be closed for ever!

She clutched Jane's arm anxiously. "Jane, you must always stay near me; wherever I go, you must come—you understand," she went on feverishly. "I dare not be alone. I am afraid of—of dreadful things happening that would hurt me—and perhaps others. Promise me, Jane, that you will always keep within calling distance?"

"I promise, miss," the woman murmured soothingly. "Why, here in your own father's house you are safe from everything. Don't worry, miss, I shall always be near you and then there is Lady Violet; she is just wrapped up in you, miss."

Marcella was conscious of a feeling of helplessness. She could not admit to the servant that it was in her father's house that for her the most danger lurked, and while she was surrounded by new perils, her aunt was happy in the knowledge that since Edward Day had left the Court she was free from danger. But she tried to shake off the weight of depression. She must be wary and so behave that in her conduct there could be no loophole for her enemies to seize upon.

"I want you to post a letter for me to-night, Jane," she said, after a pause. "Be very careful of it—it is important, and I do not like trusting it to the post-bag."

When her young mistress was in her own little boudoir that evening, Jane slipped downstairs with a letter in her hand.

"Poor young lady," she murmured. "I didn't like 'er asking all them questions about madness. It gave me quite a turn, it did—I hadn't the heart to tell her it was her own mother as they are saying died mad. And I pray she may never learn it—my dear Miss Marcella."

When she was beyond the gates of the Court, a shadow slipped from behind one of the stone pillars, and followed the figure of the lady's maid some distance, then, cutting across a field, the shadow waited near a rustic bridge that spanned a brook, and over which the pedestrians had to go in order to get into the village of Crawley.

Some little time later a man strolled through the gateway at the Court. He was smiling, and the expression on his face was the reverse of pleasant.

"That gave her a good shock; she will take some time to recover," he muttered. "A cold douche is not always pleasant on a chilly night." Then his hand sought his pocket and remained there.

THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

On the Eve of a Discovery.

"If anyone, man or woman, who was returning home on board the Australian liner, the *Asia*, about twenty-five years ago, can tell advertiser anything about a woman who died among the third-class passengers, giving birth to a living child, will communicate with 'N.,' 360 Willing a handsome remuneration will be given."

The above advertisement had appeared in several leading dailies with but scant notice. People were too busy to think much about what took place among the steerage passengers a quarter of a century back.

But out of the many thousand pairs of eyes that had glanced casually at the advertisement, one pair had seen it, and, with a start, had traversed mentally the distance of time, and lived again a brief episode on board that Australian liner. Then the owner of the eyes had sat down in a humble little parlour of a shop off the Walworth Road, and painfully and with much thought, had written a note and sent it to "N.," 360 Willing.

That letter was now in the possession of the man who had inserted the advertisement. He was reading it with a cynical smile of triumph on his weak mouth, and held the half sheet of dirty paper between dainty white fingers.

"So my little bait was not dangled in vain," he sneered, lighting a cigarette and pushing away a half-finished cup of coffee. "I must pay a visit to Mrs. Robson, and see what price her valuable information will come to. I shall certainly not pay much any way—I am broke as it is."

It was now a week since Edward Day had been installed in the house of the financier, Caleb J. Johnson, as secretary, and during that time he had not once seen the man who had engaged him.

He had, in consequence, done no work of any sort except to read as much as he could glean from the Gold King's papers concerning the new mine, the "Ruby Duncoran," and his mouth had watered at the thought of so much gold passing through the hands of a man whom he contemptuously described as a "gilded bounder."

Day possessed a very fair knowledge concerning the ways of brokers and the buying and selling of shares, and had made up his mind to gradually obtain good tips from his new employer, and build up a fortune for himself.

Of the deluded chorus girl he had married in a moment of weakness, he thought no more, unless it were to revile the day her fair prettiness had lured him to commit such an error.

"I may as well hunt the old creature up," he muttered. "It probably will not result in my finding out much that is pleasant, but anyway I shall know exactly how I stand. I'm not fool enough to imagine that I shall discover myself to be the heir to a title!" he laughed bitterly. "But in spite of the drawback of birth, I shall so play my cards that I shall succeed where another man would fail.

"I am going to sound this old Johnson rotter and he may find me useful, and then reward me by leaving me half his fortune! It's a nuisance his having married that woman, Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox." And a hard glitter shone in his blue eyes. "I might have had things my own way then. But at anyrate I mean to make Miss Marcella eat humble pie for her scorn, and I fancy her father, Sir Cyprian, is not averse to correcting her himself."

He rose and surveyed himself in the glass over the mantel, with a conscious smile.

"Yes, I am certainly a beggar on horseback just now, but I mean to win the race that I've entered for. That snivelling sky-pilot, Nullius, has been cleverly disposed of in a way that reveals Marcella's father as a prince of resource; and now he is cooling his heels. I fancy that the next time I see Marcella she will have realised that 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.' Then"—he laughed softly—"well, then I shall pay back a few old scores."

He arranged the carnation in his button-hole, inspected the cut of his new frock-coat, and smoothed the silk on his tall hat; then satisfied that he could in no way improve upon his appearance, he left the house in Park Lane and strolled into Piccadilly. There he took a hansom, and when the driver heard the address he looked sharply at his fashionable fare as though suspecting a joke.

"A cove like 'im to tell me to drive to the Walworth Road," he muttered. "Life's full of surprises. Anyway it's no business of mine so long as I gets my fare."

When he reached his destination, Edward Day paid the man, who looked at him curiously.

"Shall I wait, sir?"

"No, it's not necessary," he replied, then wending his way carefully through the barrows and crowds of people who thronged the pavements, he came to the address that had been given in the letter he had received.

"Ah, that's it," he murmured. "Mrs. Robson—Ladies' Clothing Bought at Reasonable Prices."

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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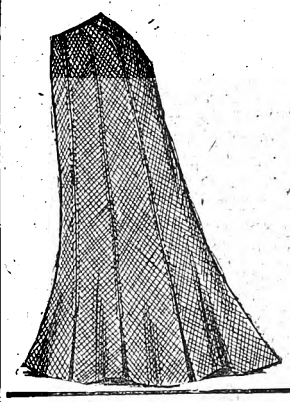

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Home Notes

(No. 525),

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

A Girl Who Doesn't Like Young Men.

"I CANNOT understand myself," writes "Q." "I see lots of young men, but I find I positively dislike them. On the other hand, I am very interested in men ten years older than myself, and find them much more attentive to me, and more fascinating than boys. What is your opinion of me, for thinking this?"

* * * * *

There are a lot of girls like you, "Q." Not every girl does care for the average young man, just as not every man cares for young girls. It is entirely a matter of temperament. If you like older men, there is no reason why your affections should not be given to one of them. Many girls marry men ten years or more older than themselves, and with very happy results. Certainly, I would not cultivate young men's society, if you dislike them. Besides, there are plenty of other girls who are different, so that we can spare one. It is just as well, though, that there are girls like you, for the sake of the old bachelors alone.

The Strange Young Man.

"RUBY" is puzzled and worried. She is in a confectioner's shop in a large provincial town. Some weeks ago, a young man, evidently a stranger, went in and bought some trifle. On the excuse of looking at other things, he stayed in the shop about twenty minutes, all the time talking to "RUBY," and trying to get intimate with her. As the proprietor was near by, "RUBY" did not dare to allow any familiarity.

* * * * *

Well, in half an hour's time, "RUBY" received a note by post-office messenger, asking her to meet the young man after she left the shop, and have tea with him. "RUBY" went, just out of curiosity, and the two got on very well together. Then the young man said he had to take the next train back to London. Without more than a short word of parting, he left "RUBY," and she has not heard a word of him since. She asks my opinion of the affair. What can the man's intention have been?

* * * * *

I think I can see through the affair, "RUBY." He was evidently a stranger in the town, and in passing the shop took a fancy to you. Just by way of amusment, I suppose, he asked you to meet him. I don't imagine he had any intentions, serious or otherwise, beyond a little harmless amusement, or you would certainly have heard from him again. I should forget all about him. But, for all you know, he may turn up again. If he does, let me know what happens. You are not the only girl who has had similar experiences. A man alone in a strange town often likes an hour or so with a chance acquaintance.

An Introduction Problem.

"I KNOW a young man by sight," writes "Muriel," "whom I should very much like to know, and I am of the opinion that he would also like to know me. You have often advised people to try and get introduced to each other by the aid of mutual friends. Now, although I first saw this young man some good time ago, since then we have come no nearer to an acquaintance. Do you think I should make the necessary overtures to get introduced, or leave it to him?

* * * * *

The latter course is, by all means, the correct one. If he is really attracted to you he will have more resources for securing an introduction to you than you to him, and, further, it is for him to make the overtures, not you. You had better wait and see whether he makes any attempts to know you, and if not, you may be sure that his feelings towards you are not so active as you imagine them to be.

Misplaced Affection.

IT seems that "Q:" has an exact opposite in "NETTY." Here is her dilemma: "I am twenty-five, but madly in love with a boy of eighteen. Of course marriage is out of the question. He returns my love, and is devoted to me. Neither of us has any means."

* * * * *

I understand your feelings, but you must control them. It is quite wrong for you to go on with such an affair, as nothing can come of it. And, later on, the boy's views are sure to alter. I cannot advise you in such a matter. It is for yourself to act as you should do, and control yourself from feelings which can only result in unhappiness.

A Changed Lover.

"RITA."—I am sorry your love affair has turned out so badly. There seems no explanation of the young man's conduct, beyond that, I fear, he has grown tired of you. From the remarks you quote, I suppose he has been hearing from other men advice against marriage and engagement, and has for a while decided to remain a bachelor. At the same time, he evidently does not wish to hurt your feelings by confessing it to you. I should wait a while and see if he alters in any way. After a time he may repent, and come back to you.

The Old Love Returns.

HERE is another phase of the "old lover" question: "MARY" and her sweetheart had quarrelled and parted three years ago. They had been very fond of each other, but the man complained that "MARY" was too sentimental for him, and did not think they would be happy together. The other day they met again. To all appearances, the old passion came back. The man was his old self, and paid "MARY" the same attentions as he used to do, and they talked of love as before.

* * * * *

Then they parted, arranging to see each other again. After a week or so, no letter came from the man. "MARY" wrote to remind him of their arrangement to meet. Again she got no answer. Then she met him in the street, and he simply raised his hat and passed on. Do I advise "MARY" to give up any hopes of a revival of the affair?

* * * * *

I do advise that. He clearly does not wish the affair to be revived. He said he found you too sentimental in the old days. Well, though on the day you met he appeared to love you as before, it is clear that on thinking the matter over he returned to his old opinion. Drop him, "MARY," as he is unprofitable to you.

Cynthia

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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SHORT STORIES

VALENTINE NUMBER

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No. 788.
PRICE ONE PENNY.

(A Dramatic Episode from the Story, "A Fateful Valentine." See inside.)

Week Ending
February 13, 1904.

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HOME NOTES

(No. 527)

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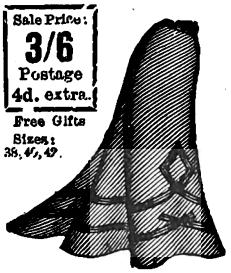

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SHORT STORIES

No. 789.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending February 13th, 1904.

A FATEFUL VALENTINE.

Telling of the Havoc it Wrought.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

PROBABLY no girl in the world was happier, on a certain fourteenth of February, some years ago, before the postman came, than Moyna Westwood. Indeed, she had everything in the world that could make a girl happy. Health, competence, a brave and true lover, and beauty into the bargain; youth, too, that most precious possession, the real value of which we do not know until we lose it, was hers.

Certainly no girl ever looked forward with brighter eyes and a gladder heart to the coming of the postman that morning than Moyna, and yet his coming was to bring her, though she knew it not, a year of pain and sorrow and tears, and the greatest shadow that had ever fallen upon her young, bright life. And this is the story of it all.

Moyna Westwood had been engaged, on this St. Valentine's morning, exactly three months. Her lover, Frank Tressilyan, adored her; and she was, or at least, counted herself as, the luckiest of girls in having won the love of so good and true a man. There had even been talk of an early wedding, somewhere about June or July, although Mrs. Westwood had looked somewhat askance at the choice of so early a date. But she loved her only girl, and she was very fond of Moyna's lover, and I think, but for this terrible Valentine's day, she would have given in to him, when he protested against her objections, with a very good grace indeed. But—that fateful valentine came between.

When Moyna Westwood heard the postman's knock, she ran to the door with a bright colour on her pretty face. The postman was upon the step and he handed her the fateful valentine that was the death-warrant of her happiness. No others were for her. Who else would send her valentines, now that she belonged to Frank; and this one, too, was in Frank's handwriting.

She did not open it at once. She crept away to her own room to put her lips to it, ever so tenderly, and to breathe her lover's name over it, with many a sweet and loving prefix, be assured. Then she opened the envelope. It seemed strangely thin.

A portrait and a letter fell out. Moyna Westwood picked them up with a strange tremor in her heart. She saw at a glance the letter was not in her lover's handwriting; but the photograph? It was that of her lover, standing beside a most handsome woman, who was looking up into his face with ardent admiration.

Moyna Westwood clutched at the rail of the bedstead to support herself, and looked again and yet again at the picture.

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For the moment she had forgotten the letter, which had fallen on the floor. Yes, without a doubt it was Frank Tressilyan. But who was the woman beside him?

And where was the valentine Moyna Westwood had expected from him that very morning? Was this it? If so, it seemed to her more like a cruel practical joke. But Frank would never play such a foolish, unkind trick upon her, Moyna Westwood knew. And yet it was—the address—in his own handwriting, and it was the only letter that the postman had handed her, upon the steps, that morning!

It was some time before Moyna Westwood could recover herself sufficiently to remember the letter that had fallen at her feet. Mechanically, as if in a dream, she at length stooped and picked it up. It was but brief, and in an unknown handwriting, plainly that of a woman:

"*This will considerably undeceive you as to Mr. Frank Tressilyan's honour and truth, if I mistake not. The woman who is photographed with him is his wife. If you doubt this, call at* 140 *Guilford Street, W.C., and you shall be shown their marriage certificate.*" MARGARET TRESSILYAN."

Truly a fateful valentine for Moyna Westwood to receive. She stared at it amazed for some time, scarcely comprehending it. Then she thrust both letter and photograph into the envelope, not without a shudder, and put on her hat and jacket. She would go and see this woman who signed herself Margaret Tressilyan, and sift the matter to the very core. She could not cry—her sense of pride forbade that, as yet; she did not doubt her lover, and yet—the proofs of his unfaithfulness were so plain, so absolute.

The cup of happiness had been dashed from her lips in one miserable moment. The whole world had suddenly gone grey and blank for her.

When dressed, she went out and, hailing a hansom, drove straight to Guilford Street. It seemed a long journey, but Moyna Westwood was feverishly anxious to know the truth of the extraordinary story conveyed by the letter and the photograph. On the way, she looked again at the latter. It was without a doubt Frank Tressilyan's and the woman—well, to Moyna Westwood, she looked coarse and uneducated—an adventuress. She put the picture back into the envelope with something akin to a shudder. Its very touch seemed to soil her glove.

At last she reached Guilford Street, and, having dismisse

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the cab, rang the bell of No. 140, asking for Mrs. Tressilyan. She was ushered into a showily-furnished drawing-room. A moment later a handsome woman of thirty swept into the room, with a smile almost approaching triumph upon her face.

"You are Miss Westwood, of course?" she said.

"I am," answered Moyna with dignity.

"And you have come——?"

"I have come for an explanation of this!" Moyna held out the letter—her valentine.

"Oh!" with an unpleasant laugh—"that is very easily explained. Has not Frank told you his version?"

"I require yours first," said Moyna calmly, though she was feeling far from calm.

"Well, I didn't like to see you being made a fool of any longer, so I told him if he didn't tell you the truth, I would."

"If he didn't tell me?"

"Yes. I wrote the letter; he—Frank, my husband—addressed the envelope. Look for yourself and see."

Moyna Westwood suddenly turned sick at heart. But she strove with all her might not to show it. She dared not let this woman see she was wounded to the heart.

"I did not come here to cross-examine you," she said, after a pause; "be good enough to show me the certificate, and I will go!"

"Certainly!" retorted Margaret Tressilyan, with a gleam of vindictive light in her dark eyes. "I think you ought to thank me for my timely warning."

"That is enough. Show me your proof."

The woman took from her bosom a folded paper and laid it upon the table.

"There it is!" she exclaimed.

It was a marriage certificate, and bore the names of Margaret Vane and Francis Tressilyan. One glance sufficed for Moyna Westwood to see this. She felt that she went white to the lips, so cruel a blow was this that Fate had dealt her.

"Thank you," was all she could say.

"You are satisfied? The date was about seven years ago, the place New York."

Moyna remembered that Frank had told her he had been to America.

"Thank you," she repeated. The other woman watched her narrowly, with an evil gleam in her eyes. But Moyna Westwood was too proud to show her pain. She bowed coldly as Margaret Tressilyan rang the bell for the maid to show her out, and went away without a word.

The other woman watched her hail a hansom and drive away, from the window.

"It went home," she said triumphantly, "though she would not show it. Master Frank, that letter will prove a spoke in your wheel. I have owed you vengeance for a long time, and it looks as though I were going to pay the debt at last!"

Not until Moyna Westwood had reached home and was safely locked in her own room did she suffer herself to give way. Then the strain of the morning broke her down utterly, and she lay on her bed and wept the bitterest tears her eyes had ever shed. See him? No, never again! No explanation on his part could possibly explain away that proof that had been shown to her of his perfidy. But she would write to him.

She took off her engagement ring, and sent it back to him with a few curt words of farewell. She told her mother that her engagement was broken off, and Mrs. Westwood, seeing that she was very upset, made little or no comment, though she secretly wondered at the suddenness of the rupture and the cause of it. And then Moyna Westwood began to try to forget her lover and his faithlessness. She went out into Society, and was the gayest of the gay, except when alone. Her mother was alternately puzzled and suspicious. But knowing her daughter's pride and selfwill, she was afraid to interfere.

'Have you heard the news about Mr. Tressilyan?" remarked a mutual friend about a month later; "he has lost a lot of money and is going abroad—has gone, I hear."

Mrs. Westwood repeated this casually to her daughter, who had not been present when the remark was made, and it only elicited from Moyna a cool "indeed!"

But when alone she thought bitterly of it.

"He has had to settle the money on her," she thought, "and has gone abroad lest I should meet him." Which was a hundred thousand miles from the truth, had she only known it. But there are times when the truth is the last thing that comes to light.

While Frank Tressilyan was on the open ocean, and, later on, was trying to forget in the wilds of the States, Moyna Westwood was rapidly acquiring the reputation of a coquette. She threw herself madly into any excitement, any enjoyment that would prevent her from thinking. She gave so much apparent encouragement to two of her old lovers, that they both proposed to her, but were mortified by being unceremoniously rejected. But her gaiety was feverish, all on the surface.

At last an old family friend took her to task one day. They happened to be alone that particular afternoon, and Mrs. Vincent, who had known Moyna Westwood from babyhood, did what she had been longing and intending to do for ever so long, and spoke out boldly:

"My dear, what is wrong with you?"

Moyna looked at her in affected surprise.

"My dear Moyna, you cannot deceive an old woman like me. What does all this mean? Tell me the truth. For the last three or four months you have not been Moyna Westwood, but somebody else. Now, I am too fond of you to let you go on in this way. Tell me the truth."

Moyna Westwood broke into a flood of bitter tears, and Mrs. Vincent's arms were round her in a moment. In that motherly refuge, Moyna sobbed out her story.

"It is wicked, it is wrong of me, but I care for him still!" she moaned.

Mrs. Vincent caressed and comforted her.

"I don't believe it!" she exclaimed; "I don't believe Frank Tressilyan capable of such baseness."

"But I saw the photograph and the marriage certificate."

"Why did you not see him and give him a chance of explaining?"

"How could I? And how could he ever explain? No. It is true. If it had not been true, he would have insisted upon seeing me."

Poor Mrs. Vincent was puzzled. Truly, it did look very black against Frank Tressilyan. He had called to say "Goodbye" before going away, but from motives of delicacy Mrs. Vincent had not spoken to him of his broken engagement. Now she felt that she almost wished she had.

"I am glad you have told me, dear. I am going to think over this problem of yours. Even now I don't believe Frank could be such a scoundrel—excuse me, but it is the only word, if it is true. But I won't believe it!" she said stoutly.

"We go away next week," said Moyna; "I am glad. I am sick of London."

"Get the roses back to your pretty cheeks while you are away, and I will try and ferret out this mystery," said Mrs. Vincent cheerfully. And Moyna Westwood went home feeling brighter and happier than she had done for months.

But the problem that Mrs. Vincent had set herself utterly baffled her all the summer, though the more she thought of it the less she believed in Frank Tressilyan's baseness. She called at 140 Guilford Street, only to learn that Mrs. Tressilyan had gone abroad. So had Frank, thought Mrs. Vincent, with something like a sigh for poor Moyna.

"It can't be true!" she said to herself. She wrote often and cheerfully to Moyna, to whom her letters were a godsend. They seemed to act as a tonic, almost as efficient on one as change of air and sea breezes.

When the end of September came Moyna returned to London. Her first visit was to Mrs. Vincent.

"Just in time," she exclaimed, "and how much better you look. I am just going to call on the Marstons, and you can come with me."

Moyna was nothing loth, so they started, Mrs. Vincent pouring all the latest gossip into her ears as they went.

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Ushered into Mrs. Marston's pretty drawing-room, they found it crowded, and a buzz of talk was in progress. Moyna, separated from her chaperon, presently found herself in a corner near the window, with leisure to look at the crowd. Almost the first face her eyes fell upon was that of Frank Tressilyan!

Yet was it her old lover? He looked across at her without the faintest sign of recognition. Moyna's heart almost stood still.

It beat again, however, when, five minutes later, her hostess brought Frank Tressilyan over to her and presented him.

"Mr. Francis Tressilyan. Not Frank, you know, but Francis."

"Frank is my cousin," said Francis Tressilyan, in a pleasant voice. To his stupefaction and Mrs. Marston's utter astonishment, Moyna Westwood threw up her arms with a wild shriek and fell fainting to the floor.

In a second all was confusion, but Francis Tressilyan picked her up in his strong arms and carried her into an ante-room. When he returned, a moment later, he came face to face with Mrs. Vincent, hurrying to Moyna.

"Frank Tressilyan!" she exclaimed.

"No. Francis!" said that perplexed individual.

"Don't go," cried Mrs. Vincent; "I must speak to you. I must." The truth had flashed upon her in a moment. "It is most important. Forgive me, but I will see you as soon as I have seen Moyna."

Bewildered and puzzled, Francis Tressilyan hardly knew what to do. Mrs. Vincent was a perfect stranger to him, but the name she had applied to the girl who had fainted at sight of him, and whom he had carried to the ante-room, seemed to awaken a dim recollection in his mind. He felt he had heard it before.

In a few minutes Mrs. Vincent came back.

"She is all right now. It was the sudden shock of seeing you."

"But, madam, pardon me, I have never met Miss Westwood before."

"You are Frank Tressilyan?"

"No. His cousin Francis."

Mrs. Vincent almost wrung her hands. But luckily the greater part of the guests had gone, so that her impetuous gestures were not noticed.

"Forgive me, Mr. Tressilyan," she exclaimed, "but are you married?" The abrupt question so startled Francis Tressilyan that he hesitated.

"Oh, I can see it all!" cried Mrs. Vincent, before he had time to reply. Then she sank into a chair, and she afterwards confessed that she never felt so much like going into hysterics in her life. Remembering Moyna, she pulled herself together with an effort.

"Will you sit down and listen?" she said, and Francis Tressilyan sat down. "Miss Moyna Westwood was engaged to your cousin——"

"Oh!" exclaimed her companion; "now I remember that quaint name of hers."

"Yes — yes — but let me speak! Last February she received a photograph and a letter—it was on St. Valentine's Day—and the letter was signed 'Margaret Tressilyan'——"

"Margaret!" exclaimed Francis.

"And the photograph was one of two people side by side—Margaret herself and Moyna Westwood's lover."

"No," said Francis Tressilyan, quietly; "it was myself."

"Then you are——"

"I was Margaret's husband."

"Was?"

"Yes. She died in South Africa a month ago.

"But the letter—the letter. It told Moyna Westwood that Frank had deceived her."

"It was not true. But had you only known her as well as I knew her, the woman who called herself Margaret Vane, you would not have been surprised for one moment at any act of villainy she committed. Let me tell you one thing. She had a hatred, a deep and bitter hatred, of my cousin, because he tried to prevent my marrying her; and she knew it. I was wild and headstrong, and would not listen to him until too late. I soon found out my mistake. But when Frank succeeded in separating me from a woman who was—forgive me for speaking ill of the dead—dragging me to ruin, she never forgave him."

"And so this——"

"This was her revenge—clever—to separate him from the woman he loved."

"How alike you are!" said Mrs. Vincent, after a long pause. She hardly knew what to say. Everything now to her was as clear as could be.

"But how was it that Frank never came to see Miss Westwood, to explain?"

"Moyna herself confessed to me," said Mrs. Vincent, "that she simply wrote and told him she never wanted to see him again."

"But surely——" began Francis Tressilyan.

"I think I can tell you," said Moyna from the door. The drawing-room was now quite empty, save for the three, Mrs. Marston having, with the tact of a woman of the world, withdrawn. Francis sprang to his feet.

"Miss Westwood, can you ever forgive me?"

"I have nothing to forgive anyone, except myself," said Moyna quietly. "I have heard all you have said, and had I had more belief in—in Frank—I should have spared myself this—this——"

But she could say no more. Francis Tressilyan gave her a chair and walked to the window. He remembered how his cousin Frank had spoken to him, long ago, of the charming girl with whom he had fallen in love, and he recollected the pretty, quaint name. Presently he returned to the seat he had left.

"Miss Westwood," he said, "let me do all I can to make amends for this terrible trouble."

"Forgive me," interposed Mrs. Vincent, "but did your late wife ever go to see your cousin?"

"Yes. To my knowledge she used to go to him when I was away from England, to obtain money that I sent her, and——"

Moyna Westwood sprang to her feet.

"I see it all!" she cried. "She was there on the eve of last St. Valentine, and in some way changed the letters, so that, instead of receiving one from Frank, her own came to me in his addressed envelope."

There was a moment's dead silence.

"She was capable of anything!" said Francis Tressilyan.

"Oh, I see it all so clearly!" continued Moyna, "but cannot put it together."

"Come home and we will think it out," said Mrs. Vincent.

"But Frank—where is he?"

"That is my affair," said Frank's cousin quietly. "I will have him in London before a month is over, or my name is not what it is!"

* * * * *

There is little more to tell. Francis Tressilyan was as good as his word, and before a month was over Moyna Westwood was in her lover's arms once more. His explanation was simple. He had written to her on St. Valentine's Eve, saying that he had lost a large part of his income, and should she—Moyna—decline to see him again, he should understand that their engagement was at an end. He could not ask her to marry a poor man. Before posting the letter, Margaret Tressilyan had called upon him at his chambers, and had presumably—and there was but little doubt of this—changed the contents—an artistic valentine and Frank's letter—for the photograph and her own vengeful epistle.

* * * * *

"When shall it be, dear?" said Frank, a few weeks later. "May I fix the date?"

Moyna only blushed, and clasped her lover's hand in her own.

"Silence gives consent, so I fix it for the fourteenth of February," said he. And with a tender kiss he sealed it.

Clifton Bingham.

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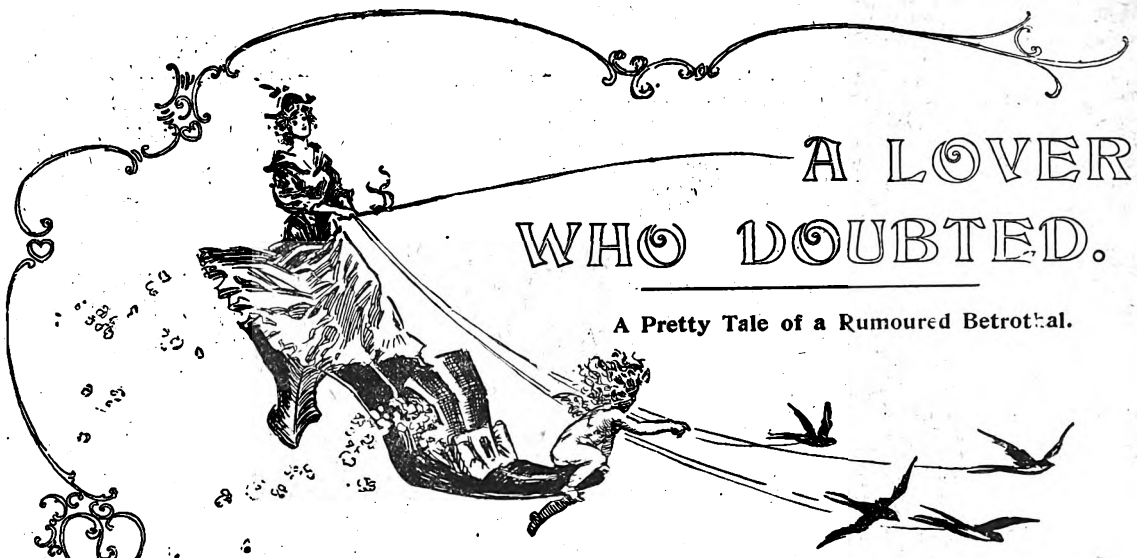

A LOVER WHO DOUBTED.

A Pretty Tale of a Rumoured Betrothal.

"WRITE to me sometimes, Nan," Gladwyn said. "You know time will not pass so quickly with me as it will with you, Nan, dearest."

"Oh, I will," she answered. "That is, if you don't demand long letters. I never can write a long letter properly, but notes or postcards, now?"—she smiled a question into his eyes.

"Oh, postcards!" Gladwyn objected. "Make it notes, Nan, as short as you please, only put them inside envelopes."

"I'll remember—that is, I'll try. Oh, the train's moving! John, you must get off. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, dear, and good-bye, Mrs. Wentworth," he grasped a hand of each. "God bring you safely and happily home again." The train steamed off, Nan waving her handkerchief from the window. He answered from the platform by a wave and lift of his hat, then turned squarely about and walked towards the place where a carriage stood waiting.

"Home!" he bade the driver, as he entered and settled himself amongst the cushions, which still bore a hint of the perfume Nan so dearly loved. A rosebud from her bouquet, broken off at the stem, lay on the carpet at his feet. He caught it up and crushed it against his lips, then, bowed forward with his face in his hands, he sat without moving until the opening of the carriage door aroused him.

He straightened himself with a start and stared at the man's mildly wondering face.

"We're home, sir," he heard.

"Oh, yes. Thank you, Brooks," John said, and alighted at once. As he mounted the steps on his way into the house he held one hand closely shut at his side. In it was Nan's rosebud.

Most of you know what a house is like when you go into it after it has been emptied of the presence that filled it with life and delight.

It is as if all that made it a goodly and pleasant thing had been carried dead out across the threshold; there is an unearthly stillness and vastness there, and the unearthly loneliness as well, which strikes you like a breath of pain as you enter.

John went slowly down the great entrance hall towards his own study door. He dared not look to right or left.

It seemed to him that at any instant one of those closed doors might open and show him a white, girlish shape on the threshold, or a step might sound on the shallow, polished stair and Nan's mocking laughter ring down to him as it had so often rung.

The study was the only place in the whole house which had not changed in his brief absence from it. He put his hat and gloves aside, and sat down in his revolving chair.

The morning had but fairly begun, as he could see from the little gilt clock on the mantelpiece. Beside the clock was a recent photograph of Nan, which she had placed there herself upon one of her infrequent visits hither. Upon the desk before him was a tinted miniature, as nearly life-like as a picture may be. He took this in his hand and examined it closely.

How would she come back to him? With her soft eyes full of the old dreams, her mouth all sweetly innocent of kisses as a child, the old sunshine in her hair, her heart free still from the care love brings? God grant it so.

But if, indeed, it needs must be otherwise, God grant him grace to bear it like a man, such a man as only was worthy to love her.

Yesterday—surely it could be no further back than yesterday—she had stood beside him here in this very room, a little child. To-day she was a woman grown—and the room was empty of her!

But he sat here still a man, fast growing elderly, whom Fame bespoke kindly, too grave perhaps, for such a winsome gaiety as hers, yet loving and missing her, God knows how deeply.

A year! It would be short enough for her to whom enjoyment was new. The old cities—the old sights—he knew well enough how keen would be her delight in them. But he must sit quietly here at home writing the books a greedy public demanded—writing them with pen only while his heart roamed unrebuked in distant lands with her.

He put the minitaure down and opened the book which he had left off reading a few hours before. He laid the rosebud reverently across a page and closed the book upon it; then, rising, put it away upon the shelf. So had he shut the sweetly fragrant secret of his love into his life against the time when she should pluck it forth.

Next day came a note from Nan, written from the house of the friend with whom she and her mother were staying until ready to start.

"DEAR COUSIN JOHN," she wrote, "you see it's to be notes after all, not postcards, and here is the first one! Are you looking after the doggie as you should? And the birds—don't let the maid forget them. And is Mrs. Hunter looking after you? I hope your coffee is hot in the mornings and strong enough to please you. How is the book getting along?

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You ought to accomplish wonders in that big, quiet house, with no such hindrances to annoy you as your naughty cousin —Nan."

The next note was inclosed in a letter of her mother's and bore the Continental post-mark. Ah, well! Her feet were on Continental soil at last. And she still had a thought for him. All that summer his heart followed her in her journeyings from the Swiss Alps to Venice's purple lagoons. Autumn found them settled for the winter in Rome. A box of such things as tourists love to gather came to him from there, and what he prized most of all was a sheaf of Roman lilies, still fairly fresh, and breathing forth exquisitely their pent-up fragrance. Once she wrote:

"Rome is lovely—better than all my dreams. It only needs one thing to be quite perfect, and that is—no, I won't tell you, though you may guess if you can. Oh, Cousin John, you should see me holding court! These young Italians and some of my own countrymen, too, pay me as much honour as if I were a queen in very truth. Already I have refused a title, and they tell me there is another at my command. It is as if I were taking part in a play."

How much of her heart was in all this John didn't know. She was surrounded by men, young, handsome, courtly, some of whom it seemed must sooner or later capture her girlish fancy.

Once he thought he would himself go to Rome. To be near her were surely better than to stay here with this gnawing suspense. Then his heart failed him.

What chance had he there—he, old and plain, and so grave among men who knew the value of a compliment, who bought favour with the golden coin of smiles and courtly graces?

No, he would stay and bear it, as he might, and when she came back—if she came back——

For days he roamed the country over with gun on his shoulder and a brace of dogs at his heels. I don't know that he shot anything, but the exercise and the keen, strong open air did him good and kept his head clear.

Two weeks before Christmas he received a box and a letter from Rome. Then began a silence that lasted until the days could be gathered into weeks. No further word came from either Nan or her mother.

One morning, as John sat lingering over his coffee and the *Daily Courier*, a friend, who lived on a neighbouring estate, strode in, crop in hand, just as he sprang from the big yellow hunter which the groom was holding at the door.

"No, I can't sit down," he said in answer to John's invitation. "Ah, I see you have the *Daily Courier* there! Seen the news from Rome? That pretty little cousin of yours is doing what she likes with Roman hearts. But they say she is fairly caught at last. Nothing like a title to win a girl's fancy. Wonder if we'll all get asked over for the wedding?"

John turned cold and white. His hand shook. Nevertheless, he managed to smooth out the sheet and read the paragraph pointed out to him. There it was in black and white. "Rumour has it that the beautiful Miss Wentworth will soon marry the young Prince di Aligheri, who has for some time been devoted to her."

After his friend had gone, John still sat on the at table. His coffee turned cold in the cup and a little slanting sunbeam wandering among the breakfast things reflected its gay gleam upon its surface. So this was the end of it all! His dream—his dear, foolish dream was over, and he was awake at last to know he must dream no more for ever. Well, if it meant happiness for her he could bear it bravely—if she loved this prince—if he loved her—ah, no man, John knew, could love her better than he himself had. Had? Did? Would so long as he lived. But why had they not written? Surely they need not fear his disapproval.

The servant came in, a little bewildered at finding him still at table. John rose.

"I fear I have kept you waiting, Margaret," he said, and went out of the room to his own study. He never knew how he got through that day. The maid came to see if he would have luncheon. "No!" "Dinner?" "No!"

"The master do look awful," she told her companions in the kitchen. "Something dreadful must have happened to make him look like that."

All night John sat at his desk staring blankly at the opposite wall. The clock on the mantelpiece, where was Nan's picture, ticked wearily on until it stopped dead. Morning came, and with it much sunshine and twittering of birds looking for their breakfast outside underneath the windows. The day was February 14th, St. Valentine's Day. John had sunk forward upon his desk; his tired head resting on his folded arms. He had fallen asleep.

The servants went about softly, wondering if the master would be as queer to-day as he was yesterday. Suddenly there was a bustle and confusion throughout the house. A cab had driven to the door and deposited two ladies, who entered the house with an air of gay mystery about them.

"Cousin John—where is he?" was demanded.

The stupefied maid pointed towards the study and stammered something. The girl left her mother to explain and give orders, and ran down the hall. Her hand grasped the brass handle tremulously. It turned, and the door slid open.

She went a little way into the room, then paused as she saw the sleeping man before her. Her finger touched her lips instinctively, and for an instant she pondered. Then her face broke into a mischievous smile, and, unwrapping something from her handkerchief, she flung it at the bowed head. It fell with a soft thud—a golden rose!

John woke. He was dazed with suffering and heavy sleep, but he saw the rose quick enough and caught it up, staring at it as if it were a fairy gift. Then a laugh rang in his ear and two hands fell on his shoulder. He wheeled round and beheld Nan, rosy above her furs, standing beside him.

"Oh, Cousin John, do you know what day this is? That's my valentine you have in your hand. I brought it all the way from Mr. Green's hothouse, wrapped in my handkerchief—it's the finest he had and worth its weight in gold. We've travelled night and day, mamma and I, to surprise you. I couldn't stand it any longer. I just had to come home and see the doggie and the birds and—and—you, of course, you dear old, stupid Cousin John. Aren't you glad to see me? Now tell me!" Her eyes laughed into his.

He caught her by the arms and held her close.

"The prince!" he demanded sternly.

She hung her head.

"Oh, you've heard that wretched story. I didn't mean you should, that is—oh, Cousin John, it wasn't true, not a word of it. I never cared for him, and I—I begged mamma to bring me home. That's all."

"And enough," John said. A great light broke over his face. He drew her down on his knee and laid her head on his shoulder and bent his over it. She was crying.

"And you've come home to me," he said, in an odd, shaky voice. "Just as I used to dream you would. Is it true—shall I believe it? Oh, Nan, my child, my darling, look in my eyes and tell me what it all means." He put his hand under her chin and tipped the sweet, shy face towards his. Her lashes slowly lifted.

"Why, don't you know?" she said. "You're such a dear old stupid, John! It just means that—that I'm your valentine!"

Constance Coniagh.

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Two Lovers and a Maid.

Telling How a Valentine went to the Wrong Person.

THE guard had whistled, the train had just begun to slip away from the platform, when a young gentleman rushed up to the moving carriages, opened the first one he came to, and flung himself in, having hurled in various minor articles of luggage before him. Putting his head out of the window he shouted to a groom standing on the platform:

"Have you seen to the luggage?" Receiving an affirmative touch of the hat, he added, at the top of his voice: "Tell them I was in lots of time," and subsided into his seat. Then recollecting the reckless way in which hat-box, sticks, and rug had preceded his entry, he looked round the carriage with a view to collecting them, and met the gaze of a fellow-passenger, at whose feet his hat-box had rolled.

This was a girl of about seventeen, with a small, pale face, clear-cut features, and a rather large mouth, whose amused expression displayed a very white and regular set of teeth.

"I am afraid I must have startled you by my abrupt entry," said he, agreeably surprised, as he picked up his various possessions, and began to arrange them in the rack above his head; "but it was a very near thing. I ran it rather too close."

"Indeed," rejoined the young lady. "I thought I overheard you say to someone on the platform that they were to be told you were in lots of time."

"A pious fraud!" exclaimed Mr. Trevor—to give our hero his name. "To have to scramble for your seat, as I have just done, is almost worse, in my governor's eyes, than to miss the train altogether."

As neither of the travellers was at all shy, they were soon deeply immersed in conversation, in the course of which the singular coincidence was elicited that they were both bound for the same destination.

"You see," said Trevor, who, after the ice had been broken by various commonplace remarks, had begun to wax confidential, "my father thinks it is time I got through sundry examinations. So he wouldn't let me go back to college this term, but packed me off to a parson; and I've got to read hard with him for the next three months. A lively time I shall have of it, by all accounts, down in Glendale."

"Glendale!" exclaimed the young lady, "Why I am going there. How very curious!"

"Indeed!" said Trevor, thinking it might not be quite so dreary as he had at first feared. "Do you live there?"

"No; I'm only going to stay with my aunt for a few weeks. It certainly is not a very lively place. But you knew I was going there," she added suddenly, "for you have read the label on my hand-bag. I've seen you looking at it a dozen times."

"I have certainly tried to read it," said Trevor, "but I could never get my neck far enough round to see the last word. 'Miss Kate Grey, Miss Foster, The Grange,' is as far as I ever managed. I hope we shall be able to keep the carriage to ourselves till we reach our destination."

And they did have it all to themselves as far as Glendale; during which time Miss Grey told him that she was very angry at having to leave home to-day, as to-morrow was Valentine's Day, and she felt sure her sisters would open her valentines to see from whom they came, and then pretend they did it under the belief that they were addressed to themselves. Mr. Trevor sympathised with her, inwardly resolving she should have one valentine, at least, that no one should open but herself.

At last they steamed into Glendale. A prim old lady standing on the platform as they passed being identified by Miss Grey as her aunt, the young lady suggested they should shake hands in the carriage. Which they did, Trevor remarking that it wasn't going to be good-bye for long, as of course he should see her often enough during the next month. At which Miss Grey blushed, and said, "Perhaps."

On emerging on to the platform Miss Grey was at once claimed and marched off by her aunt to point out her luggage to a porter; while a tall, handsome man of about thirty, in most untidy clerical garb, introduced himself to Trevor as the Reverend Paul Vyner, remarking that he believed he was right in supposing him to be Mr. Trevor.

* * * * *

We must now say a few words in defence of our heroine, whose conduct so far may appear indiscreet. Certainly she was wrong to enter into conversation with a strange young man in a railway carriage, and very wrong to more than half-promise to meet him on some future occasion; but as we have started a paragraph in defence of her, we must do our best in her behalf.

Firstly, then, she was caught laughing at his unceremonious entry, and so, in the most innocent way, laid herself open to be addressed. Secondly, he was not only a handsome man, but evidently a gentleman. Thirdly, she *was* a flirt, though a very prétty and innocent one, and was very glad to meet with someone likely to relieve the monotony of a month in the country with no one to speak to but an elderly maiden aunt.

Now all this may account for her behaviour down to this point; whether it will continue to do so is for the reader to judge.

"Aunt," began Miss Grey, at lunch, "who is the rector of the parish?"

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"Mr. Vyner, my dear," replied Miss Foster. "The Reverend Paul Vyner. He is a Cambridge man, and, I am told, of very good family. However, he is poor, and takes pupils. He conducts the service very badly, and is utterly useless in the parish."

"Oh! Has he any pupils just now?" inquired Miss Grey innocently.

"No, my dear," replied her aunt; "and I don't see what difference it would make to you if he had."

For Miss Foster, though a kind-hearted and good woman, was a great stickler for propriety. Her other main characteristic was that of saying disagreeable things she didn't mean, and was sorry for afterwards.

Miss Kate, having learnt all she wanted to know, now glided gently but swiftly away from the dangerous topic of young men, and being a bright, clever girl, succeeded in producing a favourable impression on her aunt.

During the afternoon she retired to unpack. In the course of this occupation she came upon a large envelope, which she took out of her trunk and balanced thoughtfully in her hand; then shook out the contents on to the dressing table and began sorting them through.

They were half-a-dozen cards, bearing the devices common to the feast of St. Valentine, which she had brought with her to dispatch from Glendale to various acquaintances.

Having selected one which seemed to suit her purpose, she wrote two lines on it in pencil, and, placing it in an envelope, directed it to:

"A. T.,
"Care of the Rev. P. Vyner,
"The Vicarage, Glendale."

For though Trevor knew her name, it being written in full on her luggage, she only knew his initials, which she could see printed on his hat-box. However, having ascertained from him that he was going to live at the vicarage, and from her aunt that the vicar's name was Paul Vyner, and that he had no other pupils just now, she felt sure that her letter, though vaguely addressed, must find the right person.

* * * * *

The next morning at the vicarage, when Mr. Trevor lounged down an hour late for breakfast, he found his future tutor in a curious state of bewilderment. "Considerably knocked out of time," commented that shrewd youth, when Mr. Vyner answered his apologies by saying in an absent way: "I believe it is only selfishness." And then perceiving by Trevor's face of astonishment that he must have said something very odd, he got up from his untouched breakfast, and went into the garden, pleading a headache.

This is what had happened.

On coming down that morning, he saw on the mantelpiece in the spot where his letters were always placed, an envelope with his name written across it. Being the most careless of men, he never noticed the "A. T." written above, so tore open the envelope, flung it behind him, and, to his surprise, found in his hands a card, bearing on it a gracefully-executed bunch of primroses, while underneath was written in a lady's hand:

"*In the Spring a young man's fancy*
Lightly turns to thoughts of love."

His first thought was to examine the envelope; he turned round to pick it up, but, alas! he had thrown it into the very heart of the fire, and nothing remained of it but a sheet of black ash.

After all, there would be nothing in this to account for the vicar's mental disquietude. The reception of a valentine from an unknown hand would scarcely disturb the equanimity of most young men.

But Kate's seed had fallen on fruitful ground.

It was singularly apposite (when opened by the wrong person), and chimed in so well with many of Mr. Vyner's thoughts during the last year or two, that, while the valentine in itself, or its sender, never cost him another thought, the tempest of recollections, wishes, self-reproaches, and plans for the future that it raised in him were more than he could at once allay.

The reflections that had so engrossed him at the breakfast-table, and which he was now attempting to reduce to order, by walking up and down the garden puffing furiously at a big pipe, ran briefly something like this:

"Why don't I marry? Is it, as I tell myself, because I do not wish? Because I am too poor? Because no girl would marry a slovenly object like me? Or is it because I am too selfish? Because I should have to sacrifice so much that has now become second nature to me? My bachelor's ease; my summers on the Continent; my untidy habits; and, wretch that I am, my claret and cigars? Do I do my duty here? Not a bit. I know no one intimately; I care for no one's opinion; I hate the place. With a wife, all that might be changed. A pleasant companion and a comfortable home are surely worth the surrender of a few of my special self-indulgences. I should be a better and a happier man. Besides," he thought, with a touch of selfishness on the other side of his argument, "she could do that horrid visiting; I absolutely dare not. I should resent anybody coming here and telling me I was leading a wretched and godless life. Why should anybody else be better pleased if I drop in at their cottage and tell them so? Women do that kind of thing much better than men do."

Thus the result of Miss Kate's valentine was that, for his own good and the good of his parish, the Rev. Paul Vyner decided to take unto himself a wife.

* * * * *

During the afternoon of St. Valentine's Day, Miss Grey started out for a walk, and we blush to state that she stopped the first rustic she met, and asked the way to the vicarage.

"It will amuse me to see him, and please him to see me," ruminated the young lady. "And, after all, where is the harm so long as we understand each other?"

With which very stale apology for flirtation she comforted herself, and strolled on until she came to the vicarage.

The house, a handsome, old, red-brick building, stood in extensive grounds surrounded by a high fence.

On one side, between this fence and the adjoining fields, ran a narrow lane, and down this lane Kate made her way, trying to persuade herself that she went there because it was pretty, and a likely spot to find primroses, and not because it was now possible for her to see into and be seen from the vicarage grounds.

So she dawdled listlessly down the lane, half-amused and half-angry with her own folly; at one minute wishing to see Trevor, at another, hoping she should not; poking the end of her parasol into the banks as she passed with a vague sort of idea that that was a recognised way of hunting for wild flowers.

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Suddenly she was brought to a full stop by a voice right above her, inquiring if she were looking for anything.

Kate turned her eyes up, and mentally decided that she had seldom seen a handsomer man than the one now leaning over the hedge, and in whose eyes she was quick to detect no little admiration of herself.

And certainly the parson in his lawn-tennis costume was a goodly sight. Six feet high, long in the leg, broad in the shoulder, and flat in the back, his loose flannel attire displayed as much as his dilapidated clericals concealed, his personal advantages. His handsome, clean-shaven face glowing with exercise, small head, and closely-cropped, dark curls, surmounted by a shooting cap, which he had pushed back as far as was compatible with its remaining on his head at all, formed a whole that was undeniably pleasant.

But before going any further let us just account for the vicar's presence and his pupil's absence.

After lunch Mr. Vyner had suggested a game of tennis. Both being expert, they had no difficulty in keeping themselves warm, even in February, and were just playing the deciding game of a hard-fought set, when suddenly Trevor remarked:

"I say, isn't this St. Valentine's Day?"

"Yes," replied his opponent, thinking that it was the first time for ten years that he had any special reason for recollecting the date. "Yes; why?"

"Well," said Trevor, "I ought to send a valentine. I'm afraid I'm rather late about it. Where can I get one?"

"I don't know much about that kind of thing," returned the parson. "But I should say not in Glendale."

"I think Moresborough is your nearest town. How far is that off?" inquired Trevor.

"About two miles."

"Then, if you'll excuse me," said the young gentleman, turning rather red, "I think I'll run over there."

"Certainly," replied the vicar, surprised at finding himself so sympathetic.

And so it came to pass that while Mr. Trevor hurried over to Moresborough as fast as his legs could carry him, his preceptor took a stroll round the vicarage grounds, and, coming to a railing in the fence overlooking the lane, leant over it, lost in reverie.

He was startled by the apparition of a young lady strolling slowly down the lane towards him.

"Surely," said the parson, "you are a little too early; they don't blossom till May."

Then seeing by Kate's extreme discomfiture that she was meditating a hasty retreat, he deceitfully added:

"At least most of them. Of course there might be a few early ones about, but they are rather difficult to find. I'll come and help you hunt for them, if I may."

The next minute he was on the path by her side, looking rather ashamed of his own alacrity. Though of late he had abjured female society, he was not one of those unfortunate men who cannot open their mouths in a lady's presence; and in a few minutes he had set Kate at her ease by a few commonplace remarks.

A very pleasant change the vicar found it from his ordinary afternoon's employment, to saunter down a lane with a pretty and amusing girl. There was a spice of romance about the suddenness of their acquaintance that just suited his present state of mind; while the mischievous Kate almost laughed outright, when she remembered that she had come out to look for the pupil, at finding herself strolling about in a confidential manner with the tutor.

But all good things must have an end, and when they had walked to the top of the lane and back once or twice, Miss Grey said she must be going.

"I hope I shall see you again shortly," said he, as they parted. "I must make up some excuse to call upon Miss Foster." And then he leant over the gate, and watched her graceful figure to the corner in the road where she turned back and smiled.

The vicar, forgetting alike his manners and his cloth, kissed his hand to her, then bolted down the lane as hard as he could, blushing like a girl; until he was suddenly pulled up in his stride by a thought so ridiculous that it at first made him laugh, and then made him downright angry with himself for being such an idiot.

"I have decided I want a wife; why won't she do?" he thought.

On reaching the house he found Trevor just returned. He held a parcel in his hand, and asked the vicar if he had a small box that he could pack it in, as he wished to dispatch it by post.

"Come into my study," said the latter, "and we will see what we can find."

After a few minutes' rummaging about, Trevor found one to suit him. It was a small cardboard box that had lately come down from London with some fishing-tackle, and still had the vicar's address upon it. This box Trevor carried off; and placing the parcel within it, dispatched it to Miss Grey, astutely remarking to himself that "It would be a pity to scratch old Vyner's name out, as then she won't guess who it comes from; but knowing I am at the vicarage, and seeing the parson's name on the box, I shall get the credit of it."

* * * * *

It was with considerably more consternation than pleasure that, next morning, when Miss Grey opened this parcel, she found herself the possessor of a very handsome locket and chain. Never doubting that the parson was the donor, she argued that she had given him no right to take such liberty.

She grew angry with him for his want of tact; and then remembering her valentine to Trevor, and the fact that she had taken that eventful walk solely to meet him, she grew angry with herself, and was also illogical enough to be angry with him for not meeting her, or sending any answer to his missive; for which variety of reasons she avoided the side of the village on which the vicarage lay.

Trevor, not seeing or hearing anything of her, decided he had offended her by sending her presents on so short an acquaintance, and reviled his folly for so doing. But of the three Mr. Vyner's plight was the worst. That ridiculous idea of his, that Kate, if he could persuade her, would make him the very wife he wanted, would keep recurring to him. In vain he told himself he had only seen her once; in vain he tried to persuade himself that what he had seen he didn't like; he was haunted by the idea, and at the end of a day or two he made up his mind to see her again at all hazards.

Having arrived at this decision, he was prompt to act upon it. Making as an excuse a subscription for a Christmas treat to the poor children of the parish, he called the very next morning upon Miss Foster.

That good lady received him in a manner peculiarly her own.

"Good morning, Mr. Vyner," said she. "It is a very long time since I have seen you. I suppose you want some money."

Mr. Vyner explained the object of his visit as well as he could, remarking that the idea only occurred to him that very morning; that the third week in February was late for a

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Christmas treat; but that he supposed children could eat cake at any time of the year.

Kindly Miss Foster told him that he was the worst clergyman both in the church and the parish she had ever met with, and then got up to fetch her cheque-book, remarking, as she went out of the room:

"That's my niece. Katie, dear, Mr. Vyner, our vicar."

There was a very embarrassing pause when they found themselves alone. Then he said blunderingly:

"You see, Miss Grey, I found an excuse."

"I hope," said Kate, "you don't mean me to believe that this children's treat exists only in your imagination, for my aunt has gone to get some money to pay for it."

"No, not exactly," said the vicar, who felt himself on rather dangerous ground.

"Because," continued the young lady, "I should not think very highly of you, if such were the case, Mr. Vyner."

Kate decided that she had seldom seen a handsomer man than the Vicar who was addressing her.

And then rapidly leaving the subject, she remarked in very chilling accents upon the state of the weather.

Mr. Vyner, who was no fool, in spite of his infatuation, was quick to perceive by Miss Grey's manner that he had not found favour in her sight, and immediately there flashed across his mind a remembrance of the parting salute he had waved to her.

Just then Miss Foster's step was heard outside. Determining to make the most of his opportunity, he bent down over her seat and said:

"Miss Grey, I owe you an apology for my conduct. At the risk of making matters worse, I'm going to beg of you to take a walk to-morrow afternoon in the lane where we met before, and I will try and remove the bad impression I fear I have made on you."

Before he could receive any reply, Miss Foster entering, handed him a cheque, and begged to know if it was enough.

The vicar, who felt heartily ashamed of this part of the business, began to stammer something about munificence, but was speedily cut short by the old lady, who said that now he had got what he wanted, he need not make himself miserable by stopping any longer out of politeness; that she herself was not amusing company; that Kate never flirted in her aunt's presence, whatever she did out of it; that doubtless his duties in the parish required his presence elsewhere, and fairly drove the poor gentleman out of the house.

The next afternoon the vicar, who was now growing old in deceit, gave Trevor a holiday, dispatched him to Moresborough on various pretences, and then went and sat on the railing, where he had first seen Kate, and smoked his pipe and waited.

He had resolved that he would fall in love with her if she would let him; and he was wondering how long she would consider he ought to cultivate her acquaintance before making any advances of that sort, when her slender figure came slowly down the road.

In another minute he was below, shaking hands with her.

"I don't think I ought to have done this," said Kate; "but as you asked me, you must not think any the worse of me for it; and"—extracting the obnoxious parcel from her pocket—"I have brought you back your very kind present."

"Done what?" said the astounded vicar.

"Brought back the chain and locket," said Kate. "I was so sorry you sent it. I have been very silly, but I never gave you the right to send me this."

"But," said Paul, turning Trevor's luckless valentine over and over in his hand, "I never sent you anything. Hallo! this box is directed to me. Why, it's that young scamp Trevor, who sent it to you; I gave him the box. How came he to send you a valentine?"

Poor Kate! This was turning the tables on her with a vengeance.

"I suppose because I sent him one first," she said defiantly.

"Well!" returned the Reverend Paul, "this is most extraordinary. I suppose you sent it by a messenger. There was only one letter delivered at the vicarage on St. Valentine's Day, and that was for me."

"Oh!" said Kate, glad to get a chance, however poor, of carrying the war a little into the enemy's country. "Is she good-looking?"

"Who?" said the vicar innocently.

"Why, the young lady who sent you the valentine."

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"I haven't the least idea who sent it. I burnt the envelope without looking at either writing or post-mark. Here it is," he added, taking a crumpled piece of card from his pocket, and handing it to her.

"Why!" said Kate, "that's the valentine I sent Mr. Trevor."

"Impossible!" cried Paul; "it was addressed to me."

"No, I am sure this is it. It was addressed, 'A. T., care of the Rev. P. Vyner.' You see," said Katie, "I knew he was at the vicarage, but I didn't know his name."

"I am so sorry," began the parson. "I quite thought it was addressed to me. Indeed, I scarcely looked at the outside at all. It stood where all my letters are always placed, and I opened it, never doubting it was for me."

"I am so glad he never got it," said Kate. "I have been ashamed of myself ever since I sent it. I am afraid you must be dreadfully disgusted with me."

"I think she's very pretty," said Paul, smiling rather wickedly.

"Who?" asked Kate.

"Who! Why, the young lady that sent me the valentine, of course."

"Oh," said Kate slowly, and looking down on the ground.

Then, as if anxious to change the subject, she suddenly asked:

"What were you going to apologise to me about? As you didn't send me that thing, how did you think you had offended me?"

"I was afraid you were angry because I kissed my hand to you when we parted last time," said Paul, stammering and blushing, and scarcely knowing what he said.

"I suppose I ought to have been offended," said Kate, laughing; "but, the truth is, I did not think you quite knew what you were doing. I—I forgot all about it the next moment."

There was a minute's silence, broken suddenly by Paul:

"Kate, I may offend you in reality now, but I cannot help it. Will you forgive *me?* Nay, more; will you give me some answer if I ask you to be my wife?"

"Your wife!" cried Kate. "Impossible, Mr. Vyner; I know nothing of you, and what you know of me is not to my credit. You cannot mean what you say."

"Listen to me," said Paul, quite in earnest now, and catching both her hands in his. "I have loved you since the first moment I saw you; I have tried to persuade myself that it was impossible; I have laughed at my own folly, as I thought it—but all to no purpose. Kate, I love you. What chance have I of winning your love in return? Not now—I am not so foolish as to suppose you can answer me yet—but in the future."

"But I know so little of you," stammered Kate.

"That, at any rate," said Paul, who was beginning to think he should have his own way, "can easily be remedied. Suppose, for instance, we walk up and down here once or twice, and cultivate each other's acquaintance."

So they wandered up and down the lane for the rest of the afternoon. We have never learnt exactly what passed between them, but they seemed to be perfectly satisfied with each other's company.

Suddenly the *tête-à-tête* was broken in upon by a voice from the railing where Kate had first seen the parson.

"Hallo!" said Mr. Trevor; "I hope you two are getting on all right. Good afternoon, Miss Grey."

"Trevor, come back here," said the Reverend Paul. "I wish to give you back this from Miss Grey. Don't take offence, my boy; you must see you had no earthly right to send it."

"There's only one decent way out of this hole," said Trevor imperturbably; "and that is, that Miss Grey should keep it as a wedding-present."

And Miss Grey was graciously pleased to receive it on those terms.

Thus everything turned out all right.

Barry Lefevre.

A Stitch in Time.

Everyone knows that a stitch in time saves nine, so, readers, take warning of the old proverb, and make a note not to miss entering our coming competition. There will be thousands of persons going in for it, but do not be deterred by this fact. You have quite as good an opportunity of carrying off one of the magnificent prizes that will be offered as anyone has, for this most novel and unique of schemes will be equally interesting to all types and classes of readers. It will form a most diverting pastime to while away an idle evening, and, if you are diligent enough to win a prize, you will find you will be most handsomely rewarded. I can promise you that whilst you study the competition you will indulge in many smiles that won't come off.

To You All.

I hope you are all pleased with this, our Valentine Number. I think you will find it bears out my appreciatory remarks about it in preceding chats. This column is a very great boon to me, as in it I am able to foreshadow my future ideas for the welfare of this little paper. I know my readers take what I say in good faith, for the letters that I constantly receive tell me so. Many correspondents at the end of their epistles say, "With apologies for troubling you"; now, to all such I wish to point out that, far from being worried by your letters, I am delighted to read them, and if possible to act on their suggestions. So do not think, when you get it in your head to write to me, that I am anything but pleased to hear from you.

"Running Riddles" Competition—Result.

This competition was announced in the Christmas Number. A great number of readers entered, and many of the replies were most ingenious. After very careful scrutiny of all the attempts, it has been decided to award the prize of £2 to

William Vickers,
26 Hythe Park Road,
Staines,

whose answers were decidedly clever.

The Five Hand Cameras, with complete Photographic Outfit, are won by Miss A. Arthur, Greengairs, Airdrie, N.B.; W. C. Hodsdon, Mill Rise, Church Road, Teddington; Mrs. Henrietta Suffling, 1 Portsdown Road, Maida Vale, W.; Miss Mary May, 139 Fulham Road, South Kensington, S.W.; and B. J. Whall, Lynwood, Millport, N.B.

The Seventh Love Problem.

I have very much pleasure in announcing that Mr. Arthur Taylor, of 30 Napier Road, Leytonstone, is the winner of the guinea I offered in connection with the Seventh Unsolved Love Problem.

Your Editor.

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OLD VALENTINES.

I turned an old box out to-night,
A task that I had long neglected;
A bundle dingy met my sight,
A packet strangely unexpected.
Of fleeting time it bore the signs,
In opening it I felt quite chary;
Yet they were but old Valentines,
And dated fourteenth February

One was from Charlie — silly boy,
He was ten years too young to marry.
"The heart is but a woman's toy";
The next said, 'twas from Cousin Harry.
"The rose is red, the violet blue";
How silly now sounds that old motto;
I kissed the sender once — poor Hugh,
And mother told me I ought not to.

An arrow through two hearts the next,
Entwined about with verse impassioned;
From Jack — and oh he was so vexed,
Because I said 'twas so old-fashioned.
Another — such a quaint device —
How sweet — I wonder if he meant it;
What charming lines — it would be nice
If I could recollect who sent it!

Well — put them in the fire — good-bye!
To keep them now seems rather stupid;
Their givers married — so did I —
And no one now thinks much of Cupid.
You're out of date, Saint Valentine,
Your florid cards, your verse impassioned;
Yet take my hand, dear husband mine,
Thank God true love is not old-fashioned.

C.B.

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SPLENDID NEW SERIES. **BEGIN READING TO-DAY.**

DECOYED!

A Striking Series of Astonishing Revelations.

Told by the Decoy Herself.

OF WHOM YOU READ.

Vivienne D'Alton, the decoy. She, an innocent girl, unwittingly leads young gentlemen of good social standing to their ruin, at the hands of her father.

Beverley D'Alton, who poses as a millionaire who has made his money by judicious speculation. He assumes to lavish great affection on his daughter, from whom he has been separated for many years.

Mrs. Sherwood. A florid person, who is introduced to Vivienne by her father as a great friend of her dead mother. She lives with the D'Altons, and requests Vivienne to call her "Aunt Flora," which the young girl reluctantly does.

Annchen. A lady's maid, whom Vivienne greatly detests. She seems to be on very familiar terms with Mrs. Sherwood and Mr. D'Alton.

SIXTH EPISODE.

Half-Confidences.

"A most terrible thing! It is enough to make one afraid to leave the house."

"Yes, I think it is simply awful! Just fancy us seeing the poor man in good health only last night, and now! Oh, Beverley, it can't be true!"

I had been standing beside my father for some little time, wondering how it was that both he and Mrs. Sherwood were so agitated, that they seemed to be quite oblivious of my presence.

But, though they talked past me, just as if they thought themselves alone in the room, it was impossible for them to really overlook me, and I knew quite well that they intended me to hear all they said.

"Last night!" I exclaimed. "What has happened since last night? And of whom are you speaking?"

Mrs. Sherwood affected to give a violent start of surprise, and my father uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Upon my word, Vivienne," he said irritably, "it seems impossible to keep anything from you, for you are here, there, and everywhere. But I daresay you will show less curiosity after you are more accustomed to the ways of the world."

"You have not answered my questions," was my answer, spoken calmly enough, in spite of my father's censorious attitude. "Were you alluding to Mr. O'Connell?"

"Why should you think that?"

"Because you expected him to dine with you last night. And because Mrs. Sherwood spoke of 'seeing the poor man in good health only last night.'"

"Well, I suppose you are sure to hear all about it, anyway, so you may as well hear it from us. Mr. O'Connell's dead body was found in the river last night, near London Bridge, and now lies in the mortuary."

Mrs. Sherwood was sobbing violently, with her face hidden in her handkerchief, and even my father's lips were quivering with emotion, while his face wore a most curious expression, just as if he were only simulating grief, which, of course, he must really be feeling.

As for me, the shock nearly made me faint. But I made a strong effort at self-control, and exclaimed:

"But how could his body be found last night, when he did not leave here till long after nine?"

"How do you know that?" was the sharp query, which showed me that I had made an incautious admission, if I did not want to betray what I was doing last night. Happily, I am fairly quick-witted, and was able to rectify my mistake at once.

"If he dined with you," I said, "I don't see how he could possibly leave here much before ten. And if he stayed still longer, it is less than ever likely that the body which was found last night could be his."

A breath of relief preceded my father's next words, although they were spoken gloomily.

"Unfortunately," he said, "there is no mistake as regards identity, for some letters and a card-case established that beyond doubt. It seems almost too awful to credit, but the unfortunate man must have met his death soon after he left here, for the body was found and identified in time for the tragedy to be reported in the morning papers."

"Is—is it suicide?" I gasped, for it had suddenly struck me that self-destruction might possibly have been the eventual outcome of Mr. O'Connell's disappointed love-making.

But my father's next words dispelled this fear.

"No," he said firmly, "it cannot have been suicide, for there is a great wound on the head, which must have caused death before the body was thrown into the river, after it had been stripped of money and valuables. It is a case of murder, murder most foul, and to me has fallen the painful duty of setting the authorities on the track of the murderer."

"But how can you do that?"

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"By simply describing what happened last night. Mr. O'Connell dined with us, but pleaded an engagement which compelled him to leave here at half-past nine. I daresay he would have stayed longer, if my answer to his proposal for your hand had been different. But Fate willed it that he hurried away. Unfortunately, also, he drank more Veuve Clicquot than was good for him, and the instant he stepped into the fresh air its effects were painfully manifest. He became drowsy, and staggered so much that I had to help him down to the gate. A growler was passing at the time, and, with the aid of the cabman, I got Mr. O'Connell inside. Then I told the cabby to take him to the Cecil, and the sequel is easily guessed at. The cabman has robbed and murdered him, and he would meet with no resistance, for O'Connell was absolutely helpless when I saw the last of him."

I listened to all this as if I were in a dream, and my father, hastily turning to leave us, added:

"And now I am going to the police station to tell all I know, and to give as accurate a description of the murderer as I can. I shall never forgive myself for letting O'Connell drive off alone, although it did not occur to me that he would not be quite safe. But I can at least help to avenge his death, by putting justice on the right trail."

"Oh, Beverley," wailed Mrs. Sherwood, whose emotion was still too great to allow her to show her face, "I wish you wouldn't mix yourself up in the case! Just fancy! We were the last people who saw him alive before the cabman drove away with him. Suppose we were actually blamed over it!"

"Don't be so absurd!" was the ill-mannered reproof to this outburst. "Whether I am blamed or not, I must do my duty. And I am sure Vivienne will support me when I say that the only right thing for me to do is to tell all I know."

Was this remark intended as a challenge? I thought not. On the contrary, it struck me that my father must be acting in a very self-sacrificing manner, for it must be exceedingly painful to be publicly associated with a tragedy, no matter how noble one's motives may be.

But another idea also occurred to me.

"Father," I faltered, "what about Mr. O'Connell's wonderful diamonds? Have they been stolen, too?"

The effect of this question was enough to frighten me from ever addressing another to my father. He reeled as if I had struck him, and positively gasped for breath, glaring the while at me with eyes which shone fiercely out of a lividly pale face.

"Wonderful diamonds?" he gasped, staggering towards me with so threatening a mien that I involuntarily retreated until the closed door prevented me from going any further. "What are you talking about? And why do you connect Mr. O'Connell with diamonds?"

"Because," I answered, "there is every reason to do so. Yesterday Lady Windelmore and I called at a jeweller's in Bond Street, and saw a most wonderful suite of diamond ornaments, intended for the Empress of Russia. We were told that only royalty or millionaires could afford that kind of thing, and that Mr. Emil O'Connell had ordered an identically similar set to be made. He paid for it, and fetched it away yesterday afternoon. He was coming here last night for my final answer to his proposal, and it seems only natural to suppose that even if he brought no other of the costly gems with him, he would at least bring the diamond half hoop, on the chance of its being needed."

Mrs. Sherwood was still too much agitated to join in the conversation, but she looked eagerly at me as I spoke, and I remember thinking it odd that, though she had been crying violently for about twenty minutes, her eyes were not in the least red, like mine would have been.

"This is news to me," was my father's gravely spoken response. "I had no idea that O'Connell had anything valuable on him. Of course, he would not, in any case, have brought more than the ring with him. And even that would not be alluded to in face of the emphatic way in which I declined to accept him as your husband. But the mere mention of that treasure will be enough to ruin us all for ever."

"Ruin us? Father, how can that be possible?"

"It is not merely possible, but certain. Unless it transpires that Mr. O'Connell's diamond suite is safe in his own room, or in the care of the hotel manager, it will be inferred by the world at large that he brought them here, and that we are responsible for their disappearance and the death of their owner."

This view of the case was a very dreadful one. But my father overruled all my objections to it, and succeeded in convincing me that, for all our sakes, it was vitally important to say nothing at present about the priceless gems of which Mr. O'Connell had been the purchaser.

"But what about Lady Windelmore?" I asked. "She heard just as much as I did."

"Did she also know that Mr. O'Connell was to receive his answer last night?"

"Oh, no! I didn't mention a word about it to her."

"Then she will not imagine that he had anything valuable here with him, and I trust to you to enlighten her no further."

Under the circumstances, I willingly promised to be discreet, and my father, having apparently regained possession of his nerves, soon afterwards hurried off to set the police on the track of the cabman, but not before I had asked him one more question.

"Father," I said, "what was the number of the cab? If you can tell that, there will be to difficulty about finding the driver."

A slight pause preceded the reply given to me.

"I never thought about the number. It is a thousand pities that I didn't notice it. But it would only have entered my head to do so if I had been suspicious of the cabman's *bonâ-fides*."

Another moment and my father was gone. Then Mrs. Sherwood, who had again been indulging in a display of emotion, recovered sufficiently to level a sneer at me.

"You ought to be a detective," she said aggressively. "Nothing seems to upset you. And you forget all womanly regret at the loss of a friend of the family in your anxiety to show how easy it would be to fix suspicion on the most innocent people in the world. Faugh! I've no patience with such an unnatural daughter!"

There was no time, even if there had been inclination, to reply to this undeserved tirade, for the speaker flounced out of the room as she said it, leaving me to wonder whether she was entirely wrong or not when she accused me of being unnaturally anxious to disclose incriminating facts. Nor could I entirely exonerate myself, for did there not linger in my mind the lurking conviction that my father had been as careful to avoid telling the whole truth as I had myself?

I could not be sure whether there was a number on the cab or not. But I knew there was no mistake in supposing that I had heard my father say more to the cabman than it seemed necessary for him to say.

"'I'm afraid the gentleman has had a glass too much. He lives at the Cecil. Here's your fare.'"

Those were the words that he had addressed to the cabman. But what could be the meaning of what he added, in a lower voice:

"'Lose no time. You'll find all serene at the office'?"

I would fain have gone back to my own room for the rest of the day, but was unable to do so, owing to various social engagements which it was necessary to keep. By this time I quite understood that the rule of fashionable life which commands most obedience is the one which enjoins us to hide all our troubles and our perplexities behind a smile. The smile may be either amiable, satirical, or arrogant, but so long as it forms a mask which covers all deeper emotions, it finds a welcome which is denied to sorrow.

It must also be accompanied by a corresponding lack of interest in other people's worries, and it appears to be the essence of bad taste to either court pity or bestow it.

This being thoroughly realised by me, I was apparently as gay and as careless as anybody while Lady Windelmore and I paid a visit to the Academy. Mrs. Sherwood was to have gone with us, but excused herself on the plea of a sudden

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attack of neuralgia, and though I have no desire to see anybody suffer from neuralgia, I must confess that I was glad to be spared the infliction of her presence.

There is an idea among some people that the Academy is visited for the sake of the pictures. But very few people, comparatively speaking, would go to look at the pictures if nobody else were there. Anyhow, her ladyship and I only called in on this particular morning on the chance of her meeting some friends of hers whom she wanted me to know.

That which we hoped for duly happened. Mr. Greatham and his sister were here, and I took such an immediate fancy to them that I invited them both to lunch with us. Such slight objections as were raised by Clarissa Greatham were promptly overruled by Lady Windelmore, who smilingly informed her that Mr. D'Alton's *chef* was above being surprised by an inrush of unexpected guests.

She and I were about the same age, but she was as *petite* and dainty as I was tall and vigorous. In fact, we were as as dissimilar as could be Claude Greatham had the same colouring as his sister, but was a well-grown specimen of manhood hailing from New Zealand, where his father, it appeared, had made an enormous fortune by sheep farming. This fortune, on the death of Mr. Greatham, was divided equally between his two children, who, armed with numerous letters of introduction, were now having a good time in London, amongst people whom their parents knew before they sought better luck over the seas.

When we all went back to lunch, we found Mrs. Sherwood looking her usual self, and my father welcomed our new friends in his most genial manner, for he already knew of them by hearsay.

"And you like being in London?" was one of the questions Mrs. Sherwood put beamingly to Claude Greatham, who responded at once:

"Madam, it is a delightful life, though it has its disappointments."

"Disappointments?" echoed Lady Windelmore. "Whatever can there be to disappoint you, who have everything to make you happy?"

"Not quite everything. I have a great friend who has spent many months with us, and who promised faithfully to be the first to welcome us at Southampton if we should visit the old country. He knew exactly when we were coming, and amongst the letters brought on board at Madeira was one in which he enjoined us to be sure and look out for him when the ship entered the home port. But he never came, and we have neither seen nor heard from him, although we have been in England nearly a week."

"The young man is evidently ungrateful, and has no desire to pay for past hospitality," observed my father. But Clarissa Greatham exclaimed confidently:

"Viscount Broomville is no ingrate. The letter which met us at Funchal was as cordial as possible, and I am sure it isn't his fault that nobody knows what has become of him."

"No," added her brother, "that's why I'm uneasy. If it had been anybody else, I wouldn't mind. But Broomville isn't the kind of chap to break his word."

I felt myself growing alternately hot and cold. Hot because Viscount Broomville's name always brought the uncomfortable conviction that I, who already had the choice of several eligible lovers, had given much secret admiration to a man who evidently did not care two straws for me. Cold—because the steadfast confidence of the Greathams re-awoke the fear lest harm had befallen him. I recollected the adventure on the last occasion I had seen him, and I turned pale with a sudden dread lest the "birds of evil omen" had secured their prey after all.

But I resolved to say nothing on the subject to either my father or Mrs. Sherwood, for I knew that neither of them would sympathise with my fears. The Greathams and I would meet at the Countess of Alwinnot's "Small Dance" in the evening, and I would find some means of having a chat with Clarissa about Lord Broomville.

Meanwhile my father, with his usual tact, had ingratiated himself so much with Claude Greatham that I foresaw what would soon happen. He would be asked, or would offer, his advice *re* investments, and I found myself hoping that such a course would not have the same result it had had in the cases of Lord Broomville and Alan Melrose, neither of whom I had seen after business had been satisfactorily arranged by them.

"And you must understand that I want you to make yourselves at home here," smiled my father. "I like nothing better than to have young people about me, and the oftener I see you here, the better will both Vivienne and I like it."

Lady Windelmore seemed very pleased at the favourable impression the children of her former school friend had made, and was saying as much to Mrs. Sherwood, when she suddenly faltered in her speech, turned very pale, and murmured:

"Oh, I feel so faint! Do give me another drink!"

Quick as thought, Mrs. Sherwood pressed a glass to the lips of the fainting woman. But she was already powerless to drink the wine offered her, and, with a shuddering groan, she fell back lifeless!

Instantly all was commotion! My father sent half a dozen servants in different directions, in search of the doctors whose attentions could be of no avail to the poor lady so suddenly stricken low. Mrs. Sherwood went into hysterics, and accidentally knocked into fragments the wineglass from which Lady Windelmore had taken a drink a few minutes before she was taken ill.

Claude Greatham lifted the body gently on to a lounge, and his sister and I, though we were both nearly distracted with the horror brought on by this sudden calamity, did our best to aid respiration.

But our efforts were useless, and we knew only too well what the verdict would be when the first doctor arrived on the scene.

"The case is quite hopeless. The lady has died of syncope, possibly due to unsuspected heart disease."

Thus said the doctor, and I, of course, believed implicitly in this verdict, for how was I to suspect that Lady Windelmore's sudden death was really caused by her accidentally discovering information which might prove dangerous to the security of a gang of hardened criminals?

(*Another instalment of this series next week.*)

BDLO

WHAT WORD DO THESE LETTERS FORM?

The above is one of the sets of letters which those who enter the Great Letter Juggling Competition in *Pearson's Weekly* are asked to solve. In this Competition is offered the sum of

£500 IN CASH PRIZES.

To the first prize winner **£250** will go; to the second, **£100**, and to the third, **£50**; while prizes of **£1** each will be given to the 100 competitors next in order of merit.

This type of competition is most fascinating, and will prove a most agreeable pastime for the long winter evenings.

The current number of *Pearson's Weekly* contains the third coupon, while copies containing the previous two can be had of any newsagent, or the Publisher, *Pearson's Weekly*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., will forward them post free for 3½d.

Those who wish to enter should dispatch their orders for the copies they require as early as possible.

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THE BLACK SPOT.

The Story of its Regeneration.

THAT particular portion of the parish was the despair of the vicar, the curate, and the inhabitants of the rest of the district. It was a curious condition of things; the parish, as a whole, was a well-to-do one in the south-west of London; the houses were large and were occupied by people who could well afford to maintain a residence of a rental value of £100 a year; yet, in the centre of this comparative luxury and wealth, was an exceedingly poor locality—a sort of mud pool in a field of flowers, inhabited by some of the least respectable persons to be found in any part of any town or city.

"Most Londoners," as the vicar said, "speak of the East End as the part of our great city where poverty and vice are to be found at their worst; but this black spot in our parish, although its poverty may be on a par with that of the East End, can give a start and a beating to the said East End in other ways. I have had the experience of rude, impudent children and disreputable adults in the other side of London, but the conditions here are worse!"

And those who knew the district were able to testify to the accuracy of the statement.

It was to "civilise" this black spot that the curate, the Rev. Edward Whitford, set to work in real earnest and in a manner that was not quite ordinary.

He was a splendid specimen of muscular Christianity; he was a University scholar and athlete, six feet tall, with a firm, determined face (which could, nevertheless, look very pleasing) and a frame that was sufficient indication of the physical power that could be called into action if required. Altogether, both in physique and bearing, the Rev. Edward Whitford was a man to command respect.

He was just the kind of man to take these people in hand; but it was, notwithstanding, a bold move. The only other individual who had attempted any sort of ameliorating work among them was the visiting woman; she had been protected from insult by the fact that she was a woman and that she occasionally brought cast-off garments and other welcome gifts to the inmates of the tenement houses.

"Of course, I cannot accomplish much by myself," said the curate to himself and then to the vicar. "I really want the assistance of a lady or two—one at least!—and of some young men, in order to put my idea into execution!"

The worthy vicar, who devoted his attention to the well-to-do members of his congregation, agreed with him, but that he would not get the assistance; he might have a helper or two for a week, but they would quickly fall away after an experience of the black spot. However, a notice could be read in church to the effect that helpers were wanted for the curate's campaign (without making special reference to sex), and so much was done.

The request met with very little success; two or three rather shallow young ladies, who had the curate himself and not the task in contemplation, volunteered to do something, but they were not precisely to Whitford's liking, so he told them politely that he would keep them in remembrance and assign them a part when he saw one that would be appropriate. A whole week passed; the notice was repeated in the church on the following Sunday. The next evening, Monday, when the curate called on his vicar, the latter had a communication to make.

"Here is an offer of help for you from an unexpected quarter," he remarked with a dubious smile. "Miss Eileen Richards writes to me to say that the work which is about to be undertaken by Mr. Whitford, if her information is correct, is exactly the kind of work in which she will be greatly interested, and she is prepared to assist. Now, Whitford, Miss Richards is a newcomer in this district, but from all I learn about her she is just the kind of woman to be a good helper, if——"

"If?" repeated Whitford encouragingly, seeing that his superior stopped.

"If she consents to work under your directions!" concluded Mr. Winter, with a significant look.

Whitford laughed. "I know the character which public opinion has attributed to her of being an independent, masterful young woman!" he observed. "And that opinion appears to have something in the shape of a solid basis; yet—yet I have an idea that we shall get along! For I propose to accept that offer; Miss Richards is, as you have said, exactly the kind of helper required for work of this kind. She would not be afraid of the dirt, the general lowness of the surroundings, and her air of authority will do a great deal towards moulding the parents as it seems to be doing in the process of reducing the little savages of children to something like order and decency. I am very glad!"

So a meeting was arranged, at which Whitford was to unfold his plans to Miss Eileen Richards.

The lady in question had been head teacher of the local board school for about two months, and in that short period she had made a decided impression on the lawless children whose parents were forced to send them to this educational establishment.

She was between twenty-eight and twenty-nine years of age; tall, with a well-shaped figure and a pretty face.

Some people would have called it a beautiful face, but the adjective "pretty" was a compromise, as there was an opinion that the look of decision upon the features somewhat spoilt the beauty.

Everyone who came in contact with Miss Eileen Richards acknowledged her power over others. She was a "very learned person," according to Mrs. Little, who was given to sarcasm; this description was due to the fact that Miss Richards had gained her B.A. degree at London University with flying colours, and to gain that degree at London is something to be proud of

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Edward Whitford and Miss Richards were well matched in two respects; both were endowed with that grim determination that enables people to carry out a plan in spite of all the obstacles which may arise, and both were in earnest in their desire to improve the condition of those who lived in the black spot.

The meeting at the vicarage between these two newly-made fellow-workers served to show more clearly that something would be accomplished in the low-class locality.

Although Mr. and Mrs. Winter were there, they had practically no part in the discussion, but remained interested listeners. Miss Richards heard the plans of Edward Whitford, made suggestions in a quick, matter-of-fact manner, and declared that they would achieve much before they had finished with the black spot. It could not be said that she showed enthusiasm in the ordinary sense of the word, yet she was enthusiastic, as the others confessed quite readily. In fact, good-natured, simple Mrs. Winter was so impressed with the result of the interview that she let slip a remark as Whitford and Miss Richards left which might have upset all. She intended it only for the ears of her husband, and she had no idea that anyone else heard it; but it was caught by both the new colleagues.

"They are admirably suited to each other; I shouldn't be surprised if——"

That was all they heard. Whitford pretended to ignore it, but Miss Richards, with her usual way of going straight to the point, interrupted him as he was about to wish her good evening.

"Mr. Whitford," she said, looking him squarely in the eyes in the full light of the chemist's shop, "this is a serious business, and we have engaged in it in order to carry it through, and for no other reason. You agree with me? Yes, I thought so! Then we must ignore such idle remarks as that which we have overheard, and others of a less charitable nature which we shall overhear!"

"Precisely!" he replied, with just the trace of a smile. He had come from the University with the fixed purpose of settling in a district in which he could devote himself to the improvement of the lower classes, like many other Oxford men of means, and he had found his chance in an unlooked-for direction; the idea of falling in love was so much outside his scheme that it amused him. "I think," he added, "that it is possible for two persons of opposite sexes to work together without making f——." He checked the impolite word. "I have always been a believer in platonic friendships!" he concluded.

"So have I!" she returned frankly. "We understand one another and we can go on! You will hire the large, covered yard at once, and we will get to work?"

He replied in the affirmative, and they separated.

The first movement in this battle against lawlessness and depravity was to interest the inhabitants in something other than the beershops and the attractions which unscrupulous individuals had provided in sundry underground kitchens—which were nothing less than gambling and betting places.

It was not the intention of Whitford to preach religion, because he would not have been listened to. Provide them with some novel counter-attraction, and gradually inculcate in them a liking for something better than squalor and unhealthy amusements; it was a huge task, this regeneration of the black spot, but the two workers were determined.

The covered yard belonged to a large firm which did a considerable amount of carting; the carts and vans entered this yard, went to a platform at the end, were loaded or unloaded, and went their way again. After seven in the evening this yard was empty, for it was not used for holding the carts at night. There were proper stables elsewhere.

Whitford knew the head of the firm, and he determined to hire the yard two or three evenings each week. He could purchase some collapsible chairs and tables, which could be stowed away easily during the day, and the platform would serve splendidly as a stage for singing or conjuring tricks and what not. Whitford made inquiries immediately of the head of the firm, who responded heartily, and would take no rent.

The chairs and tables were ordered, and an opening date had to be fixed, so that bills and notices could be distributed.

Miss Eileen Richards was sitting in a cosy parlour of the house in which she had rented rooms when Whitford was announced. He looked anxious.

"Sit down," said Miss Richards with refreshing coolness. "You look worried; you have been working too hard at this new idea, perhaps? When do you propose to make a start?"

"That's just it!" declared Whitford enigmatically, as he seated himself. "We are not quite ready for an immediate start, yet—we ought to begin on Monday, and to-day is Friday!"

"And Monday is Bank Holiday!" observed Miss Richards calmly. "That is rather a hard nut to crack! I thought it was your original idea to start on the following Saturday if you could, as then the people would have very little money, and would be glad to have a free entertainment. That would be the thin end of the wedge! On Monday, when they have money, saved for the purpose!" She shook her head slowly and knitted her brows thoughtfully.

"That is right enough," said Whitford, "but circumstances alter cases. The landlord of the 'Black Bull' is becoming enterprising; he has kept his plan quiet, but you can see that it is a counter-move to ours.

"He has arranged for a kind of fair to be held in his yard on Monday evening; there will be roundabouts, shooting galleries, cocoanut pitches, and all sorts of things, and he announces that he will have other attractions in the future! The result of that will be that these people will get a liking for that thing and our efforts will be nullified at the outset, our whole plan ruined!"

Miss Richards looked grave for a while, then her eyes kindled, and her usually pale cheeks had a tinge of colour.

"We must fight it!" she cried. "The opposition nerves me to battle. It is a good thing that this beershop show is not to begin till evening; we must have a rival entertainment to offer!"

"Throw drink into *his* scale, and he will win!" murmured Whitford dejectedly. "Still, we must try! But we are so unprepared!"

"Will the furniture be ready?" asked Miss Richards. "Yes? Then we open on Monday evening! We are not so unprepared as you think! I have made a point of visiting these dwellings, and asking about my scholars. I have called at night, when I could expect to see both parents.

"It has been rough work, but it served two objects, do you see? Now, if you get some bills printed and circulated with our names mentioned, their attention will be attracted. We can get up our programme very soon! See here!"

The next moment they were eagerly discussing some ideas of Miss Richards, and when he left her it was understood that the battle between the rival forces of good and evil would begin on Monday evening in deadly earnest.

Surely there never was such excitement in any one corner of the great Metropolis as there was that Saturday evening in that infamous locality when Whitford's bills were circulated! Everybody was invited to witness the free entertainment to be held in Mackington's yard on the Monday evening; there would be chairs and tables, and the men could smoke, and the women could sit and sew (if they liked) while they

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listened. The yard would be well lighted, extra gas jets having been installed, and everything done to make the audience comfortable. The programme would be announced on Monday afternoon. This last was the outcome of necessity and shrewdness; the programme was only half ready when the bills were printed, for one thing, and for another thing it was well not to show their hands too early, or the landlord of the "Black Bull" might go one better.

As it was, that worthy individual only laughed, and half wished that he could have arranged his show for Saturday and Monday also, but that could not have been done, as the various items of the fair would be busy elsewhere on the Saturday night and during the daylight hours of Monday.

The inhabitants grinned when they saw the handbills, and some threw them aside with a remark that cannot be reproduced in cold print; it would lose some of its warm colour, to use a paradoxical observation. Others, who had felt inclined to do the same, thought differently when they saw that Miss Richards, of the Board School, was in it. "There's summat in it," was the opinion, and they began to talk about it and to look forward with curiosity to the further development of the idea. Miss Eileen Richards had commanded their respect.

"If we could have started on Saturday!" was Whitford's comment. But after a chat with his coadjutor he thought differently. It was better as it was.

Somehow, nobody quite understood why, the free entertainment captivated the thoughts of the district. Men and women, saving their money for the "go-in" on the Bank Holiday evening, caught themselves wondering whether they would spend it then, after all.

Whitford and Miss Richards were busy, and it is doubtful if the young University man went through that Sunday with his thoughts so much on his immediate work as he should have centred them. And then came the Monday morning! People looked for the programme, but it did not appear. They laughed, and yet they felt slightly disappointed. And after dinner on Monday they strolled about waiting for the evening.

The rival entertainments were to begin at six o'clock. Miss Richards and Whitford left their respective lodgings at three and went into the yard.

"We'll put the bill out now," said Whitford with a nervous laugh. "I say, we have the best pitch, you know! People must come this way to get to the 'Black Bull,' and they will see our attraction first!"

"It will be hard work," said Miss Richards with quiet determination, "but I think we shall win!"

He took a glance at her from the corner of his eye as he unrolled the huge poster which he had painted himself; she was one of those who command success!

That poster was hauled outside and affixed to the gate, and within a few minutes there was a crowd round it. The word passed round, others came to look, and the publican sent a bar frequenter to examine and report to him.

Oh, the excitement after five o'clock! Saturday had been an exciting day, but it was nothing to this! Whitford disappeared, but Miss Richards smiled consciously and she went boldly round to many of the houses—those which sheltered the worst of the populace—and invited them to the free entertainment!

At half-past five a curious thing happened. People were strolling towards the "Black Bull," and they meant to stop at Mackington's yard to get a passing view, but when they reached the yard they were electrified with surprise. One half of the gate was open, but the space was filled with the booth of a Punch and Judy show, and Punch was giving a brand new entertainment to all who cared to stop. He stopped every few minutes to invite those outside to walk in and be happy—to walk in if they wanted to see more of him as he wouldn't be able to stop outside long, because those inside would be disappointed.

What is there which attracts more attention from young and old than a Punch and Judy show? A big crowd gradually collected, and the landlord of the "Black Bull" waited with ill-concealed rage for his customers who were not coming!

About fifteen minutes to six Punch popped down suddenly, and Whitford—who was giving the entertainment—whispered to Miss Richards. Punch re-appeared, but the small door in the other half of the big wooden gate was opened and the Board School teacher appeared.

"Won't you come in?" she asked of those who stood nearest. There was nothing of the showman or tout about her; she was plainly dressed, and she spoke in a manner that was at once persuasive and commanding. "Do come in! I'm sure you will like it!"

Some tried to peer in, but a partition had been arranged directly at the back of the gate.

Punch supported her efforts, and the people felt that they could not resist, it was so novel, and their curiosity got the upper hand. Slowly they began to file in. Whitford and Miss Richards were exultant.

Alas! There came diversion in the shape of a small band sent by the owner of the "Black Bull." He had been rendered desperate, and was making a final effort. He was not a bad man, but he thought only of his business, and this endeavour to retrieve the character of the locality appeared to him in a totally different light.

It never occurred to him that it was a desirable thing that the locality should be improved; he saw in this attempt only an effort to reduce his business, started by faddists. The band played a lively air; most of us are partial to lively tunes, so the people stopped going into Mackington's Yard and turned to listen. Then the small band turned and began to march away to the "Black Bull" to a quick march, while a man walked backwards at the rear and shouted out to the inhabitants to "come on!"

There was a conflict of emotions; the crowd began to waver; some marched off with the band, others stood as if they were inclined to follow. Punch redoubled his efforts, and shouted that there was nothing to pay. Miss Richards took a bold course. She pulled the bolts of the closed half of the gate and threw it open.

"All are welcome! Come!" she cried.

The Punch and Judy booth was quickly shifted by some willing young men helpers inside, the partition was removed, and the people saw the well-lighted yard, with warm sacking

Whitford unrolled the bill and shot a glance at Eileen from the corner of his eye.

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on the ground, and with tables and chairs placed in front of a platform on which was a painted scene—and they followed the Punch and Judy booth into the yard.

It was "follow-my-leader" in this, as in most cases, and the crowd surged in. The gate was closed and the entertainment began at once. Only a few went to the "Black Bull."

For nearly three hours Whitford, Miss Richards, and the young men and women who had agreed to act as chorus, kept those rough, coarse inhabitants interested. There were several repetitions of Punch's performance, always new and always entertaining, in spite of its age.

There were songs by Miss Richards, whose voice proved to be of extraordinary sweetness—songs like "Home, Sweet Home," and "Auld Lang Syne," which touched an audience whose homes were none of the best. There were glees by the chorus, duets, recitations, and some rather clever conjuring tricks by Whitford, a violin solo by another helper, and many other "turns."

And at intervals both Whitford and Miss Richards addressed the audience; their remarks had nothing of maudlin sentiment in them, but were bold and vigorous, uttered in tones of earnestness that went home. They were full of sound sense, and the effect was seen in the parish later.

It was early, perhaps, to close, but the two principals were thoroughly fagged, and they hoped that the audience would show enough sense to go straight home. and the majority did so. The victory of the Bank Holiday fight lay with the regenerators.

A proportion of the parishioners were inclined to blame Whitford for "lowering himself so," but he declared that he had done nothing "lowering" in saving people from intemperance and Bank Holiday excesses and brutality. That entertainment was the first of many, and everyone admitted that the black spot was really becoming less black. Whitford and Miss Richards devoted all their leisure to the regeneration, as they called it, but she had more leisure than he during the evenings, and her work became better known among the poor.

It would be interesting to relate in detail the progress of that struggle for the regeneration of the plague spot of the fashionable parish, but it would be rather a series of stories than one short narration. The landlord of the "Black Bull" was only one of the representatives of the enemy; neither Whitford nor Miss Richards had any personal feeling against him, but they believed that it was absolutely necessary to bring about a moderation, at least, of the drink traffic, as well as to effect the abolition of other even less desirable places in the neighbourhood; and Fate had willed it that his stronghold was the first to be attacked. Afterwards, he became friendly with them and arranged his house on a basis that made it more tolerable.

For twelve months the fight was waged with untiring vigour against the causes of degeneration, and there came a day when Whitford and his gallant fellow-worker could feel that they had won, and that the black spot was losing its blackness rapidly. Within a month from that great time there came a revelation.

Whitford called on Miss Richards, and, after a few commonplaces, announced that his work in the parish was at an end. Miss Richards looked up with a start, and her pale face grew a shade paler.

"I think that the completion of our work can be left to other hands," he observed gravely. "I am about to leave here."

"But why?" asked Miss Richards, her lips quivering slightly.

"You know that my recent work has not met with the entire approval of certain persons who are influential here," he said quietly. "They think that I have not properly upheld the dignity of my position, and so forth. I do not care for that opinion, because I feel that I—that we—have done the right thing. But Mr. Winter has now taken their side, and, rather lamely, he has this morning told me that he thinks a change will be beneficial to both him and myself. That intimation came just as I was about to answer in the negative to an offer of the vicarship of a small district in a very poor locality; I had conceived it my duty to renounce the chance of preferment in order to remain here, but Mr. Winter's communication settled the matter for me in a different way, and I wrote an acceptance instead of a refusal."

"You will be greatly missed!" That was all she could say; she was surprised at her own awkwardness, and at the strange, strained tone of her voice.

"Do you think so?" he inquired. And then there was silence.

Neither of the two ventured to glance at the other; each wondered why his or her own feelings were so tumultuous, and silently asked whether the other was similarly agitated; each tried to think that this agitation was due solely to the prospective loss of a friend and fellow-worker, and each felt a kind of inner shock as the words "Platonic friendship" flashed through the brain. Suddenly, Whitford took a firm hold of himself, as it were, and spoke boldly.

"Will *you* be sorry, Miss Richards?" He saw something in her eyes which encouraged him to go on, more boldly. "Will you miss me very much, Eileen? Yes, I think you will! It has come to me as a revelation that—that I want you with me always, Eileen! Has a similar revelation come to you?" He rose and went over to her, leaning over her chair. "Has it, dear?"

Eileen's face flushed rosily; she gave him a quick, upward glance, and dropped her eyes. That glance satisfied him; he bent lower over her and kissed her with a passion that surprised her, and made her very happy.

"We have unconsciously grown to love one another, Eileen, in the midst of our battle together!" he said tenderly. "Some will say that we are another example of the impossibility of Platonic friendship, but I am still a believer in it, although—I must confess it!—*we* made a muddle of it and fell in love."

"I think that, as we work together in the new sphere, we shall be glad that we did make a muddle of the Platonic friendship idea, Edward!" she confessed, with a happy laugh.

One of the most prized of the wedding gifts was a silver-mounted ink-stand, purchased by means of a subscription raised by the people who lived in the now regenerated black spot!

Leslie Grant.

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Smart Youth!

Teacher: "What is the definition of flirtation?" Intelligent Pupil: "It is attention without intention."

Then He Kicked Himself.

George: "You would marry the biggest fool in the world, if he asked you, wouldn't you?" Ethel: "Oh, George, this is so sudden."

A Tribute to Her Judgment.

Ada: "Why should you think that I will ever be willing to marry you?" Jack: "Because I have so high an opinion of your good sense."

Much More Comfortable.

"Maria," said Joseph, as they were going down to dinner, "may I sit on your right hand?" "Why, of course not! You'd better take a chair."

Showed His Sprinting Powers.

Tom: "I asked old Goldman for his daughter last night." Dick: "What luck?" Tom: "Well, it was what you might call a run of luck. I got away."

That Stopped It.

He: "They met at the seaside. Then commenced an acquaintance that would soon have ripened into love. But——" She: "But what?" He: "They married."

Nineteenth Century Sentiment.

Gladys: "How do you like a man to propose?" Gertie: "By post." Gladys: "But that is so prosaic." Gertie: "Prose goes further than poetry in a breach of promise suit."

She Wanted an Explanation.

Jones: "Confound it, it's too bad of you! Didn't I telegraph to you not to bring your mother?" Mrs. Jones: "I know you did, love. That's what she's come to see you about. She read your telegram!"

A Sensible Suggestion.

Softleigh: "I always weah gloves foh the—aw—purpose of keeping my hands soft, dontcherknow." Miss Cutting: "Indeed! And don't you think it would be a good idea to discontinue wearing your hat for a similar reason?"

The Only Time.

"Do you not sometimes have soulful yearnings which you long to convey in words, but cannot?' asked the sentimental girl. "Yes, indeed," replied the young man. "I was once dreadfully anxious to send home for money, but I didn't have the price of a telegram."

No Danger Whatever.

He had risked his life to rescue the fair maid from a watery grave, and, of course, her father was duly grateful. "Young man," he said, "I can never thank you sufficiently for your heroic act. You incurred an awful risk in saving my daughter." "None whatever," replied the amateur life-saver; "I'm already married."

The Reason.

She: "Really, now, aren't you a married man?" He: "No, why!" She: "Oh, you have such a settled look." He: "Yes; I've been refused by thirteen girls."

Spring is Coming!

"I dearly love birds," he gently sighed. And then what did she do but hasten to the open piano and softly begin singing, "I wish I were a bird." They are looking for a nest now.

Accounted for It.

He: "Look at that woman on the other side of the street waving her hands about her head. Is she practising physical culture?" She: "Goodness, no! She's describing her new hat to another woman."

Convincing Signs.

"How still they are," remarked Mrs. Frobb, *apropos* of the young couple in the next room. "Yes," replied Mr. Frobb, "it reminds me of my army days. It was always wonderfully quiet just previous to an engagement."

Just Like a Man.

Husband (irritably): "Can't you remember where I said I left my glasses at breakfast this morning?" Wife: "I'm sorry, dear, I really can't." Husband (peevishly): "That just shows the forgetfulness of you women!"

It Mollified Her.

Young Bride: "Why, Herbert, do you call this little pigeonhole a shoe cupboard?" "My love, that will hold a hundred pairs of shoes of the size you wear." "Well, perhaps you are right. It's neat and handy, anyway."

Diplomatic.

Wife: "Don't you think you might manage to keep house alone for a week while I go off on a visit?" Husband: "I think so. Yes, of course." "But you won't be lonely and miserable?" "Not a bit." "Then I won't go."

Quantity and Quality.

"He throws a kiss to me every morning as he goes by!" "What a waste of good material!" "Oh, dear no, it's not a waste. They're just the superfluous ones that he can't deliver in person owing to the shortness of the evenings."

On the Horns of a Dilemma.

His Sister: "It is true that Helen Goldust has money, but she is so exacting. If you were to marry her you would have to give up smoking and drinking." Her Brother: "If I don't marry her I shall have to give up eating as well."

A Covert Insinuation.

Maud: "Dicky seems to be very timid. He was afraid to kiss me last night." Marie: "I don't think he is timid. He kissed me the other night." Maud (spitefully): "That does not show he isn't timid. He probably was afraid to refuse."

What He Thought.

"With your strong arm about me I fear nothing," she said as she looked searchingly into his eyes. "Phew!" came the voice of the sarcastic small brother who had been peeping in at the door, "you don't take many chances of getting scared so far's I can find out."

A Regretful Pun.

A lady, who was very submissive and modest before marriage, was observed by a friend to use her tongue pretty freely after. "There was a time," he remarked, "when I almost imagined she had no tongue." "Yes," said the husband, with a sigh, "but it's very long since."

Desperation!

Young Wife (at dinner-table, sobbing): "I think you—you—are just as mean as—as—you can be. I made that—that apple-dumpling as a pleasant surprise for you, and—and now—you—want me to bring you a hatchet to cut it in two with." Young Husband: "Good heavens, Maria! Is that a dumpling? I took it for a cocoanut." (With desperate firmness.): "I'll eat it now, Maria, if it kills me!"

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TRUE THROUGH ALL.

Showing How All's Well that Ends Well.

"You fully understand me, Ethel? Unless you do as I wish in this matter, you cannot remain an inmate of this house. I will not have such an example of disobedience set to my own daughters. They are at an age when they may be badly influenced by it, and seriously harmed."

Mr. Stephen Curliss, broker and speculator in general, threw himself back in his chair at the breakfast table, and looked with a frown of dislike on his swarthy face at the delicately beautiful girl who was pouring out his second cup of coffee.

A wealthy widower, with two plain daughters, he had married, in a moment of weakness, the beautiful widow of an acquaintance who had died deeply in debt. His wife retained her good looks, and was, after a fashion, dear to him.

But Ethel, with the face of her dead father, who had been his rival at school and in business alike, had been obnoxious to him from the first. And now that she daily and nightly attracted the attention in Society which he felt that his own daughters ought rightly to receive, his mind was made up to be rid of her at the earliest possible date.

Ethel Vere was proud as well as beautiful. She tried to hide from his notice the wound that his words inflicted.

But her lips trembled, her dark eyes moistened, and it was some moments before she could reply:

"I thanked Mr. Winslow for the honour he had done me," she said at last. "But I told him of my engagement to Frank Hartwell. I think it ungentlemanly of him to renew his proposal, and I cannot accept it."

"Then you must find another home," frowned her step-father. "I am in earnest, Ethel. Winslow is rich; he is a respectable merchant, and he is quite foolish in his fondness for you. I am acting for your own good in urging you to marry him. You will say so yourself ten years hence, if you take my advice. But if you persist in refusing him because you were once engaged to that unfortunate young sailor, who has gone down with his ship, you must take the consequences."

"Say no more!" exclaimed Ethel, brokenly. "I do refuse, I must refuse. Only let me remain here till my mother returns from Yorkshire, and then I will find another home."

"Your mother is quite too ill to be disturbed by this nonsense, Ethel. I wrote to her last week. There is her answer. You must decide this very day. And she will not be here for three weeks to come."

With her mother's letter in her hand, Ethel hurried to her own room. Hot, blinding tears fell over the words which the weak and delicate wife had written by her stern husband's order.

"Since poor Frank is lost to you for ever in this world, do, my dear child, be guided by Mr. Curliss." The last lines ran: "Marry Mr. Winslow, and in the home of wealth which he will give you, you and I may yet see some happy days."

"A home of wealth, and that man its master, and I the wife of another than Frank!" moaned the poor girl in her despair. "Oh, Frank, my darling! How lightly they all speak, and think, and write of your loss, when it has wrapped the whole earth in mourning for my eyes and heart."

She rose and began to make preparations for her departure. She knew that her mother had no power to protect her in a strife between Mr. Curliss and herself, and she would not subject her to the pain of witnessing the misery which she could not lighten or avert.

Within an hour her trunk was packed ready for removal. In a small bag she placed such articles as she would require. She wore her plainest dress and a thick veil. Counting the contents of her purse, she found that she had but a couple of sovereigns in the world.

"But I have my watch and chain, and a well-stocked wardrobe," she thought, mentally reviewing the situation. "I will go at once to London, and I can find some kind of work, no doubt, in a very few days. Anything will be better than to ask Mr. Curliss for money. If I really need any I can write to mamma."

Without bidding farewell to a person under that hostile roof, Ethel left the house.

Mr. Curliss, glancing over his paper by the window, saw her go, noted the little bag, and whistled softly to himself.

Presently came a carrier with an order for Ethel's trunk. Mr. Curliss saw the man himself, tipped him liberally, made a brief explanation, and sent him away without the luggage.

"That will bring my lady back to ask my pardon," he chuckled, returning to his paper.

But the hours went on, till twilight deepened into nightfall, and no Ethel came. Friendless, alone, and well-nigh penniless, she had made her desperate plunge into the great world.

* * * * * * *

It was nearly dusk when Ethel reached London. The lamps were twinkling in long, unending lines throughout the streets when she timidly entered a hotel and asked for a room.

Young, lovely, unprotected, coming on foot and with no luggage, it was little wonder that the "gentlemanly clerk" found that the house was full.

But his wondering stare, and the audible comments of several well-dressed loungers near his desk, sent the hot blood surging to Ethel's cheeks, and hurried her from the place at a speed which soon outstripped several idlers on the pavement, who were tantalised by the glimpse of her fair face as it flashed by.

"What am I to do? Where am I to go?" thought the poor girl, when she had reached a poorer and safer part of the city, where she could pass unmolested among the crowds, who were too much absorbed in their own troubles to have leisure to think of hers.

What a waste, what a desert of houses the great city seemed to her, who there could claim no home!

It was the hour of reunion among the humbler classes, who depend upon the day's earnings for their daily bread.

Fathers were hurrying home from work, and at the house door the good wife met them with a smile, and the little ones drummed eagerly upon the window panes, or ran a race down the narrow passage to claim the first fond kiss.

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Some pale widow passed along, with a little parcel in her hand—the toy or cake which should make amends to her darlings for the long day's absence, spent in work for them.

Over and over again did Ethel, footsore, weary, and heart-sick, see these little domestic revelations of happiness in which she had no share. Each time she witnessed them her heart sank lower and lower.

"In this great city there is a place, a home, a welcome for everyone save me," she thought, blinded by the tears she tried to force back. "And yet if my darling's life had been spared, oh, God! how happy I could have been, even in the humblest of these homes, with Frank!"

One by one the cheery welcomes died away, and the doors and windows were closed on the fireside groups within.

"Perhaps some of these people would be willing to shelter me till morning," thought Ethel who was growing tired and faint from inanition, for she had eaten nothing all that day.

She searched for her purse, intending to ask the question of a meek-faced woman in mourning, who had just passed her.

The purse was gone!

Throwing open her cloak in an agony of horror, to search its inner pocket, she found that her watch and chain had been taken, too!

Where or when she had been robbed she knew not. It was useless to waste thought over that question. She had only to face the terrible fact that she was entirely without resources in a strange city, and to decide upon the course that she was to pursue.

Hunger and fatigue were alike forgotten in the overwhelming shock of this discovery. Some words of prayer fell vaguely from her lips as she turned into a side street that looked darker and narrower than the others.

Ethel fell into Frank's outstretched arms, and fainted away.

But she scarcely knew what she was doing; she only walked on, almost stunned by her appalling situation, till she heard the rippling of water near by, and knew by the cold breeze that blew towards her that she stood upon the river's bank.

By day this place was a busy scene. At nightfall, being lined with warehouses, it was deserted and quiet.

Ethel leant against a railing and looked out upon the dark river with its forest of masts and its twinkling lights.

For one moment a terrible temptation possessed her.

"One plunge, and it will end the trouble," she sighed, leaning over the wharf. "And Frank will never come back. What have I to look forward to—what to hope for—if I live?"

She was young and strong, and the dark mood could not long endure. With a shudder she drew back, and looked up at the dark walls around her with anxious, questioning eyes.

The door of the nearest warehouse opened softly. Two men came out—a third remained at the door—and the flash of a dark lantern was thrown across the girl's figure and face.

"All right. The cab is ready, down below at the corner, and there is the girl. You know what to do," said the man in the doorway.

"All right," replied the other two.

Ethel, frightened, yet scarcely believing that they could be speaking of her, had turned to fly, when the foremost man seized her by the arm.

"Not that way, miss. The gentleman is waiting for you down yonder," he said, trying to speak in a gracious and assuring tone.

"You are mistaken. I am not waiting for anyone. Please let me pass," replied Ethel, white with terror.

"Lood alive, Ben!" said the man in the door, with an oath. "You'll have the cops here next, at this rate."

"That's so," said the second man in the street.

Snatching Ethel from his companion's grasp, he placed one hand over her mouth, and hurried with her to a cab that stood in the shadow at the end of the street.

"I've got her safe and sound," he said, through the window, as soon as they were safely within the carriage. "Run, Ben, and tell him; and stir yourself, my man, for if we are not out of this in five minutes, some of them blessed sailors will come loafing by, and then we may see trouble. Now, missy, do you just keep quiet," he added, in a surly tone, as the poor girl struggled in his arms. "No harm's going to happen to you, if you'll only be still. You may take Jack Chapman's word for that."

The noise of Ben's running feet could plainly be heard by Ethel, mingled with the creaking and swaying of the great ships at anchor alongside the piers.

The sound of sailors singing a rude chorus floated through the air. Then came a voice whose lightest sound would have had the power to awaken her, she often thought, even from the sleep of death.

"No, thanks. You are very kind, but I must find my dear ones at home before I join in any merriment on shore," said the deep, grave tones. "I have been reported lost, you know, for some months past, and one heart, I am very sure, has mourned for me. I'm off at once. When I come back I will gladly accept your invitation—if all is well."

"I hope it may be. Good-night."

"Good-night, captain."

The voice was near. The step—the dear, familiar step was nearer yet.

Putting all her strength into one wild effort, Ethel shook off the rough hand that was laid over her mouth, and screamed:

"Frank! Frank! Save me! I am here!"

"Confound you! *Will* you hold your tongue?" cried her captor, savagely.

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But still she held herself aloof from his grasp, and cried aloud her lover.

The door of the cab was wrenched open.

"Who is calling me? What is wrong? Ethel! Good Heavens, Ethel, how came you here?" cried Frank Hartwell in blank amazement, as Ethel, with a sob of joy and thankfulness, fell into his outstretched arms, and fainted away.

The man, alarmed for his own safety, had opened the opposite door of the carriage and vanished. The messenger, Ben, held himself discreetly aloof in the distance. The horse, the only honest element in the mysterious business, for obvious reasons was unable to explain it. The door of the warehouse to which Ethel pointed when she recovered her senses was fast closed, and no answer was made to the repeated summons of the angry sailor by anyone within.

Nothing could be done, except to conduct Ethel to a respectable and pleasant shelter, under the roof of his widowed aunt, and leave her there until arrangements could be made for a wedding, which came off within a week. For Frank Hartwell, after the ill-luck which had wrecked him with one ship, had found good fortune in another, which picked him up at sea, and conveyed him to China, where in a short time, the foundation of a respectable fortune had been laid by him.

"And being a rich man's wife, my darling, you may go and bid your mother farewell before we sail for the Flowery Land," said Frank. "But never again shall you face the world alone."

* * * * *

It was nearly a month after Ethel's marriage that her husband solved the mystery of her night adventure near the pier.

He was summoned to a private conference one day by the head of the great shipping firm by whom he was employed, and offered the command of one of their finest vessels, then about to make an immediate voyage.

"I owe you this, or, rather, I owe it to your wife, in common gratitude," said the merchant in a low tone. "I know that neither of you have spoken of the events of a certain night, and you must continue to keep silence for my sake. I have a daughter, Hartwell—my only child—and very dear to me. But she is weak, fond of admiration, and with no mother to watch over her.

"Recently, while at school, but how I know not, some rascally foreigner contrived to make her acquaintance. He persuaded her that he was a nobleman in disguise, and the poor, foolish child agreed to meet him near my warehouses on that very night, and to marry him, after which my forgiveness was to be asked.

"By chance your wife happened to be on that very spot just as my daughter, with her maid, who was her confidante neared it. What the two girls saw and heard thoroughly frightened them. My child hurried home, and confessed everything to me, and she is now safe at my country-seat, with her good aunt, who will watch over her hereafter, and teach her better things.

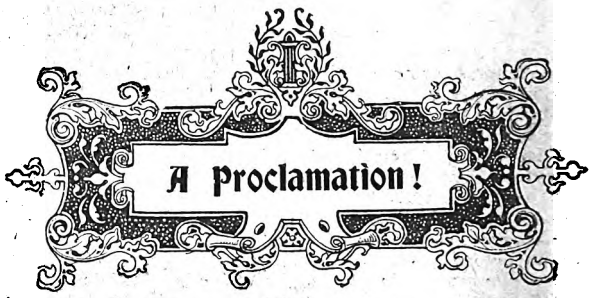
"Through her confession I got at the whole plot, and punished everyone concerned in it. It is now my happy task to reward you for the share you unconsciously had in saving my poor child from a fate that would have been worse than death. You will tell your good wife the story, of course. Then let it be forgotten. And now, Captain Hartwell, let us go and see your ship."

Thus ended Ethel's troubles. In a foreign land, as in her own, she is happy, as a loving heart must be that is true through all.

Would that thus safely and sweetly might close the story of every sad and lonely wanderer upon the city streets!

Margaret Blount.

FIRST SWELL (pretending to mistake for an attendant a rival whom he sees standing in dress clothes in the cloak-room of the theatre): "Ah! Have you a programme?" Second Swell (up to snuff): "Thanks, my man, I got one from the other fellow."



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Now, it is going to be a magazine which will interest all—which all who wish to be right up-to-date in everything must read, unless (1) They can afford to buy every magazine, review, and periodical published. (2) They can afford to buy every new book published. (3) They can afford to go to every new play. (4) They can afford to go to every new concert. (5) They can find time and patience to read the political accounts in all the papers. (6) They can afford time, money, and trouble to trace through old newspapers, text-books, and maps why nations are quarrelling, where they are quarrelling, and everything connected with the matter.

Unless they can afford to do all these things, then they must buy THE RAPID REVIEW. For this new magazine is a monthly review of the world, of its thought and progress in every form of enterprise and advancement, from politics to literature, from the drama to country life and pursuits.

All this it will accomplish by presenting each month the *essentials* of what the best books and brightest brains have given during that period to the world. Obviously, then, above all others, the busy man and busy woman will be the persons directly appealed to by THE RAPID REVIEW.

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So that it is manifestly your duty, and obviously to your advantage, to order at once and buy on February 12th the first number of THE RAPID REVIEW.

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SPLENDID SERIAL.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Eardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY ARE:

SIR CYPRIAN RUST, who has inherited the baronetcy and estates of Sir Basil Wingate, though he is not the legal heir.

MARCELLA RUST, his daughter, a very lovely girl, who is greatly in love with

PHILIP NULLIUS, the curate of Crawley Village, where the home of Sir Cyprian, Wingate Court, is situated.

LADY VIOLET FRAYNE-LENNOX, whom Marcella believes to be her aunt. She is a very beautiful woman, and loves her niece dearly, but Sir Cyprian has, for some reason, immense power over her, which he uses to further his own ends.

EDWARD DAY is an orphan whom Lady Violet has befriended. He, however, in making unreturned love to Marcella, insults her, and Lady Violet refuses to have anything more to do with him.

CALEB J. JOHNSON, a City magnate and millionaire, who marries Lady Violet, though he knows that her husband is still alive. This husband,

MAJOR RICHARD FRAYNE-LENNOX, is a good-for-nothing, who has been turned out of the Army. Lady Violet believes him dead.

THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTER (*continued*).
On the Eve of a Discovery.

EDWARD DAY went into the grimy little shop, smelling of old clothes and a paraffin lamp. On the other side of the counter a little, faded-looking woman was seated, examining some article of wearing apparel. At the sight of the aristocratic visitor, she jumped to her feet and curtsied nervously.

"Are you Mrs. Robson?" Edward inquired graciously.

"Yes, sir," she answered, "that's my name. Do you come about selling any wardrobe?" she asked in a timid voice.

Day smiled. The idea tickled him, that anyone should imagine that he had come all the way from Piccadilly to sell his old clothes.

"No. I received your letter about the information you had to impart about the woman who died on the ship coming home from Australia about twenty-five years ago," he said. "I am interested in the case, because I believe there is money in it, and if I find out anything that will throw a light upon the mystery, you will be handsomely paid."

Mrs. Robson leant across the counter, her pale, worn face and scanty grey hair lending her a look of frailty.

"Then you are not the son—or one of them?" she asked slowly.

Edward started. The question was unexpected. He had not calculated upon another waif being cast upon the world's mercy with himself, and he was rather inclined to resent it as an impertinence.

"No, I am not," he returned glibly. "But I fancy I could lay my hands on the son of that woman if I tried, but I wish to be sure that it is worth while telling him about his birth at all. Of course, if the poor woman was simply an unfortunate creature who had no name to speak of, it will be kinder to let the son live and die in ignorance of his antecedents."

"She was no common woman," Mrs. Robson said suddenly. "Although she did go steerage and was in rags, she was a lady every inch, she was, and the little chaps as she was mother of looked fit to live in a palace. I was in the same cabin with her and nursed her, and a softer spoken lady never breathed."

He looked at her closely. It almost appeared that there might, after all, be a story behind his birth, one that it were just as well to find out. But the mention of a brother stuck in his throat. He wanted no one to share his fortune, should there be one; on the other hand, it would be a nuisance to have a hanger-on in the shape of a down-at-heel brother, begging from him!

"You insist on two boys," he said. "What were they like?"

"One as dark as night, sir; black curls on 'is little 'ead, even as an infant; the other one, the younger of the two, was as white as milk—flaxen 'air and blue eyes."

"Well," he said impatiently, "I want to hear whether you have anything to tell me that will help me to unravel this mystery. Did the mother ever say anything that would lead you to believe that her sons had any right to a name at all?"

Mrs. Robson shook her head regretfully. She was living over again the tragedy of that little stuffy cabin

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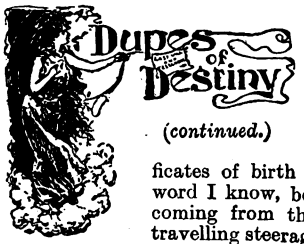

(*continued.*)

"As she lay dying, sir, she said a few words that showed there was something on her mind, and she wanted to get it off. I can't remember now what they were, but I know she was very anxious for the certificates of birth to be sent to someone; one word I know, because I thought it so odd coming from the lips of a lady who was travelling steerage."

Edward Day leant over the counter. There was no one in the shop, and he began to experience a strange feeling of excitement in the unravelling of a dead woman's stray words of long ago.

What, if after all, he could hold his head up with the highest; then with his appearance and brains no woman would be too good for him. As for Marcella, she would be at his feet, and he would remind her of her scorn!

"Well," he said sharply. "What word was it?"

The old woman puckered up her brow. "It was 'heir,' sir," she pronounced it 'hair,' but Day knew what she meant, and he was too interested to smile.

"I remember," Mrs. Robson went on, "the poor soul tried to say something. She pointed to the elder baby and said 'the heir—the heir,' and she went on with a lot of talk I couldn't foller."

Edward's breath came in uneven gasps. He had one clue that he was not of ignoble birth! The word "heir," although applied to his elder brother, proved that, and it was not his intention to seek that brother. He sought for himself alone; others must do the same for their chances.

"Did she give any clue to her surname?" he asked with trembling lips. Upon the woman's answer hung a great deal. Once let him hold his own name firmly—the rest would be easy.

"No," Mrs. Robson replied. "She died just before she got more than one quarter the name out. She tried twice, too, and all she said was something that sounded like 'Jer.'"

He bit his lip with vexation. It was too bad to lose just when success had been so near.

"And have you no papers—or even a trinket?" he asked. "After all, you have not told me very much that will be of use, you know."

The woman flushed a dark red colour.

"I know nothing about any papers, sir," she said slowly. "I think that if there were any they were taken by the doctor for the elder boy. But there were two little lockets, just alike, that she had round her wrist on one chain, one was taken off and put round the dark child's neck; the other the doctor gave to me for my services in nursing her."

Edward drew out his pocket book. His eyes were sparkling. The most important clue of all was almost within his reach.

"Well, Mrs. Robson," he said pleasantly. "I am prepared to give you ten pounds for that locket the doctor gave you. It can be of no use to you now, and in working out the mystery of the birth of those boys it will be of great service to me, if you will let me have it. I am sure," he added quietly, seeing her hesitate, "that you would not care to stand in the light of those helpless boys getting their due, and the mother—think how she would feel if she knew that they had been waiting so long for their inheritance!"

Mrs. Robson was silent, then she thought of the ten pounds and how much value it would be to her just now that times were so slack, too! Besides, an old locket was no use to her now. The memory of the dead woman grew fainter as the crisp note crackled under her eyes.

"Yes, I'll see if I can find it, sir," she murmured. "I always kept it in a little box with some things I never use, and bad as business has been in the past, I never once thought of pawning it."

She left the shop, and after some little time returned.

"Here it is, sir; there's a picture of the poor lady inside—leastways, I think it is."

With trembling fingers Edward opened the spring of the tiny locket, and inside saw the face of a young girl looking up at him. She was dark; even the faded photo could not hide that she was beautiful as well. Edward wondered what picture was in the other locket.

"This may help," he said slowly, concealing his glee under a pretence of indifference. "Anyway, I promised you a tenner, and here it is."

He flung the note on the table and, with a careless "Good-night" left the shop, and in a very short time was speeding westward once more, the locket containing the face of his unknown dead mother reposing in the inner pocket of his waistcoat.

He dismissed the cab at Piccadilly Circus, and strolled up towards Park Lane. He was excited and flushed with success.

So far he had done well; now he had to reveal himself as the heir to a good name—and then the ball would be at his feet.

He turned into one of the fashionable restaurants and ordered a bottle of champagne. He could afford it now, for was he not soon to prove himself a man of position and wealth?

The wine went to his head, but did not intoxicate him. He was too braced up by his dreams of the future to be affected by anything he drank, but he grew affable and exchanged a genial "Good-night" with the commissionaire who hailed his hansom.

A girl walking along the pavement turned suddenly at the sound of his voice, and gazed at him with distended eyes until the hansom drew up at the kerb. Then as she saw him about to step in, she darted forward with a choking cry and grasped his arm.

"Edward—stop! my husband!"

With a livid face the man who had arranged his future so brilliantly, turned and saw the white, thin face of the woman he had married, gazing into his own.

Their eyes met, both desperate, both determined not to yield an inch. With an effort of will, conscious that the wondering gaze of strangers was fixed upon the fashionable man and his shabby companion, he beckoned her into the hansom, his white lips forcing a conventional smile for the benefit of the onlookers. She obeyed his gesture silently, the look in his eyes quelling the words she would have spoken.

"Where to, sir?" the cabby inquired, opening the little flap at the top of the hansom.

He hesitated slightly—then said, "Drive along the Embankment, I'll tell you when to stop."

For some time neither spoke. The man was almost frightened of his own awful hatred for the frail, weak creature he had hung round his neck, to find in her an incubus that would drag him down when he wished to rise.

To meet her on the very day when he had clutched at Fortune's robe was an ill omen in itself. She would, in her insensate folly, send his house of cards tumbling at his feet. Her empty, doll-like prettiness, which had long since cloyed upon him, would for ever stand between him and his ambition, unless.—

The hansom trailed down one of the side streets that led off the Strand on to the Embankment, and the keen air from the river fanned his hot forehead, and moved the curls on the woman's brow. The evening was young, a few flickering lights standing pale against the grey of the sky twinkled on either side of the river with a monotonous regularity that irritated him.

He turned to her sharply: "Well, what does this mean?"

His tone stung her to retort. "That I intend to take my place by your side as your legal wife. I've been neglected long enough, but now it's my turn!" She laughed, a nervous, shrill note that jarred on his sensitive ears.

He looked out of the hansom without speaking. He could not trust himself to say a word. His mind was in a turmoil of hate and disgust.

"My legal wife!" and his voice sounded to himself rasping, as though something had broken in it. "You are very sure that you *are* my wife, aren't you?"

She flushed. "Yes, I am—and to-morrow your aunt, Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox, of Grosvenor Place, shall know it took

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He started and bit his lips savagely. The breeze tossed the lace round her neck, and the soft whiteness of it filled him with a longing to hold that throat until the taunting voice was still! Then he laughed at himself; that would be to place his own neck in a worse peril!

"Yes, I have met and talked to Lady Violet," she went on calmly. "She did not know who I was, but asked me to the house to see her. Unless I understand to-night that I am to be recognised by you—I shall go to-morrow."

He did not answer. The blood was coursing through his veins like quicksilver. The lights on the river dazzled his eyes.

The river!

For a moment he fancied he must faint, so intense was the throbbing in his brain.

He turned to her suddenly and slipped his arm round her waist.

"Come, we will get out and walk."

THIRTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

The Price of Silence.

It was long after midnight when Edward Day returned to the house of the financier, Caleb J. Johnson. He let himself in with the latchkey, and went to the study he had left earlier in the afternoon. He had a vague sense of having lived years since he had gone from the financier's study to visit the old clothes woman in the Walworth Road. Everything was the same—everything wore the old familiar aspect—save himself. He alone had changed, a distance seemed to have arisen between himself and the usual objects of ordinary life—a distance that made him feel lonely in spite of the luxury round him.

He laughed uneasily as he flung himself into a chair near the financier's desk.

"Bah, what a fool I am!" he muttered. "My nerves seem to have become rotten all of a sudden. I suppose I am over-tired and done up—that's it. I've crowded too much into the twelve hours since I got up. I'll have a peg—that will put some life into me—revive the fainting spirit." He poured out a glass of whisky and gulped it in its neat state with one long sigh of relief.

"Ah, there's nothing like a little stimulant to pull one together!" he muttered. "I feel a different man at once!"

He paused suddenly and bit his lip. He had caught a glimpse of himself in the glass over the mantel, and what he saw reflected there undid the little good the whisky had worked. His face was pale—that greenish, livid tint between white and a more ghastly hue, and in the handsome blue eyes that stared back at him there was a strained, desperate expression like unto the look of a man who had forced himself to gaze upon a fearsome object. His fair hair was disordered, and clung to his brow in damp little wisps, and above the weak mouth there was a long scratch, that looked like a thin red line, and gave his face a sinister expression.

His usually smart appearance had also deteriorated, the glazed collar was bent and limp, the tie awry, and two buttons were missing off the top of his coat as though it had been suddenly wrenched from the button-holes. His cuffs also had suffered with the rest of his attire.

But the expression of fear and horror on his face was intensified as his eyes travelled slowly from his collar downwards. Across one sleeve of his black coat something sparkled dimly under the flare of the electric globes, something yellow that contrasted vividly with the sombre hue of the black sleeve. He put up his hand, and with clenched teeth and trembling fingers picked up the yellow, thread-like object. It was a hair, a long, silky, golden hair, that had twined itself round his arm—something so pretty, so delicate and infinitesimal, that it seemed almost incredible for the sight of it to have sent the blood ebbing from the man's face. He dropped it carefully into the blazing fire, then examined the coat closely

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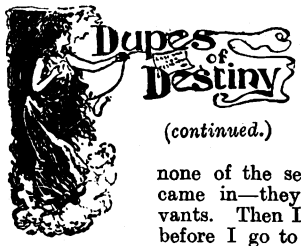

(*continued.*)

in search of others. But there were none, and with a deep-drawn breath he staggered to the door.

"It will be just as well if I change these things and get into a lounge suit," he muttered. "I'm glad none of the servants were about when I came in—they're inquisitive beings, servants. Then I can attend to these letters before I go to bed; a long spell of work will take my thoughts off myself—and"—he shivered—"they are not very cheerful ones to-night."

He left the room and went to his own quarters, and presently returned, looking the same as he generally did—well-groomed, nonchalant and supercilious, but his eyes alone remained strained, fierce, and burning. He could wash his face, smooth back the fair hair, and change into immaculate linen, but he could not alter his eyes. The windows of his soul could not be taken out and replaced. They were beyond his reach, and he could not force them to his will.

He sat down at the financier's desk and lit a cigarette, then turned over the papers carefully. He was a clever business man, and the fascination of the City was upon him—the smell of gold in his nostrils. He touched the many mining prospectuses that the financier had left in his hands as women touch children—tenderly and with light fingers. His alert brain was busy; he had many things to work out—and none of them could be approached until he had mastered the first, which was the conquest of gold, the lust of power!

Caleb J. Johnson had left his secretary his power of attorney, upon which to act in an emergency, and he had made himself fully acquainted with the contents of the financier's prospectuses, and the letter books that contained copies of the vast correspondence such things entailed.

As he looked steadily on through the pile of letters that had been brought over from the Dovermarle Hotel in the financier's absence, a sudden peal of the bell, that echoed through the silent house with an eerie vibration, stayed the pen in his hand, and sent the blood throbbing to his head.

He sprang to his feet, dropping the half-burnt cigarette on to the thick rug, where it smouldered among the fur, and it was not until the dazed man became conscious of the smell of burning that he put his foot out and ground it beneath his heel. He drew his hand across his brow—it was wet with perspiration.

"Who can that be?" he muttered. "Surely not old Johnson—he would not come at an hour like this! Why, it must be nearly two o'clock!"

He opened the door and went out into the hall. All was in darkness, but coming down the stairs was a manservant, looking half asleep, and carrying a candle in his hand. Day went forward quickly. "It may be someone for me, Robert. I will go and see, but you had better wait here in case you should have to receive some message. It is probably a wire."

He went to the door and drew the latch quietly. His pulses were quivering with the strain he had put upon his self-control, and beads of moisture trickled down his neck.

He opened the door just as there sounded another peal at the bell. On the step a man was standing, his face was in darkness, but Edward Day could see that he was big and square of frame.

"Well," he said sharply, "what do you want? This is a nice hour of the morning to knock people up. Have you come with a message?"

"I have come on important and urgent business," was the answer in a not unpleasant voice. "I wish to speak with a gentleman who lives in this house. His name is, I believe, 'Edward'—his surname I cannot remember."

Edward Day looked at him intently, but the pitch black of the sky hid the man's face.

"I think you must be mistaken, for——" he began curtly, when the stranger cut him short

"No, I'm not—an Edward someone lives in this house, because I saw him enter it with my own eyes. He came in about one!"

A sharp exclamation escaped Day. This man had come to see him, and, what was more, he intended to. Perhaps it was the better policy to admit him. He need not acknowledge that he was the "Edward" in question. After all, he was some begging letter sort of chap, who had discovered that he was the secretary to the rich financier. Anyway, he would see him in case—in case he was not a begging fellow.

"I will see you and hear what your urgent message is," he said, "and when you tell me I will judge whether it is worth my while putting you in touch with the gentleman you desire to see."

A dry smile puckered the mouth of the silent intruder, who followed the secretary along the dark hall to the study of the financier. The manservant was still yawning his head off, wondering how much longer he would have to wait. Edward turned to him suddenly. "It's all right, Robert, only an urgent message I must attend to for Mr. Johnson."

When the study door had closed, Edward turned and looked at the man who had dared to intrude at such an unearthly hour. He saw a man with the appearance of a Colonial in his breezy self-possession. He was also of great physical strength, with a bull-dog type of face, humorous eyes, and a loose, insolent mouth, which broke into a wide grin as he caught the secretary's eye.

"You haven't asked me to be seated, so I will take a chair near the fire," the stranger said in a pleasant tone. "It's no treat to be waiting about in the cold this weather."

"Then allow me to suggest that you are entirely to blame for waiting," Edward said sarcastically, suppressing his inclination to kick his unbidden guest out of the house. "Surely your news cannot be of so interesting a nature that you could not have deferred it until a more conventional hour? You had better be quick, my man. I am busy, as you see, and not inclined to waste my time. Besides," he added sharply, "the gentleman you wish to see will not care to be disturbed at this hour."

"No," laughed the man with the humorous eyes. "I can quite believe that. He has had a busy day—a very busy day."

Something in the tone of his voice sent a cold, sickly fear into Edward Day's heart. He turned abruptly, and for a moment looked as though he would have fallen on the man who sat watching him with a slow, amused smile.

Then he pulled himself together, and said hoarsely: "Well, out with it, what do you want to say? Only don't take too long—that's all."

The stranger leant forward, and said in a low, cautious voice:

"No, I won't take up more of your time than I can help, Mr. Edward. Oh," he laughed, "don't fancy I am making a mistake, my friend—I know you a little more than you know me."

"I'm not surprised," Edward retorted, seeing that disguise was useless. "Beggars like yourself make a point of knowing the people from whom they hope to extort money. But let me tell you, my man," he sneered, "unless you make short work of your message to-night, I shall kick you out of the place, and give you in custody for begging."

"Really," laughed the stranger genially, "I am half inclined to let you put your threat into execution. It would be the most amusing experience I have ever had!" He ceased laughing, and a sudden cold menace crept into his voice as he continued slowly: "See here, Mr. Edward, I'm no beggar—though I'm quite ready to acknowledge myself a scamp when in the society of a——" He stopped, and the eyes of the two men met in a flash of understanding.

Edward Day reeled against the table, and a low cry of baffled rage and fear rose to his lips, but at the sight of the other man's steady smile of power, he checked it, and said with a hoarse laugh:

"I begin to understand now. That's it, is it? Well, you want what?"

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"When I followed you," the stranger said slowly, "I was not prepared to do anything but satisfy my natural curiosity about a man with such a—a talent as you seemed to possess for disposing of, shall we call it—obstacles? But when I saw that you resided in a mansion in the heart of the West-end, I concluded that it was my duty to myself to make a suitable allowance for my old age by selling my silence to you!"

Day turned a livid face to him. "Stop that joking!" he snarled savagely, "and come to the point. What's your price?"

The other looked at him thoughtfully. "We'll say two £2,000 to begin with."

The financier's secretary and future man of wealth sprang to his feet with a rasping laugh. "Are you a madman? Such a sum is as far beyond me as the stars! You may think yourself lucky if you get a fiver—and, remember, there is such a thing as protection from blackmail," he blustered.

"Then you know your remedy," the other returned calmly. "I am quite prepared to face the penalty, if you are! For blackmail I should probably get seven to fourteen years; you——" He paused, and his humorous eyes sparkled with amusement. "I am afraid after all I can take no less than the two thou," he finished blandly.

Edward Day turned to the desk and moved some papers about aimlessly.

His brain, recovered from the first shock of knowing that his secret was no longer confined to himself, began to think rapidly. He had no intention of going under, even in the face of such odds. No, he must pay this man somehow, by hook or by crook.

Afterwards he might think out a way of getting clear of his clutches. Suddenly he paused, and his eyes, haggard and bloodshot as they were, brightened with a new inspiration. The financier had trusted him with his power of attorney—he was a rich man, and his money was at the service of the secretary, as Mr. Johnson had left a few bank-notes to the value of some hundreds in his hands, with which to meet emergencies, should occasion arise.

He opened the secret drawer in the back of the desk, and drew them out, then paused; with them was a cheque-book of the financier's. Perhaps it would be wiser to sign a cheque—the financier's signature was an easy one to copy; he had done so lately very frequently in signing letters, and had marvelled at his own cleverness. Why not settle with the blackmailer in this way? Caleb J. Johnson would not suspect him of a fraud, and even if he did, he could deny all knowledge of a cheque-book being in the desk. He turned to the stranger, who was looking at him curiously.

"I suppose it is hopeless telling you that I cannot give £2,000?" he asked curtly.

"Quite," was the laconic reply. "Either that or——"

With a muttered imprecation Edward Day bent over the financier's cheque-book and filled in a cheque for £2,000, then signed the name of "Caleb J. Johnson," just as that gentleman himself would have done.

Edward Day had a taste for imitating other people's signatures.

"What name am I to make it payable to?" he asked curtly.

The stranger hesitated, then said slowly: "To J. Rayne, and leave it open and uncrossed. I have not the luck to have a banking account—just yet!"

"There you are," and Edward flung the cheque across the table. He was quite cool, all signs of hesitancy and fear had gone from his manner. "I shall give no more," he said curtly. "Do what you like—this is all you can get from me."

Mr. Rayne looked at the signature curiously. "Caleb J Johnson" conveyed no meaning to him, but evidently the man he had shadowed to such good effect was a golden goose whom it would be wisdom not to kill. He folded the cheque and put it in his pocket, then rose.

"I will go now," he said, "but you will probably hear

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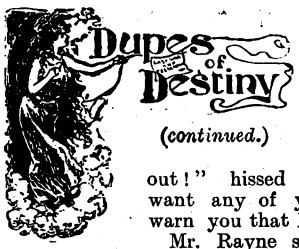

(continued.)

from me soon. I shall not lose sight of you, Mr. Johnson; to-night — or rather last night—has been a lucky one for me, and perhaps for you," he added significantly.

"Confound you, get out!" hissed the secretary. "I don't want any of your congratulations, and I warn you that I shall give no more."

Mr. Rayne smiled. "There's plenty of time to think of that," he said, "but you will find it difficult to get away from me, Mr. Johnson. Will you show me to the door—or shall I go myself?"

Silently Edward Day ushered him out, and shut the door on him with a savage bang.

"It's awful," he muttered, as he flung himself by the desk again. "Here is a far worse incubus hanging on to me now, and one that I shall not easily shake off! How is it to end—how am I to fight it out?"

Then he stooped and picked up some papers—a packet of letters that had fallen from the secret drawer in the financier's desk. He opened them absently. They were old and had apparently been tied up a long time. Then after a few minutes he sat up and began to read earnestly.

In the meantime Mr. Rayne was chuckling to himself as he walked along the deserted streets. "Two thou! Not bad! I'm glad I happened to see that little episode near the river. Now I'll go and see what is happening down there? By this time all ought to be well. I shall be a rich man yet; Jerningham's money, and now this young Johnson's. He must never find out the truth of to-night."

THIRTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

The Man with the Beard Again.

When Philip Nullius, disguised as the "Vicar" at Water Grange, reached the village, he risked being traced to his rooms by the men who were naturally incensed at having let him slip through their fingers, and were probably searching high and low for him. So it behoved him to be very careful and, as far as was possible, to avoid being seen by anyone in the beaten way.

His mind was occupied with many things. It had seemed almost incredible at first that anyone should desire to deprive him of his liberty, even temporarily, and after the first flush of anger, he knew that there was a greater reason behind it than the signing of a paper promising to relinquish all claim to the hand of Marcella Rust, that had actuated the extreme measures of Sir Cyprian's tools. But why should the baronet have taken such a keen dislike to him?

He wondered what mystery was at the back of his hatred? It was almost as though he hated him for some reason beyond that of having won the love of Marcella!

His lips relaxed into a tender smile. Marcella! His guiding star and own true love. They had dared to ask him to sign a paper that would lose him for ever the right to call her his. Then the sudden memory of that lie they had flung at him—the lie that had caused his face to flush and his heart to throb with anger—Marcella engaged to her cousin, Edward Day! No, he could laugh at such falsehoods when the vision of Marcella's beautiful pale face rose before him. Such a man as Edward Day could never win the love of a girl like Marcella, let alone keep it, and Philip glowed with a warm thrill as he knew that he—and he alone—was the man who had been blessed with the inestimable boon of her love.

It was dark when he reached the house from which he had been taken by the specious stranger with the shifty eyes. Remembering his disguise, and also fearful that some of the "enemy" might be lying in wait, he did not reveal himself to the landlady when she opened the door, but since he required the papers that had been left behind, and which were valuable to him on account of being the only links with his unknown past—he was obliged to run some risk in speaking to her.

"I—I have called for some papers that belonged to Mr. Nullius," he said, in a low, husky voice. "They are important to him."

The woman stared in amazement. "Well now, sir, that's a strange thing," she said, "a gentleman called 'ere about an hour ago with the very same question. I showed 'im into the room, and some time after 'e rushed out of the 'ouse like one mad."

Philip staggered back with surprise. Who could have taken sufficient interest in those letters, of a dead unknown mother to have read them? There were tender little notes which he had received from Marcella, too. Then all must have been seen.

"Have you the papers now?" he asked quickly. "I will take them with me, if so."

She shook her head. "The gentleman took them, sir—every one. I looked into the room afterwards."

Gone! Then the man from Water Grange had called again! "Was he the same gentleman who—who called for Mr. Nullius last night?" he asked, expecting an answer in the affirmative.

"No, sir, 'e was what I should call a toff," she said; "'e 'ad a diamond ring on 'is little finger."

More mystified than ever Philip murmured some apologetic speech, and moved away. Who was the man with the diamond ring? he wondered. He had an indistinct recollection of having once seen a man with such a ring on his little finger—but who, he could not think. He only knew that none of the men he had seen at Water Grange had worn a diamond ring. But he had no time to waste on further inquiries. He wanted to get away, to think and plan out his further movements. It was one advantage that he knew where to locate his enemies, and from whom to expect the next blow; but he resolved, with a tightening of his muscles, that forewarned was forearmed, and the next attempt—should there be one—would find him well equipped. He caught an up train to London, and, arriving there, put up at a hotel for that night, and the next day waited until dusk fell, and then sent a telegram to the Vicar of the parish Church at Crawley, which he couched in the following words:

"*Kindly grant extension of absence—most important—writing fully.*—Philip Nullius."

He waited in the telegraph office for the reply. In about an hour and a quarter's time it arrived:

"*Certainly—take two weeks.*—Preston."

He left the office thoughtfully, and paused, wondering as to his next move. It was quite dark, and the heavy coat he was wearing, together with the soft slouch hat, and the disguise in which the kindly girl at Water Grange had got him up, utterly changed his appearance and made his mind easy on the score of detection.

As he stood irresolute, two voices, coming from a couple of men close by, made him wheel suddenly round and stare at them. One was a tall, dark man with inky black beard and hair, and long, white hands, which he *used* frequently. His companion was not so tall, and Philip instantly recognised the man Boulter who had called for him in the trap to take him to Water Grange.

Very quietly he drew near to them, one at least he knew only too well, but it was the man with the black beard who puzzled him.

There was something vaguely familiar in those white, soft fingers, but he was speaking in such a low undertone, that though he went as near as prudence would admit, Philip could not make out what he was saying.

"It's not my fault, anyway," grumbled the man Boulter. "He knocked me down, and when the 'Vicar' went to my help, he got out of the room and turned the key. Then when we got out there was no trace of him anywhere, though he only got off in a dressing-gown."

"Fools—the whole lot of you," muttered the man with the

(Continued on page 223.)

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ON THE WELL-INFORMED WOMAN.

THE majority of her less up-to-date sisters envy the well-informed woman, and they do so with reason—she is never at a loss for conversation, no matter what society she may be in—that is the whole secret of the matter. She can talk with women on all that interests women, and she can express an intelligent opinion on those many matters of topical interest which appeal, particularly, perhaps, to men. Her husband, coming home from business, finds no desire to go out to his club for the discussion of this or that important question—his wife is there to delight him with her ready grasp of the chief points of the matter. Decidedly, the well-informed woman is a woman to be envied.

And yet the acquisition of knowledge, desirable though it is, is one rather difficult of attainment. Politics are interesting when it comes to a government being thrown out; international quarrelling is interesting when it comes to war—but all the events which lead up to these crises make, as a rule, but dry reading. And so the average woman "skips" the long, dry newspaper reports, and, consequently, when the climax comes—knows nothing about it, and bitterly regrets the fact.

On the 12th of this month such a state of affairs is going to be no longer possible!

On that day there will appear the first number of a new monthly periodical, entitled THE RAPID REVIEW.

On its cover you will see a picture of the world with, written across it, the magazine's title—THE RAPID REVIEW. And this is exactly symbolical of its contents and scope. It is a monthly review of the world—of its thought and progress—and it is a rapid review. Political matters, foreign affairs, Parliamentary doings—all these are full of interest when treated in the right way—in the way in which they will be treated by THE RAPID REVIEW.

Yes, and that is only one point. Do not imagine that THE RAPID REVIEW is going to be simply a political magazine—far from it; it is going to treat interestingly much lighter matters.

Every month, for example, when you have read THE RAPID REVIEW you will have read *all* the reviews, *all* the magazines, *all* the periodicals. For it will contain extracts from all the most interesting articles of the month—extracts which will be full of entertainment in themselves, and which will have the further advantage of helping you to buy just the magazines which you know will interest you, and of preventing you from wasting your money on those which will not.

And it will be just the same with the latest books, the latest plays, the latest music. THE RAPID REVIEW will be a guide-book to all these things, and a guide-book very nearly as interesting as the originals themselves. In fact, very often it will be more interesting, for it will give you the best parts of everything—the kernal of the nut, without the shell.

Nor is this by any means all; for now we come to yet another feature which clinches the matter. No woman who wishes to keep in touch with the thought and progress, the doings and the sayings of her sisters all the world over, can possibly afford to miss THE RAPID REVIEW.

Turn, when you buy your first copy, to the feature under the heading "Woman's Work and Interests." There you will find bright and brief *résumés* of all the work and progress accomplished by women during the past month. Extracts from their writings, their speeches, and their lectures; reviews of their meetings, their employment, their sports—in fact, of all their interests.

So that, whether a woman cares to take an interest in the weightier matters of current interest or not, she will at least find in THE RAPID REVIEW very many other features which are bound to interest her.

And so, let us in conclusion put forward a definition: What is a well-informed woman?—The woman who reads THE RAPID REVIEW.

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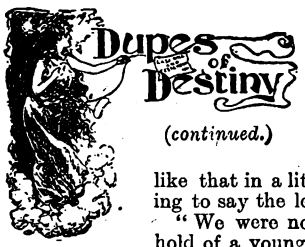

(continued.)

black beard in a louder key. "Now I must begin again. With that man loose, my own liberty and all I enjoy are in jeopardy. I came down here with Winter the moment your wire reached me. To fail like that in a little thing is infernally annoying to say the least."

"We were not to blame if you let us get hold of a young tiger for strenght," growled the other man. "The Vicar thought a clergyman would be as easy to manage as a kitten."

"Instead of which he found you as easy as kittens," sneered the other voice. "Well, he will now be on his guard and more difficult to trap—but trapped he must be. Is there a traitor among you lot at Water Grange?" he asked sharply.

"Only the 'Vicar's' girl. She's left to-day, though, to get work in London!" was the reply.

"Ah!" breathed the man with the black beard. "That's it, his handsome face has got round her, and she helped him to get off! The 'Vicar's' a fool for keeping her there!"

"If the 'Vicar' thought Lottie had betrayed him he would kill her," Boulter said savagely.

"It's too late to lock the stable door when the horse is stolen," snarled his companion. "Anyway, I shall be in town some days myself, and will watch for him. He will not return immediately to his curacy, but there is one house he may visit to get news of Marcella Rust. I will meet him there, I know." He laughed softly. "In the meantime be careful to notify me what happens—within a short time something is bound to be known. And, remember, you cannot be too careful. They have not dropped the search for the instigator of the 'Mona Lisa' deal. Leave no trail behind you that can be picked up, and be sure to stick to the signal, the sign of the"—here his voice was lowered again, and Philip was left in a maze of doubt and wonder as to who this black-bearded stranger could be, whose enmity he seemed to have also aroused.

They moved away, and he followed at a safe distance, then they parted—the man with the beard getting into a passing hansom, the other going on foot. Philip gazed after the hansom thoughtfully, until it was lost in the maze of traffic, then he started. He had reached the kerb where the bearded man had stopped the hansom, on the ground was a little piece of twisted paper. He stooped and picked it up curiously. It was a telegram; the part with the address was torn off, but the message was intact: "Bird flown—cage empty—no trace—send message in cipher.—Vicar."

"Phew!" Philip murmured, "so the 'Vicar' was waiting for orders, was he? I am glad I have seen his worthy colleague—I know a little of their movements. What's this?"—his foot had touched something on the ground, where he had seen the piece of paper. It was a coin of some sort. He looked at it closely in the dim light; it was strange that no one should have noticed the man with the beard drop it when he got into the hansom. As he looked he uttered an exclamation of surprise. The coin in his hand was a spade guinea!

"By Jove! What an odd sort of coin to be dropped at one's feet!" he muttered—then laughed. "It may bring me a slice of luck. I will throw it in the air and if it comes down with the shield up, I will chance everything and go to Marcella, in spite of her father's bitter enmity!" He threw the coin lightly in the air and caught it quickly. The shield was uppermost. Notwithstanding his disbelief in anything that depended on chance, he felt glad, in a happy, boyish way, that it had fallen as he had hoped.

"So be it!" he murmured. "I will go to-night. I shall find some means of seeing you, my darling love!"

He went back to his hotel, and there changed into his normal dress, putting the wig, eyebrows, beard, and moustache into his pocket. He felt that, once in the train, there would be no necessity for disguise until he left it, and no one would think of watching for him at Paddington; he knew that from what the bearded man had said. He took his ticket and was making for the refreshment room, when a slight touch on his arm roused him to a sudden regret that he had not kept up his disguise. He turned sharply to see a tall, beautifully-dressed woman standing beside him. Her face reminded him in a way of Marcella, and he looked at her with interest.

"I beg your pardon," he said politely, "did you wish to speak to me?"

She inclined her head, and then, speaking in a low, cautious voice, said: "You are Mr. Nullius—are you not?"

"I am," he answered slowly, wondering whether she were not also a decoy of the unknown enemy.

She saw the distrust in his eyes and coloured warmly.

"You have a right to suspect everyone, Mr. Nullius," she said softly, "but your distrust will go when I tell you that I am Marcella's aunt, Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox!" She had paused at her surname, remembering the new name she had had bestowed upon her by the millionaire, Caleb J. Johnson.

Philip's face brightened. "Lady Violet!" he exclaimed "How did you know me? I did not think you had ever seen me!"

"I saw you some time ago," she said quickly, then went on: "I came to the station to meet someone, and recognised you at once. How did you get away—tell me—was there danger?" she whispered anxiously.

He looked at her in surprise. How had Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox learnt that he had been lured to a den of rogues! She saw the expression on his face and said gently: "I guessed that you were in danger, Mr. Nullius, and found out, for Marcella's sake, where you were. I cannot tell you how I found out," she added, "but something told me that you were in danger—and—and I sent a—a friend to find you. Did anyone see you who came from me?" she said anxiously.

Philip shook his head. "No one seemed to be possessed with a great desire to help me," he said grimly, "with the exception of one person—but I am well out of it now, Lady Violet, and though I can't understand why I should be the object of so much attention, I fancy I shall not be annoyed again. I am going to Marcella."

"Going to Marcella," she echoed—her eyes flaming with a sudden light. "Thank God, Mr. Nullius, that you are! I hoped it was so, but waited until you mentioned it yourself. Promise me," she continued in a low, hurried whisper, "that, come what may, you will stay near Marcella always—don't be turned away; she wants you—your protection and love, more now than at any other period of her life. The danger that menaces Marcella is in the Court." She removed her hand from his arm, where she had placed it in her eagerness. "Good-bye, Mr. Nullius," she finished. "If you have any disguise, wear it. Don't go half way to meet danger; it is very near you now!"

She turned and moved away as abruptly as she had spoken to him, and as he took his seat in a first-class carriage, Philip found himself pondering over the words Lady Violet had breathed so earnestly into his ear. Danger at the Court! Danger for his beloved Marcella! Surely Sir Cyprian—then he paused, a man of Sir Cyprian's character would stick at nothing. He must be careful for Marcella's sake—he must not meet her father at the Court.

A sudden impulse caused him to lean out of the window of his carriage before the train started. He had quickly resumed his disguise, so feared no chance eye spotting him. On the platform he saw Lady Violet, and with her was a tall man, and as he saw the man more clearly, Philip gave an involuntary cry of amazement.

The man talking to Marcella's aunt was the same bearded stranger he had seen earlier in the evening with the man Boulter, and who had dropped a spade guinea on the pavement!

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

HANDWRITING DENOTES YOUR CHARACTER.

And if you wish to learn what this is send a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope, to Ranee, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. A reliable delineation of your character will be sent in return.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

"Natty" Men and Marriage.

"Do natty men make good husbands?" asks "PERPLEXED." "My young man is the neatest, tidiest man I ever knew, particularly about his personal appearance and dress. I should almost call him 'finicking.' I love him very dearly, but am rather afraid this quality of his may make him a tiresome husband."

* * * * *

I don't very much care for the "natty" man myself. From the wife's point of view, though, he should be pleasing, as he is unlikely to cause her extra work by untidiness, and may perhaps help her very much in keeping the house as it should be. But, in my experience, I find that "nattiness" does not, as a rule, last very long after marriage. Though a man may take no end of trouble about himself when he alone is in charge of matters, when he finds that there is a wife handy to do things, quite likely he falls off very considerably. In a year or two he may lose all that "finicking" way of his. How often is it that the neatest, sprucest single man becomes untidy and careless after marriage. So I do not think "PERPLEXED" and her beloved need think of separating on this trivial score, for things will probably turn out all right in the end.

Dressmaking and Married Life.

"SOPHIE" writes: "I am a business girl, and engaged to a clerk with a small salary. When we marry, would you advise me to help matters by taking in dressmaking—at which I am rather clever? I have asked other people about this, but they advise me not to, as they think it would interfere with my other household duties, and also, later on, with my care for any children we may have. I should very much like to know your opinion on the subject."

* * * * *

I should think your husband-to-be would be the best judge of the matter. If his means are really very slender, then what you might earn would perhaps help you both a great deal. Of course, it is quite true that dressmaking does interfere with a woman's home duties. If unable to keep a servant, too, she would soon find that the strain of housekeeping as well as dressmaking would break down her health. It would certainly interfere with her care of children. So, "SOPHIE" had better decide the matter with her *fiancé*. In any case, it is a very good thing to have such an accomplishment as dressmaking, if the family should in future be in any financial trouble. It would always keep the wolf from the door, if ever there should arise a case of urgent necessity.

Propose or Postpone?

"Q." sails for South America very shortly. While in Britain, he has, he thinks, fallen in love with a girl. He is not quite sure of feelings, but thinks if he knew her longer he would certainly be devoted to her, and she to him. Would I advise him, under the circumstances, to propose before going abroad, or to postpone it until he returns, say, two years hence. By that time he expects to have an assured business position, which he has not at present.

* * * * *

I advise "Q." not to propose. He is not, he says, sure of either his own or the girl's feelings, and to bind himself and her to an engagement during his two years' absence, would be unfair to both of them. Let him wait until he returns, though it is two years from now.

Two Eighteen-Year-Olds.

"Is a man in love if he does not, after fourteen months' courtship, take his sweetheart home to meet his family?" "ANXIOUS" asks this question, as her lover, while always talking of his love and their marriage, has not yet introduced her to his people. They are both eighteen.

* * * * *

He may quite possibly be very much in love. But a youth of eighteen might, quite naturally, be reluctant to take his sweetheart home. While I hope you will both continue to love each other, you are very young to talk of an engagement, and no doubt the reason he has not taken you home is that either his people are ignorant of your courtship, or opposed to it. Wait until you are both a little older before you think about marriage. When you are in a position to think of it, no doubt he will introduce you to his people.

The Casual Acquaintance.

"I TRAVELLED from Plymouth the other day," writes "W. E.," "and in the same carriage met a very charming young lady. I made some passing remark about opening the window, and as a result we got into conversation. By the time we reached our destination, we seemed to know all about each other, and to be very good friends. Now, what I wish to know is: Ought I to endeavour to resume her acquaintance? Or would that be resented by her as taking advantage of her? By-the-way, though she gave me no address or name, I think I could easily trace her again."

* * * * *

If the girl did not give you her name and address, and in any way hint that she wished to resume your acquaintance, of course it is not for you to make overtures. At the same time, if you think you could find her, it would not be a bad idea to try to meet her again by accident. Such things have been done by ardent lovers, times out of number. By-the-way, I happened to know some years ago of a similar case. The man was travelling in the same carriage as a girl, and they got very friendly. The man knew that he could not ask the girl her name and address outright, but he somehow managed to get it by other means. The girl was reading a certain book. The man, on seeing it, pretended that it was the one book he wished to read. At the end of the journey, the girl promised to lend it to him—giving her name and address for its return. When he sent the book back, he wrote a little note, which the girl answered. A correspondence sprung up, which led to meetings, and not a very great time elapsed before the two became engaged.

Cynthia

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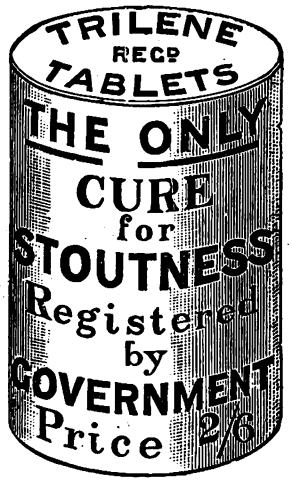

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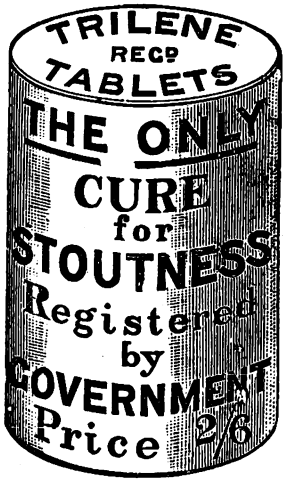

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SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.

"Yours faithfully, J. B. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Liatorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 8lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 29 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st. and do not get any heavier."

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Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets.

Miss JANE CARTER of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

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SHORT STORIES

No. 790.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending February 20th, 1904.

Her Desperate Venture.

The Tale of a Desecrated Ideal.

THE brilliant October morning, promising so much, had clouded over. Valerie Blanchard declined going for a walk; the wind did not improve her complexion at nine-and-twenty as it had at nineteen. She half envied insignificant Doris Norwood, who would come back all abloom like a wild rose, her bluish-grey eyes full of violet lights. Youth was charming, and there could be but one youth.

"I have a headache," she said, sharply.

"But it may cure your headache, and freshen you up a bit."

All such illusions, however innocently made, held a sting for her now.

"No, run along by yourself, Doris! I shall go to bed. It looks as if a storm might blow up."

"And a storm will spoil the foliage. I must see the hills once more in their glory."

Doris tripped down the wide lawn path bordered with chrysanthemums, with a wall of late dahlias at the back. Miss Blanchard went to her room. The grate fire was laid, and she touched a match to it. The apartment was soon in a glow. She did not go to bed, but dropped into a capacious arm-chair.

To-day was her birthday. Her cousin, Ellen Norwood, had forgotten, for which Valerie felt thankful. Just now she was at odds with the world, with life, with everything. A handsome woman, whose triumphant girlhood lay behind her, whose later triumphs were as nothing, now they had passed, and whose future——

She had come to this dull little Westborough to consider and decide it; to economise in purse and in strength, after a wearing summer campaign, and to make up her mind to marry Digby Kemp. He was old—past sixty—and there was much that was artificial about him. He was rich and luxurious, always travelled with a valet and a man, if he took his horses. Twenty years before he had buried his wife and his son. Since then he had been constantly in Society. He had a handsome town house, and gave elegant dinners to his lady friends, with some unexceptional matron to play propriety. Women had tried their utmost for him, and so far failed.

Miss Blanchard had not tried, but he had made her an urgent offer with generous settlements. At first she was quite incredulous, and suspected some ulterior motive. She was an elegant, well-trained Society woman, and when made up did not look a day over twenty-five—was indeed regal.

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She had been extravagant, and some losses had made rather startling inroads upon her capital. She did not like poverty. This little round in which her cousin lived would kill her. Of course it was restful, and just what she needed now.

Next year she would be thirty. Looking over that was like peering down a chasm. The best of single life would be gone. If she were not tall, stately and imperious, she would have been relegated to the wall ere this. So far she had held her own bravely. What did it all amount to? The flower of young marriageable men were not for her. There were widowers and somewhat *passé* bachelors—and love was at a discount. Did she care to be loved? Why, Digby Kemp was certain he loved her with the fervour of youth. How much of the fervour of middle life had he wasted on pretty actresses? Faugh!

She never said to herself she had been waiting a whole year for a sign, and that now her hope was like a little heap of grey ashes. Nothing could kindle the hope again; but the sting of the old love remained. Had she never met anyone equal to that youthful lover? Well, she had never loved anyone in that fashion since, though she had played with love, and more than one heart had been laid at her feet. She had tried to forget. Yet a year ago her pulses suddenly thrilled and the flame leapt up anew, at a few lines she saw in a paper. Yes, over a year she had waited. He had not married. She had read of men and women who had waited half a lifetime with no absolute promise between them. And this had been only ten years, ten fast-flying, delightful years.

Why could she not make up her mind to answer Mr. Kemp? She had pleaded for a month, and three weeks were gone already. It was time she was married. Here she could still be a queen in the fashionable world. What utter folly to hesitate!

The room grew warmer. A soft drowsiness pervaded her nerves and brain. Outside long, black drifts went scurrying across the sky, each one breaking into a gust of wind that racketed like a tornado, creaking and groaning through the trees, and sweeping up the falling leaves in great windrows. It was only a vague music floating through her sleepy senses. Then something roused her. A confusion of voices and sounds of hurrying, scraping feet in the wide porch startled her. She sprang to the window. The door opened, and there was a shriek. She hurried down the wide stairs, and stood in the hall dazed and speechless, as her eyes met those of the lover of her youth.

He was the first to recover.

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"I am answerable for a sad accident, I fear," he began in a grave tone of concern. "We have Miss Norwood—how much she is hurt we cannot tell. I have sent for the physician. We judged it best to bring her home at once——"

"Yes."

She stood like one in a dream. A tall, regal woman in the affluence of mature beauty, her complexion softened by the warmth and touch of slumber, her eyes dewy, her lips in beguiling scarlet curves; her white cashmere gown trailing around her in billowy softness, the lace open at the neck and showing her shapely throat; and her slim, fair hands dropped at her side.

"Where shall we take her?" said one of the bearers of the improvised stretcher.

"Oh! Yes—to her room, I think," rousing herself. "This way."

She preceded them upstairs, and opened the door of a large room that Doris shared with her mother. There was a wide Turkish couch, and they laid her on this.

"Her mother——" Boyd Jeffries began.

"Mrs. Norwood is out—attending some church meeting. Is she——" Miss Blanchard shuddered.

"She is unconscious. She was startled by the report of a gun, I judged, and a young tree she grasped for support gave way. She came crashing down at our feet. The shot was in another direction. There must have been a landslip some hours before; there was an accumulation of fresh earth we noticed as we were passing. You had better summon her mother," he said, authoritatively.

Miss Blanchard turned.

"Give me the message," said the man who had helped to bring her in. "It will be on my way."

Valerie Blanchard began to recover her presence of mind. With gentle touches she divested the girlish figure of its wrappings.

"There is a faint pulsation," remarked Jeffries. "What a sweet, innocent child's face! It looks like a bit of sculpture."

"She is hardly more than a child. I ought not to have let her go—at least I ought——"

Jeffries bit his lip and frowned unconsciously. Miss Blanchard was trying restoratives and chafing the dimpled hands, several shades browner than her own. There had been so much between these two, and yet he would rather have gone to the world's end than have met her, and she would gladly have gone to the world's end to meet him. It had come about by the purest accident; yet as they stood there they might better have been the veriest strangers with no past between them.

He could not go. The commonest politeness compelled him to remain and apologise for his unwitting share of the transaction; and his own interest in the result held him. For many minutes no word was spoken. All Miss Blanchard's delicate efforts were fruitless.

"You were out hunting?" she ventured presently. The silence seemed insupportable.

"Yes." Briefly, and without raising his eyes from Miss Norwood's face.

She hated the child bitterly. She had treated her with the rather contemptuous tender tolerance one gives to a pretty kitten. Did she recognise a possible rival? If this man had waited ten years and loved no other woman, must there not have been something—and now for this chit to come between! Valerie had never studied the face before. It was a rather short oval, with a low brow clustered about with bronze-brown tendrilly curls. The lids of the closed eyes were almost transparent, and defined the shape of the long eyeballs. They were edged with a long, silken fringe. A small, straight nose, lovely lips, and a rounded chin that sloped down to the white throat. An insignificant little thing she had considered her. Yet she was really beautiful with the budding sweetness of first youth.

"Are you staying at Westborough?" she asked after another silence.

He glanced up inquiringly. Whatever he had meant to say died away on his lips, and he merely answered, "Yes," again.

"He is bitterly resentful," she thought.

There was a diversion in the embarrassing interview, a swift rustle up the stairs, and Mrs. Norwood came flying in with a shriek as she threw herself beside the couch.

"No, she is not dead," he said. "Believe me, madam. As soon as the doctor comes——"

The carriage drove up. Jeffries ran down and held a few moments' conversation with him, briefly explaining the manner of the fall. She had struck on her shoulder on the soft earth, but what had happened in her downward descent they could not tell.

"I will wait here. You may need a steady hand if there are any bones broken. And I shall be anxious to hear the verdict."

Dr. Fields bowed. Jeffries paced up and down under the large trees. A fine, drizzling rain had set in. The air was chilly and penetrating, but the man's pulses hammered all his being to a strange white heat. He had come upon Valerie Blanchard utterly unprepared, and the resolves, the hatred, the contempt had almost died as he remembered his olden infatuation.

"I wonder why she has not married?" he said hoarsely to himself. "A woman like that does not go begging. There was the talk about the French marquis—the family was impoverished, to be sure, and old French castles are wanting in comforts. Ten years is a long while. She was just nineteen, I remember. She said she would wait. But she was engaged to Fessenden—that I am certain of. I wonder——"

He gnawed the end of his moustache, and drew his brows into a savage frown. Did any point of honour hold him? What an unfortunate episode to meet in this way! He had counted on seeing her someone's wife, if he saw her at all. And to find her the same, perhaps—no, not the same, after all these years.

It was quite dark when Dr. Fields came down.

"It is concussion of the brain and a dislocated shoulder. I cannot tell just yet, but I do not anticipate anything fatal. And the superb coolness and presence of mind of the girl staying with them is worth everything. I shall look in about nine this evening, but I do not count on any change. Jump in with me."

Jeffries sprang in and shivered as he settled himself. Then he exclaimed suddenly:

"But I thought——"

"They are best let alone for the present. The mother is almost wild. Miss Blanchard will do and say all that is necessary."

"I am taking you out of your way——"

"Not at all. I was going over to Kingswood when the man came. So I shall pass Old Place on my way."

"You are quite sure Miss Norwood——"

"There is every reason for hoping. She is young and her frame is elastic, but I am not sure that it is a sensible thing to go wandering about in dangerous places. They have been taking out sand, and the point above had caved in. The prospect is fine, and it is a favourite walk. There are some beautiful wild flowers. But its insecurity must be understood."

"I'll send some men out in the morning to render it less dangerous. Here we are at Old Place. Thank you."

Jeffries walked up the broad avenue lined with tall elms. There had been generations of Jeffries here. After newer homes had been built this had been termed "The Old Place," and finally the article had been dropped. For several years it had been in the care of a keeper while its owner was abroad. He had died at length, and during the past summer it had been opened and renovated by the heir, a nephew, who had passed some of his early years in its sheltering walls.

Valerie Blanchard came out at her very best in this sudden disaster. Society training had not been quite worthless, since it had given her steady nerves, and a kind of disciplined brain. She restrained Mrs. Norwood's passionate anxiety and frantic forebodings. She was soothing, really gentle, a kind of grand gentleness that held one in check. And now she was minded to make herself not only necessary but really admirable.

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Presently she brought up a dainty little tea, and in spite of Mrs. Norwood's indifference, she tempted her into sipping the tea and eating the toast.

"It will not do to waste your strength in the beginning," she said kindly.

Then they waited. Mrs. Norwood paced the floor until Valerie, with gentle insistence, drew a chair to a point where she could watch Doris, and be in range of the cheerful fire. She took up a book, but now and then said a comforting thing to the poor mother. And so the slow hours toiled on till the doctor came.

"She looks so like death," and Mrs. Norwood's voice quivered with fear.

"But she is not dead. Indeed, I trust she is a long way from it. Everything about her is more favourable than it was five hours ago. Will you remain with her through the night?"

This to Miss Blanchard.

"Oh! thank you!" she cried. "I would gladly suffer it all over again for that result."

"Most assuredly," with a slight inclination of the beautiful head, and eyes full of sympathy.

"When she wakes, answer her questions with no air of mystery, but do not let her waste her strength in talking. Fever may supervene—then she is to have this medicine. But if she is quiet, do not disturb her. To-morrow we may count confidently on a change—I do not really expect it before. But note the slightest variation in her. If she appears to be sinking, give her this." He touched the second phial.

Both women settled to their watch. Past midnight, Mrs. Norwood succumbed to the fatigue and anxiety and drowsed. Valerie seemed as if she would never sleep again. She was almost breathless with retrospection. She had been a little weak in that old time. She should have held him more securely! She might have known his uncle would relent, all the sooner, perhaps, if she had married him. But the certainty of poverty appalled her then. Now, as she thought her life over, it seemed rather singular that she had not married. Was there some curious interposition of Fate? It gave her a sense of exultation.

When the doctor came in the next morning, Valerie was curiously fresh, and evinced no trace of fatigue.

"She has moved of her own accord," Miss Blanchard announced. "Half an hour ago she opened her eyes."

"That is promising. Now I am going to dismiss you two ladies for an hour. Mrs. Norwood had better go to bed at once. You are a marvel," and Dr. Fields smiled. "But there will be more real nursing presently."

"Dissipation may have its wise purposes. I am quite used to being up at night," and Valerie gave him a half-deprecating, half-enchanting, look.

"Your steady nerves have been invaluable. But for you, I must have remained myself. The one most interested at such a crisis is the one least to be depended upon. I saw your courage. It speaks in every gesture. And one doesn't always meet it conjoined with ready sympathy. Go now, and get a little rest."

"I will be back in an hour," she said softly, with an appreciative deference that had found its way to more than one man's heart.

Valerie was as good as her word. The mother was asleep.

"She has spoken," said Dr. Fields, "though she does not remember what has occurred. She is not out of danger, but all the chances are in favour of her recovery."

Down the road a short distance he met Mr. Jeffries and announced the good tidings to him in a few words.

"It will be safe to call this afternoon," he said.

Valerie Blanchard stationed herself at the window, where she could watch the callers. Mrs. Norwood had risen, much refreshed. Luncheon was past, and the dull, rough sky showed signs of clearing. A few anxious inquiries were settled with messages. Then Mrs. Norwood went down to meet the rector's wife, and she was lingering in the porch when Jeffries walked up the path. Valerie frowned savagely. She had trusted to her woman's wit to manage this interview, and it had been snatched out of her very hands. How long it seemed! What were they talking about all this time?

Mrs. Norwood had praised her warmly. Boyd Jeffries had expressed his sincere regret for the accidental part he had taken in what might have proved a tragedy. He hoped to be allowed to send Miss Doris some choice fruit and flowers, and see her presently, when she could receive visitors.

"You will be most welcome at any time. And I cannot see that it was your fault, since you did not fire the shot."

"The old story of poor dog Tray," and he smiled. "I have never been especially fond of shooting innocent birds, and shall eschew such pastime in the future, I assure you."

"What a long call Mr. Jeffries made!" Valerie cried, rather impatiently, as Mrs. Norwood entered the room. "Was he duly penitent?"

"It was not his fault. And he has sent his men out to the woods to-day to take down the treacherous edge, though it is not absolutely his affair. He is really charming."

"You have known him—how long?"

"Why, I have not known him at all. Old Place has been

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shut up four or five years, and we have only been here three, you know. Last autumn Mr. Jeffries was brought here for burial, and there was some gossip about the young man—though he is thirty or past. There was some difficulty years ago—a love affair, I believe, and the young man quarrelled with his uncle, and went away. Later on they had some odd kind of encounter on the Continent, and became friends again, and he was devoted to his uncle after that. There is a great deal of property, I believe. The old gentleman was very rich. Old Place has been greatly improved. The Jeffries' estate consisted of a great deal of the river front, which is now very valuable, since Westborough has become a thriving town."

"And the girl who was the cause of the—whom the difference was about, I mean?"

"Oh, no one knows anything about her. She was quite a Society belle, I believe. I daresay she was married long ago."

Valerie Blanchard considered some moments.

"In such cases the woman—the girl—is often blamed. In this case—she has married no one. If he had listened to her, much of the trouble might have been averted."

"You knew her?" Mrs. Norwood ejaculated, in surprise. Then she studied her cousin intently.

"I knew her, yes. Both were very young. He was dependent upon his uncle, who, wisely enough, considered them too young to marry. She was willing to wait. He insisted on an immediate marriage, and that she should trust to his energy and industry. She saw that such a step would wreck his life at once, and perhaps break kindly relations with his uncle. So she withstood his eager pleading. He was irritated with her, quarrelled with his uncle, went abroad in some capacity, and for awhile was lost to sight. Then the difficulty with his uncle was made up. But the other——"

"Why, he owes her some reparation, surely!" cried Mrs. Norwood indignantly. "Has he never sought her out? Perhaps she would not receive him!"

"He has never made the slightest overture. Since old Mr. Jeffries' death he has been quite free, even if he felt himself bound by duty until then."

"Oh, the poor girl! Can you not do something for her, Valerie? He doesn't seem like a man who could be so cruel! And he must know that she has waited for him."

"You think I might—that I ought to try? There is an old proverb that 'It's ill-meddling with other people's love affairs.'"

"I shouldn't mind proverbs. Why, he ought to give her the opportunity to accept him, if she cared to. He might not know if she has remained single all these years. Yes, I should try"—and a soft flush of eagerness lighted Mrs. Norwood's face.

"Ellen, I beg of you to keep this secret, even from Doris. I am not sure I had a right to betray it. And I think—if I can find an opportunity——"

"Oh, you shall find that!" She smiled a little.

That afternoon Doris seemed to awake from a troubled sleep. She watched her mother for many seconds.

"Mamma!" faintly. "Is it you? Where have I been? I feel so strange and weak."

"Yes, dear. You have been ill. But you are better now, and will soon be well again."

Then Doris closed her eyes, and drowsed off to dreamless slumber.

For several days there was little alteration. Valerie was an indefatigable nurse. Dr. Fields sounded her praises enthusiastically, was indeed fascinated with her himself. Mrs. Norwood felt conscience-smitten that she had never known her worth before. Their paths had lain in such different directions. Mr. Norwood had been an engineer, and Mrs. Norwood's marriage had practically shut her out of the sphere in which she might have moved.

Her husband's death had reduced her to poverty, but soon after this an old aunt, whose favourite he had been, left all her fortune to Doris, charged with a life-right to the mother. This consisted of a pretty old-fashioned but substantial house, with two acres of land in lawn and garden, and some bank and railway stock. Several of her relatives had looked her up to congratulate her. She and Miss Blanchard had crossed each other's orbit accidentally, and Valerie had come to Westborough as a place of refuge while she was settling her future plans, though she put it down to a desire to find some quiet place in which to recruit. Now that she had heard Boyd Jeffries' brief story, she recalled the fact that his uncle, who had made such havoc with their youthful attachment, lived in a small manufacturing town. Had Fate interposed signally in her behalf?

It was comforting to think so. Yet the matter must be entirely taken into her own hands, she foresaw. She must make the first advances. He was in no haste to see her. He called every day, but never asked for her, and only twice entered the house. But Valerie Blanchard was wary and patient where she had an object to gain. She made herself attractive to the doctor by her womanly sweetness and intuitive knowledge or appreciation. And Mrs. Norwood was beginning to be strangely fascinated. She was the more ready to be generous because she fancied she had been unjust in her first impressions.

"I want you to see Mr. Jeffries," she said, one morning. "He knows what you have been to us in this time of trial, but he seems to think he has no right to take my time whilst Doris needs such close attention."

"You surely have not proposed to inflict me upon him as your substitute?" And Valerie gave a short laugh. "Cousin Ellen, let the matter come about naturally, or not at all. I may not be able to plead my friend's cause to any advantage. I certainly shall not injure it by dragging it in with undue haste or imprudence. When Doris is better he will wish to see her, and we can make acquaintance by degrees. I daresay he has seen enough of Society to be slightly *blasé*, and imagine that because he has known a few women he is entitled to judge all. That is a man's way. They seldom make any allowance."

"My dear Valerie, men are not the only sinners in this respect." Mrs. Norwood flushed a little and smiled in a beseeching fashion. "I have made a great mistake about you, and I sincerely beg your pardon. You are so different from all my impressions of you. I have looked upon you as a mere fashionable woman, caring for nothing but admiration, and—very unjustly, I think, rumour had given you the reputation of a coquette."

"Because I have not married, I suppose?" Miss Blanchard interrupted bitterly. "Cousin Ellen, how many men do you imagine have wanted to marry me for my handsome face? They are like moths in a flame. Did any of them take pains to learn whether I had any heart or not, any qualities that would make a satisfactory home? And if I longed for something better than mere appreciation of my beauty——"

Her voice broke a little, her eyes were lustrous with a certain dewiness.

"My dear Valerie!" Mrs. Norwood clasped her arms about her neck and kissed her warmly. "I am glad to have had this glimpse of your heart. No sister could have been more tender to Doris, and I had fancied she was rather tiresome to you."

"We change a little with years and experience. Fancy my trying to be as youthful and kittenish as Doris! Why, I should make a complete guy of myself. And if I tried to make her as worldly and experienced as my years give me the right to be, I should spoil her youthful charm. It would be cruel of me."

"Yes, I see," answered the mother.

"Doris must remain a sweet, innocent little maiden for years to come. Wisdom would crown her like a grandmother's hood. Between us there is quite a gulf." And Valerie laughed.

She had made a fast friend of Mrs. Norwood.

That day's post brought a letter from Mr. Kemp. Her month had expired. He made his excuse his anxiety about her health, but he was very importunate about her assent to his suit. He proposed visiting her at Westborough.

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She hesitated some time with the letter in her hand. It was too good a chance to lose. She had considered it in all its bearings. The Kemps were not a long-lived family. Out of seven or eight children, only two had gone past middle-life. Miss Kemp was nearing seventy and very frail. Her fortune would go to her two nieces, and render them quite heiresses. Two nephews had inherited their father's fortune. Digby Kemp could endow his wife with all his own, and as a widow she would be the envied of her sex. Was it worth while to throw away such an opportunity for a bit of old romance, and a man who had ceased to care for her?

Then her anger blazed up to white heat. She would make one effort to bring him to her feet, even if he rejected her. If Digby Kemp had asked her eighteen months ago, before she had heard the sequel of Boyd Jeffries' fortune! If some event had taken the opportunity out of her hands! But here it was staring her in the face, tempting her with the old passionate tenderness that she had never been quite able to efface.

She answered his letter with the most delicate discretion, making the most of her cousin's accident and the necessity of her further stay. To have him come now would be most inconvenient. He had only to be patient if he really cared for her. But it would be cruel to leave these relatives in their trouble and anxiety. She would write to him again.

A fortnight had elapsed before Doris was able to see visitors. Boyd Jeffries was certain Miss Blanchard would be present and he was not mistaken. For more than a fortnight he had heard her praises continually. Had he been mistaken in her? Had she changed? Had the worldly-wise girl developed into the sympathetic, tender woman?

Yet he could not rouse that old enthusiasm. Passion for her lay dead. The girl he had loved so ardently had existed only in his youthful fancy. His meeting her had surprised him, but no pulse thrilled with vivifying warmth. Dr. Fields might as well have talked of a statue.

So when he entered the room she sat at the head of the couch with a trifle of silk knitting in her hand, and their greeting was simply polite. Doris stretched out a soft hand, white enough now, and smiled.

"I have to thank you for all your beautiful flowers, and such grapes and peaches as I have never seen before. You have been very solicitous, mamma said. And you are not to blame yourself, for you were not the cause of the accident, since you did not fire the gun."

"That was a mere chance—a sort of quibble—since I was with the party, and had the same intent."

He sat down, still holding the hand whose pulse seemed to throb with a soft, warm rapidness that thrilled him.

"I should have been braver," and the pale rose lips curved with a half smile. "But the sound startled me, and I caught the sapling, never dreaming it was so near the edge. I think I must have leant against it a little, and over we both went. What might have happened if you had not been there——" And she shuddered. "I did not know of the landslip. I came up from the other side."

"Did your mother tell you that I had forsworn shooting round about here? It may do well enough for Western wilds or Northern forests. I think a man can find better pleasure than the exercise of cruelty to harmless birds."

"Oh, thank you!" she cried, raising her soft, gratified eyes to his. "I would gladly suffer it all over again for that result. It seems the one terror of autumn. I cannot bear to have them killed."

"It is your ring," she said. "I have kept it all these years."

Something in the sweet, innocent face touched him, took him back to the youth of faith and high endeavour that this other woman had come so near wrecking. What if he began his life over again? At two-and-thirty it was not too late.

The other deep eyes were watching him narrowly. They saw that old light dawn like a flash and then vanish. Another woman could call it into existence, a mere child! She could have strangled her in that instant's anger, so vexed she was that *her* charms had failed.

Mrs. Norwood had been arranging the flowers. She stood the table with its choice burden at the foot of the couch which was Doris' change by day.

"Oh, how lovely! Mr. Jeffries, you must be passionately fond of flowers. And there are Parma violets."

"Yes." He drew some out and laid them in her hand. "There was a large verandah at Old Place glassed in, and my man has made a delightful conservatory of it. It adjoins my library. When you have recovered, your mother must bring you over some day. There are a greenhouse and vinery besides. I have knocked about the world so much that a home of one's own seems good. And Westborough looks really picturesque to me, with the high-wooded range at the north, and the river winding in and out. Some of my early days were passed here, but I am afraid I thought it stupid then."

"Go on," said Doris in a quaint, persuasive fashion. "We have looked at the place so many times while it was shut up.

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And this summer it has blossomed into strange beauty. Tell me about the inside. It is a very old house, I believe ?"

Mrs. Norwood was curiously interested. With her kindly gratitude and tact she made the talk more general, appealing to Valerie now and then, who posed in her most seductive fashion while her heart was seething with rage. To play a second part—when she had been first with this man !

"I have stayed unconscionably," he declared an hour later. "If I have tired you or made you worse, Dr. Fields will forbid me the house." And he rose.

"You have not tired me. Why, I feel almost well," and she smiled mirthfully. "I have been spoilt by indulgence. Cousin Valerie and mamma have been so devoted !"

Jeffries came the next day and the next. As soon as Doris was able to be taken out he sent the carriage for the use of the ladies. Valerie would not go. She pleaded some important letters to write, and that done she indulged in a very unusual thing—a stroll through the woody edges of the hills. It was a solitary ramble.

Sometimes it seemed to her as if she should go quite mad with a sense of her own impotence. If Jeffries had shunned her, if now and then he had betrayed some consciousness of the past, a touch of embarrassment, an expression off guard ; but to her he was always the courteous gentleman whom she might have met for the first time on the day of the accident. She was more beautiful than ever. The rest had improved her in many ways. Could these magnificent charms make no impression on him ? They had parted in passionate anger ; now she could not rouse him to a hasty retort.

Was he in love with this silly, honest, unformed girl, fifteen years his junior ? What idiocy ! To spend his life and his fortune in a philanthropical effort to benefit this ugly manufacturing town—for now he was on a committee to consider a public library, and another looking to the erection of a home for old people. And he, in the prime of manhood, with a presence and the gifts of nature that would distinguish him in Society ! Why, even to save him from such a mental suicide would be worthy any woman's effort.

She used her arts to perfection. He neither sought her nor shunned her. He really enjoyed sensible, sincere, well-informed Mrs. Norwood, and began to take a hearty interest in her charities. Doris he treated like a little sister, with the delicate, indescribable touch that defined the lack of relationship. And so things progressed.

Summer came with flowers and sunshine. Valerie's old lover grew urgent. Time was flying on the fleetest of wings. She must take the matter in her own hands. For now she did not mean to relinquish him without an effort. She would render it difficult for him to banish all the remembrances of the past. She was desperate enough to make an appeal that no man of fine honour would resist, she imagined.

They had been invited over to Old Place to dine. They were to be sent for quite early that they might have time enough before dark to inspect the house and the curiosities brought from abroad.

Jeffries had announced this to a visitor staying in the house for a few days. He had said :

"Wait, Jack, and meet one of the most magnificent women you have ever seen. I think her destiny is to show the world what a royally beautiful woman can be. You can go back the day after."

"Is that all her destiny—to simply look beautiful for the world ?" and his friend gave a meaning smile.

"So far as I am concerned—yes."

"How has a place like this raised such a marvel ?"

"Oh, she is not a native ! She has been a London beauty."

"And what may be this wonder's name ? Have I heard of her ?"

"No doubt ; and met her as well. Miss Valerie Blanchard."

Jack Spencer gave a half-laughing whistle.

"Why, yes," he said, "though I only know her very slightly. But I believe she is to shine shortly in a new orbit. Somehow, last summer, she caught one of the matrimonial prizes. She is no 'chicken,' as you are aware, but one of the regal full-blown roses. She is to marry Digby Kemp, one of the many-times millionaires."

"She has been here two months or more. It cannot be a very ardent courtship."

"Oh, yes ; taking care of a sick cousin, who was half-killed, or something. Lovely devotion, and all that ! But the old man is tremendously hard hit, Jeffries. If she should play fast and loose with him it would nearly kill the poor fellow. I'll tell you, in confidence, how I come to know so much. Our firm does his legal business. He has been making some magnificent settlements on her, and has his will drafted, ready to sign on the wedding-day, or the night before, maybe. There are no near heirs who really need anything, so the old fellow can do it with a clear conscience. Why, I'm lucky to have a sight of her."

"The cousin will be here, too ; she has quite recovered. No bones were broken. It just missed being very serious. The young girl's mother is one of those nice, honest, sensible women who are born ladies. They have lived here some three or four years."

"I'll be glad to stay, Jeffries. I doubt if I shall ever get so near to regal magnificence again."

Boyd Jeffries went for them himself. It was a beautiful day, and the drive brought a wild-rose tint to Doris Norwood's cheeks and gave her a strange beauty.

Afterwards they rambled through the house and unearthed old curiosities, as well as modern treasures.

It was at the dinner that Jeffries first noted a ring on Valerie's finger. It was a small but fine diamond in an old-fashioned setting. It seemed rather odd to him. And at last the fortune she had been seeking all her life had come to her. What if he had cared for her all these years, and met her thus to lay his heart in the dust at her feet ? She would walk over it with her royal smile. Ah, well for him the old love was dead beyond recall, gone to dust and ashes—the love that had so nearly made a wreck of him.

It was a gay little dinner. Spencer was a rising young lawyer, and at his very best. The table was like a picture. Valerie Blanchard was a magnificent woman, but to-night Jeffries liked best the simple, honest little girl who had as yet kept, unspoilt, from the great world.

They had some music later on ; they strolled about, and Spencer took Doris off to explain a ghost chamber to her. Mrs. Norwood was busy with some engravings. Valerie sauntered out to the small conservatory with its glass dome, through which the stars looked down, and a small crescent of yellowish moon.

She held out her hand suddenly to Jeffries, and the long ray of the diamond flashed in his eyes.

"It is your ring," she said under her breath. "I have kept it all these years."

Jeffries started, and his breath for a moment left him. He seemed groping for possession of himself.

"All these years," she said proudly.

"It was folly." His voice was low and husky.

"A woman's folly, then. Men are sensible, and forget." She looked at him with dark, glittering eyes. "And sometimes they are merciful and forgive."

"You do not mean—you cannot mean—— "

She stood there proudly. He should interpret himself.

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He thought of the man loving her now, and having the utmost faith in her. He did not love her. He had no faith in her.

"That past is dead and done with," he made protest. "Do not recall it."

"You loved me then." She raised her seductive eyes; her scarlet lip quivered.

"Yes, I loved then. But you——"

"I preached patience," she interrupted. "If you had been willing to wait——"

"And deceive the man who loved me as only the best of fathers can love? No, I could not do that. He said, 'Tell this woman you are poor, with only your health and your energy to offer her, and she will reject you.' You did not quite reject me. You played with me, like the coquette you were. Perhaps you believed he might relent."

"Good Heavens! I loved you! Did I not offer to wait until you could take me?"

"And let him believe it was broken off! Take his love and his money and wait for him to die or something! No. I was too honest for that. I kept my faith in you and quarrelled with him, headstrong fool that I was. And then—you did not quite throw me over, but you gave me that three years' probation abroad, with no engagement, no promise of letters to live upon. And meanwhile you accepted Ralph Fessenden."

She turned pale at that.

"He pleaded so; I felt I had no right——"

"You might have recalled me if you were so conscientious. He lost his fortune, and you threw him over."

"No, it was not altogether that. There were other reasons. He went the swift road to destruction—there was a talk of his unsteadiness before. Why should I have ruined my own life——"

"Why hold out hopes at first? He died almost in the arms of a friend of mine, indebted to him for shelter, for decent burial. I will not tell you his dying words. Then my heart began to yearn for the other love I had thrown aside for you. I was a coward, and ashamed to ask for it. But he came to me in his great love and kindness——"

"And bound you never to forgive me?" she interrupted, passionately.

"No, I am quite free. He made no conditions. I took back my son's place thankfully, glad to make some amends for my wrong-headedness. Thank God for that comfort and pleasure!"

"It might all have been so different with you, and with me, if you had listened to reason. I, too, was young, and not over wise. And in my anger I did try to put others in your place. I never succeeded. Boyd, think of me with a little pity, a little tenderness. If you have been forgiven for what you did in anger and impatience, think how divine a thing forgiveness is, and be merciful."

She bowed her head towards him. She stretched out her hands. He had only to clasp her to his heart, and the old flood of love might return. Then he remembered the other man who was buying her.

"I forgive you," he said coldly. "But the old love is dead. Let it go with the past. If I were a richer man my money might make amends for the ghost I should bring to the feast. As it is——"

She looked at him for a moment as if she could kill him where he stood, if a deadly glance could kill. All this she had done for love of him! Was it love? If he had not proved his uncle's heir, he might have gone his way. Yet she hated to think of another woman rekindling the flame that she could not.

"Here is your ring," she said mockingly. "Doris Norwood has a plump finger; it may fit her."

He took it, and throwing it on the ground, crushed it under his heel.

Spencer and Doris entered from the hall, laughing, yet Doris looked a little pale and tired, but very sweet. What if he made that part of Valerie's prediction true? Was she not the sort of woman to make him happy?

"We must go home," said Mrs. Norwood. "It is late for you to be up, my child."

They all expressed their delight and satisfaction; but the drive home was strangely silent. Valerie went directly to her room. Her desperate venture had been of no avail. He had penetrated her inmost soul, and now she hated him.

Nearly noon of the next day a carriage drove up, and an elderly man alighted. From her window Valerie saw and recognised him. She had been packing, but she slipped into her prettiest gown, and sped downstairs, where he was awaiting her in the drawing-room.

"Forgive my impatience. I could not stay away." His voice was tremulous, his eyes eager. "I heard——"

"Did you hear I had stumbled over an old lover here?" in her silvery, half-teasing voice. "Well, that is true. When he was young and poor I fancied myself in love with him. Now he is older, richer, and I have seen him every day for three weeks. Do I look as if I meant to break your heart?" She held out both hands, and smiled beguilingly. "Did you bring me a ring?"

"The ring you would not wear before!" He began to fumble in his pocket.

"You may put it on now. There, you may take me home. Then—you may fix the wedding-day, and I promise the ghost of no old lover shall appear at the feast."

He clasped her in his arms in a transport of bliss.

Just before she left she sank a parting shaft into Mrs. Norwood's very soul. A month later she was Mrs. Digby Kemp, and on her way to Paris.

Boyd Jeffries felt the indescribable change in the pleasant friendship of the past month. He let it go for awhile until he had quite resolved upon the future. Then he spent an evening with Mrs. Norwood.

"Confess," he said, "that your coldness is due to a warning of Miss Blanchard's. You have heard her story, now hear mine, and judge between us. Then let me prove myself worthy of your friendship."

She was a good deal surprised and shocked at Valerie's duplicity. Or was it the desperation of love?

"She is very fascinating when she chooses, but I am thankful our ways lie apart," the elder woman said, gravely.

"She is better fitted for the life she has chosen," was the rejoinder.

Valerie Kemp was still abroad when she heard of Jeffries' marriage. She ground her heel in the soft rug as if she were gladly crushing the life out of something.

But the picture of Doris by the cheerful fire at Old Place, with her husband smiling down in her face, was the ghost at her feast.

Aubrey Leigh.

THE TERRIBLE Q.

CAPTAIN KETTLE—you remember his adventures in *Pearson's Magazine*—was an unpleasant person to meet if he wasn't in a good temper. But he was a perfect angel when compared with Don Q. This gentleman is a Spanish brigand, punctiliously polite, and consistently courteous: at the same time, he will gladly torture his captives to death if the fancy strikes him; or throw them over 500-foot precipices as an after-dinner amusement. He is like a vulture in appearance, and like a vulture, too, in rapacity. At the same time he can sometimes show the utmost unselfishness and chivalry. He's really a character worth knowing—so read his adventures—written by K. & Hesketh Prichard—in PEARSON'S MAGAZINE.

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- THE -
REVENGE OF BARBARA WALKER.

Telling of the Fearful Consequences of a Great Wrong.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

BARBARA WALKER, blooming with all the freshness of eighteen summers, sat curled up in the bay-window watching for the postman; her eyes were full of dreams, her mouth smiling, the whole picture suggestive of youth and happiness.

Half an hour later the picture was changed. A woman sat there, rigid, stricken with sudden age; the eyes were filled with a great despair, the mouth hopeless in its painful compression. Yet Barbara Walker had not exchanged her seat with anyone; the change had come to her, swift, sudden, and appalling.

The postman had given a letter into the outstretched hands of the young girl in the morning of light and love. The letter was opened and read, it fell from the nerveless hand of a woman matured by sudden and awful horror. Only another man faithless, another life blighted. Only the old story.

"DEAR FRIEND BARBARA," the letter began. Oh, Heavens! how like the keen cut of a sword that word *friend* goes to the heart when it takes the place of another dearer word.

"DEAR FRIEND BARBARA,—*I fear that you will be somewhat surprised and pained at what I feel compelled to write you. For many weeks I have been conscious of a growing change in my sentiments towards you. What I thought was love was only fancy—the result of association. Knowing this, I could never make you happy as my wife. Therefore, I trust you will give me my freedom, as I give you yours, and always think of me as your friend.* "HOWARD SNOW."

So the beautiful dream of a year that had filled a young life with the golden glory of a June sunrise was quenched in the blackness of a starless night.

Do you know what it is to see a great hope die? To have the happiness that makes all of life for you crushed with one blow from the hand of Fate? Do you know what it is to drop from noonday heights of joy to the depths of the darkest midnight? If you do, I need not try to tell you of the days and weeks that followed for Barbara Walker. If you do not, it would be useless for me to try; for only through experience, or close companionship with an awful sorrow, are we enabled to comprehend it.

And while she sat in the shadows, struggling with her stricken young heart, that knew not how to entertain the stranger, Pain, striving vainly to pierce the impenetrable gloom that shrouded her, a hundred miles away Howard Snow basked in the sunlight of another woman's smile.

He was not a cruel or a heartless man. But his better impulses, his sympathies, his regard for the feelings of others were all lost in an infatuation for another beautiful daughter of Eve.

Howard Snow was only twenty-three, and Helen Thomas was thirty; one of those women who ripen like a peach in the sun, and to whom mature years add only richer charms.

Rightly directed, her life might have been of rare usefulness and power, for she possessed that strong magnetic charm that sways the world.

But she used it only to draw men to her feet.

Howard Snow was the only desirable young man in the little village where she chanced to be spending a few months with a relative.

"He has the face of a Greek god," she said, "but it needs strong emotion to perfect it."

"He is engaged to a lovely girl, a fresh wild-rose of womanhood, who visited here last summer," said her relative.

"Is that so?" responded Helen, as she dropped her lashes. But she was most cordial and alluring when she next met Howard Snow.

It was an easy conquest. He was unused to women like Helen Thomas, and he did not know himself. She played upon the slumbering passions of his nature, and set his blood on fire by the soft touches of her caressing hands and the languor of her glances.

It was the old story of a young man's infatuation for a woman older than himself. It blinded his judgment and blunted his sense of right and wrong, and made him conscious of but one desire in life—to be free and under no obligations to any woman but his Helen. His bonds to Barbara Walker grew hateful, and she seemed to him a child, whose weakness would be a drag upon him always.

So he freed himself, and for a time was happy. Then his better nature awoke with a sudden shock. He spoke of marriage to Helen Thomas, and she laughed in his face.

"Marriage!" she said. "Why, you are only a boy! How can you think of so absurd a thing?"

And her laughter had the ring of scorn in it.

"A boy?" he answered. "Yes, I *was* a boy when I met you, and you were not content to let me remain so. You played upon me by every art in your power till you woke up the *man* in me. Now it demands its own, and you laugh at me. I did not know before that a woman could do a thing like this and not die of shame if she knew it.

"You have lessened my estimate of the sex, Miss Thomas, and no woman can do a crueller or baser thing than that. The upward growth and glory of the world depend upon man's estimate of woman. And you have lowered her standard in my sight. May God forgive you!"

Then he went his way, with a face that bore the marks of the "strong emotions" which Helen Thomas thought it needed to perfect it, and a heart that was bitter and cynical.

He thought of Barbara Walker with a strange tenderness, but with no idea of insulting her with any attempt at a renewal of old ties. He felt no love for her, in truth; only he felt his own baseness and lack of stability. She was to him like a child he had cruelly hurt, and he was filled with tender pity. For Helen he grew to feel only scorn. Her hold upon him had been solely physical, and when a man grows to notice that, the woman is sure to be scorned.

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He applied himself to his profession, and made a success of it. He grew rich, prosperous, popular with men, but feared by women, for his sarcasm was unsparing and his wit always two-edged. Yet marriageable women sought after him, for he had personal attractions, added to his wealth and influence, and seemed a desirable husband for an ambitious woman.

But he reached the age of thirty-five and was still free. And then he met Barbara Walker again.

Through all these years he had lost trace of her, and had heard nothing of her.

Now they met suddenly, and to him, at least, unexpectedly, at a formal dinner party, given by a prominent politician.

Howard Snow was presented to Miss Walker by the hostess, and requested to lead her into dinner. It was Barbara Walker! There was no mistaking the face and form he so well remembered, and yet what a change!

The nine years had but perfected the girlish graces that were pleasing of old, and lent the charm of dignity and elegance to what was once only sweetness and simplicity. The shy, modest manner had given place to a perfect self-possession, and rare conversational powers rendered her the star of the evening.

"It is a long time since we last met, Mr. Snow," she said, as they went to dinner. "I am pleased to know of the success and prosperity that have attended you during these years."

How quietly she spoke of their last meeting. He wondered if she remembered the parting—a lover's parting!

"I had lost all trace of you," he answered, "but am glad to find, as I do, that you have been well and happy. Your face denotes both. Where are your parents?"

"In Heaven I trust!" she said, softly. "They died eight years ago, and left me all alone. I had an uncle in America, and went to him, and have spent most of my time in travel since. A few months ago a longing seized upon me to see my own land and my old home again, so I came back."

Howard Snow scarcely left her side all the evening. She charmed him with her descriptions of scenery and chit-chat of foreign life.

"I would be glad to call," he said, as they parted. "Where can I find you?"

"In the house where we first met," she said, glancing up at him, with the old, shy look. "I am visiting the same friends."

He could not have described his sensations as he rang the bell the next day, and was ushered into the presence of that woman who was once his betrothed wife. Admiration, reverence, respect, and, it seemed to him, *love*, stirred together in his heart.

It was only one of many calls. She was so kind, so cordial, so entertaining. Her soul was too large to treasure any resentment against him for that old wrong.

Then by-and-by he grew to realise how he was loving this woman. Not the old love awakened, but a new love created—the one grand passion of his life.

Mentally, morally, and physically this woman ministered to him; her conversation charmed him, her moral atmosphere elevated him, and the touch of her hand electrified him. Surely a love like this was from Heaven, and must meet with some response. Still he hesitated, not daring to speak. But so strong grew the emotion, it overpowered him at length.

"God knows I feel my unworthiness," he said, "but I love you, Barbara, and I want you for my wife. I said the same words to you years ago, and failed you. I was only a weak boy then, swayed about by a designing woman. Now I am a man, knowing my own heart, and with all its intense, pent-up passion it cries out for you."

For a moment Barbara's face seemed glorified with light. Her cheeks glowed, her eyes enlarged, her breast heaved. She put both hands in his.

"I have never been content without you—not for one moment," she said. "Nothing filled my life so full that I did not feel the need of you, Harold."

Their marriage was arranged for three months later. She lingered until the last month, seemingly unwilling to separate from him, and then went back to her old home. It was occupied by tenants, but she wanted to make her preparations there, she said, as she had dreamt of doing so long ago.

And they were to be married in the village church by the old family rector.

"Let the old dream reach perfection in every detail at last," she said.

The little church was crowded when the day came. All in a sheen of white, Barbara stood before the altar, and felt her hand taken by the man who had discarded her years before.

"Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband?"

The old rector waited for the response. It came like the report of a pistol.

"*Never!* As he once rejected me, so now do I reject him!"

And she swept down the aisle, whiter than her robes, and left a gasping crowd of astonished people staring blankly after her.

Very calmly and very coldly Howard Snow passed down and out of the church. He went to the hotel where his luggage was left, and began to make preparations for departure by an early train. But his hands seemed paralysed, and strange lights danced before his eyes.

Before midnight he was in a raving delirium. The next morning they found him in a high fever, calling wildly on the name of Barbara, and reviling some woman he called Helen, who seemed pursuing him.

"He cannot live," the doctor said the next evening. "Will someone go and ask the woman who has done this cruel deed to come here for a moment? The sight of her may quiet him, perhaps."

But while he spoke she came in, her bridal white exchanged for funeral black, her long hair falling loose about her.

She glided to the bedside and put her hands on his face.

"Howard!" she called, in a trembling voice; "oh, my love, Howard, forgive me before you die."

But he fancied she was the woman Helen, and shrieked and grew so violent that they sent her from the room.

There was a week of wild delirium, and then a week of stupor, and then, like a pale wraith of her former self, she came slowly in and knelt beside him.

She put her wasted cheek beside his on the pillow, and the tears that had refused to flow fell slowly down, as she said:

"Oh, I thought revenge was sweet, but it is bitter, bitter, my love."

How long she knelt there she did not know, but suddenly she was startled by a sigh—a very ghost of a sigh, it seemed to her. She put her hand over the heart she had believed still for ever. It fluttered feebly.

"Oh, thank Heaven!" she cried, and fell unconscious.

An hour later she found herself in bed, and kindly cared for, and smiling faces all about her.

"He lives," they said. "Your touch brought him from the very gates of death."

A few weeks later a pallid bride, and a still more pallid groom, passed down the old church aisle, and out into the great world.

Somewhere they dwell to-day—happy, let us hope, since they had both so suffered in the past.

Stanley Hammond.

WHAT HANDWRITING WILL TELL.

It can tell you what sort of a person you are as regards disposition and many other points that it is as well to know. If you wish for this information, send a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope, to Ranfe, 32 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. You will receive in return an accurate delineation of your character, which will tell you what you wish to know.

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Splendid Series.

A Striking Series of Astonishing Revelations.

Told by the Decoy Herself.

OF WHOM YOU READ.

Vivienne D'Alton, the decoy. She, an innocent girl, unwittingly leads young gentlemen of good social standing to their ruin at the hands of her father.

Beverley D'Alton, who poses as a millionaire who has made his money by judicious speculation. He assumes to lavish great affection on his daughter, from whom he has been separated for many years.

Mrs. Sherwood. A florid person, who is introduced to Vivienne by her father as a great friend of her dead mother. She lives with the D'Altons, and requests Vivienne to call her "Aunt Flora," which the young girl reluctantly does.

Annchen. A lady's maid, whom Vivienne greatly detests. She seems to be on very familiar terms with Mrs. Sherwood and Mr. D'Alton.

SEVENTH EPISODE.

Mr. D'Alton Prevents Unpleasantness.

I used to have an idea, shared by a great section of humanity, that money was the cure of all evil. Nowadays my opinion is considerably modified, for I have seen for myself that, though wealth may mitigate many evils, it is not proof against sickness, domestic trouble, or sudden calamity, such as overtook me when poor Lady Windelmore expired before my eyes.

Of course there was any amount of help forthcoming immediately, but the end had come almost like lightning, and nobody considered that we could have done anything to postpone it.

My tears fell fast and copiously, for Lady Windelmore had already won my love, and for a time it was difficult to believe that she was really dead.

"She was quite well an hour ago," I sobbed. "She cannot be dead!"

My father's face wore the look of a man who is struggling with sudden grief, and even Aunt Flora, who was always jealous of her ladyship's presence in the house, was pale with the shock she had received. Her voice was very gentle, too, as she strove to convince me of the reality of my bereavement.

"My poor, dear child!" she murmured. "It is a terrible affair to have happened. But it's no use encouraging you to believe anything but the truth. Nothing on earth could ever bring the unfortunate lady back to life. But if she would only have heeded me, she might still have been alive and well, though of course I hardly expected her to take advice from me."

"And," added my father, virtually addressing himself to the two other doctors, who had just pronounced life to be quite extinct, "I feared this when I noticed how vigorously her ladyship attacked her lunch to-day."

"What do you mean?" was my sharp interjection. "How could advice from Aunt Flora have saved Lady Windelmore? And how could you tell that there was anything wrong with her at lunch? I'm sure she seemed to enjoy the meal heartily."

My father turned his eyes up to the ceiling; Mrs. Sherwood groaned aloud, and the two doctors looked significantly at each other.

"Yes, that's the crux of the mischief," said my father. "I never saw so small a person eat so much."

"Enormous!" added Aunt Flora. "It was an enormous meal."

I was about to protest that Lady Windelmore had eaten far less at lunch than the rest of us, when Dr. Spondan hastily observed, "Yes, Mr. D'Alton, it is only too evident that the poor lady died from syncope, brought on by eating too hearty a meal. What do you say, Dr. Arnold?"

"I agree with you *in toto*," was Dr. Arnold's response.

"Wouldn't it be more charitable to indorse Dr. Marshall's opinion that she suffered from unsuspected disease of the heart?" remonstrated my father in his gentlest manner. "You see, the unfortunate lady has relatives who would be needlessly pained by the bare, brutal truth."

"Exactly! I see no reason why we should be unnecessarily precise," agreed Dr. Arnold, and Dr. Spondan also nodded acquiescence.

"Of course," continued my father, "if you two gentlemen think there should be a *post mortem*, I must agree to it, though naturally such a course will be very painful to all concerned. However, I am willing to take your advice, irrespective of personal feeling, and, in addition to the cheque for a hundred pounds, which I hope Dr. Marshall and each of you will accept in payment for the trouble already incurred, I shall insist upon defraying any expense connected with the inquest."

"An inquest!" exclaimed Aunt Flora. "Why, it would ruin Vivienne's season!"

The idea horrified me also, but not from a selfish point of view. I was thinking of how Lady Windelmore herself would have endured anything rather than be the centre of notoriety. And, these being her principles when she was alive, why should they be violated when she could no longer help herself?

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Greatly to my relief the doctors seemed to take this view also. They were firmly convinced that there could be no doubt as to the cause of death, and the ultimate outcome of the sad affair was what we all hoped for.

The body was reverently removed to another room, to await the ministrations of the undertakers and their assistants. Then the doctors, each a hundred pounds richer, left the house, after certifying syncope to have been the cause of death, and the unpleasant prospect of an inquest no longer stared us in the face.

Nobody could have been more generous than my father. And nobody could have been more courteous to the relatives of the deceased lady than he was. Their rank was all that could be desired, but their income was totally inadequate for their position, and they were very favourably impressed by the tactful manner in which Mr. D'Alton relieved them of all pecuniary outlay in connection with the dowager's sudden demise.

They were also thankful to be spared the pain of an inquest, but there came a time when they must have wished they had had not been quite so ready to believe all that was told them.

It was so with me. But, meanwhile, I was still free from the dreadful suspicion which gradually forced itself upon my notice, and life seemed to move so swiftly that there was little time to bestow upon individual griefs. No sooner had my late chaperon's relatives removed the remains for interment, than my father and Aunt Flora seemed to think that I would suffer mental and physical harm if I were not kept constantly amused.

It had not been a *family* bereavement for us, so it was only considered necessary to make limited concessions to conventional restraint, and though one or two big receptions were postponed, my father insisted that I should be the centre of a constantly coming and going crowd of visitors.

Some of these alluded to the mysterious fate which had overtaken Mr. O'Connell, for the case had made a great sensation, and Scotland Yard was very keen in working up fresh clues. But nothing seemed to come of them, although my father himself went to Scotland Yard and gave all the information he could.

Somehow, I could never bring myself to talk of the tragedy at all, for I was haunted by a strange uneasiness whenever I thought of it. The sleepy, helpless face seemed to reproach me for having stood idly by while the dastardly cabman drove away, and time and again I tried to think what my father meant when he said, "Lose no time! You'll find all serene at the office."

And time after time I wondered if the police had traced any of the jewellery which I knew Mr. O'Connell to possess. Certainly he may have taken it to his rooms before he came on to our house. But I had persistent doubts on the subject, and could not help thinking that the diamonds were the direct cause of his death.

However, there was no mention of them in connection with the case, and Lady Windelmore, the only person besides myself who could have guessed the probably intended destination of the costly parure, was no longer able to give me her advice as to whether or not I ought to mention my knowledge.

"And after all," I thought eventually, "I do not suppose that I could do anything but harm by appearing to be familiar with Mr. O'Connell's movements and possessions. As for that speech to the cabman—well, I was excited and nervous, so I very likely misunderstood what I heard."

This solution of the worry helped to raise my spirits considerably, until a visit from Sophie Melrose made me wonder if Fate intended me to be always pursued by the shadow of tragedy.

* * * * *

Miss Melrose looked the picture of distress and burst into tears as soon as she saw me.

"I suppose you have heard of our trouble?" she asked, and, without giving me time to reply, she continued: "It is the most terrible thing, and the doctors say that it may last indefinitely, unless we can do something to rouse him."

Sobs made some of Sophie's words almost indistinct, but there was no mistaking the fact that she was in great grief, and I felt glad that there was nobody likely to interrupt our conversation before the poor girl had opened her heart to me fully.

My father never seemed to turn a deaf ear to applications for charity. But he was hardly a congenial recipient of a girl's confidences, and I thought it just as well that he was not at home just now.

Aunt Flora was indulging in a nap in her own room, so we were spared her flagrant insincerities, and I was able to devote myself entirely to the task of soothing my excited visitor.

"Now, dear, if you will tell me what has happened," I said, putting my arms comfortingly round her, and pillowing her head on my shoulder—"if you will tell me what has happened I shall know better what to say to you in return. At present I am quite in the dark."

"It is Alan," was the sorrowful answer. "He went out one afternoon last week, saying that he would probably dine with his old schoolfriend, Seymour Phillips, and that we were not to be surprised if he spent the night at his chambers. Knowing that they had only just discovered their mutual presence in London, we thought it quite natural that they should want to see a great deal of each other, and never worried until forty-eight hours passed away without any message from Alan. Then Mr. Phillips called at our house and it transpired that my brother had never gone to dine with him, as he had promised to do. Of course this put us all in a great state, and we communicated with the police at once, for we were afraid of foul play. But it was two days later before we discovered the poor boy's whereabouts. He was found wandering on Clapham Common in a most distressing state of mental collapse. He was hungry, weary and penniless. His memory was an absolute blank. He could recollect nobody nor anything, and it was only by comparing him with the description we had given of him to the police that his identity was discovered.

"We have him under a skilled brain specialist, who says that some terrible shock must have made his mind a blank, and the fact that not a card, or letter, or anything of value was left on him seems to prove that he has been in the hands of thieves. Oh, Miss D'Alton, if you could but see what a pitiful state my brother has been brought to, your heart would ache for him!"

My heart already ached for both Alan and his sisters, and I eagerly questioned Sophie concerning the strange calamity that had befallen them.

"Mr. Phillips is very good," she continued. "He immediately did his best to become acquainted with Alan's business affairs, so that they would not suffer while he was away. But, to all our amazement, it turns out that they could not be much worse. He has actually realised most of the fortune lately bequeathed to him, and no less than eighty thousand pounds seems to be missing. There is not the slightest clue to what has become of it, and the poor boy himself can tell us nothing concerning it. He does not recognise a single one of us. In fact, he doesn't even remember his own name!"

Sophie Melrose was evidently almost distracted. But her feelings were nothing to mine, for one awful dread was thrusting itself upon my notice. How was it that I seemed to be indirectly connected with a sequence of tragedies, concerning each one of which I possessed some knowledge which I

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dared not communicate ? And how was it that my thoughts at once flew to my father, as the one man who might be able to elucidate the mystery of the lost fortune.

Did I not hear young Alan tell him that he had realised all he could, and that he was prepared to immediately invest £80,000 in the New Barbary Land Development Co. ? Did I not hear him implore to be allowed to place it in my father's hands ? And did I not hear the latter consent to waive his own preferential rights in favour of Alan ?

" I shall go mad if I let my thoughts run that way ! " was my mental exclamation. " It is merely a coincidence, and very likely this happened some days after the interview I overheard."

" Tell me," I urged, and Sophie looked quite thankful when she saw how desperately interested I was in her story, " when did you see your brother last ? "

" It was Tuesday week, about three o'clock. He had been out all morning, on business, so he said, and was as bright while we were having luncheon as ever he was. There was nothing to indicate trouble of any sort."

Tuesday week ! That was the day he had the conversation with my father, and, if I dared but do so, I could tell Sophie that I had seen her brother two hours later than she did !

I was in a whirl of doubt and amazement, but my agitation was accepted as nothing more than the outcome of pity, and Sophie kissed me warmly as she whispered: " Vivienne, we centre all our hopes on you ! The specialist says that if we can suddenly confront Alan with someone he loves, he may instantly regain his lost memory, and then he will be able o explain all that is troubling us."

" Yes, I will come," was my answer. " And I pray that good may result from the visit. Annchen ! What are you doing here ? How dare you intrude without knocking ? "

How long Annchen had been in the room, I could not tell, for she had entered noiselessly, and stood within the doorway.

" Please, miss," she replied, without the slightest departure from her usual impassive manner, " I had just come in. I did knock, and thought you would have heard me."

" And now that you are here, what do you want ? "

" Please, miss, the master sent me to say that he would like you to come into the drawing-room. Mr. and Miss Greatham are there, and have inquired for you."

" Tell them that I am very sorry, but that I am unable to see anyone else just now. I am going out with Miss Melrose."

" Yes, miss," answered Annchen. Then she hastened off with her message. But before I could make my departure good, my father came to protest against my going out just then.

" My dear girl," he began, " I hope you do not mean to leave me to entertain your visitors ? Ah ! how do you do, Miss Melrose ? How is it that we have seen nothing of you for several days ? "

" Father," I hastily interposed, wishing to spare Sophie the pain of telling her story all over again, " Miss Melrose wants me to go home with her on a rather important errand."

" I'm very sorry, my dear, but I'm sure she will excuse you when I say that it is more important for you to remain at home this afternoon."

My father spoke as suavely as usual, but there was a determined gleam in his eye, and a firm set of his mouth, which gave me fully to understand that he did not intend to allow me my usual freedom, and I was very glad when Sophie interposed with the words :

" I should be very sorry to inconvenience you, Mr. D'Alton, and as you do not appear to be able to spare Vivienne just now, will you let her come to us to-morrow morning ? "

" With all my heart ! " was the prompt response. " Make whatever arrangements you like with each other, and a carriage shall be at your disposal. I suppose you really want to do a bit of shopping together. Ah, well, girls will be girls, and if they have money to spend, then let them spend it, say I."

We seemed to have no time to rectify my father's mistake, ere we were left alone with a final injunction for me to proceed to the drawing-room as quickly as I could. So Sophie departed immediately, and I, anything but pleased at being compelled to remain indoors, went to see what was the wonderful occasion that demanded my presence.

Claude Greatham welcomed me with a beaming smile, and Clarissa nodded pleasantly to me. Aunt Flora was in evidence, wearing a tea-gown of fearful colour and wonderful make. And my father was making himself agreeable.

" That's right, dear ! " he ejaculated as I entered the room. " We want you to preside at the tea-tray. Your aunt has hurt her wrist, so cannot touch the teapot. And, in any case, when I do happen to be at home in the afternoon, I like to receive my tea from you."

So that was all ! Fancy considering afternoon tea of more importance than helping to do an inestimable service to somebody else ! Worse still, fancy having to let Sophie go away without a cup of tea ! No wonder I felt vexed, but of course the Greathams couldn't help it, so I did not allow my vexation to show on the surface.

But though I tried my best to keep the ball of conversation rolling, without appearing to notice Claude Greatham's fast increasing infatuation for me, it soon became all too evident that he was falling deeper in love every minute, and that he only waited his opportunity to ask me to marry him.

Now Claude Greatham was a nice young fellow. But I knew that I could never feel anything warmer than friendship for him, so I was in one sense relieved when Clarissa, whose fortune equalled her brother's, broached the subject of investments, which nobody seemed able to resist doing after they had spent some time in my father's company.

As usual, he was kindness itself, but I did not quite hear the outcome of what was going to be done with a large sum of money which Clarissa Greatham wanted to place at better interest than she was already getting, for Mrs. Sherwood suddenly complained of faintness, and I was so frightened, remembering what had happened to Lady Windelmore, that I fell in with my father's suggestion that I should go at once with Aunt Flora to her own room.

Happily, the faintness did not last long. Indeed, I couldn't help wondering if it had been real or assumed, for there was no change of colour observable, such as generally accompanies an attack of the kind complained of. It also struck me as more than odd that my father, after compelling me to go into the drawing-room against my wish, should have dismissed me again without giving me the chance of being decently civil to the guests of whom he made such a fuss awhile ago.

One more thing occurred to me. I was evidently growing horribly suspicious, for I seemed to scent a deep motive in almost every trivial little detail that happened, and I was just reproaching myself to this effect when my doubts were reawakened with full vigour.

" You can go now, dear," said Aunt Flora, who was now lying down on a big Chesterfield in her sitting-room. " I don't think I shall come downstairs again, but there is no need to feel uneasy, Annchen will let you know if I have a relapse."

I was not sorry to receive my dismissal, although my pride was very much in arms at the idea of being spoken patronisingly to by Mrs. Sherwood, and I made no pretence of wanting to remain with her.

But I was altogether in a miserable humour, and was walking moodily out of Mrs. Sherwood's suite of rooms, when I espied a red-backed, morrocco-bound book which partially projected from behind a cushion on an armchair I had to pass.

Obeying an idle impulse, I thought I would see if the book would suffice to amuse me till it was time to dress for dinner, and, without being seen by Mrs. Sherwood, I quietly took it to my own room.

But my face turned cold with a strange dread when I saw what kind of a book it was that Mrs. Sherwood must have been studying diligently, for there were numerous pencilled notes in it, and it was impossible to avoid putting a sinister construction upon the ardent study of a book called " The Lives and Methods of Lucrezia Borgia and the Marchioness of Brinvilliers."

(Another instalment of this exciting series next week.)

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A Double Flirtation.

How a Girl was Foiled with her Own Weapon.

"WHAT! Going to leave a week before your time? What is the meaning of this hasty departure, Dick? Bert is coming this evening, you know, and I thought you were both looking forward to the pleasure of having a week together. I am perplexed, and I can't imagine what he will say!"

"Don't be offended, uncle!" cried Dick Atherton penitently. "I'm very sorry to go, but—well, I simply can't stand it!" he blurted forth hotly.

Mr. John Atherton looked at his brother's son with a searching gaze; his face hardened, and he placed his hand on the young fellow's shoulder with an affectionate pressure.

"I see what it is now, Dick!" he said gravely. "What an idiot I was not to foresee the danger. It's Dorothy Haldane. That girl is a heartless——"

"Don't call her that, Uncle Jack!" pleaded his nephew. "I suppose it was all my fault. She didn't ask me to fall in love with her, and I couldn't help doing so, and if I have burnt my wings in the flame, it is my fault, or the fault of human nature!"

"Fiddlesticks!" retorted John Atherton angrily. "That girl—that woman, I ought to say!—is a coquette; she lures the men and plays with their hearts. You are not the first who has been so dealt with, but it never occurred to me that you would fall under the spell. I was blind! Well, my boy, I am sorry for you, and I blame myself; but you will go away and forget! Don't do anything rash, mind! It wears off, Dick!"

The young fellow laughed mirthlessly, and left the room in order to see about packing his things. John Atherton seated himself in a chair placed sideways to the table, so that he could lie back and rest his elbow on the table in order to support his head. His face assumed an expression of painful reflection.

John Atherton was the youngest son of a large family, all of whom were dead except the two eldest, a brother and a sister. Thus it came about that this comparatively young man of thirty-one had nephews only nine or ten years his junior. It was rather curious to hear broad-shouldered Dick Atherton call this man "uncle."

John Atherton had been living in Wyckham for three years and a half; this was really the fourth summer he had passed in the place, and each year his two nephews had spent a week or two with him. All had gone well till this particular summer.

The ordinary aspect of Wyckham had been changed during the preceding autumn, when Mr. Haldane had rented a fine house in the little town; his daughter, Dorothy, had played a great part in the life of the place, and balls, parties, and amusement of all descriptions had increased greatly. The young men of Wyckham had raved about Dorothy Haldane; some of them had suffered in the flirtations, while others had played with the fire and received no more injury than Dorothy herself. John Atherton had never mixed much in Wyckham society, so most of this information had come to him from others. He was reserved, and shunned the company of other people to an extent which gained for him the epithet of "peculiar," yet all those who came in contact with him spoke highly of him. He was cultured, good-looking, and of a generous nature.

John Atherton had invited his "boys" to stay with him as usual, and it was not till Dick announced his intention of going at once that he awoke to the real position.

"I don't think that Dick will take it to heart very much!" he murmured, after several minutes of deep reflection. "His nature is not so deep. But Bert! If that girl fascinates him, it will serve him as it did me ten years ago! His mother and I resemble each other in disposition, and Bert takes after her. Heavens! what would be the result, and what would Sis think? What shall I do?"

He rose abruptly, and paced the room in agitation that seemed strange in one usually so calm and self-contained. Presently he re-seated himself with an expression of weariness.

"It would be foolish to wire him not to come; besides, he is probably on his way here now. If I warn him that may have just the reverse effect to that which I desire to obtain. I must watch and——"

The sentence remained unfinished, but there was an odd light in the dark brown eyes, and an expression of determination gradually overspread his grave countenance. Some fixed purpose had formed itself in his mind, and those who understood John Atherton knew that if he made up his mind to do a thing, he would do it.

A few hours later he was shaking hands heartily with Bert Allinson, and answering his inquiries concerning the non-appearance of Dick at the railway station.

"No, Bert, he is not ill. The fact is, he went away this morning! Oh, yes, I daresay you are surprised, but—well, perhaps I was wrong to say that he isn't ill; he *is* ill in a way! But jump in, and I will tell you as I drive you home!"

John Atherton was brief in his explanation; he told Bert that his cousin had fallen in love with a young lady of the neighbourhood, whom some people regarded as a flirt, and that Dick had fancied himself rather hard hit.

"I hope and believe that he will soon get over it, Bert! It is lucky for him, in this instance, that he does not feel quite so profoundly as you and I! Such an experience would be a calamity to us, and we should be careful how we let ourselves go!"

This was an indirect warning; he would not press it further, but turned the conversation.

Alas! John Atherton perceived, three days afterwards, that he had miscalculated the powers of Miss Dorothy Haldane, and his heart felt chilled with concern for his second nephew. His fists clenched involuntarily, and he muttered: "I must stop it!"

On the following day John Atherton surprised Bert by saying that he intended to accompany him on the excursion organised by Mr. Haldane, and take part in the picnic.

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"I have not been invited formally," he remarked easily, "but that is probably because Mr. Haldane has grown tired of sending me invitations which I have declined. I fancy that I shall not be in the way!"

"I am sure you will not!" declared Bert warmly. "Why, Dor—— Miss Haldane was saying only yesterday, that it was such a pity that you were so—that you did not come out more, you know!" Bert became confused.

"That was very kind of her!" observed John Atherton gratefully. "Yes, I think I must come out of my shell more! It may do me good."

To himself he said: "So she takes a little interest in me, eh? That is because I have taken no interest in her hitherto! Well, that gives me a start, anyhow, and it helps my plans!"

"What in the name of Fortune is going to happen?" That was the question which all Wyckham asked when it became known that the recluse was coming out of his cave.

John Atherton was actually joining in the life of the town in the heartiest of fashions, and everybody agreed that Wyckham had lost something during the preceding three years and a half. Unquestionably, Atherton was an acquisition; for, although there was a certain gravity which seemed to be part of the man, he was excellent company and a perfect cavalier.

Then people began to cast knowing glances at one another and to utter enigmatic expressions; the younger men occasionally scowled, while the marriageable ladies of all ages looked disconsolate and envious. The reason for this was clear; John Atherton and Dorothy Haldane were so often together!

It was with some astonishment, not unmingled with contempt, that Bert Allinson noticed the change which came over both John Atherton and Dorothy Haldane; he could not understand why the former should so completely alter his mode of living and oust him from the place of favour with Dorothy—for that is what actually occurred; nor could he comprehend, at first, why the girl who had appeared so coy, so pleased at his attentions, should so readily transfer her smiles to his uncle.

Fortunately, he was not stabbed as yet by Cupid's dart, only just superficially scratched, and he was able to turn to other attractions very readily. Nevertheless, there was still enough influence to make him linger round the flame sufficiently to render it plain that he would approach close to it again as soon as there was an opportunity. It was this opportunity which John Atherton's new mode of life effectually prevented from arising.

It was amusing to the onlookers to witness the assiduity with which John Atherton, grave, retiring Atherton, danced attendance on Miss Haldane. She was highly gratified at this forthcoming conquest; it was a distinct triumph to have brought this recluse into the daylight, and caused him to fall a victim to her charms!

Life in the little township was more free from the conventionalities than in less sleepy places, so it was nothing out of the way for Atherton to be seen bicycling, boating or golfing, with Miss Haldane.

"Is that your nephew in the distance?" asked Dorothy lazily, as the boat glided along the sluggish river one day, a fortnight or so after Bert's arrival. Atherton was rowing easily, while she was doing all the steering that was required, which was not much. "He isn't a bad sort of a boy, is he?"

"No," returned Atherton, just as lazily. "He is not quite so impressionable as Dick, is he? You remember Dick, of course?"

A slight colour tinged her cheeks. Atherton was glancing at the figure of Bert Allinson in the distance, so Dorothy's sharp glance failed to catch his eye.

"One cannot always go by appearances, Mr. Atherton. People who are apparently reserved, are often the most impressionable!" she was goaded to retort.

"Meaning me?" he said quietly, but facing her abruptly. "It depends on the source from which the impression comes. Don't you think so, Miss Haldane?"

"Perhaps!" was the confused reply. She had not anticipated this deliberate thrust; it was not often that she was taken unawares, and she was annoyed with herself for having shown her sentiments so plainly. Yet her heart beat a trifle more rapidly!

"Perhaps?" he repeated, raising his eyebrows slightly. "I think that it must be so. Now confess. You found your darts—your charms, that is—less powerful in the case of Bert than in that of his cousin, but it does not follow that the different result is due to the different nature of the one to be impressed. I should say that the two young men were much alike in that respect."

The flush deepened on Dorothy's cheeks. She understood that he was surreptitiously quizzing her. She realised that he knew that she had coquetted with Dick and had tried the same amusement with Bert, but had failed.

Her vanity was wounded; she cast about her for some scheme of retaliation, and she resolved upon the only one left to her. She would humble this man; then, if Bert Allinson remained long enough, she would attract him once more to her side. It would be useless to throw over John Atherton now and smile upon his nephew; she had coquetted longer with this grave man than with the younger, and this would, indeed, be counted a failure! In the other affair it would be assumed that she had not considered him worth powder and shot!

"Oh, dear," she sighed, with apparent density of mind, "I am afraid I cannot follow such learned reasoning, Mr. Atherton! I always get out of my depth when I attempt to argue, and I find myself arguing against my own cause. Let us talk of something more congenial."

From that moment, Dorothy set to work to reduce Atherton to capitulation; she used every artifice to capture his heart, and, to her great joy, she found him yielding.

He was more constant than ever in his attendance, his tones were more caressing, his actions more ardent. In the intoxication of success, she cared nothing for the fact that time was flying and Bert Allinson's stay was nearly over. She did not care for that now; she had conquered the man who had chaffed her and called her unsuccessful, when she had not tried. It was not fair, and she would make him confess his injustice.

She had at first asked herself why he had said that; she had puzzled over it, but his subsequent actions had elucidated the mystery. It was the blundering artifice of a man unaccustomed to society; he had desired to know if she had really cared for others, if her heart were still free. Had she really responded to his attentions because she wished to have them, or was she playing with him in order to bring about more ardent wooing on the part of another?

Dorothy laughed joyously as this solution presented itself to her—she laughed again when certain words let fall by him had confirmed her in this opinion. She had vaguely wondered—absurd idea!—if he had tried to flirt with her for some purpose; but that was so unlike grave John Atherton.

They were cycling together to a bicycle meet some ten miles from Wyckham. It was a glorious day and the meet was to be a grand affair. The weather was exhilarating, the ride and the prospect of pleasure were exciting. Dorothy's eyes sparkled and her breast heaved; she knew from her

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experience that a proposal was the most probable thing in the world on such an occasion, and that it might come at any moment. Triumph was at hand!

The time went by, however, and no declaration came from the lips of John Atherton. The meet was a grand success, and all who took part appeared to enjoy it thoroughly, with the possible exception of the one who, in the usual course of things, would have derived the greatest pleasure from it. Dorothy Haldane grew pensive as the hours passed and wondered what had put things out of joint.

To make matters worse, Bert Allinson seemed to be having a very good time with a modest member of the party who was undoubtedly happy to be with him. There was no mistaking the meaning of the glances and whispered conversations which passed between the two. Dorothy bit her lip, and waited for her own cavalier to speak the words which she had been expecting to hear.

The homeward journey by twilight raised her drooping spirits, and she became almost hysterically gay when Atherton suggested a rest on a rustic bench in a deserted part of their route.

"This has been a pleasant day, Miss Haldane; in fact, I have spent several agreeable days lately. I am afraid that this will be the last. My nephew goes home to-morrow, and I must return to my studies. I came out of my seclusion in order to protect him from danger, but my mission is ended. I think I have kept him safe."

An icy chill struck Dorothy's heart, and she had hard work to repress a moan of pain. Her face paled, and she was glad indeed that it was too dark for Atherton to observe it.

"You mean——?" she began, the words coming almost unconsciously from her lips. She hesitated.

"We may as well be plain with one another, Miss Haldane," he replied, somewhat coldly. "I am quite sure that we understand each other. You were flirting with Bert, and I had no desire to see him suffer. With you, it is play; with him, as with most men, it is different. I thought that I could provide you with the amusement which you wanted in that direction, so I stepped into the breach and took Bert's place. He did not like it at first, and I nearly spoilt the plan by twitting you while in the boat."

"You flirted with me?" inquired Dorothy, in a hollow voice.

"Well, I suppose that is what it comes to. I did the same as yourself. We were both flirting, you and I, and we knew it; there was never any doubt in either your mind or mine concerning the fact. You will not suffer in the eyes of the public, for my return to seclusion will be regarded as evidence that I have proposed and been rejected. I do not mind. I have provided you with amusement, and I have saved Bert from a big heartache. Silly fellow! He was not capable of grasping the fact that you did not want him. Shall we mount again now?"

They continued their return journey in silence, and they parted gravely outside Mr. Haldane's residence. On reaching her own room, Dorothy threw herself on the bed with a joyless laugh.

"So that is how it feels to be flirted with and cast aside," she moaned. "I did not know that it was so hard to bear! It is a bitter lesson, but I deserved it. Only—only lately it was not a flirtation on my side. I know now that it was real." And she sobbed hysterically.

"The Haldanes gone!" ejaculated John Atherton some weeks after that bicycle meet. He had not seen Dorothy since. He sat back in the chair and looked graver than usual. "It was a lesson for her, but I wonder—— No, I cannot think so; it is altogether unlikely! I felt the effects of that playing with fire myself. Did she? I hope not, at least. I had no wish, no intention, of inflicting pain on her, although she had done it to others. No, it is only a foolish fancy of mine, so let it pass. But no more of that dangerous sport for me, not even to spare my own kith and kin!"

H. Bramley.

A Surprise for All.

The competition which will be announced in a now very early number of this paper will be one that will come as a surprise to you all. It is an absolutely new idea; nothing of the sort has ever before been published. It has nothing to do with hidden treasure, picture puzzles, or any other time-honoured subject. It is of a perfectly unique description, and will be of enthralling interest to all those (and they should be legion) who enter it. Don't think for a moment that the competition will be too abstruse for him, for the beauty of the whole idea is that everyone has an equal opportunity, whatever may be his walk in life. It will form a most fascinating, as well as instructive, occupation, for the long evenings, and the magnificent cash prizes offered will amply repay the winners for the time and trouble they have spent in complying with the details of the competition. Tell your friends about it, and get them to enter if you can. Remember that in a week or so's time full particulars of the scheme will be published in this paper.

A Curious Coincidence.

"Dora" writes me a long letter in which she says that she was very much interested in our Seventh Unsolved Love Problem, which was entitled "The Engagement of Edith Sargeant," as the case was an exact parallel to her own love experience. Edith Sargeant, it will be remembered, was in an unenviable dilemma. She had pledged herself to a Bishop whom she really did not love, because she thought the man for whom she had an affection did not return it. Afterwards this latter showed that Edith was very dear to him. What should she do?

Well, "Dora" was in a like predicament. She, however, took the course of marrying the one she loved. Her elderly *fiancé* was much hurt at first, but he very soon saw that "Dora" was very much happier with her husband than she could possibly have been with him, so, being a just man, he was glad that Dora had not married him, though it had broken his heart.

I am very pleased to hear that "Dora's" married life is such a happy one, and I thank her for telling me of her love history. May the love affairs of all my readers end in so lovely a way as Dora's has done!

The Ninth Love Problem.

The Ninth Unsolved Love Problem will probably appear in the next number, and I consider it to be one of the most interesting in the series. A guinea will be offered in connection with it as usual. I am very busy now reading the replies to the Eighth Problem, and in the number after next I hope to announce the winner.

Your Editor.

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PAT KELLY'S RING.

The Story of an Adventure that ended as it should.

It was one of those uncertain days, showery and sunny at once, which make the skies of Ireland so like the emotional faces of her daughters. A party of wanderers touring in the Emerald Isle had been deluded into giving up their trip to the lakes and other places of interest in the neighbourhood, until the weather should be more propitious, and were not in the best of humour at the delay.

The prospect of a whole day in the dull little inn at Kenmare was not cheerful, and Mr. Fielding and his maiden sister, their niece, Gladys Fenwick, and Philip Dacre, a student cousin, expressed their complaints forcibly.

"It is too bad that Phil's last day with us should be spoilt," said Mr. Fielding.

"Couldn't you stay another day, Phil, for Muckross Abbey?"

"Impossible. I must be in Dublin to-morrow, or I shall miss that examination, and I wouldn't fail in that for all the ruins on the island."

The malcontents stared out of the windows grimly as the rain began to patter down again, and took what satisfaction they could in watching the fresh-cheeked old women with bobbing white cap-frills and long blue cloaks, and little donkeys dragging big carts in the street below.

A shield, representing a golden lion crowned, hanging over the doorway, led the conversation quite naturally to the subject of heraldry.

"That is an odd seal you have upon your watch-chain, Uncle George," said Gladys. "I never noticed it before; an owl holding a lizard in its claws."

"It is a quaint device, of which I never heard the meaning; it belonged to my wife's mother."

"Fitzgerald's crest is a monkey's head," said Philip.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Miss Fielding; "crests always take their origin from a brave deed of some remote ancestor, expressed allegorically or any way one fancies. What valiant suggestion could there be in a monkey? You are trying to impose on us, Phil, but we are not so gullible as you think. Are we, Gladys?"

"I certainly should not feel proud of a monkey upon my escutcheon," said Gladys, with her lovely smile; "but I suppose my opinion in such a grave matter is worth very little."

"I wish Fitzgerald were here; he could show you a ring of his, and explain why a monkey's face figures upon it, you incredulous pair."

With this, Philip discreetly left the room.

At dinner the young gentleman began again.

"Wasn't it odd, I met Fitzgerald in the coffee-room here, half an hour ago! He is invited to a ball at Mount Edgecombe this evening and is staying here to-night. I was sorry I did not know sooner of his arrival, as I might have introduced him to you. He is a very nice fellow, and I should have liked you to know him, but it is too late now, as we all disperse to-morrow morning. I only mentioned to him casually that I was here with friends."

"A great pity," said Gladys, "I should like to know Mr. Fitzgerald."

"By the way," continued Philip, "I asked him how his crest happened to be a monkey's head."

"That was thoughtful of you."

"He said that many generations ago, one of the Fitzgeralds, an only son, was sleeping unguarded in his cradle. A fire broke out and spread with great rapidity, so that all approach to the infant was cut off by the flames. No one dared go to the rescue, until a pet monkey of one of the daughters of the house was seen at an open window of the burning building with the baby clasped in its arms. The clever beast clambered down the steep wall by means of the luxuriant ivy, and with a chuckle of delight, restored the baby unharmed to the arms of its agonised mother. Since that time Jacko has figured upon the Fitzgeralds' coat-of-arms. Deservedly too, I think."

"All honour to Jacko! I am sorry I spoke disrespectfully of him," said Miss Fielding.

"I borrowed Fitzgerald's ring to show you. It is as curious as it is valuable."

The trio peered over Philip's shoulder at the ring—a sardonyx, on which was cut in relief, with consummate skill, the crest of the Fitzgeralds—a monkey's head.

"The workmanship is wonderful," said Mr. Fielding. "Any museum would be proud of such a cameo. I almost envy the owner his treasure."

"The stone is an ugly colour," Gladys remarked, slipping the ring upon her dainty finger; "but I like the gold griffin's claws holding it in place. It is a novel idea."

"Thank you for showing it to us, Philip. Be sure you give it back safely to Mr. Fitzgerald, or he will revile our memory for ever afterwards. Such a treasure as that is not easily replaced."

Early the next morning Philip Dacre took his departure for Dublin, the remainder of the party intending to start on their excursion a few hours later.

Through the half-drawn blinds of his room at the "Kenmare Arms" Hugh Fitzgerald was the unsuspected observer of a very pleasing little scene about breakfast time. A bewitchingly pretty girl, with reddish-brown hair curling low about her forehead, and hanging far below her waist in a rich plait, sweet violet eyes, and the daintiest of figures, in a neat-fitting travelling dress, came out upon a balcony within range of Fitzgerald's windows, and began friendly overtures with a flock of pigeons in the court below.

The pigeons responded willingly enough—it would indeed be a low order of creation that would give no heed when Gladys Fenwick called—and began an eager fight for the supply of crumbs generously showered from the girl's pink-and-white fingers.

"She will have no breakfast left for herself if she feeds those cormorants at such a rate," soliloquised Fitzgerald. "Who is she, I wonder? Of all the pretty faces I saw at the ball last night, every one pales before hers. Can she be one of Dacre's party? I am sure he would have mentioned the existence of this lovely little girl if he had known her! Stupid of me not to ask who his friends were before he went."

As the pigeons devoured the last handful someone called, "Gladys, there is no time to lose!" and the girl disappeared.

Mr. Fitzgerald sauntered down to the coffee-room to glean what information he could regarding the guests at the "Kenmare Arms," but the report given him was vague and unsatisfactory.

There were races in the neighbourhood, and the hotel was full to overflowing, and the host was content if he found shelter

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for his guests, without knowing their names or destinations.

"The gentleman who went away early this morning came with Sir William Bancroft and his wife, from Tralee," said a porter, in answer to Fitzgerald's question.

"Ooh, Teddy, what are you thinking of? The young gentleman came with a grey-haired lady and two little girls."

"Young gintleman, is it? He was old as the parish priest, and came alone," said a third disdainfully.

Fitzgerald turned away in despair, and betook himself to the stables to look after the welfare of his horse, and, inquiring of a certain dignitary of that department, called Rowley, was shown into an apology for a bedroom to wait.

Rowley's bower was at one end of the stables occupied by the omnibus horses, and, in its furnishing, showed the occupant to be of very jovial tastes. An old fiddle hung upon the wall, along with highly-coloured pictures. Generous-looking beer-mugs and huge pipes were tumbled helter-skelter upon a shelf, and in one corner were a gay costume and a shabby brown wig, which had evidently figured at a masked ball.

An animated discussion began outside, and Fitzgerald, leaning through the window, gathered the facts of the case.

Patsey Kelly, the only man left to drive the jaunting-car, had been to the races, and was in such an exalted state as to be quite unfit to trust with the horse. A party of tourists had engaged the cart to go to Muckross Abbey that morning, and would be angry if anything happened, as they had been disappointed the day before by the rain.

"Who are the people?" Fitzgerald asked of the despairing landlord, who had appeared on the scene.

"A gentleman and two ladies. One of them as pretty as a picture, with a long plait of hair of the colour of the chestnut over there, and bonnie blue eyes that reminded me of my own girl's. She told me in such a friendly way about her pleasure at the prospect of seeing the Abbey, and the other sights about here, I hate to have her disappointed. Bless her heart! I would drive her there myself if it wasn't for rheumatism in my old arms. Confound that scamp Kelly! There is not another man about the place that I can send."

"If you will lend me an old coat and hat, I will drive the car myself," said Fitzgerald, coming forward. "It must be an unruly horse, indeed, that I cannot manage, and I should like the fun of the thing."

"Do you really mean it?" said the landlord, a look of intense relief lighting his face.

"Certainly, I do."

"There is an old suit of clothes my son wears fishing, hanging in Rowley's room. You are about Fred's height; if you would not scorn them, they are at your service."

Hugh Fitzgerald, an erect, handsome fair fellow of twenty-four with a look about him that proclaimed the gentleman wherever he went, vanished into Rowley's sanctum, from which he shortly reappeared completely altered.

In the shabby, ill-fitting clothes of the inn-keeper's son, his figure seemed to lose all its dignity and grace, and the wig belonging to the fancy costume, surmounted by a battered old hat, made him quite unrecognisable. He had browned his hands with some nut hulls lying in a corner, and only his neatly-fitting boots, which he hoped would pass unnoticed, betrayed the gentleman.

"Ha, ha, ha! you will do capitally," said the old inn-keeper, his fat sides shaking with laughter. "Bring my guests safe home to-night and you shall have an extra half-crown for yourself. Ha, ha, ha!"

The escapade was quite to Fitzgerald's fancy; instead of for ever losing sight of the pretty girl who had so bewitched him, he would be with her all day, even though it were only in Patsey Kelly's humble capacity; he would probably find out whither she was going, and could perhaps meet her again under circumstances more favourable for acquaintance.

As he put the fruit into Gladys' hand, three pairs of eyes lighted upon the beautiful ring on his finger.

"Stop a moment. I had better take off my ring. It might look suspicious," said Fitzgerald, tugging at his seal-ring which was rather tight.

"Kelly, make haste, you rascal! the ladies are waiting," called a peremptory voice from the door.

"Bother the ring! I can't get it off! But I have a shabby pair of gloves in my pocket which will do instead."

Five minutes later the curious, tilting jaunting car, with its seat on each side arranged so that the occupants sat back to back, with their feet propped only on a little shelf which made jumping off upon the road almost irresistible, its two wheels, one horse and seat for the driver in front, drew up with all possible dignity before the doorway of the "Kenmare Arms."

The driver, apparently a rough, good-natured, country bumpkin, with a shock of brown hair and shabby, ill-fitting clothes, made an awkward clutch at his hat as his passengers took their places—a middle-aged gentleman, a lady, to whom the same adjective might apply, and a beautiful young girl with rose-tinted cheeks, and chestnut hair in a long plait.

"Gladys, mind you don't slip off; we cannot catch you if you fall," said the elder lady, taking her place beside the gentleman, while the girl sat alone.

Fitzgerald would have given—not his eyes, for then he could not have looked at her fresh young beauty—but years of his

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life to have taken the vacant place beside her instead of being obliged to turn his back upon her and mind the horse; but he had begun his acting and he must play the part through to the end.

The young lady seemed to be a very enthusiastic admirer of Nature, and she plied the driver with questions regarding the various scenes they entered upon.

Fitzgerald was delighted that she cared to address him, and told, unblushingly, tales of his own manufacture about a region that was as new to him as to Miss Gladys herself.

"I think Gladys is losing her heart to our charioteer," said Miss Field laughingly, in German to her brother.

"The admiration is natural, I fancy; the fellow nearly drove over that donkey-cart, so intent is he on what our young *protégée* says."

Fitzgerald especially prided himself on his proficiency in the German language, and he was immensely, though rather guiltily, amused at the turn affairs had taken.

"He is very handsome, don't you think so?" asked Gladys, in the same language. "His eyes are a trifle washy-looking, but he has a good complexion and beautiful teeth. I suppose he owes his teeth to his native diet of Murphys and buttermilk."

"Murphys and buttermilk, indeed!" thought Fitzgerald, as he assailed Billy, the horse, for some imaginary viciousness, to conceal the smile that would rise to his lips.

He wondered if his honour as a gentleman demanded that he should tell his knowledge of German; but an Irish peasant speaking foreign languages fluently was too suspicious a character.

Fitzgerald would not now betray his imposture for worlds, for these travellers would naturally be indignant if they knew of the trick played upon them, and the more he saw of Gladys Fenwick, the more earnestly he wished that nothing should occur to prevent their acquaintance in the future.

From scraps of their conversation he learnt that the travellers intended to pass a few weeks at Queenstown for the sea-bathing before returning to the Continent, and he made a mental note of the hotel which they had chosen for their stay, and wondered in what way he could present himself, as the idea that these people were Philip Dacre's friends had never been cherished.

"Are you afraid of spoiling your hands, that you wear gloves this weather, Kelly?" asked Mr. Fielding with a laugh.

A guilty colour rose to Fitzgerald's cheeks, and he made some awkward reply, knowing that gloves were very unsuitable for him under the circumstances.

A turn in the road brought the walls of Muckross Abbey before them, and Fitzgerald was glad for something to direct the conversation from himself, though he regretted the interruption to his chat with his pretty companion.

They all alighted, the driver gallantly lending his arm to assist the young lady in the rather perilous descent from the car, and then Fitzgerald began, for the first time, to realise the trials of his position.

Instead of going with the others to wander about the beautiful old ruin, and speculate upon its history and antiquity, he had to stay behind to feed the horse and guard his employer's umbrellas and wraps.

To brighten his solitude the supposed Kelly was presented with two bottles of stout and a huge hunk of bread-and-cheese, which he accepted with a forced smile of thanks.

That day, to his evident satisfaction, Billy, the old excursion horse of the "Kenmare Arms," had his dinner of oats supplemented with a liberal allowance of bread-and-cheese.

After a weary hour, which a cigar failed to enliven, a ragged urchin appeared, whom Fitzgerald engaged with the promise of half-a-crown, to guard the vehicle and its contents; the gentleman then directed his steps towards the path taken by his party of tourists.

They were sitting under the famous tree, which, gnarled and aged beyond all reckoning, has still sprung up since the roof of the Abbey fell, a mute but emphatic witness of the great antiquity of the walls surrounding it, ragged, ivy-grown, and picturesque.

The travellers were partaking of sandwiches, cold fowl, and sherry, and Fitzgerald devoutly wished he could join them, instead of hanging about in the background like a shabby pickpocket.

Gladys rose first, and began gathering a nosegay of the pretty pink daisies growing in the soft turf.

"What lovely red berries those are! I wonder if I could reach them," she said, looking longingly at the rich scarlet clusters standing out bravely against the grey wall above her head.

She swung herself lightly up on a ledge of rock, but still the berries hung tantalisingly above her grasp, and she was obliged to abandon the attempt, and rejoined her friends under the tree.

Fitzgerald followed her presently with a huge handful of the coveted berries, which he had easily reached, taking off his gloves as he scrambled up the wall.

"I gathered these for the young lady, if she will accept them," he said, with a bow which was far from being the awkward gesture he intended to make.

"Thank you," said Gladys, with her goddess-like smile, "how kind of you to get them."

As Fitzgerald transferred the fruit into Gladys's hand, three pairs of eyes lighted simultaneously upon the cameo of the monkey's face worn on the pseudo-driver's finger, and Mr. Fielding, his sister, and Gladys, exchanged glances of surprise.

"That is a nice ring you wear, Kelly, where did you get it?" asked Mr. Fielding, watching the man's face narrowly.

Fitzgerald blushed with vexation at having forgotten his glove, and stammered:

"Oh, I got it as a present from my late master!"

"An odd present for a gentleman to make his servant; a five-pound note would have done you more good. Let me examine the ring a little closer. It is beautifully cut."

As soon as possible Fitzgerald withdrew from the scrutiny that was becoming awkward, but he little suspected the great cause for astonishment his companions had.

"That man is certainly a rogue," said Mr. Fielding, as soon as Fitzgerald had disappeared. "The ring he wears belongs without any doubt to Phil's friend, and this man has stolen it either last night or this morning. There is no possible question of its being the same ring."

"But, Uncle George, if he had stolen it, he surely would have hidden it, instead of wearing it so conspicuously," said Glady pleadingly.

"He couldn't get it off his finger—it was quite fast, so he wore gloves to hide it. The rascal! You both saw how he blushed when I spoke of the gloves, and asked how he came by the ring. I am sure the fellow is guilty, and we must put him under arrest. It is rather an awkward business; he has noticed our suspicions, and I am afraid he will sneak away before we arrive again at Kenmare. I have it! We will return by way of Killarney, and there, under pretence of getting a glass of wine, we can give him in charge of the police."

"It is our duty to Phil's friend to have him arrested, I suppose?"

"Unquestionably!"

"Poor fellow, perhaps he is innocent," said Gladys, a troubled look shading her lovely eyes.

Fortunately there were plenty of sign-posts, or Fitzgerald would have been hopelessly at sea when told to return by way of Killarney.

His passengers, including Gladys, were surprisingly silent and self-contained during the homeward route, a state of mind which he could only attribute to fatigue.

Arrived at the hotel in Killarney, the ladies and gentlemen descended and disappeared within doors, and directly after, to Fitzgerald's amazement, two policemen advanced, and taking him by both arms, announced that he was their prisoner.

"Confound that ring, I thought it would bring me into trouble!" he mentally ejaculated. "But how ready these strangers are to jump at a conclusion. How could they know but that Kelly the car-driver might not honestly have such a trinket?"

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It would not do to explain the ridiculous affair until the departure of Gladys and her friends, so Hugh Fitzgerald allowed himself to be ignominiously led away to prison for the theft of his own property.

As he was turning the corner, flanked by the two policemen, he heard light footsteps behind him; Gladys Fenwick darted forward, pressed something in the prisoner's hand, and flew away again, as swiftly as she had come.

Fitzgerald opened his hand and saw a bright gold sovereign lying in the palm.

"The dear little girl, she was sorry for me, and gave me this money as a consolation. Bless her kind heart!" he said, as something very like a tear dimmed his eye.

* * * * *

Six weeks later, Hugh Fitzgerald, walking with a friend on the quay at Queenstown, saw Gladys Fenwick and her aunt approaching.

To his delight his friend advanced to meet them, shaking hands cordially.

Fitzgerald was presented in due time, and the desire of his heart was gratified, his right to address Gladys was established.

She in her turn was nothing loth to having the tall, handsome Englishman for a cavalier, and they had many a pleasant stroll together on the beach.

Gladys had often noticed what seemed only an ordinary English sovereign attached to Mr. Fitzgerald's watch-chain, and one day she jokingly asked him if, in all his wanderings, he had found no rarer keepsake.

"I prize it more than anything else I own," he answered quietly.

Reversing the coin he showed Gladys engraved on the other side:

"Killarney, July 7th, 1903."

"We were there at that date! How odd we did not meet!" she exclaimed. "But why do you wear the sovereign, all the same?"

"I will tell you some time, perhaps. Not now."

* * * * *

A few days later there was great excitement among the bathers at Whitepoint. A young lady, Miss Fenwick, had ventured beyond her depth, and no one was expert enough to swim out to save her.

A gentleman walking along the beach, hearing of what had happened, sprang into the waves with a white, anxious face, and, as Gladys Fenwick knew that her strength was going and she must sink, Hugh Fitzgerald's strong arms clasped her and drew her back to life.

* * * * *

"Gladys," Hugh Fitzgerald said, one moonlit evening on the sands, "I have a confession to make, and I want to tell you the secret of the gold coin I wear. I prize it because you gave it to me."

"I gave it to you? You are surely mistaken!"

Fitzgerald led her to a seat on the sea-wall, and told how his love for her had commenced when he saw her on the balcony at Kenmare, and how, for the sake of seeing her again, he had disguised himself as a peasant.

The fate that had overtaken him he need not describe, as she saw him arrested.

"I have so wondered where I had seen your face before! It was not surprising that I could not identify you," said Gladys, in astonishment. "But how did you escape from the prison?"

"Oh, that was easy enough! As soon as I was sure you had gone, I wrote a few words in pencil on my card to the landlord at the Killarney hotel, and I was released immediately. I trusted to the people at Kenmare not betraying me, and I was not mistaken in them."

"You certainly are fond of an adventure," said Gladys.

"Can you forgive such an impostor, Gladys? Do forgive me and love me, for I want you to be my wife, darling."

"I ought to have proper pride, and order you away for ever, but you saved my life, and—I love you," said Gladys shyly.

Lucy Blake.

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A Crucial Test.

"AND you think he loves you?" "I am afraid he does. I sang to him for an hour and a half last night, and when I stopped he asked me to go on."

Would Earn His Money.

TOMMY: "Do you love my sister?" Suitor: "Why do you ask?" Tommy: "Well, she said she'd give a shilling to know, and I want that shilling."

A Narrow Escape.

"I read an account of how a girl fell over forty feet without killing herself." "Good gracious! How did she do it?" "Tried to get out of a tramcar with exactly twenty men in it."

Encouragement!

MR. RICH: "I doubt if my daughter ever gave you any encouragement!" Mr. Suitor: "Most substantial encouragement, my dear sir! She said you were *the most generous of men!*"

It was His Barber!

"OH, *do* tell me who that fine, handsome, foreign-looking gentleman is? He looked as if he remembered you, George!" "Oh, yes. I frequently saw him some time back, but *now I shave myself!*"

Cause and Effect.

MRS. BLIFFERS: "Your old friend has such a sad face. Why is it?" Mr. Bliffers: "Years ago he proposed to a very beautiful girl, and——" Mrs. Bliffers: "And she refused him?" Mr. Bliffers: "No. She married him."

Plain Language.

SHE: "He didn't succeed in convincing her of his argument after all." He: "No; he merely made her indignant." "But his explanation was clear." "Yes, but that's where he made his mistake. He told her it was as 'plain as the nose on her face.'"

Too Expensive a Luxury.

"I KNOW we are poor, dear papa," said Evelyn, nestling her head against his shoulder, "but Charles is brave and hopeful, and he says that love will make a way." "I know it will," said the old banker grimly. "It has made away with two tons of best coal and two pounds' worth of gas already this winter."

Irretrievable.

"WHY is it," he asked, "that beautiful women are always the most stupid?" "Sir," she replied, "am I to understand that you desire to cast reflections upon my mental capacity?" "Oh, no," he hurriedly returned; "I have always said that you were one of the cleverest girls I ever——" But he did not finish. Before he could do so he realised that he had said the wrong thing, and could never make it right.

Depends on Circumstances.

EDYTHE: "Don't you think that character in a young man is everything?" Ethel: "Oh, yes; if he has nothing else."

Compassionate Girl.

HE: "Then I may live upon hope until next Sunday evening?" She: "Oh, poor fellow, is it as bad as that? Here, I'll lend you enough to buy a meal."

His View.

SHE: "From a purely psychological standpoint, do you think a man can give true and enduring love to two women?" The Professor: "Only until one or the other finds it out, Miss Tompkins."

A Cautious Girl.

CLARA: "I'm not going to tell him where I want to go on a honeymoon until after we are married." Maud: "Why not?" "Because I don't want him to break off the engagement."

Revenge!

FRANK: "I've got even with James at last." Edward: "How did you do it?" Frank: "I gave his girl a pair of pretty vases, and he will be ruined in keeping them filled with flowers."

Why He was Going.

CAPTAIN SLINGER: "Yes, Miss Maud. I am going to try my hand at shooting big game! I sail next week!" The Little Sister: "I suppose you find it very hard to hit the little birds, Captain Slinger?"

Then Trouble Began.

MR. JONES: "My dear, do you know that you have one of the best voices in the world?" Mrs. Jones: "Indeed! Do you really think so?" Mr. Jones: "I certainly do; otherwise it would have been worn out long ago."

He Went Quickly.

JOHNNY DUDE: "Julia, my little cherub, when does your sister Emma return?" Julia: "I don't know." "Didn't she say anything before she went away?" "She said if you came to see her, that she'd be gone till Doomsday."

Surprising in these Days.

"THEY had one of the strangest marriages recorded for a long time." "In what respect?" "In every respect. Why, the parents on both sides were present, there was nothing sudden or secret about it, and their own clergyman performed the ceremony."

The Origin of it All.

NAOMI: "George, I believe that love brings us anguish as well as bliss." "So do I." "Did you ever experience that restlessness, that anxiety, that positive pain, that——" "Certainly, love." "And what do you think caused it all?" "Indigestion!"

Hidden Treasure.

MISS MAINCHANCE: "I suppose you've heard of my engagement to Mr. Jenks?" Miss Ascott: "Yes; and I confess I was surprised. You told me once that you wouldn't marry him for a million." Miss Mainchance: "I know, dear, but I discovered later that he had two millions."

Two Reasons for the Change.

"DARLING," said the young man, as he tenderly raised the lovely head from the place where it had rested an hour or more, got up, sat down again on the other side of the beautiful maiden, and once more drew the golden curls to his bosom, "you have no objection to a slight change of position, have you?" "No, Alfred," she murmured softly, "your heart is on this side." "Yes, my angel," responded the young man, his voice trembling with deep feeling, "and my waistcoat will now get worn alike on both sides."

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A FRIEND IN NEED.

Telling How the Unexpected Happened.

"I DON'T care, I'm happy," said Frank.

"I'm sure I don't care, I'm happy—perfectly happy. Don't see how I could be more so," said Nellie, in a hopeful tone of voice.

Neither was looking at the other. Each tried to be absorbed in a book; but certainly neither was absorbed, for on the average, during the entire afternoon, they had made remarks similar to the foregoing at least every ten minutes.

"Did you say, Nellie," continued Frank, just a trifle doubtfully, "that there was enough in the house for supper and breakfast?"

"I'm quite sure, dear," said Nellie, "that there is enough for supper, and perhaps for breakfast. But we shall not want much for breakfast. You know that you have very often said that you did not care for much breakfast, and really I can get along on nothing at all."

"I don't see what we have to worry about then, do you?"

"Indeed I do not. I think we have every reason to be perfectly happy," she answered.

"Sure of supper to-day and breakfast to-morrow. I should say we have every reason to be thankful," continued Frank.

"Yes, indeed," added Nellie. "Just think of the number of people in the world who are sure neither of supper to-day nor breakfast to-morrow. Take the case of a cannibal——"

"Just what I was thinking," broke in Frank. "He is dependent on the chance call of a missionary—surely a precarious existence."

"Oh, Frank, you are joking!" said Nellie.

"Proof that I am perfectly happy," responded Frank.

"While I am perfectly happy," said Nellie, "I do wish that the firm had not failed, and that you had not lost your position and your good salary."

"Yes, and while I am perfectly happy," said Frank, "I do wish that our parents had not objected to our marriage."

"The idea that we, who are children, both of us, of rich parents, should be left to the disagreeable expedient of pawning the few wedding presents that we received!"

"Say rather the disagreeable expedient of pawning the last wedding present that we received. Now—now—now, little wife, you are going to cry!"

"Indeed, I am not," said Nellie, struggling bravely to suppress the tears. "I think we are very lucky to have any wedding presents to pawn. In fact, I think we are very lucky indeed."

"And so do I," added Frank, "very, very lucky——" Just there he was interrupted.

There is no better time than an interruption to explain the conditions of affairs in a romance, so I will take advantage of the present one, which may be the only interruption in my story. Frank and Nellie Hayward had married against their parents' wishes. Their parents, though rich, refused to help them in any way, or even to receive them in their homes. Frank was brave and manly, and Nellie was sensible and womanly. They determined to do for themselves, and at the very outset made a solemn compact with each other that, come what might, they would consider their love for each other compensation for all the ills of life.

For a time things went very well. Frank obtained a position that enabled them to live very comfortably in a furnished flat. But, as in the life of everyone else, the time came when luck turned against them. The firm that employed Frank failed, and he was unable to get another position. The little money that they had saved up from his salary was soon exhausted. They were forced to the disagreeable expedient of pawning such things of value as they possessed, and finally they had come to the end of even that resource.

Never during all their trouble had either acknowledged to the other that they were anything but happy. The crisis, however, had just about been reached. They were in a quandary. It was a question whether they would be forgiven by their parents under any circumstances, and they were not at all willing to acknowledge that they had made a mistake. They were obstinately proud.

But there was an interruption. It was a knock at the door. Nellie rose from her seat, and Frank was about to do so, when it occurred to him that the chances were that it was a creditor, and he thought it hardly worth while to go to the door. He was rather surprised, though, when, at the invitation of his wife, the door was opened by a queer old man, who looked at each of them over the rims of his eyeglasses for a full minute before he spoke.

"Mr. and Mrs. Hayward, I believe?" he said at length.

"Yes, sir," replied Nellie. "Will you take a chair?"

"Ought to have been named Wayward, I suppose," he said, chuckling to himself, as he took the proffered chair. "I suppose my visit is rather unexpected?"

"Decidedly," said Frank, curtly.

"Well, it is the unexpected that always happens," said the old gentleman. "I was rather surprised to hear you through the door, accidentally, of course, assuring yourselves that you were very lucky and very happy, and all that sort of thing."

"May I inquire what business it is of yours, sir?" asked Frank.

"None, except that it assured me that I had found the right place," answered the old gentleman.

"And what place were you looking for?" asked Frank.

"The house of a happy married couple," said the old gentleman.

"You have found it," said Frank and Nellie together.

"Ah," said the old gentleman. "It is quite a curiosity. I suppose you will pardon an old gentleman like myself, if he asks a few questions. I am a student of human nature, you know, and, who knows? perhaps this visit may redound to your advantage."

"Fire away," said Frank, who was beginning to be interested.

"In the first place, what was the occasion of your saying just now that you were lucky?"

"Because we had some wedding presents to pawn," answered the ingenuous Frank.

"No," corrected his wife gently, "because we had had some wedding presents to pawn."

"Dear me!" said the old gentleman, "they are all pawned then?"

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"Yes," answered Nellie, "but that does not make us unhappy."

"I suppose that you occupy a good position?" said the old gentleman to Frank.

"I have lost my position, sir," the latter answered.

"You have plenty of money in the bank?"

"None."

"Undoubtedly you have a well-stocked larder, though?"

"It is about exhausted."

"Of course, in case of real distress you have your parents to rely on?"

"On the contrary, we would not wish to ask them to help us under any circumstances."

"Well, young man," said the old gentleman, excitedly, "will you tell me what in the world you are going to do?"

"I would much rather have you tell me what I am going to do," answered Frank.

"Nothing," answered the old gentleman, solemnly.

"That's what I have been doing quite a while."

"The fact is," continued the old gentleman, "you are precisely what you were saying you were when I knocked on your door—you are lucky. I am a man of whimsicalities. I have been looking all my life for a happy married couple. Someone, never mind who, told me that you were the couple I was looking for. I did not believe it for a long time, but when I discovered that you were in hard luck, and still were not complaining, I began to believe it. My mission on earth is to assist happy couples who are in hard luck. That is the first time I have ever had a chance to fulfil my mission. It is all the more to your advantage, though—there is more money in the fund than there would be if the world were stocked with happy couples. I propose to settle on you a little income of five hundred a year."

The old gentleman paused to see what effect this startling announcement would have on the happy couple. The effect was not marked. They looked at him very much as they would look at a curiosity.

"I suppose you think I am an insane man?" he said angrily.

"No," answered Nellie, "but I think you are my father, with a wig and eyeglasses, and a very poor attempt at a disguised voice."

Saying which, she ran to him and threw her arms about his neck.

"Well, I am," said the old gentleman, laughingly, as he removed his disguise, "and I frankly confess that for a long time I have had a disguised heart. I didn't want to help you until I thought you needed it, so I waited. But I will tell you this—if you had acknowledged that you were not happy I would have given you double the allowance I have."

"I don't care," said Nellie. "I'm perfectly happy."

"And so am I," said Frank. **Stanley Hammond.**

Old Bellows: "Oh, for a thousand tongues!" Mrs. Bellows (facetiously): "What would you do with so many?" Old Bellows: "Raise a row with you and see if I couldn't get the best of it."

"Darling," he said, "your eyes are as bright as diamonds, your teeth as white as pearls, your lips as red as rubies, and——" "Yes, Horace," she replied sweetly, "and you're as green as an emerald." Then Horace went out into the jet black night.

Prospective Father (to young man): "Have you spoken to my daughter yet?" Young Man: "Oh, yes, sir." Father: "And she loves you?" Young Man (with enthusiasm): "You should have seen her hug me when I came to-night. Talk about love!"

She "I haven't anything new to sing to you to-night, George." He: "Well, give me something old then." She broke into a refrain that was "a song of the day" seventeen years before. He (at the close): "That's very, very old, Clara." She: "Yes, George; I sang that to you the night we became engaged."

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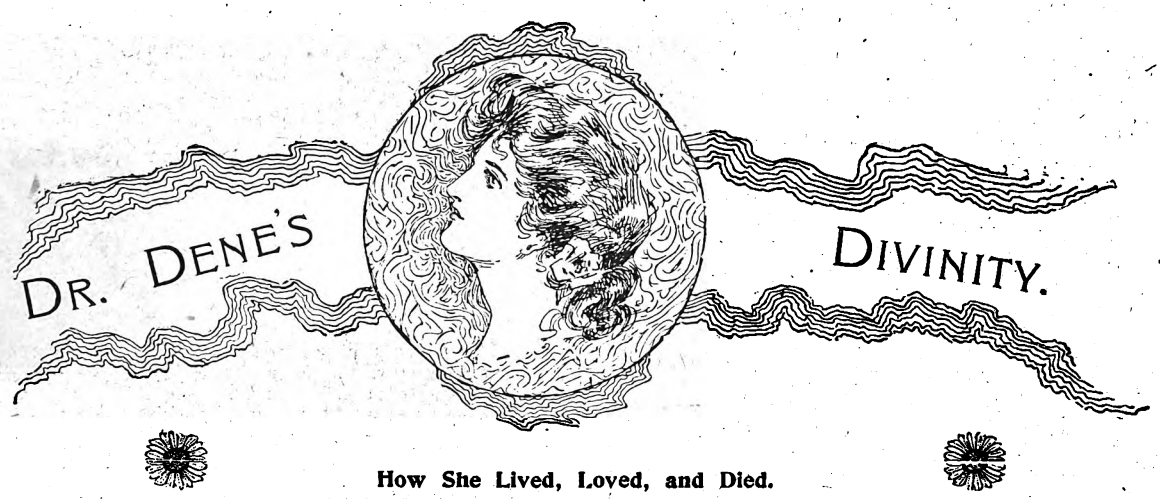

How She Lived, Loved, and Died.

DOCTOR DENE was a young man who by much over-study and superfluous cramming had managed to scrape through his many exams., gain his degree, and yet be one of the simplest men that ever ate bread and butter.

He had a good practice in a fashionable London suburb, and although too shy a man—apart from his professional character—ever to make many friends, especially among the fair sex, still he was universally admired for his skill and integrity, and laughed at as well, because of his extreme gullibility.

Instead of growing better in this respect as he grew older, the doctor suddenly became rapidly worse.

More dreamy, more absent-minded, more eccentric every day.

Truth to tell, Theodore Dene had fallen in love.

To a serious, single-minded, shy man, such as he, this was a fearful calamity.

He was in love without rhyme or reason either, which made it still more serious.

His divinity, too, was the veriest shrimp of a thing. Wasp-waisted, high-heeled, always fashionably dressed. The very sort of girl that a medical man, who hadn't quite forgotten all his anatomy, would tell you was a disgrace to civilisation.

She passed his house frequently, generally once a day; and looking up at his surgery window one morning—her big eyes had caught him peeping behind the blind—had made a conquest of him then and there.

All the years of his life—he was barely thirty now—he had ground away at his books and had never looked at a woman. He had had no little love affairs to knock off his bashfulness. No strolls by moonlight. No billets-doux. No bright telegraphic eyes ever to talk love's language with him. No sleepless nights.

Indeed, I am half ashamed to write about such a shockingly wasted life.

Kitty Coram—for that was the divinity's name—was very quick to perceive—as indeed, what ordinary woman is not?—the impression she made on the reticent, studious man. From a friend of hers—Gerald Thorncroft—she managed to glean a great deal at odd times about the doctor; of his goodness, his simpleness, his cleverness.

This Thorncroft had, indeed, studied for some time at the same college with Theodore Dene.

A man of the world, a dashing fellow was Gerald; handsome, passing rich, well connected, and a thoroughpaced scoundrel withal.

He paid assiduous court to Kitty, and at first she smiled on him, although, wondrous to relate, she kept herself as straight and pure as if she had a chaperon ever at her elbow. Self-reliant, witty, ambitious, Kitty did not let her morals run askew.

When she heard so much about the doctor, thought of the security of his position, the happy home he could offer a wife, a great disgust came over her for Gerald Thorncroft, with his swagger and dash and style.

"He swears he loves me. Yet he's never asked me to marry. If he did, he's drowning in debt, and would make a brute of a husband. Oh! if I could only marry Dr. Dene."

The thought grew in her mind until she could picture nothing else.

Poor little divinity! She was only a chorus-singer at a West End theatre. Her mother had been the same before her. Can you wonder that she wished for better things? Can you wonder that, born and bred behind the scenes, she grew sick and loth to lead such a life, and wondered how it would be when her beauty waned!

Her head was a clever as well as a pretty one, and this is how she set to work:

One day, passing the doctor's house, she caught him watching for her at his surgery window, which closely overlooked the road. Just as nervous and shy was he as any silly schoolgirl when she sees her lover in church.

Kitty, who was a first-rate actress, let her umbrella slip out of her hand, staggered a step or two, clutched wildly at the lamp-post, and finally fell very gracefully on the unimpressive pavement.

Dr. Dene was at her side in a moment. Lifting the little figure very tenderly in his arms he bore her to his surgery.

"She has fainted! Poor child!" he said compassionately to his housekeeper, who had been a witness to the scene. Mrs. Grant tossed her head, and deluged the pretty pale face with cold water.

This quickly brought Kitty to, and she went on with her acting.

She was better, much better. So ashamed and sorry to have given such trouble. Thank them both very much. She was quite ready to go now. She had not far to walk, only to Caraman Street.

The doctor told a white lie for once in his life, and stuck to it like a man.

"I am passing Caraman Street on a professional visit," he said. "May I offer to take you in my carriage?"

She refused very prettily and with sweet hesitation.

Half surprised at his own temerity, the doctor pressed the matter and over-ruled her objections.

Mrs. Grant tossed her head again as the little dainty thing went lightly down the steps on Dr. Dene's arm and then into Dr. Dene's carriage.

On the way, Kitty was talkative. Told the doctor all about herself. There was no mention of a theatre in her narrative though, nor of anything else connected with her real life. Just a cleverly-told, high-flown little fiction of fallen fortunes—a helpless orphan—no one to befriend her, and so on. The doctor

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was charmed with her woes, he would have asked her to marry him on the spot, if only he had dared.

She made good use of the twenty minutes' drive, you may be sure, and when they reached Caraman Street, she gave his hand ever so slight a pressure, and said modestly:

"I will ask you to set me down at the corner. My landlady is very strict, and might be harsh to me if she saw me get out of your carriage. Unfortunately for me I am in her debt, and the world is so censorious."

"How delicate! How thoughtful!" mused Theodore afterwards.

She no more lived in Caraman Street, reader, than you or I do. But before nightfall she had secured two top rooms in one of the highly respectable houses there; had cut her connection with the theatre under the plea that she was going at once to America to join some rich relatives. Had even borrowed ten pounds from Gerald Thorncroft to aid her on her voyage out.

"You can pay me how and when you like, Kitty—in coin, or kisses, dear!"

"It won't be in kisses," said she, very scornfully; and scarcely let him touch her hand when she said "Good-bye."

Then Kitty was taken ill in her grand new lodgings, and Theodore Dene attended her.

You can guess the consequence. The very first day she went out of doors, the doctor drove her to church and they were very quietly married.

Now you know by this time that Kitty was ambitious. Well, suppose we skip over ten years and find her, socially speaking, at the top of the tree. Her husband is a full-blown physician now—with a host of letters after his name and a title in front of it.

Kitty had looked upon life in London in the early part of their marriage as decidedly dangerous, and had induced her husband to take a practice in Scotland; where, through Mrs. Dene's clever scheming, he had come under royal notice and quickly risen in royal favour. After ten years she considered herself sufficiently safe to come back to London. Lady Theodore Dene, the beautiful wife of the well-known physician, was not likely to be connected in any way with vanished Kitty Coram. It is wrong to tell a lady's age, and Lady Dene carried hers in her pocket. She looked about twenty-five, though really she was thirty.

We find her the belle of the season. People make a great fuss over her. By right of her wit and beauty she is a queen in Society's kingdom. Yet the throne she values highest is her place in her husband's heart. He loves her so loyally, so trustfully, so tenderly still. She is above rank and riches to him, she is his guiding star, his divinity.

He is never jealous of the admiration showered upon her. He is only too proud of her loveliness and fame. Kitty is giddy at the height she has reached. She never thinks of detection now.

You can guess what a blow it is to her when, coming out of a jeweller's in Bond Street, where she has been choosing a new setting for her diamonds, a gentleman raises his hat, stopping her in her way to her carriage, and addressing her in well-remembered tones.

"How do you do, Lady Dene? You're in danger of forgetting old friends, I fear. You've cut me once or twice in the park."

"Is it really you, Mr. Thorncroft? You have altered indeed. I should not have known you. It is a lovely day. Good morning."

With great *sang-froid* Lady Kitty, stepping into her carriage, says, "Home!" and drives away. It was a great shock to her nerves, but she was very plucky. Poor little fly! That was only the beginning of your trials; you are fairly caught in the subtle spider's web.

Day after day, wherever you go, you see him. He dares to write you disgustingly familiar notes, and finally frightens you into granting him interviews. Here, with boorish license, he makes love to you, rendering your golden life a tarnished misery.

"This must end," she says to him despairingly, in one of their *tête-à-têtes*.

"So it shall, Kitty, when you consent to be mine! You fooled me years ago. I haven't forgotten or forgiven. You're a riper plum now, and I swear I will pluck you yet."

"I am rich," she said pleadingly. "I will give you anything you ask for if you will only cease tormenting me."

He laughed at her.

"I am twice as handsome as your dried up stick of a husband, who only married you because he was a fool. I don't want money. I want you. If you won't come of your own free will, I'll tell such tales of your past to the world that it will spit at you, and your saint of a doctor will turn you out of doors."

"I will defy you. I will tell him everything myself. I don't care what the world thinks, I only care for him."

"Couldn't trust you, Beauty," said Thorncroft, sneeringly. "You've lied so successfully all these years, that you couldn't tell the truth now if you tried. I should tell him I had a right to you as your lover. Get witnesses to swear we lived together before you threw me up for him."

"Heaven help me!" she sighed despairingly.

"All's fair in love and war, little woman. Cheer up. Take a run with me over to the Continent to-morrow. Be at Victoria in the afternoon. Don't stop to consider. Come."

"Give me time. Let me think."

"No! That's just what I don't want to do. If you're not there, I'll come to your grand house in the evening, and he'll turn you over to me himself, when he's heard my tale. Aye, and be glad to get rid of you."

Poor Kitty. What a sleepless night she passed. Kissing her wedding-ring with passionate pain, scalding it with her tears; looking with loving, sorrowing eyes at her husband, smiling in his sleep. Praying, planning, plotting, all to no purpose. Anyway, she saw how certain her downfall was—how she must lose everything, even her husband's love. Her weak little word would never hold out against Gerald's plausible lies.

"*A lie, that is all a lie, can be met with and fought outright,*
But a lie that is half a truth is a harder matter to fight."

"Oh, that I could die! Thorncroft would surely spare me then."

Through the dark night she lay and pondered how. Poison? No! Too easily detected.

Drowning—hanging—she went through a list of deaths, but all were too palpable.

When morning dawned she was white and ill.

Dene stayed with her all the day, rested her aching head on his breast. She clung to him tremblingly in her despair.

They were to dine with an earl that night; she would insist upon going. "The excitement will do me good," she said.

It was past six o'clock; they had a long drive before them. He waited, watch in hand, at the head of his magnificent staircase, to conduct her down to the carriage. Her dressing-room door opened and out she came.

Dressed like a bride almost; in purest ivory silk with draperies of rich old lace. Diamonds in her hair—round her fair throat—clasping her beautiful arms and gleaming from her breast. Her face was star-like in its loveliness, only so strangely pale.

"You should never wear anything but white, sweetheart," he whispered, offering his arm.

She turned and kissed him gratefully.

"Go back, dear, and ask Jane for my wedding-ring; I left it on my dressing-table," she said.

As he passed away from her side, she threw herself forward with wild energy, down those many, many polished oaken stairs. Down! down! down! till she lay in a shapeless mass on the marble pavement below.

* * * * *

"She was plucky to the end," said Thorncroft to himself as he read the many accounts of the beautiful Lady Dene's fatal accident, and heard of the letters of condolence that were showered on the bereaved husband from the highest quarters.

"No accident that, I know. Anyway I won't peach on her now. Wouldn't the world stare though if I showed it the flaw in Dr. Dene's divinity?"

Edith Dunaway.

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SPLENDID SERIAL.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Eardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY ARE:

SIR CYPRIAN RUST, who has inherited the baronetcy and estates of Sir Basil Wingate, though he is not the legal heir.

MARCELLA RUST, his daughter, a very lovely girl, who is greatly in love with

PHILIP NULLIUS, the curate of Crawley Village, where the home of Sir Cyprian, Wingate Court, is situated.

LADY VIOLET FRAYNE-LENNOX, whom Marcella believes to be her aunt. She is a very beautiful woman, and loves her niece dearly, but Sir Cyprian has, for some reason, immense power over her, which he uses to further his own ends.

EDWARD DAY is an orphan whom Lady Violet has befriended. He, however, in making unreturned love to Marcella, insults her, and Lady Violet refuses to have anything more to do with him.

CALEB J. JOHNSON, a City magnate and millionaire, who marries Lady Violet, though he knows that her husband is still alive. This husband,

MAJOR RICHARD FRAYNE-LENNOX, is a good-for-nothing, who has been turned out of the Army. Lady Violet believes him dead.

THIRTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Meeting at the Court.

MARCELLA for two days had been free from the haunting presence of her father. Both he and the repulsive doctor had left hurriedly soon after the telegram had arrived, that had sent Sir Cyprian tearing out of the rooom forgetful of the errand on which he had brought his friend, Dr. Winter.

And when she had seen the carriage driving through the gates, Marcella had sighed with relief. She wandered about free from that dread of an unexpected terror without which she was never free when Sir Cyprian was watching her with those cold, smiling, blue eyes of his.

It was just as well that this was so, for she was now without the society of her faithful maid, Jane being ill in bed with pneumonia caught, the doctor said, through a sudden immersion in cold water. How Jane had managed to fall into the brook was a mystery, and seemed likely to remain one for some little time. She had been brought back by a carter some two hours after she had left the Court with Marcella's letter in her hand, which had, so Marcella supposed, drifted down the little brook.

She went through the gates of the Court and walked slowly towards the village. It was a pretty walk, and one that led through leafy wildernesses and undulating paths. She sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree that stretched across the lane. She was on part of the estate that belonged to the Court, and so feared no interruption. She was thinking of her lover, and her thoughts were full of sadness as she remembered how long it was since she had heard anything of him.

"Surely Aunt Violet has not forgotten me?" she mused. "It is a long time since I had a letter." Then she flushed as the vision of her aunt's beautiful face rose before her. "No, I will never think hardly of dear Aunt Violet," she murmured. "I will hope for brighter days, and if father and that hateful Dr. Winter stay away long enough, I may be almost happy at the Court, if I could just hear from Philip that all is well with him."

Suddenly she drew in her breath with a startled cry. A voice had sounded quite near her; a whisper of "Marcella" had reached her ears as vividly as though she had heard Philip in the flesh. She sprang to her feet, and gazed with startled eyes in the direction from which the voice had come. There was a rustle of leaves and twigs, then a man stepped from behind a large tree, and the next moment, sobbing with joy and relief, Marcella was once again clasped in the arms of the man she loved with all her heart.

"Philip, oh, Philip!" she cried. "Am I really looking at you, or is this some beautiful dream, darling?"

He pressed his lips to hers. "It is I, dearest love," he answered tenderly. "And I am never going to lose sight of you again, come what may. Oh, my love, when I think what you have endured for my sake, I feel I can never forgive——" he stopped suddenly. He remembered that his enemy was the father of the girl he loved.

She glanced up quickly. "Yes, I know," she murmured. "I guess why you pause, dearest. But tell me, Philip, how did you get here so suddenly? Why did you not write me?"

He drew her closer to him. How beautiful she looked with

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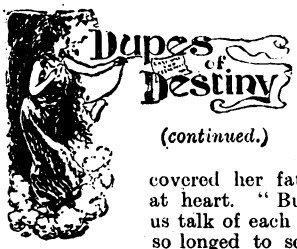

(continued.)

that light in her eyes, and her pale face was flushed again with love.

"I came here after one or two interesting adventures, sweetheart," he answered. He could not tell her that he had discovered her father to be almost a murderer at heart. "But," he went on quickly, "let us talk of each other now, darling. I have so longed to see your dear face and to kiss your beautiful mouth. Let us leave mysteries alone."

For a time the lovers were silent; they had forgotten the danger of being seen together by any of Sir Cyprian's spies, or by the baronet himself. They remembered only their love and that the world was a beautiful place after all.

Suddenly Marcella raised her head from Philip's shoulder. "Dearest," she said, "I can't stay long at the Court now. There are strange things happening here—mysteries I cannot fathom. There is a man with a black beard who comes and goes, and——"

Philip started. It was odd that he should also have seen such a man. He opened his mouth to speak, but Marcella clutched him tightly.

"There is someone looking for us, Philip. I can hear the rustling of the leaves in the distance. Perhaps father has returned from London! Oh, you must not meet him," she cried wildly.

Philip's mind was made up. "I shall not, darling. Just do as I tell you and be brave. Hide behind that great oak near that thicket, and don't make a sound; whoever that is shall not recognise me as Philip Nullius!"

But Marcella protested, bewildered. "I don't understand."

He drew her to him, then pressed his lips to hers. "You will soon, my darling love; only obey me if you love me."

With a tender look she disappeared behind the tree, and drawing something from his pocket, Philip quickly and accurately transferred to his head and face the grey wig, beard, and moustache that the girl Lottie had given him.

Then he turned the rim of his hat down, and the collar of his coat up, and after one quick glance into a pocket mirror, and a whispered word to the wondering girl behind the tree, he stepped forward in the guise of the "Vicar" to meet the man who, impatiently beating the brambles and bushes with a stick, came out into the open.

THIRTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.

Philip Learns Something.

THE man who stumbled before Philip from behind the thick bushes of the wilderness was not the man whom Marcella had dreaded meeting, and whom Philip had acknowledged to himself that it would be awkward to speak with in the near presence of his sweetheart, for he had things to say to Sir Cyprian Rust that he could never say before his innocent daughter. So it was with a sense of relief that he saw another man in the place of the baronet.

The intruder was, however, no stranger to Philip Nullius, and it was with difficulty that he refrained from betraying his personality through his disguise, as he looked upon the face of the man Boulter, whom he had seen on several memorable occasions, the last being the day before on the platform at Paddington with the man with the black beard!

He was so concerned with his own amazement at encountering his enemy within the very precincts of his lady love's home, that he at first was oblivious to the impression his own appearance made upon Boulter. It was growing dusk, and they stood beneath the shadows cast by the trees overhead, but in the gloom Boulter's face took unto it an expression of frank amazement and perplexity. And when he spoke Philip knew the reason of his astonishment.

"Why, what on earth are you doing up here, 'Vicar'?" he said hoarsely. "I thought you decided that it was safest to keep at Water Grange? Anyway, the 'Spade' would be wild if he knew you had risked everything just to look round here. It's not safe, you know—if you don't mind my telling you."

While he had been speaking Philip had grasped the clue to his further conduct. This man Boulter had taken him for the man as whom the girl Lottie had disguised him. If he could keep it up he would be able to come to some conclusion regarding much that puzzled him.

The real "Vicar" had spoken with a curiously American accent, and in his schooldays Philip had been no mean mimic of other people's voices. He would see whether he still possessed that gift. It would, perhaps, help him to learn a little of what was going on behind the scenes of the mystery into which he had been dragged.

He opened his mouth, and then, seized with a sudden idea, took from his pocket the spade guinea he had picked up in London when the man with the beard had dropped it. He had noticed a bright gleam of something yellow shining in the other man's hand, and had wondered whether it was a coin similar to the one in his possession.

The effect upon Boulter was not entirely unexpected. He laughed and opened his hand, showing a spade guinea lying in the hollow of it.

"Oh, it's all right with me, 'Vicar'!" he said. "I thought you would have dropped showing the sign with *me*—we are such old pals."

Philip smiled grimly; then he had been right! The spade guinea was a sign between the "Vicar" he was personating and the man with the black beard, as well as the scoundrel Boulter—a sign of some secret confederation, and one in which villainy largely predominated. Acting swiftly upon his intention to learn as much as he could about this secret society, he said, in the drawling, nasal tones of the master of Water Grange:

"I came up here to have a look round for purposes of my own. But what brings you here, Boulter? I thought you had your instructions to meet the 'Spade' in London. Why didn't you?"

His chance shot was a lucky one. The man replied glibly:

"I did meet him at the station, and got his instructions about that wretched parson chap we've got to track down. The 'Spade' seems to fear him more than anyone else—even the scent of the police on the 'Mona Lisa' is nothing to him so long as the sky-pilot is at large; of course it's our duty to do all we can to help the 'Spade' but I'd like to be a little more in the know, wouldn't you? So far as I can make out this sky-pilot stands in the 'Spade's' way."

Philip smiled beneath the disguise of hair on his face. So far he was succeeding better than he had anticipated, but he would learn more before he finished with the loquacious Boulter.

"Oh, I dare say the 'Spade' has a good reason for wishing the parson out of the way," he muttered; "but did he give you any further orders that should bring you up here? It's risky, I should say, to be hanging round this part!" Another chance shot that also went home.

"I don't know," Boulter answered cautiously. "I've not been up here for a long time, and the last time I was dressed as a farm labourer, so I would not be known; anyway, the 'Spade' sent me himself to be on the look out for a day or so, in case that sky-pilot returned here, and"—he lowered his voice cautiously—"there's some talk about the 'tecs nosing round; it appears they've got hold of some clue that has sent them into this part of the country to investigate. Anyway, the 'Spade' said I was to be about here a day or two, because the 'swag' is concealed here; besides I wanted to have a look at that girl. I intended mentioning all this to you when I got back to the Grange," he finished. "Now tell me why you've trotted up here; who's in charge while you are away?"

Philip hesitated. "Oh, the others will see to things," he murmured. He was trying to find a way out of the maze of perplexity into which his companion's speech had flung him. "I really intended calling to hear if the curate had been seen

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at his lodgings," he went on quickly, feeling the other man's eyes fixed on him strangely. "I'm not afraid of being noticed; this coat and hat make an effective yet quiet disguise! By-the-way, it's a nuisance those papers were missing from his rooms when Rayne went to get them!" he added, with a sudden thought, remembering that there had been a strangely mysterious reason for those letters and papers of his to be found.

Boulter laughed softly. "Yes, the 'Spade' was wild about it; it seems he wanted them most of all. They were nearly as important as the parson himself! But there is to be a meeting at the Grange, so the 'Spade' told me, and he's going to be there. He said he would distribute details about that fresh deal we shall be working soon, and he intended seeing you one day about it!"

"Ah!" Philip murmured thoughtfully. "I shall be pleased to listen to the Chief's orders. By-the-way, have you any letters of the 'Spade's'? I should like to have one of them. He has not written much except in cipher lately," he said, remembering the words of the man in the black beard.

"I've only a few papers," Boulter answered slowly. "Most of them are not written by the Chief himself; he's too sharp to put his hand to anything that will incriminate himself, but he's got someone else to write for him. They're the names of the new 'cribs' to be 'cracked,' and a list of the principal valuables. You know the 'Spade' never bothers about cheap stuff. But he don't expect to get such a haul as he did with the 'Mona Lisa' at that millionaire's place."

"Ah!" said Philip quickly. "That was exceptional luck, of course. But I hope the 'Spade' will drop hunting that parson down—it will recoil on his own head if he does, I feel sure of it. The fellow's harmless and quiet, and if left alone will do no harm; but I am afraid that things will go wrong with the 'Spade' if he tackles him again!"

Boulter laughed harshly. "What! Turning saint, 'Vicar'! Don't go and say you're going to play King's Evidence after all the years we've pulled together! The 'Spade' would get his own back, you know. He'd stick at nothing—he'd soon knife you, or get someone else to do it. Do you remember that informer he got put away for trying that game on with us?"

A slight shiver shook Philip from head to foot. In the presence of so much cold-blooded villainy he felt inclined to take the man by his neck and shake the life out of him; but prudence, and something else—a regard for the safety of the girl he loved, whom he knew was listening in bewilderment to their conversation, held his tongue; besides, he wanted to get something definite out of the man, so that he would be enabled to place the facts in the hands of the police and run this gang to earth.

"I'm not likely to betray those whose cause I uphold," he said slowly. "But there is danger ahead for the 'Spade,' if he insists, for no reason whatever, in hunting the innocent. That curate, after all, did not even know the 'Spade'."

"There you are wrong!" was the quick retort. "The 'Spade' was well acquainted with the parson, and it's my own private opinion that it is because this parson by being alive threatens the 'Spade's' position. But no one can drag the 'Spade' from his place without injuring the innocent whom he uses as his tools! He's a darned clever man, and will never be traced. Although the 'Mona Lisa' was his plan, there's not a sign to show that he had a personal hand in it, except the coin that fool the 'Shovel' must have dropped out of his pocket!" He laughed softly. "No, the 'Spade' had a splendid decoy for that lay!"

A slight rustle behind the tree where Marcella was hiding made both men start—one with suspicion, the other with fear lest she should be discovered.

"What's that?" Boulter said sharply, and, taking a step forward. "If there's anyone listening, I'll soon know what to do!"

Philip grasped his arm roughly. "Don't be a fool, Boulter!" he said in a voice that trembled in spite of the drawl. "How can anyone be there!" He stopped suddenly.

Boulter had again looked at him strangely, and Philip's face flushed beneath his disguise.

"Very well, of course if you are certain," the other said grumblingly, "I'll not bother. By-the-way, 'Vicar,' I shall get some papers of rather rare value to us from the 'Spade' to-morrow night. Will you meet me here about nine, and I'll show them to you—that is, if you are staying longer in this place," he added quickly.

Philip agreed readily. He wanted to get hold of tangible proof of the 'Spade's' villiany, and that of his confederates, and could hope to do so only by strategy and an equal cunning. If he could but learn the reason of the mysterious 'Spade's' antipathy and loathing for himself, he would be glad. It was bad enough to know that Marcella's father was against him, and had some acquaintance with the powerful incognito, to have trusted his satellites with the charge of abducting him to Water Grange.

He compelled himself to part on friendly terms with Boulter, who went in the same manner as that in which he had arrived, and disappeared among the bushes and trees, an odd little smile puckering his sardonic mouth as though he had experienced some new pleasure in speaking with the 'Vicar,' whom he had imagined to be still at Water Grange.

Philip watched him out of sight, and waited until he felt quite certain of the man being far enough away from him for it to be impossible for him to overhear anything that happened on the spot he had just left. Then, hastily freeing himself from his ugly disguise, he ran to the tree behind which he knew Marcella had been so long in hiding.

THIRTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.

By Woman's Wit.

"PHILIP! Philip!" she cried, turning her white, tearful face to him, upon which were traces of the agony she had endured. "That man! That awful man! The things he said about the 'Mona Lisa' that was stolen from Mr. Johnson's. How could you let him speak so familiarly to you?" she went on, puzzled. "For whom did he take you?"

Philip hesitated, then, drawing her into his arms, said tenderly: "For a man who is just as wicked and cruel as himself, my darling. The disguise I put on made him think I was his friend, and I encouraged him to speak as he did, because, by so doing, I hope to discover a strange and deeply-laid plot that will be the means of handing over to justice several clever rogues. But you must not be frightened, sweetheart," he went on soothingly. "I am able to fight with my own weapons of truth and honesty. Come," he added, "you must let me see you safely within the walls of the Court before I leave you again."

Marcella seized his arm and said impressively: "Philip, don't meet that man to-morrow night without being armed. Oh, my dear!" she cried. "I know my woman's instinct told me that that man was only talking like that to get you into a trap! He meant to play you some trick—to put you out of his way by some cunning deed! Promise," she pleaded, "that you will take someone with you who will be able to defend you should he want to play you false!"

Philip gazed into her beautiful, eager face with a loving

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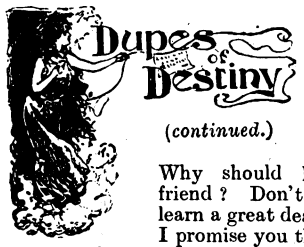

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smile. How he thanked God for the heart of this pure, tender woman.

"Darling," he said earnestly, "you need have no fear for me this time. That man Boulter thought I was his confederate! Why should he mean treachery to his friend? Don't be afraid, my dearest; I shall learn a great deal that will be valuable, and I promise you that I will take care of myself for your dear sake," he added, kissing her trembling lips tenderly. His love for her then was greater than ever.

Marcella sighed. She saw argument was useless, and her heart was too full to dwell on the subject further. "I hope you may be right," she murmured, "and that my doubts are unfounded. But since I have had so much mystery to combat, and so many uncanny experiences at the Court, I am not surprised at anything that may happen. But promise at least that before you go you will meet me at half-past eight to-morrow."

At the Court gates the lovers parted regretfully, with renewed vows of tenderness and love. And Philip swung lightly down the drive, Marcella gazing after him into the gloom.

"Until to-morrow night at half-past eight," she murmured, then the great gate closed with a harsh clang that jarred upon her, and she went thoughtfully into the house. In the hall she met Deacon, Sir Cyprian's valet. He had been to the post-bag, and in his hand were several letters. "Are there any letters for me, Deacon?" she said eagerly.

The man looked at her sharply. "No, miss—only for Sir Cyprian," he answered civilly.

Marcella glanced wistfully at the letters in his hand—one envelope looked as though it might have been from her Aunt Violet; she thought it was just like those she always used. She put out her hand impulsively, "Let me see them?"

Deacon shook his head regretfully, yet firmly. "I'm very sorry, miss, but it's my orders direct from Sir Cyprian that he sees the letters before anyone else."

"But surely, while my father is away, the letters are not sent on to him before other people are allowed to see them?" she protested haughtily.

A malicious twinkle shot from the man's narrow little eyes as he replied urbanely, "Those are the master's orders, miss; I dare not disobey him."

Marcella shrugged her shoulders resignedly. She knew from bitter experience that her father's servants would lie and perjure their very souls for love of him. Sir Cyprian exercised an almost heathenish fascination over his domestics, and Marcella realised that for him they would walk through fire and water if need be, while for her their allegiance was only perfunctory at the best of times, except poor old Jane's, who was unable to be of any assistance for some time to come.

The following day she spent in her bedroom, and when dusk fell she set out to meet her lover. She was very pale, and her great brown eyes burnt as though some hidden fire smouldered behind them. Her gown was black, a great heavy cloak covered her, and in her arms she held a large bottle full of some dark liquid. As she neared the outer gates of the Court, a man stepped from behind a tree and went up to her. She drew back with a smothered cry.

The man laughed softly. "Forgive me, darling! I forgot you would not recognise me in this get-up; you have not forgotten my appointment for this evening, have you?"

Marcella breathed a low, glad little cry as her lover's arms closed round her. "Oh, Philip, dearest! At first I thought that—it was someone else!" Then she added—"No, I had not forgotten your appointment—we have a few moments before you go yet."

Philip kissed her passionately on her red, tender mouth. "My darling! I wish I had never to leave you again—but I hope to-night to put my disguise to some good purpose, and perhaps learn something that has long puzzled me."

Her arms tightened round him. "Dearest," she said with a half tremulous laugh, "you will think me very foolish, but—but—I remembered that it was a cold night, and you would have a long time to wait about, so I brought some wine out with me. I hoped, for my sake," she continued earnestly, "that you would drink some. Please, please, Philip," she pleaded, "don't refuse."

Philip hesitated. He had no desire to drink the wine, but seeing that Marcella was so prettily concerned for him, he resolved to do as she asked.

"Very well, dearest; I will drink a little of your wine," he laughed, "but I really don't need it. I am afraid you are spoiling me."

Marcella's eyes shone with relief. "Then, dear, I will give it to you in the old summer house," she returned. "It is only a minute's walk."

He followed her to the ivy covered arbour, and, taking a small tumbler from the pocket in her cloak, Marcella poured out a glassful of the wine. "There, that will warm you," she murmured.

He took the glass from her and drained it obediently. It certainly was comforting, but there was a strange taste about it that might have been a bitter one, it was so pungent and strong.

"Now for a few moment's talk before I go to the wilderness," he said tenderly, drawing her down beside him on the rustic seat. "I shall make the most of my opportunity to-night, and then, with those papers that that man mentioned, perhaps I may be able to bring a great wrong to justice."

Marcella murmured a few words of loving sympathy. She could not talk; something held her tongue, and she sat in an agony of suspense, gazing at her lover's dark, intense face with eager yet frightened eyes. Suddenly she saw Philip half rise from the seat, then fall back. "Marcella!" he cried sharply, "it is time I went, yet my limbs feel as heavy as lead. What am I to do?"

She pushed him down gently on to the seat. "Wait here, darling," she said tenderly. Then after a pause his head grew heavy on her shoulder, and she breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"Thank God!" she murmured. "I feel so cruel having played him such a trick, but it is for his own dear sake. I could not let him go to meet treachery. He will be safe here—until I return."

Pressing one long kiss upon the sleeping man's brow, she left the summer house, and soon was running with swift, noiseless steps in the direction of the wilderness.

The parish church clock struck a quarter to the hour when she arrived, breathless, at the place where Philip had met the strange man the day before. "There is still time," she murmured softly, then hastily flinging the black cloak upon the ground she placed the bottle of wine she had still carried on top of it, and upon the whole she threw a white handkerchief.

"I think that will do; it looks careless, and as though someone would return for it soon!" Then she listened keenly; above the low moaning of the wind among the trees, she heard a crashing noise, as though someone were trying vainly to force a way through the blackness of the night to where she stood waiting—waiting, for what?

Then with one swift glance at the cloak and the bottle on the ground, Marcella slipped behind a tree, just as two men came out into the open.

* * * * *

More than half an hour went by. The pale moon, rising higher in the heavens as night advanced, fell full upon two motionless figures lying side by side, and not far from one was a broken bottle.

A woman crept softly up to one of the figures, and, leaning over it, searched with white, trembling fingers one man's coat and pockets, doing the same with the other motionless sleeper. At last her search was satisfied, and she rose from her crouching attitude with a sigh of relief. In her hand was a packet of papers, and her big brown eyes flashed with triumph, as she flung the cloak round her shivering shoulders

(Continued on page 254.)

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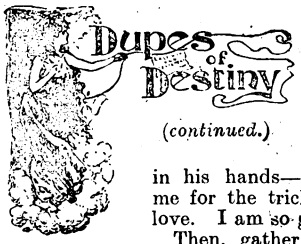

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once again. "I was right," she murmured. "There was a plot—a cruel wicked plot to silence him, and thank God for my woman's instinct that told me I guessed correctly! Now to go and put these papers in his hands—and to beg him to forgive me for the trick that was prompted by my love. I am so glad I accomplished it."

Then, gathering up her skirts, she ran swiftly through the darkness and gloom, stumbling over the mounds of earth and broken branches that had fallen across the path, flying with dishevelled hair and triumphant eyes towards the summer house, while clasped to her bosom was the packet of papers for which she had staked so much to lose—or win.

THIRTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Sealed Lips.

Two days later Philip Nullius sat in his old rooms near the parish church, reading the papers that his brave devoted little love had obtained for him. His first sensation on recovering from the deep sleep into which he had been drugged after drinking the wine Marcella had given him had been one of amazement and fear, lest he had, after all, missed learning so much that he had counted upon. But when he understood that it was a woman's unerring instinct which had saved him, and at the same time outwitted his enemies, he had owned with a throb of shame that had he listened to the girl who had loved him so devotedly, her young life would not have been risked, as it most assuredly had been, in the carrying out of so hazardous an undertaking.

He was now turning over the packet of miscellaneous papers with a sense of disappointment. They were memoranda consisting mostly of dates and ambiguous sentences, that only those understanding the allusions hidden between the lines could follow.

"These are not of much use to me," he said slowly. "They implicate no one; even if I were to hand them over to the police, they would know no more than I do now, unless this last paper contains more detail." He opened it curiously. It was a curt note of but a few stilted phrases, but as Philip Nullius looked more closely into it, a startled expression leapt into his dark eyes, and his face paled to a deathly whiteness.

"It can't be," he muttered hoarsely. "My God! to imagine for a moment that such a madness can exist! Yet it is in the same writing—the same queer little characteristics. There is no mistaking it—in doubting the hideous truth!"

He rose from his chair and paced the floor with quick, impatient steps. His mind was divided between two things—love and duty—and he knew that in the performance of his duty he would drag his love down into the dust with shame and horror.

This evidence which had fallen so strangely into his hands would startle the entire world of criminal investigation, and place in the possession of the authorities of Scotland Yard the person of the notorious leader of the most dangerous gang of burglars—the man whose sobriquet was a menace in itself to those who, though never having seen him or heard his voice, recognised his master brain that planned out the daringly audacious raids that had earned for him the questionable nickname of the "Spade." And the simple fact of placing the letter he had just read, and the one he had taken from his own drawer to compare with it, would make the blood of the chiefs in unravelling crime thrill with delight at the prospect of getting into their hands the mysterious King of Burglars.

"What am I to do?" he muttered, after a fruitless ten minutes' ramble to and fro his small sitting-room. "There seems to be no other course open but to keep silence—I dare not speak—I dare not with my own hand kill the heart that loves me—I must let Justice play her own game—I will not place the best trump in her grasp."

He brushed his hair back from his brow, which was lined with thought and perplexity. "No, I will not, even to aid the law of my country, stir one inch towards bringing this mysterious leader of criminals to the tribunal that awaits him. I can't be doing wrong," he mused; "surely it is the only course open to me—the one chance I have of warding off sorrow and shame from the innocent."

He crossed the room to the fire and held over the flames the two papers that would hurt more in proportion to the good they would accomplish. As the blaze caught and licked them up, he did not know that he would shortly regret that act of generosity more than any other in his life.

As he moved away he murmured again: "It is better so—far, far better that I should do that than send them to Scotland Yard with the information I possess." Then his face clouded, and he shut his teeth sharply together at the thought of the mercy an unscrupulous villain was receiving on account of the innocent dependent upon him.

"One day he shall know! One day I shall reveal my knowledge and then I shall give no quarter!" he said, as the last flicker died in the grate and ashes only remained.

Then, packing a few things into a bag, and writing a loving note to Marcella, telling her not to worry about him, as he was going to London to see the authorities at the Foundling Hospital where he had been brought up, in order to ascertain about the details of his birth, also that he had destroyed the papers as they were of no value after all, Philip caught the up-train to town, and neither he, nor the man whose enmity was pursuing him so relentlessly, knew that they had passed on the line, one returning to Crawley to resume life as the country gentleman, and the other to London, to try to trace, for his sweetheart's sake, the mystery that surrounded his life.

THIRTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.

"She is your Mother!"

Marcella, on the night of her lover's departure to London, felt a renewal of the interest in the woman whom she had seen concealed in the hidden wing of the subterranean corridor.

Her father was still away, and, catching sight of Deacon disappearing towards the door that led into the passage, she waited until his steps had died away; then, creeping up to it, she pushed the door gently.

It yielded immediately, and she quickly slipped past it, and closed it noiselessly on the other side. She very soon found herself near the panelled door of the room at the end of the underground passage. Not a sound could she hear; it was almost as though she were in a silent tomb of death—so chilly and awesome was the atmosphere. She raised one corner of the curtain that hung before the glass panels, and looked into the room. It was brightly illuminated with electric light, and to her surprise she saw Deacon speaking with a tone of command to the woman she had seen before, whose white, frightened face was even thinner and more wild-looking than ever.

"You've got to do as you're told," he said roughly; "and if you start any of your nonsense, you'll be put somewhere else where it won't matter how much noise you make. Come along, you take that medicine without any more to do."

"No, no!" wailed the low voice. "I don't like it; I took some before and it was nasty. I won't take any more," and she retreated further against the wall, holding out one white, thin hand as though afraid of being struck.

Deacon's dark face scowled savagely. "You wait—you precious bundle of bones. I've got my orders to see to, and one of 'em is that you take your medicine regular or there'll be a nice little surprise for you from someone else."

A terrified glance crept into the delicate face. "You mean—you mean—him?" she whispered.

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

A Lover's Complaint.

I AM sorry, "WALTER," that you can so seldom see your sweetheart by yourself in the evenings when you call, as the members of her family are so plentiful. You say: "Would you advise me to call in the mornings, when I am sometimes free?" I certainly should not. If you are free yourself in the mornings, I don't suppose she will be. Besides, girls don't like morning sweethearts. They never feel they look their best then, and are nearly always busy. I suppose now that Spring is not far off, you will be able to take her out more for walks, so the family grievance will not fall so heavily on you.

Lady Detectives.

"CAN a girl become a lady detective?" asks "FLOSSIE." "I have a great gift for finding out things about people, and my friends often say I should make a splendid detective. Now, is there any kind of opening for me, do you think?"

* * * * *

There are lady detectives, but I don't think it is a kind of profession I would advise any girl to take up of her own free will. There is no official position for a lady in the detective force, as the Scotland Yard authorities do not, I believe, engage women. If a woman is employed, it is an affair arranged privately between herself and a male detective who wants her services. Some private detective agencies employ ladies. Their work consists chiefly in watching people's movements, and in finding out their secrets by means of tricks. It is, no doubt, a fascinating occupation to read stories about, but I don't think I should like any girl friend of mine to follow it up, as spying and prying do not make a woman's character lovable.

A Melancholy Youth.

"F.," aged nineteen, writes me the following gloomy lines: "What is wrong with me? I am always brooding and melancholy. I dislike the society of other people, and only like to be by myself. I always look on the black side of everything, and think I have no prospects in life, and am of no use in the world. Can you suggest a remedy?"

* * * * *

There is no remedy, except those which "F." alone has the power to take. It is not unusual at the age of nineteen for a young man to look at things in the light you speak of. The best thing to do is to keep the mind as fully occupied as possible. Get more work than you can do, and even if you do not, as you say, like the society of other people, I should cultivate it. It will certainly help you to get out of your melancholy state. And, in not very many years, you will be a changed being. It is wonderful how sensible and practical many a dreamer has been known to turn out n after life.

Resuming an Old Acquaintance.

SIX years ago, "T. G. W." was very friendly with a girl he met while on his school holidays. Since then he has never seen her. He feels that he would like to meet her again, but does not like to write. He saw her once, but she did not recognise him, as he has probably altered a great deal.

* * * * * *

Why not write to her? You were on intimate terms then, so it would not be resented if you tried to resume an old acquaintance.

Sending Presents to an Engaged Man.

"A. W." writes: "Would you tell me if it is right for a young lady friend of mine to write letters and send presents to the young man I am engaged to?"

* * * * * *

It doesn't seem altogether right. Find out the facts. Is she sending him letters and presents just out of friendship, or in kindness to him, or are they being sent as tokens of love? Ask the young man straight out what is the meaning of the affair, and if he confesses that he is carrying on a double game, I should ask him to cease at once, or cancel the engagement. But before you take any such steps, find out the facts of the case. It may after all be a mere harmless bit of pleasantry on the girl's part.

Servants as Wives.

"WORKING MAN" wishes to marry, and asks my advice as to the best kind of girl for him to choose. "Do you think a servant would suit me best, as being more used to household work?"

* * * * *

I do not see why a servant should not make "WORKING MAN" as good a wife as a girl of any other class. But he should not run away with the idea that she will be a good wife because she has been a servant. After all, there is nothing much in common between the life of a girl who has to do the work of a family of good position, and one who has to make both ends meet in a much smaller dwelling. Servants are not generally the most economical of people, and are, I am afraid, often given to waste. However, such faults as that should soon be lost in married life. I merely mention them because "WORKING MAN" should be prepared to take such things into consideration when seeking for a wife.

The Loveless Man.

"WHAT is the matter with me?" writes "FRANCIS." "I cannot fall in love. I am twenty-four, and have met dozens of girls who have seemed to like me, but I have never yet felt any kind of tender feeling towards them. Is there anything wrong with me, and, if so, what is the best cure?"

* * * * *

While I am sorry "FRANCIS" is so cold in his affections, I do not know that there is anything wrong with him. Not everybody has it in him to be deeply in love. The nearest approach is a lasting friendship. "FRANCIS" should on no account think himself the victim of anything wrong. If he wishes to get married, then he had better cultivate the acquaintance of as many girls as possible. The one with whom he feels he has most in common, he should try to learn to love, if she returns his liking for her. It is of no use for a man of "FRANCIS'" disposition to go with the expectation of being suddenly love-stricken. He is not, evidently, built that way, and if he ever does love, it will be more the platonic but sincere affection than the passionate feeling.

Cynthia

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SHORT STORIES

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"SIGN THAT PAPER IF YOU DARE!" SHE CRIED.

(A Dramatic Incident from the Story, "Turning the Tables." See inside.)

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Short Stories

No. 791.] [One Penny.

For the Week Ending February 27th, 1904.

Turning the Tables.

A Story of Love and Gratitude.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

Walter Heaton surveyed the portrait on the wall with a queer smile.

"My father used to tell me that there is always a way of getting what you want if you have the will! 'Where there's a will there's a way!' I pride myself on having studied his advice, and I'll undertake to say that I can get most things that I set my heart on. Now, let us see! I've made up my mind to be rich, and also that I am going to marry Lena Brookes. I think that both desires are on the high road to realisation; in fact, I shall put the latter to the test to-morrow, and I'm sure of winning. Yet the task in both cases has offered considerable difficulty!"

He puffed away contentedly at his cigar. At the end of a few seconds he resumed his half-audible monologue.

"I first determined to be rich, and, as at that time I had no fancy for marriage, I did not set about making a fortune by the unintelligent method of trying to captivate some rich widow or silly girl. I am succeeding well in my own direction. What that direction is, I don't tell! A wise man keeps his own style of fortune-making secret. The least said about that, the safer! And the wife? Ah!"

It was a long-drawn exclamation, which told of anxiety to possess.

"That girl would not have married me in ordinary circumstances. It isn't flattering to me, I'll admit, but that's the fact!" So ran Heaton's thoughts. "She is not beautiful, only just pretty, but with a smile and an expression in the liquid eyes that takes the soul out of a man from the very moment he sets eyes on her. At least, that's the way she affected me. I was in love with her from the first moment, and I said that if my eminently respectable parent was correct, I could have her for my wife if I wanted her. I did want her, I do want her! By all that's good, I mean to have her!

"It didn't take me long to see that she would not take to me in the ordinary course of things, so stratagem had to be resorted to. And I hit upon a very pretty little plan, which worked like magic!

"She was skating. I knew that she would be at it in good time, and I prepared things accordingly!" A curious light came in his eyes at this instant. "I kept close behind her, and she got cross, so she scudded away and I followed, without appearing to notice her! Oh, I worked the oracle so that she could suspect nothing! And all at once something happened! Isn't it strange how accidents happen, now? She went over, just at a *particular* spot! That accident couldn't have happened at a worse spot, even if the thing had been *planned!*

"Before she realised it, she had gone through the ice. Of course, I was just in time to save her. I got her out before she had been fairly in. I had saved her life, so I managed to insinuate in a very innocent way; and, naturally, she was compelled to be grateful! She couldn't help herself!

"After that I took good care that I should reap the full benefit of this affair. I pressed my suit upon her gradually, and she couldn't tell me to get out. I contrived to keep that life-saving business just enough in the foreground to make her feel that she must receive my attentions, and all the while I appeared as if I wasn't thinking of that, but was taking it for granted that she liked me for myself alone! And I've got her so tight in the meshes now, that I don't see how she can get out! Will she be happy with me? Why not? It will be her fault if she isn't, and all I have to consider is that I shall be happy with her!"

An uneasy thought crossed his mind at that moment. Was there anyone else in the background? Certain indications suggested an affirmative reply, and he did not like that.

"Then it is someone of whom her father does not, or would not, approve, so I think there is not much chance for him. On the other hand, she might take it into her dainty head that she preferred to remain single if she could not have him. That's where my hold comes in. I'll force her, out of sheer gratitude, to marry me!"

Walter Heaton ought to have been contented with his prospects, considering that he was so sure of his ultimate success, but he was not pleased. Something had disturbed him, so he strode from the apartment and put on his hat and overcoat.

A minute later he was striding along the almost empty street in the darkness. The air was cold, and the wind keen; he felt a certain exhilaration as he walked rapidly along. The fresh air was dispelling the troubled thoughts and cooling the heated brain. Lena Brookes would marry him; she *must*. He could win her father's consent; the old man was wealthy, and would not tolerate a poor son-in-law. Walter Heaton could prove that he was well provided with this world's goods, and likely to have a still larger share in the future. And there might be some other power of persuasion; it might be possible to find out that old Brookes was involved in some-

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thing or the other, and it was not beyond the range of possibility to get him involved if he were not so already!

He had arrived at this stage when he pulled himself up short, just in time to prevent himself from stumbling on two people as he turned the corner. They were going in the same direction as himself, which helped him to avert a collision; they must have crossed from the opposite corner just before he reached it with his long strides. He was turning aside in order to pass them, when the voice of Lena Brookes fell upon his ear with astounding suddenness. She was addressing her companion, a man.

"I wish I could take as rosy a view of matters as you do, Harold!" she said with a sigh. "Papa will not consent to our marriage, I know quite well! And how can I get rid of Mr. Heaton? He saved my life, and it would be the basest ingratitude to treat him so coldly!"

"I know that you are distressed, Lena, dear," returned the young man, his voice so full of infinite tenderness that Heaton set his teeth hard and stifled an oath. "But you will never entertain any offer of marriage from this Mr. Heaton, will you?"

Heaton waited with bated breath for the answer; it came in a low, clear tone:

"I do not love him! He would not make the offer unless I gave him some encouragement! But we must return, Harold, or——"

Heaton darted into the road, and was on the other side of the street before the young couple had turned to retrace their steps.

"So that's how the land lies, eh?" he muttered, his face white with anger. "That must be Harold Winslow! Well, *he* will stand no chance with the old man, and as for Lena, she shall be my wife, and if gratitude will not help me, then I'll arrange it otherwise! I'll begin to-morrow!"

He was very busy all the next day, but he appeared to be satisfied with the result of his doings when he shut himself up in his own special den in the evening.

"That will get the young man right enough!" he laughed. "It will take a fortnight, and then it will be ready. In the meantime, I press my suit and make the other arrangements. I was at first inclined to spare him if she agreed to marry me, but there may be a chance of doing both things, the advantage being that she will lose faith in her idol and fall in love with me as a reaction!"

Heaton presented himself on the following evening at the house of Robert Brookes, and was welcomed in the usual manner by the old man and his daughter. There was no question of the warmth of the father's greeting, but the girl's demeanour was ambiguous. Mr. Brookes looked with a favourable eye on these visits; Heaton was an eligible man, and it would serve to drive from Lena's head any nonsense about young Harold Winslow, if she still harboured any feeling of that kind towards him.

After five minutes of general conversation, Mr. Brookes rose and looked about him.

"I'll ask you to excuse me for a while, Mr. Heaton," he remarked blandly. "I must see Jackson about the property, you know, and Lena can entertain you. Where is that book of views, Lena? Show them to Mr. Heaton."

Lena shot a quick glance at her father, who, however, had half turned from her, and so missed it. Lena felt that there was some concerted action here, so she tried to fortify herself for the ordeal that awaited her.

"Better to have it over and ended!" she thought. "I fancied that he would not be so blind, but he is rushing to his own doom!"

"I am sure that it will be very interesting to hear your explanations of the photographs," Heaton was saying in his most dulcet tones, but Lena did not hear.

He had seen the book, which he understood to be new, as he had not noticed it previously, and he took it in his hands and seated himself in the chair beside hers. He opened the book, but shut it so suddenly that it startled her.

"I have not come here to look at counterfeit presentments, but at a reality, a living, palpitating reality!" he cried with a passionate gesture. It was a genuine expression of passion purposely exaggerated. "Miss Brookes, I have come here with the avowed intention of asking you to let me call you by a less formal name! Fortune has favoured me in giving me a chance to be with you alone. Lena!" He let the book drop, and seized her unwilling hands in his. "Lena! Was it not Fate that caused the accident from the awful results of which it was my good fortune to save you? Can we not see in that the hand of Fate that was to bind us more closely together than could have been possible under any other circumstances? To me, it means the loving and tender care of the one whose life was preserved that it might be linked with mine by the deepest of ties, those of love and gratitude—ties which must have a natural significance to one who is the embodiment of all that is good!"

If Lena Brookes had been less agitated by the torrent of words, which she tried at the outset to stem, she might have detected some insincerity in them. As it was she tried to take her hands from his grasp, essaying to utter the words that appeared unable to leave her trembling lips. Her countenance was pale, her breast was heaving with emotion and anxiety.

"Mr. Heaton!" she gasped at length. "I had not anticipated this! Oh, I am so sorry! It cannot be, for I——"

"You do not know what you are saying, Lena!" he expostulated gently. He was acting a part, now. "In your natural embarrassment, you are uttering words that have no foundation. I know, I feel, that you love me! It must be so, dearest, for our lives were linked together by that fateful slip on the ice! Linked together indissolubly by the closest of bonds. Your life is mine, and it is my duty, as it will be my delight, to insure that your life is crowded with happiness!"

It was an artful speech, and the poor girl turned white to the lips. She owed this man the greatest of all debts, and from the point of view of her code of honour, she must acknowledge his claim. Yet how could she give herself to this man? She did not love him; and, more than all, she had given her word to Harold Winslow that she loved *him* and would marry none other.

"Mr. Heaton," she said, striving vainly to steady her voice, "I cannot marry you! I know that I owe you a great debt, but I cannot suppose that you would wish to marry me against my will. You force me to tell you the truth; I have given my word to another!"

Lena's face now flushed crimson; it was a terrible ordeal for a girl to pass through. Her natural modesty caused her to shrink from making this confession to Heaton; she reproached herself unjustly for giving him pain, for showing what seemed to be ingratitude; yet she was compelled to speak the truth.

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Walter Heaton did not flinch under the blow; he was playing his game with consummate cunning.

"I believe that you are too noble to wish to force me to do anything against my will!" cried the girl before he had time to say a word. "Oh, I am so sorry!"

This appeal showed Heaton that he must act cautiously.

"I am not unprepared for this," he returned calmly, "although it is a bitter disappointment for me to find that my suspicions are correct. But I am actuated even in this by my ardent desire to give you happiness and to save you from disgrace and sorrow. I know, I know! You are alluding to Harold Winslow. Yes, I see that I am correct!" he continued, as she started in surprise. "I am grieved to say it, but you are giving your affection to one who is unworthy! No, no, do not interrupt! I must speak, for your sake, and you will thank me for it in the time to come! Harold Winslow is a scoundrel; if he receives his deserts, he will one day find himself in prison!"

"It is false, false, false!" cried the girl vehemently, as she drew herself up to her full height, her small hands clenched, her eyes flashing. "You are libelling him; you must withdraw those words!"

"Alas! Would that I could, Miss Brookes, for your sake," he answered with assumed sadness. "It is only too true!"

"Prove it!" she cried passionately, but there was less fire in her eyes. There was something convincing in his positive manner; it made her heart sink.

"I will!" he cried, seizing the opportunity. "Give me a fortnight, and I will have ample proof."

"I will see Harold and ask him!" she said in a tone that was almost a wail. "It cannot be true; he is so good, so noble. There must be some mistake!"

"No, you must not mention it to him!" protested Heaton. If she did that it might upset his scheme! "That is not fair, you will be warning him, and he will contrive to elude the consequences of his wrong-doing. You must say nothing, and let us both abide by the result. I claim your promise!"

Lena Brookes was too agitated to do aught save acquiesce. Walter Heaton had carried his first point, and he now did his best to calm the trembling girl, and give her an appearance of ease before the return of her father.

Heaton continued the execution of his plan for ruining Harold Winslow with a calmness and indifference that were callous in the extreme. He weaved the net about the unsuspecting young man in a most skilful manner, and the blow that should strike two innocent persons and make them suffer for misdeeds in which neither had a hand, was prepared with a surety of aim that appeared to exclude the possibility of failure.

Lena Brookes waited in terrible anxiety, alternating between belief in her lover's integrity and doubts concerning his sterling honesty. She dared not meet him, lest she should break her promise, yet she cried herself to sleep night after night in her unsatisfied longing to meet him.

Sometimes she would feel that she must despise herself for her doubts; at others she would be unable to resist the sentiment of doubt that pervaded her.

Fate seemed to be playing into the hands of Heaton, for Harold Winslow was engaged in a large firm which the former had selected as one of his fields of operation. It had become necessary to find a scapegoat on whom to tack the frauds and so relieve his accomplice from suspicion, and Harold was selected.

"It is all going beautifully!" chuckled Heaton, a week after the scene with Lena Brookes. "In less than another week I shall have him in a tight place! Hallo, what is that?"

A knock at the door made him rise lazily from his seat and open it. A man stood outside, and Heaton bade him enter.

"What is it, Dodson?" he asked, with a searching glance.

"Laxton, who is doing that trick in Manchester, arrived home last night," said Dodson without the least perturbation, "and he had a little too much, with the result that he fell under a heavy waggon and got hurt. He died this morning!"

"H'm! He had practically finished the job, so there's no harm done!" remarked Heaton unconcernedly. "You can get another man to finish it, if that is necessary, can't you?"

"Exactly!" replied Dodson easily.

The two men conferred together for a time, and then Dodson left his principal. They had arranged matters to their own satisfaction, and neither was particularly sorry for the accident, as the man had learnt more of his chief than was desirable. "It's a good riddance!" was Heaton's thought. Yet neither guessed how that accident was to affect them!

The fortnight passed away, and Heaton sent a message to Lena in order to ask her to see him. Lena replied in non-committal terms, and Heaton betook himself to Mr. Brookes' residence with a light heart. Everything looked gay, as he himself expressed it; several of his coups were coming off. Lena was bound to submit, and all would be well with him. He would mend his ways, and live happily with her in luxury.

He found Lena looking worried to the last degree, and a quick feeling of regret and pity shot shrough his heart.

"I'll make it up to her when we are married!" he mentally vowed, as he saluted her gallantly.

"My father is out," said Lena in a cold, monotonous voice. "We had better go into his little room, where we can talk without interruption." She led the way, and he followed, blessing his good fortune at having Lena to himself. "Sit down," she said, motioning him to a chair as they entered the room and she closed the door. "You have failed?"

"No!" he cried, throwing himself into the chair, which was a swivel chair placed before a small table. He noted the question with satisfaction; it showed him that she dreaded to hear, expected to hear, that he had been successful. "I have ample proofs!"

She moved away from him without speaking, and sank into another chair a few feet from the table.

"Tell me all!" she commanded in a hollow voice.

"It will distress you, but it is to save you from degradation! I love you too well to permit it; so, even while I inflict pain, I am working for your good! I have proofs here," he continued, spreading some papers on the empty table, "which show what a rascal he is! Come and look at these."

She rose hurriedly, and, pressing her hand to her side, she leant over the table from the opposite side, and tried to follow with unseeing eyes what he was explaining.

It was so clearly set forth that even she could see that Harold Winslow was guilty of a great crime. She wanted to refuse to believe it, but the evidence was so clear! She was not a lawyer, able to pick this and that point to pieces. She uttered a groan and held on to the table for support as Heaton rolled up the papers and slipped them into an inner pocket.

"Is that sufficient, Lena? Will you marry me now?" he asked, springing to his feet and making his way round to her side of the table.

"No, no! I will not!" she cried, raising her voice till he feared

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that the servants might hear and come to their mistress' assistance. "Keep away from me! I will not marry you, I cannot!"

She lifted her hands to thrust him back, and there was such a look of abhorrence and determination on her usually placid and smiling features that he recoiled. He cast a swift glance at her, and he recognised that he must use force now if he wished to possess her. Possess her? He would have her if he died a week after the wedding! His blood was up, but, unlike Lena, he did not show it in his features.

"I have a paper here," he said with calm deliberation, "that will send your lover to prison as certainly as we are looking at it. That paper requires only my signature. Will you be my wife or shall I sign it?"

Moving swiftly to a side table, he brought pen and ink to the table at which he had been sitting; he held his incriminating document tightly in his left hand all the time. Seating himself, he laid the paper on the table, took a pen and prepared to sign.

"For the last time, Lena, will you be my wife or shall I sign this and send your lover to prison?"

"I cannot marry you, I will not marry you!" came in vehement tones from the girl's lips.

"Then I sign it!" he cried, fixing his keen eyes upon her.

He saw an agonised look creep into her eyes; her face was convulsed with conflicting sentiments; she stood over the table and stretched out her hand with a finger pointing to the paper and his pen.

"*Sign that paper if you dare!*" she said. "You are forcing me to it! I owe you my life, but you are taking it from me! I cannot undo the guilt of the man to whom I have given my love, but I can demonstrate my love by saving him! Walter Heaton, if you sign that paper and send my lover to prison, I will bring upon your head the just punishment of your own crime!"

For the first time, Heaton lost his self-possession; her words were so significant, and uttered with such conviction, that they alarmed him.

"What do you mean?" he gasped, springing to his feet and brushing the fatal document to the floor. "I don't understand."

"You are a villain, and you know it!" she cried. "See!" she added, pointing her finger at his now livid face and speaking as if to an invisible judge. "See how guilty he looks! Walter Heaton, I have discovered your crime! The widow of your poor accomplice, forced to do your rascally bidding because you had a hold on him through one false step he had made—his widow received his confession in his last moments. I befriended her, and she told me! I have found out much, for it was right that I should know the real characters of *both* the men who wished to marry me! If you had left me in peace, I would have said nothing, leaving the working of justice to other and higher hands; but you forced me to speak. My gratitude would have held me, but there must be some concession on your part!"

Walter Heaton did not trouble to examine into the logic of her action; all that concerned him was that she had learnt enough to visit his sins upon him if he persisted in carrying out his threat with regard to Harold Winslow. The tables were turned with a vengeance!

She still believed that Harold was guilty! He tried to collect himself, in order to find a way out. Before he had time to utter a word, however, a servant knocked at the door.

"There's two detectives, miss, as wants to come in! I've tried to bamboozle 'em, while I come to you, but they're coming and says as I'll catch it for hindering 'em or my name ain't John, and they 'ave got a warrant for the arrest of Mr. Heaton! Here they come!"

Lena shut the door in the man's face, then turned to confront the man who had saved her life, as she thought. He was trembling in every limb.

"They have found you out!" she cried spasmodically. "I have said nothing. There may yet be a chance of escape, and it is the last thing I can do for you! Quick, through that door, up the narrow staircase to the first floor, then take the servants' staircase to the left, and make your way to the roof! Quick, quick! You can escape that way, along the roofs! I will hold them at that door!"

He hesitated for a moment; for one brief second he forgot himself and thought of the risk she was running in helping him, and of the suffering he had caused her by his fiendish plot against Harold Winslow. Then the instinct of self-preservation gained the upper hand.

"Hold them!" he cried, white with fear. "I may escape!"

He dashed through the opposite door, not stopping even to give a sign that the document on the floor was false. Lena gathered up the paper and thrust it into her pocket; then she locked the door and threw the key through the open window into the shrubbery. The next moment the two officers entered, angry at having been detained.

"Where is he?" demanded one.

"Gone!" declared Lena, laconically, trying to be calm and gain time. Every minute was precious!

One man dashed towards the open window and quickly examined the sill.

"He didn't go that way!" he shouted. "Here, Jack, through this door!"

Lena, by an effort, prevented herself from placing her weak frame between them and the door; that would have betrayed her and him. The officers tried to open the door, but were baffled. It appeared as if Heaton would gain all the time necessary to make good his flight, but the feeling of exultation that was rising in Lena's breast was dashed by the inspiration of one of the detectives.

"I know these houses! That leads to the first floor! Follow me, and we'll have him!"

What happened during the next five minutes Lena never properly understood. She waited with nervously-clasped hands for the result. She waited till she heard a shriek from somewhere above, and then she fell into a swoon. They told her all afterwards.

The officers found Heaton on the roof; there was a short chase, Heaton missed his footing, and fell from the high roof, uttering that shriek as he fell. When picked up he was still living, and he made use of his last moments, as his accomplice had done, to endeavour to right a wrong.

Harold Winslow was amazed when he discovered how narrowly he had escaped prison without being in the least aware of his danger. Old Brookes was so upset, that he vowed that Lena should make her own selection of a husband, which duty she delegated to Harold with a charming blush.

The marriage did not take place for a year, and, when it was solemnised, Mr. Brookes sold his house and went to live in the South of England, near to the pretty estate which he had given to his daughter as a wedding present.

Leslie Grant.

A Word to the Wise.

Probably there is not a reader of *Short Stories* who is not fond of bright, clever fiction; and that being the case, we expect to earn the gratitude of a large number of people by putting them on to a very good thing.

That good thing is "The Food of the Gods"—the great new serial by H. G. Wells, which is appearing in Pearson's Magazine—and it may safely be described as the most powerful and exciting magazine serial ever published. If you have not already started reading it, you had better get the current number of Pearson's Magazine, in which a full summary of the earlier instalments appears, thus enabling new readers to commence the story now.

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A WIFE WHO WAS ABOVE REPROACH.

The Tale of a Happy Married Couple and a Jealous Woman.

PICTURE to yourself one of the large, fashionable houses during one of the most superb receptions of the season; the whole suite of magnificent rooms thrown open, and a blaze of light, odorous with flowers, and gay with the exquisite toilets of women, and the glittering uniforms of the Army and Navy men, and the orders and decorations of the members of the foreign embassies; music was wafted in waves of sweetness from the Marine Band, and altogether nothing was wanting to make the scene one of the most beautiful and attractive to a beautiful and pleasure-loving woman.

Such an one, Kate St. George, stood a little apart from the throng, leaning against a marble pillar, attracting hundreds of pairs of eyes towards her, but not rewarding any one of them with even the most formal glance of recognition. Her gaze, an intent one, was fixed on the face of a man who stood in the same relative position as herself, only on the other side of the room; a man most fair to look upon indeed.

Guy Beauregard was always an object of interest to women, and it was not strange, for a face of such strength and such beauty it is not more than once in a lifetime given to a woman to behold. Just at this moment he was bending over the fair head of his wife, Beatrice; and when it is written that Guy Beauregard loved his wife with all the might of his nature, it is also written that she was perhaps the happiest woman in this world. They had been married five years, and Kate St. George had known them both since before their wedding.

The throng had thinned a little; there was more air, and the fragrance of the rich blossoms was more deliciously strong, and the music came more wooingly than when it had to struggle with such a rush and roar of human voices and merry laughter. There were not, perchance, more than a dozen people remaining in the East Room; Kate St. George turned her handsome, dark head wearily towards the crowd yonder, as though she would summon a cavalier to her side. Beatrice Beauregard glanced quickly about as she spoke:

"Guy, nearly everyone has left us. Come!"

"And what if they have?" murmured the lover-husband.

As they stepped out from the shadows of the columns they beheld the face of a man—young, fine-looking, yet with a haggard expression, whether from illness or dissipation it would be somewhat difficult to decide—and the women both uttered a man's name in almost a whisper, half of horror, half of terror.

"Jack!" they exclaimed; and Kate St. George shrunk back into the protection of the column once more. She was the older and more practised woman of the two, and watched Guy Beauregard. He started slightly as he studied his wife's terrible pallor, and went to fetch her a glass of water. When he returned, the gentleman had disappeared. But little occurred in his absence, and that little Kate St. George bore witness to. A few whispered words, and none of which she caught, save the last, as the stranger walked quickly away.

"Contrive to meet me, Beatrice, for Heaven's sake! in the Blue Room, before you go home—I will wait for you there!"

And Beatrice Beauregard bowed assent eagerly, as she pressed his hand—that was all.

"Here is some champagne, my darling!" cried the young fellow, as he put his arm round her trembling form. "What is the matter? Did that man—was he rude to you, or what made you start so? and I thought you made some exclamation—did you not?"

"Nonsense! Why, Guy, dear, what a ridiculous idea!" Beatrice laughed nervously. "It is the heat—the crowd, you know. I have not been feeling well all day."

"No, my heart," he said soberly, "I did not know it."

"Well, then, it was because I wanted to spare my boy pain and anxiety that I did not tell him."

"Bless your heart." He looked proudly and tenderly down at her from his height. "Then I must take you home at once; these infernal crowds are not fit places for you at any time!"

"No, no!" she answered pettishly. "Not yet. I want to see Mrs. McGregor before I go. I will go and look for her. You wait for me, or——" How obligingly and opportunely at this moment Kate St. George emerged from her place of concealment! "Yes, there is Kate, unescorted now, Guy!" she laughed gaily. "I give you *carte blanche* until I return!"

Kate glanced from husband to wife in remarkably well-feigned innocence.

"How is Mr. Beauregard this evening?" she asked playfully.

"Oh, thanks, Miss St. George, I am in a tolerable state of

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preservation. I need not ask how you are," he said, bending his blue eyes in gallant fashion full upon her face. Guy Beauregard was one of those men who could not help being civil to a woman, or saying the thing and looking the thing he was expected to.

There was a sort of chivalry in the man's nature that furnished him with a creed that women were created to be humoured, but he was loyal as ever knight of old to the lady of his heart.

"I am always well," she replied sweetly; "but——" For an instant Kate St. George hesitated; who shall say whether she lost herself in that moment of hesitation or not? "Shall I risk it? Jack will never betray me—even to *her*. Yes, I will risk all, for I have all to gain and little to lose," she thought to herself, and the instant of doubt was over. She turned her great black eyes up to Beauregard's face. "But I think Beatrice is not looking at all well, especially during the latter part of the evening, since——"

"Since what?" he inquired slowly.

"Why, since that start that she had—that handsome, dark man—an old friend of your wife's, I presume, Mr. Beauregard?"

"Were you——" Guy stopped short and was silent. He felt as though on the brink of some frightful precipice, and, unconsciously to himself, he quivered in every nerve of his strong frame. "Can I get you anything?" he asked cautiously, after a moment's pause.

"Oh, no; thanks."

Kate was radiant.

"Then, with your permission, I will go and find Mrs. Beauregard."

Kate was leaning, with hands clasped in front of her, against the identical column where she had spent a considerable portion of her evening; they had stopped there in their promenade, and she was looking down at the floor with a curious expression on her face.

"I wouldn't, if I were you."

"I do not understand you."

"Then I suppose I must initiate you, Mr. Beauregard, that is all. I heard Beatrice make an appointment to meet the handsome unknown in the Blue Room before she went home!"

"You l——" For a brief second of time—the very first in his whole life—Guy Beauregard forgot his courtesy to a woman, but he broke off shortly with a muttered: "I beg your pardon!"

Kate laughed.

"I suppose you think your wife is like Cæsar's, Mr. Beauregard, eh?—above reproach? Ah, well, I only say, go and see for yourself. I supposed, of course, Beatrice had told you, else I never should have mentioned it."

"See for myself!" he repeated scornfully. "Do you suppose I will play the spy? No. I do consider my wife 'above reproach,' Miss St. George!"

Kate lifted her eyes.

"You are spared the trouble; there goes 'Cæsar's wife'—and the handsome unknown!"

She turned away in an opposite direction, while Guy Beauregard, every drop of his hot blood surging through his veins like fire, watched Beatrice—his wife—hanging on the arm of the man whose sudden appearance, not half an hour since, caused her such apparent anguish.

* * *

"But, Kate?" murmured Beatrice, looking with wild eyes up at her companion's face.

He passed his hand uneasily across his brow.

"I—Kate will not betray me—she will not even recognise me—I——"

"How can she help it?"

"Ah, Beatrice, never mind, never mind—I—you are all, and the only human being in the world for me now. I am not worthy of you. I surely am not worthy to seek, or voice, or hold any woman's love."

"Hush!—quick, there is my husband—you are an old friend of mine from childhood. The name? I forget it?"

He whispered two words in her ear, and Guy Beauregard stood before them.

"Guy"—her voice trembled a little, and her sweet blue eyes were full of some unutterable pathos—"Guy—this is Berkeley Halpine; Berkeley, this is my husband—Guy Beauregard. Mr. Halpine and I are old friends, dear; we knew each other when we were children."

The two men looked at each other. Halpine did not even offer to extend his hand; but in a second Guy Beauregard put out his, and threw his other arm round his wife.

* * * * *

Two months had passed. Berkeley Halpine was a constant visitor at the Beauregards'. It was generally understood that he was in London endeavouring to obtain a foreign consulate, and that his chances, therefore, were not the most promising.

Meantime Society was busying itself with his devotion to Mrs. Beauregard, the woman whom men had vainly tried for the five years of her married life to lure or coerce into even the mild semblance of a flirtation.

"Gone this time!" exclaimed Colonel Templeton, the irresistible. "Pity she hadn't better taste, and taken me instead of that sallow-faced youngling, who looks as though he'd been through a course of India and curry!"

The Colonel was fifty-one.

Beauregard had as yet heard nothing of this. Absorbed in his affairs, he had tried, with a man's best might, to banish for ever from his mind the memory of that night, eight weeks ago, at the ball. There were times when it rose before him like a horrible vision of torture; but he crushed it as he drew in the sweetness of her lips, and listened to the soft words of her shy love telling. He was sitting in his library, hard at work, one morning, when the door suddenly opened, and Miss St. George entered, looking charming in her outdoor dress.

"Oh," she exclaimed, sinking into the most convenient chair, "I am glad that I have found someone! I have been up in the nursery, and Nelly is out with her maid. Servants are so stupid, and I want——"

"I am sorry you have been put to so much trouble, Miss St. George, I am sure; Beatrice is out."

"Oh, I know she is; I met her driving down the avenue with Berkeley Halpine. I want to leave a message with you, please. Tell her that Henriette—the dressmaker, you know—will be ready for her this afternoon, at four. Don't forget, there's a dear boy!"

"I will not."

He bowed profoundly.

"Ta-ta! then. Oh, I nearly forgot—and that Henriette says she cannot find anywhere that peculiar shade of pink that Mr. Halpine admires so much for Beatrice's new evening dress. Don't forget! Ta-ta!"

"One moment!" He laid his hand upon her arm, and the touch thrilled to the core of her heart. "Were those the dressmaker's words?"

"To be sure! Oh, dear me, Mr. Beauregard, the woman is not to be blamed; the whole town is exciting itself over dear Beatrice's flirtation with her old friend, and every woman thinks you so charming and good-natured not to object or act stupidly about it. Really I must go. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

He stood like a thing of flesh suddenly transformed into stone. His wife—his true-hearted darling and pride—the jeer and jest of the most frivolous Society in the world—that of London! No, no—a thousand times no!

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"Guy, dear!"—her fresh, clear voice—"what's the matter?"

"Nothing; your friend Miss St. George has just been here and left word that the dressmaker waits you at four o'clock, and that Mr. Halpine's favourite pink is not to be had anywhere."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Well, never mind. Dear"—she nestled down on a little hassock at his feet—"I have a favour to ask of you—I never asked one before, and you will grant it, won't you?" She took her husband's hands and looked up into his face.

"What is it, Beatrice? Anything on earth that I can in honour I will do for you!"

"Well, you know you have influence—power; you are a strong man, politically speaking, and I want a political favour—I want this foreign consulate for Berkeley Halpine, Guy. I implore it of you—I beg—I beseech—I intreat. He is worthy and capable—and, dear, you will get it for him? I know you will?"

"But he will leave England, then, Beatrice; go away from—from here."

"Why, of course; that is what he wants to do, Guy."

"Child"—he laid his hand upon her fair young head—"say you love me as you did when you married me!"

"No, no, Guy—but so much better, by five years."

"Ah, my little one, I will do my best for your friend; it may be some time before its accomplishment, but——"

Guy Beauregard worked faithfully in behalf of the man whom half the world believed he was only working to be rid of. In a few brief weeks the appointment as British Consul would be officially bestowed upon Berkeley Halpine. Guy and Beatrice and the little Nelly were at the seaside, stopping at the Avenue Hotel, where also Miss St. George was staying for a few days with her friends, the Blanchards, prior to their departure for abroad.

The day for the party to sail had in fact arrived, and when the *Britannic* steamed out of the harbour that afternoon she would bear as precious freight the young woman who, just at this time—9 a.m.—was reading over a letter that had lately been handed her.

"That is all right," she soliloquised. "I fancy the Consul in prospect will not realise his fondest hopes. And now to tell my dear Beatrice of her dear Guy's absorbing passion for me. If I am not very much mistaken, she will fly with Berkeley Halpine to that haven for elopements—the Continent."

Somewhat late in the morning Kate went down and knocked gently at Beatrice's door. In a moment it was softly opened, not by Mrs. Beauregard, but by her husband.

"Beatrice is asleep, Miss St. George. She was out until two this morning—the Meredith ball—and I have just persuaded her to go and lie down on the couch in her room."

"Never mind; don't disturb her, Mr. Beauregard; I'll come down later. We have so much to do and so little time to do it in, that I ventured thus early——" She hesitated an instant; the exquisite room and the soft half-lights through the heavy curtains, the perfumes of flowers, the draperies drawn closely together in the arch leading to the adjoining apartment where Beatrice is, the man whom she adores—worshipped as much as she might with her ignoble nature. Could she turn away? No. "I will come in and rest, Mr. Beauregard, and wait for Beatrice to wake, if you will allow me?"

She saw him stoop and kiss Kate St. George.

"I shall be most happy!"

He drew the most luxurious chair to the window, and placed the morning papers and the freshest magazines beside her, with a plate of fruit and biscuits, and then betook himself back again to his desk and his correspondence. She sat there perhaps fifteen minutes, listening to the tick of the clock, the dulled roar of the streets, and the occasional rustle of the letters that the other occupant of the room was engaged in reading and replying to; for fifteen minutes, and then she could stand it no longer.

She rose and crossed swiftly and noiselessly over to where he sat, and, standing behind his seat she laid her two hands on his broad shoulders and pressed herred lips down upon his bonny curls.

"Guy!—oh, Guy!" she cried brokenly, "have mercy upon a woman who loves—who worships you!"

"Great Heaven!" he cried, springing to his feet. "Kate!—Miss St. George!—you are mad!—you are mistaking me for someone else! I——" But she is weeping now, clinging and kneeling. "Oh, my poor child!—for Heaven's sake——" He raised her in his arms and laid her on the sofa. "Let me get you some water—some wine—you are ill!"

"Ill!" she repeated passionately. "I am ill unto

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death. I am going away—away—into a far place, out of the sight of your eyes—and I leave you here with her—with Beatrice, who never loved you as I have done—who even now is deceiving you, for she loves this mysterious Berkeley Halpine."

There was a faint rustle in the next room, but the man did not hear it.

"My darling deceiving me?" he cried, in agony and bitterness.

"Kiss me—kiss me once, Guy!" she begged; "there is no harm in your kissing me, since, in a few short hours, we shall be separated for ever!" He bent his head and kissed her brow, and the curtains parted and dropped together again. "Thank you! Heaven bless you, my love!"

She left him sitting like one stunned with a terrible blow; and then in a few moments he dashed out of the room, passing Berkeley Halpine in the corridor as he went. He merely turned to see that the man entered the room which he had just quitted, and then went on his way to quench and still his grief in brandy, whisky—anything.

Beatrice Beauregard stood in the middle of the pretty room, with wild, wide eyes and fallen hair, when the man they called her lover came in and found her.

"Beatrice, what——"

"Hush!"

"No, no! Oh, Beatrice, I must tell you. They are on my track!—they have been given a clue by—by someone. I must fly on a sailing vessel at once, this very day. My darling! My dear Beatrice!"

The young man flung himself on his knees before her, while the tears coursed down his thin cheeks.

"I will go with you!" she cried steadily. "Berkeley, my husband loves someone else. I have heard with these ears, seen with these eyes, and I am going to leave them free to love each other. Do not attempt to remonstrate with me."

She raised her small white hand imploringly.

"But, Beatrice, the man worships you. Who is the woman?"

"The girl whom I always thought loved you."

"Kate!" he exclaimed, in horror. "Oh, no, Beatrice—Guy does not care for her! She"—he faltered—"always has cared for him."

"I have made up my mind," Beatrice Beauregard answered slowly. "I am going to leave my husband—and—my child!" The fierce sobs forced their utterance, and the miserable woman fell on her knees beside her companion. "Berkeley, do not refuse me; you are my refuge—my harbour—my only hope of rest; take me with you!"

"I can refuse you nothing," he replied.

"Take me this hour—this moment—from the home that I would not stoop to call mine an instant longer! When Love has died, I cannot stay to smile and play false over his grave!"

When Guy Beauregard came back from seeing the party off on board the *Britannic*, his wife's maid informed him that "Mrs. Beauregard left the hotel two hours since in a carriage with Mr. Halpine."

* * * * *

At the Hotel Continental at Nice Kate St. George, the Blanchards, Guy Beauregard, and his little daughter and her nurse were staying, for in the ship that sailed next after the *Britannic* Guy had taken passage—a heartbroken man, unable to find a single clue, a faint thread, upon which to hang his hope of finding the wife he had lost, without even a solitary written word to say farewell, or to speak of sorrow—nothing but a terrible, sickening blank.

At Paris he fell in with the Blanchard party, and Kate, who petted and humoured the little Nelly to the top of her bent, was quite careful that the plans of her friends should tally with those of Mr. Beauregard. Kate was an heiress, having come into some fifty thousand pounds, through foreign relatives, some eight years back. So they were all together at Nice.

The stay did not promise to be long: in fact, Guy was unable to rest anywhere for a length of time. He wandered about the Continent like an uneasy spirit, with naught to comfort him but the baby he idolised. Two or three times of late the child had insisted upon it that she had seen her mamma, "that mamma had tissed her and tried about her a dreat deal."

"Dreaming, poor little one! Dreaming!" the father murmured over her golden head. "If it were only so! If I could only find my girl and take her home—if she would come to me! If I could only once lay these hands on *him!* Great Heaven! I——"

The next day—it was to be the last of their stay at Nice—Miss St. George this time insisting that she needed a change at once—when Guy Beauregard came home from a weary walk about the gay streets of the town, he stood in amazement at the open door of the little *salon*.

There stood Berkeley Halpine with his child in his arms, kissing her wee, innocent lips and coaxing her with fruits and sweets. "I will take you to mamma, Nelly; come with me, like a good little girl, to mamma," he said.

"Put down my child!" The voice was one not to be disobeyed, the voice of a man overwhelmed with grief, anger, shame, outraged pride. "Is it not enough that you have robbed me of my wife, that you should steal away our child from me, too? Villain!" he cried, rushing upon the young fellow like a lion in his passionate fury, "what have you done with my wife? Where is she? Tell me, or I will kill you where you stand—coward, miserable scoundrel, that you are!"

"Guy Beauregard," returned Berkeley Halpine, the colour rising in his pale, thin cheeks, "your wife"—he spoke contemptuously, believing the other to have given her love up for another's—"your wife is my——"

"Your what?"

Guy sprang upon him and threw him to the floor.

"Is my sister."

"Mamma, mamma!" lisped the little child; and in another instant Beatrice and her baby were gathered into Guy's strong arms.

"What an affecting tableau!" exclaimed Miss St. George, suddenly appearing upon the scene.

"Oh, Kate!" groaned Halpine, while all the blood forsook his face. "My hour has come at last. Guy Beauregard, Beatrice—you see that woman. I loved her eight years ago with all a boy's first wild passion. I was poor—so was she. At her instigation I forged my employer's name for fifty thousand pounds, and placed it for safe keeping in her hands. Remorse overtook me; I implored her to give me back the money.

"I begged; but she would not—she is living on it now. I fled to South America. I dared not return a year since. I met my sister in London. You, Guy Beauregard, procured me the Consulate to T——. But this woman was not satisfied that I should live and succeed honestly anywhere; she gave the clue to my identity to the police; she drove my sister mad by making her believe that her husband's love was no longer hers.

"Then Beatrice fled with me. Oh, Kate St. George, I must have loved you well to have held my peace so long! Had you only tampered with me—my peace—my lips should never have been unsealed; but hers—no, no! Guy, there is your wife—take her!"

"Beatrice, my darling, forgive me!" cried the strong man, in his joy and anguish.

"Forgive you, dear heart? Ah, I did that long ago; and now there is nothing to forgive, unless for you to pardon me."

"To pardon you?" he said, gathering her and her child again to his heart. "I have a wife such as Cæsar of old had, dear—above reproach!"

And Kate St. George left Nice that very hour, it is presumed, for no trace of her, or of the money she liked so well, has ever been found.

May Vickers.

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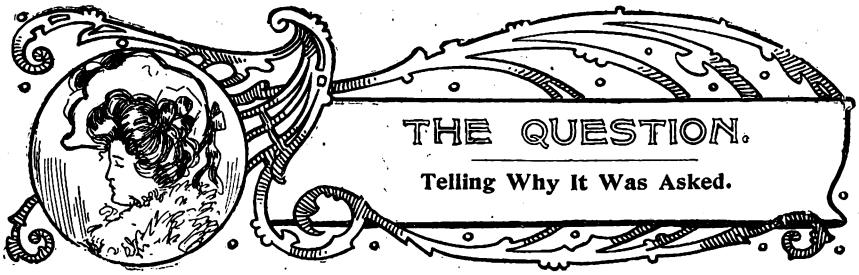

THE QUESTION.

Telling Why It Was Asked.

Travers and Miss Wainwright had been discussing all the latest happenings in their world. Now there came a lull; there seemed to be nothing more to say. Miss Wainwright stared absently into the fire. Presently Travers leant forward and looked at her searchingly.

"Miss Wainwright," he said, slowly, "there is something I want to know. I have been thinking——" He paused, then went on abruptly: "If I ask you a question will you promise to answer it truthfully, yes or no?"

Miss Wainwright looked at him quickly, the colour mounted to her cheeks. Of what was he thinking?

"It depends altogether upon the question," she said. "If I answer it at all, I shall answer it truthfully. What is it?"

"Oh, no, that won't do. Before I ask the question you must promise me that you will answer it, and truthfully, yes or no."

"Well, I won't promise any such thing."

"Then I can't ask the question."

"But possibly it is something that I couldn't answer."

"No, it is something that you can answer, if you will—by a simple yes or no."

"Is it something concerning—myself?"

"Yes."

"Does it concern anyone else besides myself?"

"Well, that would depend on the point of view," Travers said slowly. "In one way I might say that it concerns you alone, and then, again, I might say that it concerns—somebody else. However, I refuse to answer any more leading questions."

Miss Wainwright gazed throughtfully into the fire. Then she looked at Travers again.

"If I knew it wasn't——. But, then, how could you—?" She laughed excitedly, her eyes glowed, she leant forward in her chair with flushed cheeks and parted lips. Oh, what *did* he know?

"Couldn't you—just give me a little hint of what it is?" she said persuasively.

Travers shook his head.

"No, that would be the same as telling you outright."

"Well, then, I will do this—I will promise to answer you truthfully, unless it is a question on one certain subject, which—which I really couldn't—wouldn't have any right to answer, you know. Will that satisfy you?"

"That isn't fair at all. You might refuse to answer; then, in any case, you would know what I wanted to ask, and I would know nothing."

Miss Wainwright pushed back her hair petulantly.

"You are unkind. I don't see where the fairness of your proposition comes in. To make one promise to answer a question before one knows what it is! No, I won't promise!"

"Then let us drop the subject," said Travers.

For some time they sat in silence. Then she said suddenly:

"You will tell me the question you were going to ask, won't you?"

She leant forward coaxingly, irresistibly. Travers hesitated, then he gathered himself together.

"I had rather not say any more about it."

"I promise," she said, quickly, as if fearful of a second thought.

"Well, it is simply this. Weren't you getting just a little sleepy before we began this question business? Now answer me truthfully."

Miss Wainwright stared at him with wide open eyes.

"Mr. Travers, you don't mean to tell me that that is the question?"

"That is the question. I have tried it before on girls when things were getting a little dull, you know, and I have never known it to fail yet. It wakes them up; they always get excited, their cheeks glow and their eyes sparkle; they look awfully pretty, and it is the most amusing game I know. They invariably promise in the end."

Travers leant back and chuckled, until a deluge of sofa pillows almost smothered him. Nevertheless, as he walked home he said to himself:

"There is no getting round a woman. If I had asked her the question which she had in her mind she wouldn't have answered it. I saw in her face that she meant to break her promise."

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Annchen. A lady's maid, whom Vivienne greatly detests. She seems to be on very familiar terms with Mrs Sherwood and Mr. D'Alton.

EPISODE EIGHT.

The Morocco-Bound Book.

The morocco-bound book proved weirdly fascinating, and, after looking round my rooms to make sure that neither of the maids was there, I shut the door. Then I sat down to investigate the inside of the volume, and what I read seemed to turn my very blood cold, for each chapter proved to be a concise treatise on the special effects of various poisons.

Some of these, by their apparently significant bearing upon recent events, attracted my instant attention, and I read of one poison which produced slow stupefaction, of others that would throw the victim into a fainting fit that would end fatally, and of others whose action could be prolonged many months without producing any symptoms except those of a wasting decline.

But one chapter was even more absorbingly interesting than the rest, for it dealt with a pernicious drug, easily administered in wine or spirits, which produced temporary paralysis of that portion of the brain which governs the faculty of memory.

"There is but one antidote to the condition induced by the administration of this toxicological marvel," continued the article, "and that is to be found in the vegetable kingdom. Take some Dutch tulips, express the raw juice, give the patient a teaspoonful of this juice, and its immediate effect will be to neutralise the poison so as to restore its normal action to that part of the brain which has been held in bondage."

The book fell from my nerveless fingers, and I closed my eyes as though to shut out the awful spectres of suspicion which faced me.

"Surely, surely," was my gasping thought, "I must be mad to imagine there can be any connection between this fiendish book and——"

"Ah, there it is! Vivienne, my dear! What a terrible fright you have given me! I was afraid that one of the maids had picked up that silly collection of impossibilities, and I am thankful to find it here, for there is no telling what stupid notions it might put into the heads of ignorant people."

Mrs. Sherwood, noiseless as a cat, had opened my door, and stolen in upon me quite unperceived. But, with almost miraculous self-control, I opened my eyes so slowly as to seem still half asleep. Then, yawning, and stretching myself, I said lazily: "Oh, it's you, is it? I thought you were going to sleep. Are you better?"

"Yes, dear, quite better. But you—you look pale."

"Very likely. I feel pale. I wanted to go out, but was kept indoors to amuse people I don't care about. When father asked me to see you to your room, I thought there was a fine chance to amuse myself in my own way, without going back to the drawing-room. So I borrowed a book, thinking it was a novel. But it proved to be too stupid for anything, so I fell asleep, and I think that a longer nap would have done me good."

"You should have asked me for a book. I could have lent you a splendid novel."

"Very well. Send Annchen with it now, and I will read it till it is time to dress for dinner."

Mrs. Sherwood smiled her approval, and walked off with her recovered volume, being followed by another audible yawn from me. She seemed to be quite satisfied that "The Life and Methods of Lucrezia Borgia" held no interest for me. But the chances were that she was dissembling just as much as I was, and the conviction was borne in upon me that I must trust her no more than I would trust a snake.

I also knew that never again would I have the chance of seeing the book of poisons. But I had had it long enough in my possession to make a valuable discovery, and I resolved to experiment upon Alan Melrose on the following morning. If the vegetable antidote failed to restore his lost memory, it would still add enormously to my peace of mind, for it would remove therefrom a most dreadful suspicion of deliberate foul play. If, on the other hand, it proved efficacious, it would be an incalculable blessing to the unfortunate Alan and his

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sisters, although my own mental anguish would no doubt be intensified.

So I planned to act upon the directions given in the book, and, in the meantime, strove to appear as usual. I was, however, not at all pleased at the facility with which I was constantly being interrupted when in fancied privacy.

My father laid great stress upon having all the hinges and locks in the house in such perfect condition that the doors would open and shut noiselessly. But such perfection as this had its drawbacks, and I resolved to emphasise my objection to it by locking my door the next time a friend called on me.

When I first came home from school, I was told that I was to preside over my father's palatial establishment, but my presidency had so many limitations that it soon practically became non-existent. Certainly, I was the nominal mistress of the house, with a large staff of servants to do my bidding.

But everything seemed to go on by clockwork, and it very often happened that though several people were invited to dine with us, it was not always considered necessary to inform me of the fact. So I was by no means surprised that Claude and Clarissa Greatham, after going home to change into evening attire, had come back to have dinner here, at my father's invitation. Notwithstanding my professed indifference on their account, I was very glad to see them, for I wanted to warn them against putting any money in the New Barbary Land Development Company, if I could do so without being observed by my own people.

Not even to myself did I explain my full reasons for being anxious on their behalf. And as for being explicit with them, how was that possible?

Beyond the fact that there had been abnormally erratic behaviour on the part of those whom I knew to have dabbled in the business, I had nothing which I could cite in support of my objections to this particular investment.

For how dared I even hint that, contrary to popular opinion, my father was not a Mascot, who brought good luck to all who sought his advice, but a Hoodoo, in whose wake there seemed to follow a long procession of calamitous events?

Nevertheless, I meant to bestow my warning in some form or other. But strange to relate, neither during dinner nor after did I find a minute's chance of a confidential word with either Claude or Clarissa, and it now dawned on me that every moment was being quietly and unostentatiously supervised.

What could be the reason of this? Was it possible that my vague suspicions had some foundation in fact, and that it was feared that I should make undesirable disclosures? Was my tongue being muzzled? And were my movements being curtailed, so as to restrict me to a circumscribed sphere of action?

Or perhaps—and here a more charitable line of argument crept in—perhaps my father, having concluded that Claude Greatham's openly displayed admiration for me was distasteful to its object, had decided to spare both of us the embarrassment which a proposal and consequent refusal would entail.

Anyhow, whatever the reason might be, the fact remained that I had no chance of giving my warning, and I had to console myself with the resolve to drive round to Clarissa Greatham's address next morning, after I had been to see Alan Melrose and his sisters.

My father, always anxious for me to enjoy life, had insisted that I must not allow Lady Windelmore's death to interfere with several social engagements I had made, and there were two receptions that night, from which I should have found it impossible to excuse myself, even if I had wished to do so. Mrs. Sherwood, it seemed, was not feeling well enough to go out, so I was to be escorted by my father himself, whose sudden cultivation of my society was becoming rather irksome to me, for it must be confessed that not all the kindness he had displayed towards me was able to kindle that devoted filial love which a daughter ought to feel for her parent.

The first of the receptions, held at the town house of the Dowager Lady Blankerley, was a dull, stiff affair, characterised by a total absence of the kind of people that my father liked me to cultivate, so we soon passed on to the Hon. Mrs. Donoughvan's, where everything was gay and sparkling.

"There are several men here whom I want you to capture," whispered my father, and I replied rather mutinously:

"You speak as if I were a bandit, or a policeman, and as if I were here solely to make conquests."

"That is exactly what you are here for. If it were all one what you did, or where you went, I should not have gone to either the trouble of bringing you here, or the expense of providing you with more costly attire than anybody else is wearing."

I looked round at the crowd of well-dressed members of Society, who, under cover of some of the best music to be had in London, were exchanging gossip with each other, and saw that for personal richness, my white *crêpe-de-Chine* gown, with its costly embroidery in real pearls, could not be equalled by that of anybody else in the room.

But it was something new to have the question of expense brought home to me, and, for the first time, I wondered if I were being paraded as a sort of speculation which was expected to return both capital and interest in due course.

The very idea roused my pride, and I answered, with some warmth:

"If my costumière's bills are too heavy for you, I will economise in future."

"Don't be so silly! I am not asking you to economise. All I want of you is to encourage desirable men to come to our house, so that I can have plenty of bright society about me without having to come out to seek it. But I suppose you are like all other daughters I have ever heard of—you grudge the least return for the many benefits heaped upon you, and you do not realise that you have duties as well as privileges."

This reproof hurt me to the quick, and, to show how undeserved it was, I exerted myself to the utmost to appear as brilliant, as attractive, and as free from care as I was when I was first introduced into Society at the beginning of the season. The result was that my father's expectations were more than realised, and amongst those who sought permission to pay their early respects to me were a Russian prince of fabulous wealth, the heir to an English earldom, and two wealthy Englishmen who had made fortunes by turning their businesses into limited liability companies.

The first was fat and fifty. The second was thin and thirty. The third was round and rosy. The fourth was long and lanky. So far as my own inclination went, I would not have encouraged one of them. But I saw that my father seemed to like them all, though I could not help thinking that, if they had been poor, he would have regarded them even more indifferently than I did myself.

* * * * *

Although I did not get to bed until nearly two o'clock, I was up in good time next morning, for I intended to go out soon after breakfast in my own rooms to visit Sophie Melrose. Even if I were asked to go out shopping, or for a drive, with Aunt Flora, I was not likely to be wanted by her for a couple of hours, for she never went out before half-past eleven, and I meant to slip out quietly, and take a hansom, instead of using the smart little *coupé* placed at my special disposal.

So I told Annchen to have my outdoor things in readiness for me to start at once, and I was by no means pleased to receive a visit from Aunt Flora.

"Good morning, dear," she smiled; "I don't suppose you expected to see me for hours yet. But dear Beverley sent me a note after he came home last night, saying that urgent business would take him to his City office very early, and that, as he wanted specially to see us both, we were to call there for him at a quarter past ten."

This was vexing news, though at any other time I

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would have hailed it with pleasure, for I had felt some curiosity to visit the City office in which so much unostentatious charity was dispensed. Now, however, I wanted to be elsewhere, and I promptly said so.

"I can't go with you this morning," I protested. "As you know, I have an appointment with Sophie Melrose, and I mean to keep it."

"I am very sorry, but you will have to disappoint Miss Melrose this time. Your father's orders are imperative, and you know that he is not the kind of man to be disobeyed."

"Then I shall send a message to say that I will see Sophie Melrose immediately after lunch."

"A very good idea! Write the note now, and Annchen shall go at once with it."

I complied with this suggestion, though I felt very disappointed, and was presently *en route* for the office, which proved to be situated down a court off Lombard Street. Greatly, however, to my increased vexation, we were told that Mr. D'Alton had been compelled to go out, and had left a message for us to await his return. So there was nothing for it but to muster what patience I could, and the little stock I had was entirely exhausted when, at twelve o'clock, my father put in his belated appearance.

He was full of apologies for having kept us waiting, and I felt that there was need of apology when it turned out that the important business which had brought us thither was nothing more than an appointment with a photographer to whom the influential millionaire had promised his patronage.

"I'm afraid it's too late to go to Mr. Vaughan now," he said; "we must manage better another time."

Of course I could not wisely say all that was in my mind. But I did not hide my disappointment at having missed going to the Melroses' because of an unwelcome appointment which had led to nothing after all.

We reached home rather late for lunch, and as soon as it was over, I ordered my *coupé* to be brought round at once.

"You took my note to Miss Melrose?" I asked Annchen, who replied respectfully: "Yes, miss; and I wondered how it was that everything was in such a bustle. The servants were running about as if something had happened, and Miss Melrose herself told me to say that she would write and thank you as soon as she could."

This message was absolutely unintelligible to me. For why did Sophie need to write when she expected to see me sooner than a letter could reach me by post? However, the only way to remove my mystification was to go before any more hindrances occurred, and my carriage stopped, within an hour, outside the house in which Alan Melrose lived with his sisters.

Greater still, however, was my surprise when, instead of being admitted, I was told that the Misses Melrose had left London, taking with them their brother, whom they were going to place under the care of a famous specialist.

More than this I could not gather. The servants knew neither the name nor the abiding place of the specialist, and I could have sat down and cried there and then to think that while I was meeting with a series of trivial but effective hindrances, the unfortunate Alan was being taken beyond the reach of the antidotal experiment whereby he might possibly have been restored to his former state of mind.

"Perhaps Sophie's letter will explain everything," I told myself, as I was once more being driven homewards. "She must have heard of the specialist since she called to beseech my aid, or she would have mentioned him when she was here. I only hope a cure will be effected."

We were nearly home when I remembered that I wanted to advise Clarissa Greatham against investing in anything that was recommended to her on account of big possibilities, and, pulling the check string, I ordered my coachman to drive to her house.

Then I gave myself up to try to solve the many things that puzzled me, and took no more notice of my surroundings until we actually drew up at home!

"How dared you drive me here without calling first at the address I gave you?" was the angry question I put to the coachman, who professed to be quite surprised at the mistake that had been made.

"Please, miss, I'm very sorry," he said; "but I thought you meant that I was to drive you to see Miss Greatham the next time you used the *coupé*."

The man was lying. I knew it by the shifty expression of his eyes, but I disdained to argue with him, though the sudden conviction that even the coachman told off for my special service was acting as a kind of spying restraint on my movements, gave me a severe shock.

But what could be the meaning of it all?

Many hindrances had prevented me from seeing the Melroses again. Were these hindrances premeditated? And had I been carefully kept out of the way until I could no longer communicate with them?

I certainly began to think so, and a vague terror possessed me when I remembered how oddly I had been prevented from talking to the Greathams. But I am not a nervous subject, and the instinct of self-defence soon asserted itself to such purpose that I was able to seem only mildly vexed when I met Aunt Flora, gaily dressed, and smiling benignantly, crossing the hall.

"I shall tell father to speak sharply to Bryce," I said in the tone of a petulant child. "I told him to drive to the Greathams', but he brought me straight home."

"Ah, well, dear, you mustn't blame Bryce," was the gentle reply; "you know how particular your father is about your being in to receive afternoon callers, and I daresay poor Bryce had his orders to get home before four o'clock."

"Upon my word, I am treated as if I were a little child."

"There are thousands of girls in London who would go wild with delight if they thought they were going to be half as well treated as you."

This reproof was so palpably true that I almost reproached myself for being ungrateful, and I made no demur when Aunt Flora suggested that I should have my toilet attended to at once, lest visitors should find me unprepared.

Thus it happened that we both went upstairs together, and when Aunt Flora saw my boudoir door closed behind me, I daresay she thought I had been easily hoodwinked. But I was not quite so docile as I seemed, for as soon as I knew that she was out of sight, I hurried softly downstairs again. I had heard the postman's knock, and meant to see if anything had arrived for me. Quick as I was, Annchen was before me, and I saw her take, from the pile lying on the table, two letters on which I could read my own name.

She was about to put them into her pocket when, swift as thought, I crept up behind her, and snatching the letters out of her hand, said sternly: "The next time you fetch my letters up for me, put them on a salver at once, and not into your pocket, which is not the proper place for them."

For an instant Annchen's eyes flashed venom. Then she said humbly: "I'm very sorry, miss. I shall know better next time."

Notwithstanding her feigned humility, I felt sure that the girl was furious because she had been deprived of the letters, but it was not until I came to read them myself that I knew their possession to be a matter of life and death.

(Another instalment of this exciting series next week.)

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No. IX.—THE ORDEAL OF DAVID HUME.

A WELL-PRESERVED, grey-haired woman was sitting in a comfortable arm-chair by a blazing fire one cold December day. The room and its occupant were well suited to each other; they were both clothed in excellent taste, handsomely, yet not aggressively fashionable; they both impressed the observer with an idea of riches without ostentation.

It was evident that she expected a visitor, for the silver kettle was left boiling and bubbling, and the tea was still unmade in the silver teapot, and the look of anxiety on her face cleared at the sound of footsteps on the stairs.

A man of medium height with a thoughtful, clever face, entered the room. He looked about forty, but, really, he was rapidly nearing his fiftieth year. His hair was thick and wavy, but strongly tinged with grey, which, however, only served to intensify the depth of his deep-set, dark eyes; his face was clean-shaven, and showed all the sweetness and strength of the lines of mouth and chin. Altogether, a man to be loved and trusted; not perhaps a successful man—the eyes were too soft and dreamy for that—but a man who would never fail one in one's need.

"Oh, David," cried Mrs. Craven, coming to meet him with both hands outstretched, "I am so glad you have come; I feared something might prevent you, and I really must have a talk with you to-day."

"You know I am always at liberty on a Friday, for my week's work is done by then, and there is only my pleasure to consider," he replied in a musical voice.

"Yes, I know; but whenever one particularly wants a thing all sorts of unexpected accidents crop up to prevent it. Also, I must beg you to forgive me for dragging you away from your real pleasure, your etching——"

"No, no, Eleanor—my real pleasure is to be of service to my friends. Tell me now, what is troubling you?"

And he seated himself, drawing up his chair in the manner of a man who feels at home.

But now that he was there, Mrs. Craven seemed in no haste to broach the subject of her anxiety. Instead, she chatted pleasantly on indifferent subjects till the tea was finished and removed.

"No, thank you; no lamps yet," and the soft-footed domestic withdrew.

"I think one can talk better by the firelight," she explained half apologetically, and David Hume replied:

"Your subject seems to cause you embarrassment?"

"Why, yes, frankly it does—you see, it is about Etta."

There was no movement from the figure opposite her, half hidden in the chair, only a sort of tense stillness.

"I am troubled about her," went on Mrs. Craven hurriedly; "she has refused Charlie Mowbray for the second time."

There was a short silence, and then David said:

"Why does *that* trouble you?"

"He is a charming young fellow, and very much in love with her; he would make her an excellent husband. It is most provoking that she should refuse what any girl would jump at——"

"One thousand pounds a year, and—youth," said the man meditatively, the last word almost a sigh.

"Well," she replied, "the one thousand pounds a year is not to be despised, though I should not dream of urging the marriage if it were only that, but we have known him so long and he is a thoroughly good fellow. John says so, and you know the value *he* puts upon character."

"What does John think about it?"

Mrs. Craven leant forward.

"He says if she can find her happiness with Charlie he would be very pleased, but he is not going to speak to her about it—that is a woman's affair."

"Surely you don't want me to do so?" cried David in an alarmed voice.

"Yes, I do," replied Mrs. Craven firmly. "Listen!"—and she enjoined silence by holding up her hand. "You know that six months ago John found out that his partner had been embezzling money. Well, the bank could not afford a scandal, the partnership was dissolved, and John has to pay back all the money that young Hilton had taken. The world must not guess, for should there be a sudden demand on the bank, it must close, therefore we still live like this," and she waved her hand comprehensively. "You alone know of this affair, and if you think, you will see how important it is that Etta should be comfortably married, for we can settle nothing on her, and should the secret leak out, the crash may come at any moment."

David was gazing thoughtfully at the fire, and made no reply.

"You know what a great influence you have always had with the child——"

"Surely Etta is a woman now," and there was an unwonted sound of impatience in his voice.

"She is only twenty," urged the woman of fifty-three. "In the eyes of the law she is not old enough to sign away money; why should she be any more fit to throw away the intangible treasure of an honest young fellow's love?"

David smiled at the argument.

"Well, what does Etta say herself? What excuse does she give for such silly behaviour?"

Mrs. Craven glanced at him nervously, and then spoke slowly, with her gaze on the leaping flames.

"She says she might have loved him had no ther ideal been something very different; something older, graver, deeper, something infinitely above her——"

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David's heart seemed to stand still as he forced the question from his lips:

"And this ideal—has she found it in real life?"

"She thinks so," replied Mrs. Craven significantly.

The silence grew intense; in David's ears there was only the sound of the thumping of his heart, which seemed to him to grow louder and louder till he thought his companion must hear it. To speak just then without betraying his emotion was beyond even his self-control.

Suddenly Mrs. Craven rose and stood before him, and spoke in a passionate pleading:

"*Now* do you see why I want you to speak to her? Poor, foolish child, that is the only way to show her how hopeless is her dream without letting her know she has betrayed her secret. You have always been a sort of god to her from her childhood, and in your kindness you have almost made a friend of her despite her immature mind. How should she understand the real nature of her love, that it is a religion, and not love at all? How should she know that it will not bear the terrible intimacy of married life? That it would not survive the discovery that you are a man and not a god? How should she see the gulf that lies between you? The gulf of mental growth, of experience of life, of years—the gulf that will widen with every decade? How should she know that she would never be a mate for you, that your mind and heart are given to your art? Or realise the wearing struggle it would be for you to earn enough to keep two? Into her innocent child-like worship practical thoughts have never come; we must think for her, and save her from wrecking her life."

Her voice sank, as in a whisper, and stretching out her hands to him in appeal, she added:

"Ah, David, do not be vexed with the poor child. Pity a mother's anxiety for her only daughter's happiness, and speak to her about this marriage. It is the only way to make her really understand what are your feelings towards her. I do not want you to seriously urge her to marry Charlie; let her refuse him again, but I do intreat you to set her heart free that she may be able to love, with an everyday, human love, some man who is worthy and of a suitable age."

Her appeal made, the mother waited anxiously for his reply, but the man that sat so still saw pictures in the fire. Etta, the tiny, dark-eyed baby; Etta, the winsome, imaginative child; Etta, the gentle, sensitive maiden, whose mind he had helped to train, and who had so often startled him by flashes showing her intimacy with the Higher Knowledge; Etta, the woman, who was enshrined in his heart, in the holiest of holies to which none other had yet had access.

At last he rose from his chair, and spoke, but his tongue moved stiffly, and he found it difficult to form his words.

"Eleanor, you and John have been my friends for thirty years, and I would give my right hand if it could be of any service to you, but in this matter I cannot decide without time for thought. Give me till to-morrow."

"God bless you, David!" cried Mrs. Craven with a sob in her voice as he gave her his hand. "I knew you would not fail me."

And David walked out of the room like a man in a dream.

"What a dear, delicate-minded fellow he is!" murmured Mrs. Craven. "He evidently does not like the difficult task, perhaps he fears the responsibility; but he is as sensitive as a woman, and I know he will never let dear Etta guess that he knows her secret. I am glad that I had the courage to tell him."

Meanwhile David paced the cold, wet streets.

Why was this dazzling vision shown to him only to be snatched away? If Etta loved him, and God alone knew how he loved her, why should he not tell her of it? Why should they not be happy? Had he not a right to happiness like any other man? And did she not love him?

But then he knew the great question was, what would be for her happiness?

On the one side, Charlie Mowbray, young, strong, and noble-natured, with a good income, and a beautiful home to take her to, where they might grow old together and see their children grow up around them

On the other hand, himself, elderly, poor and unambitious, living on a bare two hundred pounds a year as a designer, which had hitherto satisfied his few needs, and devoting all his spare time to etchings which gave satisfaction to his soul, but brought in barely enough to cover their expense. He felt himself the father of her higher intelligence, but—he was thirty years her senior.

How ought he to act?

L. Hughes.

Unique and Interesting.

A COMPETITION which embraces a totally new idea is a rarity. In these days it is a very difficult task to discover something novel, some idea that has not already been worked to death. But the new competition, a preliminary announcement of which appears on page 265, will exploit fresh fields. In this will lay one of its greatest charms. In our issue dated March 12th the competition will commence, and in order that the scheme shall come as a greater surprise to you I shall not divulge full details of it until then. Bear in mind these important facts; firstly, that the competition will be simple, yet interesting in the extreme; secondly, that anybody, irrespective of age or station, may enter with equal opportunities; and thirdly, that the prizes offered are magnificent ones. Do not forget that the competition will commence the week after next. Let your friends and acquaintances know what is coming, so that they, too, may endeavour to win a fine award

The Ninth Love Problem.

ON the previous page appears the ninth Unsolved Love Problem. I am offering a prize of one guinea to the reader who sends me, not later than first post, Friday, March 4th, what I consider to be the best advice for David Hume under the circumstances. Replies should be written in not more than a hundred words, on one side of the paper only. State as clearly as possible *why* you consider your solution to be the best.

Mark your envelopes "Ninth Love Problem" in the top left hand corner, and address them to the "Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C."

Remember that the last possible date on which I can receive replies is Friday, the 4th of next month. None arriving after then will be considered.

The Eighth Love Problem.

"THE DIFFICULTY OF HUGH CHESTER," as the eighth problem was entitled, brought forth letters from very many readers. I shall announce the winner of the guinea in my next chat.

Your Editor.

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FOR EDITH'S SAKE.

The Tale of a Wrong Forgiven.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Above the roaring of the wind, above the swash of the driving rain, above the beating of the angry waves against the beach, rose the sound of the reports that implored aid for a sinking vessel.

In a hut just beyond the reach of the storm-tossed waves a man raised his head and listened. A man with a thin, delicately-featured face, coal-black hair and eyes, and long, slim, hands. A man whose whole appearance, even in the dimly-lighted hut, contradicted the coarse dress he wore, the utter penury of the room, that was the only one that the cabin contained.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Again, rising above the battle of the elements, pathetic in its monotonous appeal, came the sound of a minute gun.

The man stood erect, took a lantern from the wall, lighted it, and opened the door of his hut.

The sudden rush of wind and rain drove him back for a moment; then, as he was, bareheaded, he strode into the darkness beyond. Only the feeble glimmer of his lantern, the occasional flashes of vivid lightning, guided his steps as he turned his face to the coast.

Below him, where the fishermen had a small colony of cabins, lanterns gleamed, and men were collecting in groups. But where he stood, upon higher ground, his was the solitary figure. Women looked up at the starlike glitter of his lantern, and said:

"The hermit is out to-night. Will he come down here to help, or look on as usual?"

For on that wild coast shipwrecks were not infrequent. It was but watching to save such lives as the sea spared them, for no boat could live for a moment in a storm there; but on the chance of reviving such as were washed ashore these men and women waited patiently.

Whether the man they called the hermit would have crossed the rocky cliff to where the fishermen were gathered can only be conjectured, for, as he stood quietly waiting alone, the waves carried to his very feet the lifeless form of a man, and instinctively he clutched it before it could be washed back again.

Half lifting, half dragging it, he succeeded in carrying it to his hut and putting it upon the rude bed there. Then, lighting a second candle, he brought spirits from a shelf and rubbed the temples, trying to force some drops between the clenched teeth. The face the candles revealed was a youthful one, not over twenty-one or two, dark-complexioned, with aristocratic features. The dress was fine in texture, and on one finger glittered a diamond ring of quaint design.

"Quite dead!" the hermit muttered, as he drew off the ring and examined it. "Quite dead!" he repeated, slipping it upon the smallest of his slender fingers.

Then he stripped the body to rub it with spirits, to wrap it in a coarse blanket, to try again to bring life back. This he intended; but as he took off the garments a belt of soft leather, sewed in compartments, was revealed, and this he hastily loosened and carried to the table where the candles burnt. With eager, trembling hands he ripped open one of the little bags of which the belt was composed, and there rolled out a diamond, large, pure, and dazzling. Another, another, and the man's face was eager and wild, counting the wealth before him, when a weak voice said, "My friend!" and starting, he saw the man he had rescued sitting upright upon the bed, looking steadily into his face.

A mad rage seized him that the treasure should be threatened, and, in an insane fury, he seized the wooden chair upon which he had been sitting, and aimed one blow at the rescued man. Only one before his senses returned, and a chill of horror shook him from head to foot. Without word or groan, utterly overwhelmed by the sudden attack, the stranger dropped back upon the bed.

The hermit, with shaking hands and chattering teeth, huddled on again the clothing he had removed, taking no notice of what further wealth might be there, only hastening—as if already he felt the hangman's hand at his threat—to remove the traces of his murderous act.

Trembling yet, he dragged the form out into the darkness to the spot where he had found it, gave it a push into the hungry waves again, and fled back to his cabin.

Still shaking, white as the man he had murdered, he gathered the glittering treasures into the belt, clasped it round his own body, and, wrapping himself in his cloak, drew a hat over his eyes and again went into the darkness outside.

Not to the sea this time, but over the inland road; fiercely battling the storm at every step, the man sped from the lonely hut his own hand had turned from a rude home into a spot accursed for ever—fled, with the brand of Cain upon his brow.

* * * * * *

"My Dear Edith.—*You will be rejoiced, I have no doubt, to hear that I am still amongst the living, and not only that, but once more I have my hand upon such gifts of fortune as will enable us to resume something of our former state. Tell your Aunt Margaret that I shall ask her hospitality for a few days, until I can arrange our future household, when I look to you, my dear child, to make a home for one who has long been exiled from you. I shall be with you on Tuesday.—Your affectionate father,*

"James Montgomery."

This letter being opened in a cosy sitting-room in a London mansion, where evidences of luxurious comfort spoke silently of the wealth of the owner, engrossed the reader so entirely that a second occupant of the room looked up in surprise.

"Who is your correspondent, Edie?" she said. "You look as if the fate of nations depended upon that letter."

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Edith Montgomery raised her face, disclosing large, dark eyes, a coronet of golden-brown hair, and a countenance at once noble and gentle.

"My letter is from my father," she said.

Mrs. Ross, whose face was like Edith's, though matured by some fifty years of life's experience, dropped from her hands her dainty worsted work in unfeigned consternation.

"Your father?" she cried. "Where is he?"

"The letter is not dated, but postmarked Glasgow. He will be here on Tuesday."

And Edith read the letter aloud.

"It is characteristic of your father," said Mrs. Ross, "to remain all these years silent, and suddenly return with a fortune. And you may be sure it is no small sum that will content him, dear. I congratulate you, my child."

But there was no exultation in the girl's face. Consternation would better describe it, though it was scarcely that, either. More a bewildered terror.

"Aunt Margaret," she said, suddenly, "it is so long since he went away that I forget him. Why did he go? Why has he let us suppose him dead?"

"Ah, my dear, that last is a hard question to answer. I should attribute it all to a stubborn pride, if I were to judge. There is no great mystery about it, Edie. Your father made a mammoth fortune by successful speculation, and lived up to the full limits of an almost princely income. I remember your mother, my dear sister, Edith, closed your infant robes with diamond-studded clasps. And your childish dresses were trimmed with lace fit for a queen's robes, and your father's entertainments were the wonder even of our extravagant city. Your mother died when you were but four years old, and your father allowed you to come to my widowed, childless home. Five years later, as suddenly as riches had come to James, they fled from him, and by the same road—speculation. He came to me, intending to leave the city and to take you with him. But I pleaded so hard to keep you that he yielded to my wish."

"I remember that," Edith said. "It was ten years ago."

"Ten years ago, dear. After honourably meeting every obligation, leaving no debt unpaid, your father, with about a hundred pounds, left London. The letter you hold in your hand is the first token he has given of his existence in ten years."

"I have such a vague recollection of him!" Edith said. "Yet I think I should know him. I remember him as a tall, slight man, with dark eyes, dark hair, and a look of energy and spirit, as if ever eager to be moving. A man, in my memory, who would wrestle with fortune till one was conqueror."

"An eminently handsome man, my dear. You have his features, Edie, but not his expression. That is all your mother's. But this is Tuesday. I must see about preparing a room for your father."

Yet it was slowly, with a heavy sigh, not gladly, Mrs. Ross left the room to attend to the comfort of her expected guest. She could not forget for one moment that this sudden, unexpected return threatened separation between herself and Edith, the child she had taken into her warmest love for fifteen years.

And Edith, dressing mechanically, in becoming attire, to do honour to this almost unknown father, was haunted with dread. A new home, new love—all strange—was a prospect from which she shrank, remembering what a happy home, what warm, tender love she would be called upon to leave.

It was a dreary evening when aunt and niece met again in the sitting-room, where the fire crackled in an open grate, and the shaded lamps made a pleasant light. Both ladies were richly dressed, but upon both faces was a deep pallor and an expression of sadness.

"I delayed dinner," Mrs. Ross said, "in case your father comes by the seven o'clock train. Hark! Surely that was a carriage."

A peal at the door bell, a step across the hall, and the traveller was ushered into the room. Edith's heart contracted with sorrowful dismay as she went quickly forward to meet her father. All other emotion was swallowed up in a tender pity for the feeble old man who waited her welcome. Even Mrs. Ross forgot all else, looking at the wreck of the man who had been "handsome James Montgomery" for years.

Together, with all womanly tenderness, they welcomed him, drawing a chair to the fire, taking his hat and coat, and speaking words of warmest welcome.

It was the cold, they thought, that had driven all the colour from his face and made him tremble so violently. But the cold had never aged him so that he looked like a man of seventy, with snow-white hair and deeply-lined forehead.

After a few moments, the agitation of again meeting his child over, James Montgomery became calmer, and could thank his hostess for her kind welcome.

"I have been very ill recently," he said, "and I am weak."

"You must have rest," Mrs. Ross said gently; "and we are excellent nurses—are we not, Edith?"

"Let me look at you, Edith," her father said hastily. "I can scarcely realise that this is the little curly-headed girl I left. Yet it is a long time—a long time."

"You have travelled far, I presume?" Mrs. Ross said.

"Yes, yes," very hastily. "Never long in one place—never long in one place."

"But you will not leave home again," Edith said, her heart yearning over his feebleness, as a true woman ever does over any weak object of love.

"Never again, I trust," was the reply. "I have come home at last, Edith. Margaret," he added, turning his haggard eyes upon Mrs. Ross, "how can I thank you for the care you have taken of the child I deserted?"

"I hope to tell you soon," was the gentle reply.

It was still many days before James Montgomery heard in what way Mrs. Ross hoped for a proof of his gratitude. He asserted that it was but adding to his debt when she begged him to remain in her house, to let Edith be her child still.

And after a long discussion it was so arranged, a suite of rooms being set apart for the sole use of the new inmate.

But it soon became evident that he intended to lead a recluse life in these rooms, having a library fitted up there, where he spent all his time. Here he transacted his business, which consisted of a voluminous correspondence with estate agents, and such men as are ever ready to propose profitable investments to the possessors of wealth. Here he welcomed Edith, the only sunshine of his solitary life, and learnt to lavish upon her a love but little short of positive idolatry.

Finding she had not been introduced to Society, he pleaded for a magnificent entertainment, and spent money lavishly on the occasion. Her dress, he insisted, should be of rarest lace over glistening satin, and he drove himself to the jeweller's to purchase a parure of pearls.

Yet on the evening when the drawing-rooms were filled with guests he did not appear.

"I am not strong enough," he pleaded, looking fondly at his beautiful child, in her exquisite dress. "You must not expect me to join in such festivities.'

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And Edith was forced to be content.

In the year that followed, all sorts of stories were current in Society regarding this sudden return of James Montgomery, the evidence of wealth betokened in his large purchases of real estate, his daughter's lavish expenditures. He had been in Australia, in California, in Africa; every gossip had a new version of his broken health and suddenly acquired wealth. A few old friends called upon him, but their visits were not returned, and gradually he was left to the seclusion he coveted.

He often refused admittance even to Edith; would refuse food for days, and be heard feebly pacing his room even during the night hours. Ever reserved, he seemed to live in an atmosphere of mystery, with an element of dread in it. He would tell nothing of those ten years of absence, and shrank so visibly from all allusion to them, that Edith at length ceased to refer in the most distant manner to his supposed travels.

Clear and stern came the voice of Guy: "This time it is no ghost!"

During this year of gaiety that was Edith's introduction to Society, a new happiness came into her life—the happiness that wakes in all young hearts when first they learn that there is one other of all the busy world who is learning the sweet lesson of love with their own faces for inspiration.

Not all at once is the lesson learnt. Not at first did Edith suspect the page was opening for her. Yet on the first evening that Guy Stevens bowed over her little gloved hand she knew that his face had an attraction all its own for her.

It was nearly a year after her father's return, when the winter gaieties were yet new, and gossip had heralded this newcomer. He was a young Australian, possessed of wealth almost fabulous, travelling for pleasure, and bringing letters that proved his right of entrance to the most exclusive circles of the fashionable world.

He was a very handsome man, with clear, olive complexion, and blackest of hair and eyes. From the moment of his introduction to Edith he paid her marked attention, and Edith found that no courtesies of all she had received had ever seemed so pleasant to her as those this stranger offered.

She dreamt of the dark eyes, the deep, rich voice, the graceful manner of Guy Stevens, and then, for many days, forgot his existence. For, the next morning, going to her father's library, Edith found him senseless upon the floor, a newspaper grasped in his hand, and for ten days his life hung upon a thread.

The doctors gave the attack a long name. Aunt Margaret and Edith nursed the invalid tenderly, and no one in the household read in the newspaper they loosened from his clutch this paragraph:

"*One thousand pounds reward for any information leading to the present address of a man known as the 'Hermit,' for ten years a resident in a lonely hut upon a point on the Scottish coast called Sea Gull Rock. This man, tall, emaciated, with black hair and eyes, disappeared suddenly on the night of September 17th, 1901, during a violent storm. Any information leading to his present whereabouts will be rewarded as above, by applying to Messrs. Harris and Harris, Queen Victoria Street.*"

Very slowly James Montgomery struggled back to life after the attack mentioned, and only to life. All vigour was gone—even the feeble interest he had taken in his child's appearance and success in Society. His books were neglected, and he would sit for hours, with his hands folded, staring into vacancy. His appetite had to be coaxed with gentle persistence before he would touch any food.

The physicians called in consultation gravely spoke of a great shock to the nervous system, recommended care and quiet, and amongst themselves decided that the life which they tried to lengthen was very near its end, and that they were powerless.

* * * * *

Spring had come before Guy Stevens spoke his love to Edith, winning the answer he coveted. The noble yet purely womanly beauty of the young maiden had captivated the fancy of the Australian, but his heart was won by the higher charm of Edith's mind, her cultivated intellect, her modestly displayed accomplishments, and admiration deepened into love, while all the best of his own manly nature appealed to her for a return. Aunt Margaret listened, well pleased, to Edith's blushing confession, for with more matured judgment she had learnt to respect and like her niece's suitor. But she became very grave as she said:

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"Your father must be persuaded now to see Mr. Stevens, Edith."

"He has refused so often. I am sure he would like Guy; yet he would not see him."

"But it is different now. You cannot betroth yourself to a man who is a stranger to your father, or without his consent. So I will speak myself to James."

Expecting some objections, or, perhaps, only the feeble refusal that had met all attempts to draw him from his seclusion, Mrs. Ross went to the library, where her brother-in-law sat, listlessly idle, apparently watching a fly upon his writing-table. Very gently Mrs. Ross introduced her errand, and in a moment the invalid started into unexpected animation.

"Marry Edith? Take her to a new country, away from here?"

"Not yet, James. There will be some months before we can let her go."

"No, let her marry him now—to-day, go away where she can never hear—never—— There, there, Margaret. I cannot talk. Let her marry him."

"But, James," said the bewildered woman, "you will see him first."

"Yes, if I must." He spoke wearily, as if the sudden burst of animation had utterly tired him. "Is he here?"

"He will come this morning. May I bring him here?"

"Yes, yes; have it over quickly. Anything for Edith."

"Anything for Edith! And yet you are willing to have her go away from you."

"I shall go a long journey soon, Margaret, and she will be far from here."

Perplexed beyond description, Margaret Ross went again to Edith, her only solution of this strange interview being that the sudden illness from which Mr. Montgomery was recovering had shaken his reason. She spared Edith a description of her father's words or manner, only saying he would see Mr. Stevens when he called.

"Then I will go to my father, and you can send Guy to the library when he comes," said Edith, rising as she spoke, and her aunt said no word to detain her.

Edith found her father much as her aunt had found him, seated in the apathetic silence that had become habitual to him. She drew a low chair to his feet, and while he gently caressed her hair, and her hands folded upon his knees, she told him of her lover in the sweet light of her own loving thoughts. Often she thought he did not hear her, his eyes seemingly fixed on vacancy, his thoughts far away, but if the melodious ripple of her voice ceased, he said gently:

"Tell me more of your lover, Edith. Let me be sure I am giving you your heart's desire. Tell me you love him."

And while Edith unfolded all her maiden dreams to her father's loving gentleness, Mrs. Ross, in the drawing-room, was listening to Guy Stevens.

In frank, manly words he had urged his suit, sure of her sympathy. But while he spoke he unfolded to her a secret she had never guessed.

"You may judge how engrossing my love is," he said to her, "when I tell you that for Edith's sake I shall abandon entirely the purpose on which I left Scotland. And yet I can scarcely believe myself that I can give up my purposed revenge."

"Revenge!" was the startled repetition.

"Revenge!" repeated Mr. Stevens. "I do not look like the ghost of a murdered man, Mrs. Ross, but I assure you I came here to seek a man who robbed, and to all intents, murdered me."

"But how?"

"I will tell you. When my father died, nearly two years ago, he left me, in addition to the family estate and the income from other investments, a valuable collection of diamonds, the accumulation of which had been the labour of a lifetime. Every one of these gems was of the purest water, and they were all of valuable size. Not inheriting my father's love of the stones themselves, and wishing to visit England, I determined to bring them to London and sell them. I sailed in the *Castilian* in August, 1901, and after a safe voyage of many days, we were overtaken by a storm and drifted out of our course. We struck upon the rocks on the coast of Scotland, and I must have been thrown ashore by the waves. About my waist was a belt of soft leather, in which my diamonds were securely stitched. I was senseless before I had been long in the water, and wakened to life in a rude room, lying upon a bed, with the sting of raw spirits on my lips. I sat up, to see a table with two candles, and between them a man, ripping open my belt of diamonds. I spoke, and in a moment the man sprang up, and, seizing his chair, brought it crashing down upon my head."

"Horrible!"

"He must have thrown me back into the sea, which washed me again ashore, to be revived by some fishermen, who nursed me through a delirious fever back to life and health."

"But the murderer?"

"As soon as I was reasonable I inquired about the people round me, and was soon satisfied that I had been robbed by a man they called the 'hermit,' who had lived a lonely life in a wretched hut, just outside the cluster of the fishermen's huts where I lay ill. He had disappeared on the night of the storm, and was supposed to be drowned. As soon as I was strong enough I visited his hut, and every doubt I might have felt before vanished when I recognised the room in which I had seen the robber counting his gains."

"But could you not trace him?" inquired Mrs. Ross.

"I have given the detectives here his description, have had the steamers watched, have advertised him; but he has vanished as if the waves, indeed, had swallowed him up. Probably he escaped to America. But if he ever crosses my path I will be revenged for that cowardly blow."

A few moments more of friendly converse followed; then Guy Stevens took courteous leave of Mrs. Ross to seek Mr. Montgomery in the library. He entered the sitting-room adjoining the library unannounced, and crossed upon the thick carpet unheard. Edith was still seated at her father's feet, when, looking into his face, she saw come upon it an appalling look of horror. The jaw fell, the pallor became grey, the eyes were distended, and the whole face grew rigid.

With a cry the girl sprang to her feet, to see Guy standing in the doorway.

"He is ill! My father is ill!" Edith cried. "Ring for the servants to send for a doctor."

"Loosen his necktie, and bring some water," was the reply; and even in her terror Edith wondered at the stern ring in her lover's voice. But she followed his directions, loosening the collar, bathing the face of the invalid, till, with a shivering moan, he closed the horribly dilated eyes, and sank back into the chair.

"Father, dear father!" she said then—"what is it?"

"A ghost, child," he whispered. "It comes often in my dreams; never before when I was awake."

"This time it is no ghost."

Clear and stern the voice of Guy rang out in the room as he stepped in front of the chair. But James Montgomery did not lose consciousness again, struggling to his feet, crying:

"Wait, only a moment! Go, Edith, go! I will call you if I need you. Go, child, go!"

The agony of appeal in his voice could not be resisted, and Edith left him, though she waited in the hall for any call he might make

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"Spare her!" the old man cried, sinking upon his knees, and lifting his shaking hands—"spare her! Take all, take my life, but spare Edith!"

He fell, a mere helpless mass, upon the floor, as he finished his appeal, and the man who had vowed bitterest vengeance upon his would-be murderer bent over him now with womanly tenderness. It was so plainly evident that God's vengeance had overtaken James Montgomery, that the man he had wronged stood powerless before that Mightier Hand. He lifted the slight form in his strong arms and placed it upon a wide sofa, wondering even then if remorse alone had so aged and wrecked the man he had last seen vigorous and strong, with hair unstreaked in its raven hue, and eyes full of burning fire. Yet he knew that it was this man, and no other, who had stricken him down and thrown him into the sea to die, How easily he could take his revenge! Not only would one grasp of his strong hand end the frail life, but he could doom his enemy to lingering torture through Edith. A heavenly smile came upon the lips of Guy Stevens as he looked into the unconscious face—so pathetic in its still pallor.

"For Edith's sake!" he murmured, as he wet his hand and passed it over James Montgomery's brow.

It was a long swoon—so long that more than once Guy Stevens bent his ear to the heart of the still figure, to be sure he had not already been the unconscious executioner of the man he had sought for nearly two years. But at last, with a long, sighing inspiration, James Montgomery opened his eyes.

Above him hung the dark, handsome face that had haunted his dreams for many weary months. And in that face there was no anger, no revengeful animosity—only a pity unutterable.

"I was mad!" the old man whispered. "One hour later I would have given my life freely to know I was not a murderer. You could not desire a deeper vengeance than my life has been since that night."

"I see you have suffered," was the gentle answer.

"Ah, you can never know. I am glad it is over. You will have no trouble, for I will confess whenever you wish. Only"—and here the words came with feverish rapidity, and the trembling hands were lifted imploringly—"I have a child, a daughter. She has no share in my crime. If you could spare her the knowledge that her father is the wretch you know him, I will bless you, even if you exact my very life!"

"Do you know who I am?"

"The man who was washed ashore at Sea Gull Rock."

"Guy Stevens."

"Edith's lover! Oh, my child, my child!"

"Hush! I am Edith's lover, as you say. I ask no prouder title than that. And because I love Edith I would spare her all pain as eagerly as you would."

"May Heaven bless you! It is all yours. I will sign any paper you will write to give you back your own; but you will spare Edith!"

"I have said so."

But even as he spoke Guy Stevens knew that a grief he could not avert must come to his betrothed. Over the face so worn with remorse and suffering was creeping that change which comes but once in a human life. Already the staring eyes were becoming blank, as the Australian lifted his voice and called:

"Edith—Edith!"

Rightly he guessed she would not be far away, and as she answered his call he advanced to meet her.

"Keep calm, my beloved!" he said. "Your father is very ill."

"Dying?" she whispered huskily.

He let her pass him then, to read her answer in the face of her father. And as she knelt beside the sofa, pleading for one word, one look, Guy Stevens rang the bell, sent for a physician and Mrs. Ross, and took a calm control of the situation.

Mrs. Ross came hurriedly, but Edith never stirred from her place, hoping wildly for one farewell glance or word.

The laboured breath grew shorter, the grey shadows deepened on the wan face, but at last the large, dark eyes opened.

"Edith!" the dying voice whispered faintly.

"I am here, father."

"Where is he?"

"Guy?"

"Yes, let me see him."

"I am here," said Guy, bending over Edith.

"Edith, give—him—true—love—truth, faith! God bless you both. God bless him!"

So he died. Only one man ever knew the secret over which his grave closed, and he never spoke the cruel words that would have betrayed his knowledge, ever guarding the ghastly horror in his own heart for the sake of Edith, his wife.

Herbert Cullen.

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Compounding a Felony.

Telling how a Girl Played the Part of a Detective, and afterwards that of Barrister for the Defence.

Eric Charteris sat smoking a cigar in his modest lodgings in Gray's Inn. He was a pleasant-faced fellow of five-and-twenty, and his position, though in keeping with his lodgings, was ample for his wants. Steady, upright, genial, generous, it was small wonder that everyone who knew him liked Eric Charteris.

There was a tap at the door, and his landlady announced a visitor. A moment later Gerald Whitcombe, the husband of his sister Rose, stepped into the room and took a seat by the table.

Eric opened his eyes in genuine surprise. It was seldom that his brother-in-law favoured him with a visit. And, as he now regarded him, his surprise deepened.

The face of Gerald Whitcombe was pale and haggard, and his eyes had in them a frightened, hunted look that caused Eric some inward uneasiness.

"What's up?" he asked quickly. "Anything the matter with Rose or the child?"

Gerald Whitcombe fidgeted uneasily in his seat.

"No," he replied nervously. "But—but there will be before long."

Eric started.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "Come—out with it!"

Gerald rose and hurriedly paced the floor of the room. Then he stopped suddenly, and, with his face averted, said:

"I'm in a terrible mess, Eric. You were right when you criticised my too expensive tastes, though I forbade you the house in consequence of such utterance of an unpleasant truth. And now these same expensive tastes have landed me in the clutch of the law. To-morrow will probably be my last day of liberty. The next day I shall be arrested."

He stopped. Eric never spoke—only waited for him to proceed. The silence seemed to add to Gerald Whitcombe's nervousness.

"I suppose I'd better tell the whole miserable story," went on the latter shamefacedly. "I had a friend—or I thought him such until recently—and, in a weak moment, I put my name to a deed of surety for him to the tune of fifty pounds.

"A month later he decamped, leaving me to face the music as best I could. I hadn't so much as five, let alone fifty pounds, but that tale isn't worth much in such a crisis. So I—I made a false entry in one of the books of the firm who employ me, and—and borrowed the money."

"Borrowed!" echoed Eric. There was just the faintest indication of a sneer in his tone.

Gerald Whitcombe flushed.

"Yes, borrowed," he repeated defiantly. "I'm not a wilful thief, Eric Charteris. Look here!"

He drew from his breast-pocket a small paper packet. Opening it, he displayed a ten-pound note and eight sovereigns.

"I was never a saving man," he protested. "But since I took that fifty pounds, I've pinched and scraped till I've got together these eighteen with which to pay back what I took. Ah, that surprises you, doesn't it? You didn't think it was in me."

"I did not," replied Eric honestly. "I was wrong. I beg your pardon."

Gerald Whitcombe looked up. But Eric was not sneering now.

"Is there any more to tell?" he asked quietly.

"Yes. Had things gone on in their usual way I could have raised the fifty pounds in time to put the entry straight before the half-yearly audit. But something or other has gone wrong—none of us know exactly what—and the books have this afternoon been given over to the accountants for a special audit. Even if I had the money to-night, I could do nothing to stop what is now inevitable."

"Then it is useless for me to advance the money?"

"I'm afraid so. Wilmot Brothers are business men, and the mere repayment of the money would, I fear, not content them."

There was silence for some moments. And then Eric asked:

"Does Rose know?"

"Yes."

It was late when Gerald Whitcombe took his departure. And ere he left, he had agreed to a plan which Eric Charteris had proposed.

* * * * *

Gabriel Wilmot, sole surviving partner in the firm of Wilmot Brothers, returned to his house the following afternoon in a state of great perturbation.

"Whatever is the matter?" asked his daughter Alma. "You look worried to death."

"So I am," ejaculated Mr. Wilmot savagely. "There's a defalcation in one of the books to the amount of fifty pounds, and the clerk who had charge of the book hasn't turned up to-day. I sent round to his house, but the beggar's sloped. It's as plain as a pikestaff!"

"Oh, daddie! What are you going to do? Is—is he a married man?"

"Yes, he's a married man, with one little girl—at least, that is what I learnt from the man I sent round. I can't make it out. His salary wasn't bad, as salaries go, and the fellow seemed a decent sort. I don't know what to do. I suppose I shall have to notify the police of the fact."

Gabriel Wilmot sighed. It was the first time in all his business career that such a step had been forced upon him.

"Daddie," said Alma, coming over to his chair and laying a little hand caressingly on his shoulder, "don't be in a hurry, dear. Find out *why* he did it."

"How can I?" responded the old man irritably.

"Then let me."

"You!"

Gabriel Wilmot gazed at his daughter in stupefied astonishment. But Alma never flinched.

"Yes, me," she repeated boldly. "You always said I was cut out for a detective. Why not put it to the test now? If there should be extenuating circumstances in the case, you will be glad you did not call in the aid of the police. If there be none—which I doubt—or if I fail—which I doubt still more—it will be time enough to communicate then with the proper authorities. In all probability the man has left London. I have been wanting a holiday for some time, but the country lacks interest this time of year. This little business will just fill up the blank and save me from ennui."

Gabriel Wilmot was only half convinced.

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"But think of the example to the other clerks!" he protested.

"Bother the example!" said Alma decisively. "That's the excuse of a flint-heart. You needn't tell the others anything about the loss, and, if they don't know, where's the need of example?"

There was sound reason in this. But the old man was still dissatisfied.

"But you'll never find him!" he protested weakly. "You've had no ex——" But the look he got effectually stopped him.

"Don't you trouble your old head about that," replied his daughter scornfully. "I know what I'm about, and shall take care not to bungle the business. You leave it to me. Now tell me all you know about the man—what his name is, where he lived, and what he looks like."

There was no help for it. It was his daughter's way to treat him like this. And, to tell the truth, her "way" generally turned out to be the right one in the end. So he gave her all the information in his power and reluctantly promised to keep the matter a secret for three or four weeks.

"That's right!" she said, as she kissed his troubled face. "Now come and have some tea, and I'll sit with you all the evening. To-morrow will be soon enough to begin work."

* * * * *

It was a delightful day. The air was fresh—for it was not yet summer—and the blue sky was innocent of a cloud. A man was sitting on the beach, in the shelter of a great groyne that jutted out into the sea. A book was in his hand, and a little girl of five frolicked merrily round him. From time to time she attracted his attention by her clamouring insistence, but more often she was unsuccessful, for the volume in his hand absorbed and interested him. He was on the lee of the groyne, the tide flowing towards its opposite side, where the water was deep. Above his head rose the great stone barrier, skirted by the huge square timbers, slimy with sea-moss, which form so well-known a feature of most south-coast summer resorts. Presently the child looked up at the great groyne above her head.

"Put me wight up there," she pleaded. "I wants to sit on the edge and look down at you."

The man took her on his back, and, mounting the great timbers, set her on the top of the groyne.

"Don't move, Kitty," he commanded, as he again leapt down to the beach. "Sit quite still and tell me when you are tired."

"All wight," responded the child. "I'll wemember."

Once more the man took up his book, while the child, looking down at him from her pinnacle, began singing softly to herself.

"There's a nice lady coming this way," she observed presently, pausing in her song.

But the man never heard. The book had claimed him once more. How long they remained thus he never knew, but he was suddenly startled by hearing a cry from the child above him. Dropping his book, he looked up. Kitty was on her feet now, a look of terror in her eyes.

"Oh!" she screamed excitedly. "The nice lady's tumbled wight in the water!"

For a moment the man failed to comprehend. But a second scream—not a child's this time, but a woman's—made him spring suddenly to his feet. In an instant he was on the top of the great groyne. A girl was struggling helplessly in the blue water below. He was the only person in sight, and, as the sinking girl saw him, she cried piteously to him to save her.

"Stop there!" he shouted peremptorily to the child. "Don't move!"

Another instant and his coat was off. With a quick bound he was in the water. A dozen rapid strokes and the girl was in his arms.

"All right!" he said. "Keep cool; you're quite safe now."

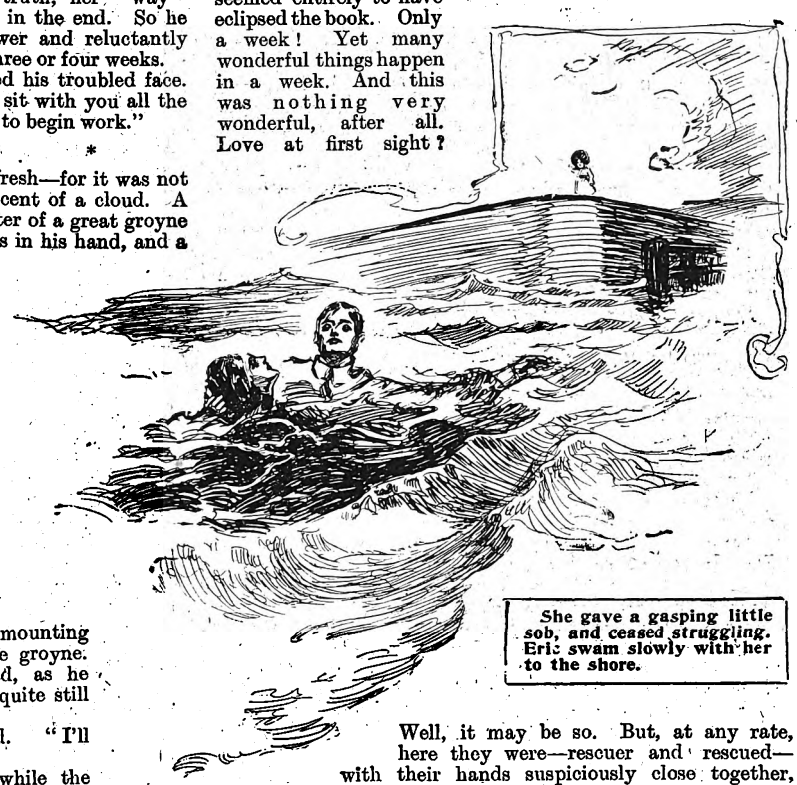
She gave a gasping little sob and ceased struggling, while the man slowly swam with her to shore.

"Oh!" she sobbed, as she sank down on the beach, "you have saved my life! How can I ever thank you! My foot slipped on the groyne. Oh, thank God you were here!"

"I shouldn't have been of much service, had it not been for the child," he said, shaking the water from his clothes. "It was she who saw you."

* * * * * *

It was a week later. That great black groyne seemed to possess some subtle fascination for two young people. The man with the book had a companion now, and the companion seemed entirely to have eclipsed the book. Only a week! Yet many wonderful things happen in a week. And this was nothing very wonderful, after all. Love at first sight?



She gave a gasping little sob, and ceased struggling. Eric swam slowly with her to the shore.

Well, it may be so. But, at any rate, here they were—rescuer and rescued—with their hands suspiciously close together, with the forsaken book artfully arranged so as to conceal the fact.

"It beats me," said the man, "how on earth you come to be down here alone. I'm afraid you're a spoilt daughter! If I were your father——"

"Father, indeed!"

"Well, yes—it's better as it is, isn't it?" he admitted, with a twinkle.

"Much!" assented the girl archly.

There was a curious and quite unaccountable movement about that book. And the girl said:

"Don't!"

There was silence for a moment or two, and then she added: "I don't know what dad will say!"

"Oh, never mind him," responded the man. "I'll manage him all right as soon as I get back to town."

"When will that be?" inquired the girl.

"I—I don't know. When will you?"

"I don't know, either."

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Their eyes met.

"Seems as if we've got *one* secret," commented the man. I can't tell you mine—yet."

"Neither can I."

The man laughed.

"Well, it doesn't matter," he said. "We can trust each other, can't we?"

* * * * *

It was three days later. Alma Wilmot had searched the little seaside town with praiseworthy persistence. And at last she had discovered the present whereabouts of Mr. and Mrs. Whitcombe. At the outset, she had been somewhat surprised to find that the absconding clerk had been so careless of his liberty as to leave behind him the name of the town to which he had removed. But the town was one thing and the street and number were another. It had taken her almost a fortnight to find out the house that sheltered Mr. and Mrs. Whitcombe. The question now was—should she go straight to the house and confront him with the crime? At last she decided to do so.

The door was opened by a quiet, sweet-faced young woman.

"Is Mr. Whitcombe in?" inquired Alma briefly.

The woman nodded, smiled, and ushered her into a cosy little sitting-room. A man rose as she entered, and, as she saw him, Alma gave a little gasp of astonishment.

"Eric!" she exclaimed. "You here! I—I asked for Mr. Whitcombe!"

Eric Charteris smiled.

"I am Mr. Whitcombe—*pro tem.*" he said, laughing.

"I thought your name was Charteris?"

"So it is," responded Eric promptly. "I see I must explain. But tell me—what do *you* want with Mr. Whitcombe?"

And then Alma sat down, still bewildered, and told him who she was and why she had come to the town. Eric listened in blank amazement.

"You—a detective!" he gasped, and laughed again. "Well, now I must tell you my story. Gerald Whitcombe is the husband of my sister Rose and the father of Kitty. The night before the discovery of the—er—little clerical error in his books, he came to me and told me all. It was a sad story, and I pitied the man. Moreover, I could see he was deeply penitent. I decided at once that he must be got out of the country. But there was little time.

"The officers of Scotland Yard think little of a twenty-four hours' start, and I cast about for some means of putting them off the scent and thereby gaining time. So early the next morning the Whitcombes moved from London, leaving the name of this town behind them. As soon as they were safe out of the district, I took the place and adopted the name of Gerald Whitcombe, while he slipped off to the Continent. Since then, I have been waiting for the arrival of the detectives. And, instead, I find you."

"But the detective might have arrested you!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, no," was the reply. "I should have explained, and then I would have gone to Mr. Wilmot, offered him the money, and begged his forgiveness for my sister's husband."

"And now?" asked Alma.

"Now," replied Eric confidently, "I shall have a good backer-up in my pleading. You have played the detective. Now you must be barrister for the defence."

"Oh!" said Alma. "And why?"

"For two very excellent reasons," replied Eric. "First, because you are engaged to the brother-in-law of Gerald Whitcombe, and, secondly, because, but for his daughter, his little Kitty, you might have perished in the sea ten days ago. Surely your father cannot resist such pleading!"

"He'll do just what I tell him!" affirmed Alma,

And he did.

Walter J. Mowbray.

The Mystery of Dobson's Wife.

And How it was Cleared Up.

"A LETTER for you, John, and I really can't make out who it can be from," said my wife, as she took her seat at the breakfast-table one morning two or three months ago.

"The postmark is Kingston. Who on earth do we know at Kingston?" she continued, as, womanlike, she held the letter first this way, and then that, in a vain endeavour to find out who was the sender.

"If you'll allow me, my dear, I'll open it," I replied; "I may then possibly be enabled to gratify your curiosity."

The epistle in question was from an old friend whom I had not seen for years, and the contents I must confess, caused me some surprise. They were as follows:

"*Rose Cottage, Kingston.*

"DEAR ROBERTSON,—*Having recently taken unto myself a wife, and settled down for good, I think it time we should renew our old acquaintance. I shall be very pleased, therefore, to see you and your wife at dinner on Monday next* (6.30 *sharp*), *on the occasion of my wife's tenth birthday.—Yours sincerely,*

"W. DOBSON."

"'On the occasion of my wife's *tenth* birthday'!" Surely Dobson must have made a mistake. I read the letter over again. Yes, there were the words, written plainly enough—"my wife's *tenth* birthday!"

"Whom is it from, and what are you looking so astonished about?" inquired my wife impatiently.

"Read it," I replied laconically, handing the missive across to her.

"Oh, John, he must have made a mistake!" exclaimed my wife when she had finished the perusal of the letter. "He meant her twentieth—or more likely her thirtieth birthday, as I'm sure he must be over forty. Shall you go? Why, I didn't know he was married—did you?"

"Well, yes. Jackson told me a few days ago. By the way, I may as well look Jackson up; his office isn't far from mine; he may have met Mrs. Dobson, and will no doubt be able to set us right as to her age. By Jove! won't I chaff old Dobson about this on Monday!"

"Oh, yes, do, John; mind you ask him all about her. I should so like to know what sort of a person she is. There's the 'bus coming; let me help you on with your coat. Good-bye! Don't forget to bring the note-paper from Laker's, and ask the price of that brown bag, and——"

The rest of the sentence was lost to me, as I rushed down the steps and took my place on the 'bus bound for the City.

About mid-day, during the interval allowed for lunch, I met Jackson.

"Hallo, old fellow, how are you? I was just coming round to see you," he exclaimed as he shook my hand. "I received a letter from Dobson this morning that I wished to show you."

"Why, I was coming round to you on the same errand. I have a letter from him that I wanted to show you."

"Is it an invitation to spend the evening on the occasion of his wife's tenth birthday?"

"Yes." And on comparing the letters we had received we found they were nearly identical.

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"I came to the conclusion he had made a mistake," I said, "and as I thought it possible you might have seen his wife——"

"Never seen the lady," interrupted Jackson. "Can't make it out; he can scarcely have made a mistake in both letters; and yet it's impossible that he can have married a child only ten years of age. True, he has travelled a great deal in the East, and may have imbibed some Eastern notions. Perhaps he's brought home a 'dusky bride.'"

"Maybe," I replied, "though from what I remember of Dobson, he hadn't a very high opinion of the inhabitants of Oriental countries. Do you intend to go?"

"I think so. However, if you and Mrs. Robertson will call round at my place this evening, we'll talk the matter over. Until then, *au reservoir*, as we say in the classics. My time's up; I must be off. Wednesday will solve the mystery;" and, waving his hand in a melodramatic manner, Jackson hastened up Chancery Lane.

On "talking the matter over" that evening at Jackson's house, an old aunt of his, who was staying there, and had not been invited to the Dobsons', decided that it would be very improper for us to go.

"You surely couldn't think of going, my dear," she said, turning to Mrs. Jackson. "The girl's parents surely can't be alive, or they would never have allowed such a disgraceful thing to take place."

"But he may have brought home a young Turkish lady, or possibly a Hindoo girl," suggested Jackson; "you know in those countries they marry at a very early age."

"All the more reason that you shouldn't go," replied his aunt; "those Eastern women have no idea of morality at all; and if Mr. Dobson chooses to place himself on a level with heathens, and adopt their customs, he can't expect decent respectable people to visit him."

"It is possible that a Hindoo or Turkish woman may have just as much claim to be called a lady as many an Englishwoman—more than some, perhaps, who are received every day in respectable society," I remarked; "though that of course would not justify Dobson's conduct in marrying a girl of such tender years; still, we ought not to condemn him until we know the facts of the case, so I vote that we accept his invitation."

But Jackson's aunt declined to listen to our arguments, and indeed the other ladies seemed at first inclined to take her view of the matter; ultimately, however, feminine curiosity prevailed, and it was decided that we should go, although the aunt still expressed her conviction that it was "highly improper."

* * * * *

On Wednesday, punctual to the time appointed—indeed, a little before it—Mr. and Mrs. Jackson, my wife and self, stood on the steps leading to the front door of Rose Cottage, and announced our presence by ringing the visitors' bell. A neat little maid-servant answered our summons, and ushered us into a prettily-furnished room, with French-windows opening on to a lawn at the back of the house. With a remark to the effect that she would let her mistress know of our arrival, the trim little servant disappeared.

Her mistress! She spoke of her as any ordinary servant would speak of an ordinary every-day mistress. But then, no doubt, that was because she was used to her.

But speculation was rife in that back room of Rose Cottage, and expectations ran high. There was nothing Oriental that we could see about the furniture, which was of the ordinary type one usually finds in English homes of the well-to-do classes. Moreover, a very English-looking bonnet was resting on a small table in a corner of the room.

"Of course she has adopted the European style of dress, my dear," said my wife.

"I think I should have preferred to have seen her in her native costume, if she is an Eastern lady," remarked Jackson.

Mrs. Jackson turned sharply upon her husband.

"If she is, Thomas! Surely you don't suppose I should have come here had I imagined his wife was an English girl of such tender years? Besides, it would not be permitted——"

"Hush! There's someone coming down the garden."

All eyes were at once turned eagerly in that direction, just in time to catch a glimpse of a very pretty and graceful girl clad in white, and apparently of about fourteen or fifteen years of age. Masses of dark hair fell loosely over her shoulders, but her skin was as fair as ours. She was certainly not a Hindoo, nor was there anything Oriental in her appearance. There was, in fact, a decidedly English look about her.

"I suppose that is his wife," said Jackson, "though she looks rather more than ten years old!"

"Perhaps she's tall for her age," remarked my wife.

"And I'm sure she's English," exclaimed Mrs. Jackson. "I really don't think we ought to remain."

Further conversation was, however, cut short by the entrance of Dobson and the young lady in question.

The ladies of our party drew themselves up stiffly, their skirts rustling ominously.

"Ah, I'm awfully glad to see you all," said Dobson cheerily, shaking hands all round, "it seems ages since we last met, doesn't it?" Then turning to the young girl in white, "Allow me to introduce my niece, Miss Bradley."

Not his wife after all! Was he ashamed to present her to us? He certainly hadn't mentioned her, though I must say he seemed quite at his ease. I wondered in my own mind whether he had so far adopted the customs of the Orientals as to keep her shut up altogether and out of sight.

Conversation was being carried on in a constrained sort of manner, on our side at all events; when it was again interrupted by the entrance of a pleasant-looking, stoutish lady of about forty summers.

"Why, Martha, what a time you've been!" exclaimed Dobson. "I thought you were never coming. Let me introduce you. Mrs. Robertson, my *wife!*"

His *wife!* The ceremony of introduction was proceeded with, and I bowed in a bewildered sort of way when it came to my turn, and murmured something about "extreme pleasure—wife of such an old friend," and so on.

Dobson, seeing our looks of surprise, said:

"Why, what's the matter? You will pardon me for remarking it, but really you all seem to be in such a state of astonishment——"

"Well, the fact is," broke in Jackson, "we have been labouring under a delusion, in consequence of a mistake you made in your letters of invitation."

"What mistake?" asked Dobson, looking surprised in his turn.

"Why, you said something about this being your wife's tenth birthday, and——"

"And you imagined I had married a girl only ten years of age!" interrupted Dobson, roaring with laughter. "Thanks, I prefer a lady of maturer years and greater experience in the management of a household. I thought you would have guessed. Don't you know that to-day is the twenty-ninth of February, and this is leap year? It is my wife's tenth birthday, as of course it can only take place every fourth year."

Strange to say, this solution of the mystery surrounding "Dobson's wife" had occurred to none of us, and we were all very much surprised that we had not thought of it before. However, we spent a very pleasant evening, and Mrs. Dobson laughed heartily when we told her how we had been speculating as to whether she would appear in Oriental or English costume, and the arguments we had respecting her nationality.

The scruples even of Jackson's aunt were satisfied when she heard the account of our visit the next day, although that worthy old lady expressed it as her opinion "that it was very stupid of Mr. Dobson not to have worded his letter like any ordinary mortal!"

A. G. Price.

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The Result.

She: "They say there are microbes in kisses." He: "Nonsense. What dangerous disease do they develop into?" She: "Marriage, sometimes."

She was Fishing.

She: "Have you ever formed any idea of what an angel really looks like?" He (after some deliberation): "No, I don't believe I have." It was curious how shortly after this his visit terminated.

He was Pleased.

"Yes," said the wife's mother, "I see it was a mistake for my daughter to marry you at all. She is just as different from you in every respect as she can be." "Well, well," replied the great brute, "how you flatter me!"

She Returned Them.

She (tearfully): "Henry, our engagement is at an end, and I wish to return to you everything you have ever given me." He (cheerfully): "Thanks, Blanche! You may begin at once with the kisses!" They are married now.

A Lovers' Quarrel.

She (turning to the door): "I think you are just hateful, and I'm never going to speak to you again; so there's no use coming into the drawing-room after me—because I'll be on the rustic seat at the far end of the conservatory."

How Ungallant!

Miss Ratherold (who has just received a proposal): "But, Major, don't you think there is too much difference in our ages?" Major Sharpshooter: "No, indeed! I'm a great deal older than I look, my dear Miss Ratherold."

A Necessity.

George: "Are you ready to live on my income, dear? Maud: "Certainly, dearest, if—if——" George: "If what?" Maud: "If you can get another one for yourself." George: "Another?" Maud: "Yes; another income."

And He Kissed Her.

"Frank," said a girl to her lover, "here's a piece in the paper headed Kismet. What does Kismet mean?" "The word must be pronounced with the 't' silent, Nettie," replied Frank. "Why, that would be 'Kiss me,'" said Nettie. "With the greatest pleasure," answered Frank, as he did so.

Then the Band Played.

It was in a suburban drawing-room that the following conversation is reported to have been overheard. Said the young man who was calling: "Mary, you are the only girl I ever really and truly loved." "Oh, Will," said his companion, "you said the same very thing to that Jones girl only last week. She told me so." "True," answered Will unblushingly, "but that was only a dress rehearsal. This is the first performance."

The Mean Thing.

She: "Yes, dearest, I made this cake all alone." He: "I can't believe it. Somebody must, at least, have helped you to lift it out of the oven."

The Difference.

She: "You were not so dissipated before we were married." He: "Indeed I was, my dear, but when anyone told you so then, you wouldn't believe it."

What Father Thought.

Willie: "Papa is going to let you marry my sister." Featherstone: "How do you know?" Willie: "He said it was better than nothing, after all."

Then the Sun Froze.

Gussie (gleefully): "Bah Jove! All the girls round here smile at me." Tom: "Well, that shows they have some manners. Anywhere else they would laugh outright."

The Unromantic Maiden.

"Dearest Laura, since it is not permitted us to live together, let us together plunge into the river." "But, Arthur, what are you thinking of? I don't know how to swim?"

Quite Provoking.

"We had planned an ideal life; love in a cottage and all that, you know." "Well, why did you not carry it out?" "The man who owned the cottage insisted on having the rent in advance."

Through Sheer Spite.

Mr. Batch: "You say you are going to let your daughter marry young Hobson. But I thought you had a grudge against Hobson?" Mr. Henpeck: "So I have. That's why I want him to have my wife for a mother-in-law."

A Difference.

The Widow: "Yes, Mr. Gibbs proposed last night; but when I thought of poor dear Charles I refused—absolutely refused—to marry again——" Friend: "Indeed?" The Widow: "To marry again before the year was out."

A Fact.

"Like the rest of my sex," said the mermaid, "I suppose I open my mouth a good deal, but——" "But what?" interrupted the lobster. "I never put my foot in it," continued the belle of the sea, as she plunged into the surf.

A Pitiable Mistake.

"I didn't know Miss Passay was interested in chemical matters." "She isn't, that I know of." "Well, I saw her pay a shilling yesterday for a book on the 'Best Methods of Filtration.'" "Yes, poor old girl. She thought it was 'Flirtation.'"

The Prologue.

Pat was a bashful lover, and Biddy was coy, but not too coy. "Biddy," Pat began, timidly, "did ye ivver think of marryin'?" "Sure, now, th' subject has nivver entered my thoughts," demurely replied Biddy. "It's sorry Oi am," said Pat, turning away. "Wan minute, Pat!" called Biddy, softly. "Ye've set me a-thinkin'."

No Need for Argument.

"Put yourself in my place, young man. Would you want your only daughter to marry a penniless youth?" "Put yourself in my place, sir. Would you want to remain a penniless youth when there were rich men's daughters to marry?" "You confess that you'd marry my child simply for her father's wealth?" "And you confess that you withhold her from me simply because of my poverty?" "What other reason do I need?" "What other reason could influence you?" "This talk is quite useless." "Quite." "We have nothing to gain by it." "Absolutely nothing." "You take it philosophically." "Why shouldn't I? Your daughter and I were quietly married a month ago." "Good gracious!"

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SPLENDID SERIAL.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Eardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY ARE:

SIR CYPRIAN RUST, who has inherited the baronetcy and estates of Sir Basil Wingate, though he is not the legal heir.

MARCELLA RUST, his daughter, a very lovely girl, who is greatly in love with

PHILIP NULLIUS, the curate of Crawley Village, where the home of Sir Cyprian, Wingate Court, is situated.

LADY VIOLET FRAYNE-LENNOX, whom Marcella believes to be her aunt. She is a very beautiful woman, and loves her niece dearly, but Sir Cyprian has, for some reason, immense power over her, which he uses to further his own ends.

EDWARD DAY is an orphan whom Lady Violet has befriended. He, however, in making unreturned love to Marcella, insults her, and Lady Violet refuses to have anything more to do with him.

CALEB J. JOHNSON, a City magnate and millionaire, who marries Lady Violet, though he knows that her husband is still alive. This husband,

MAJOR RICHARD FRAYNE-LENNOX, is a good-for-nothing, who has been turned out of the Army. Lady Violet believes him dead.

THIRTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.

"She is your Mother!"

DEACON grinned. "Yes—you understand that, don't you? So come along and take this medicine!"

He seized the trembling creature roughly by the arm, and tried to force the glass to her lips. She uttered a low cry of terror like that of an animal at bay, and Marcella, listening outside, flung all thought of prudence to the wind; she turned the handle, and before either Deacon or the trembling woman he was grasping had realised what had happened, she was inside the room and had dashed the glass in the man's hand to the ground.

"How dare you!" she panted, drawing the frail shrinking figure of the woman closer to her. "How dare you insult a lady in my father's house! You forget, Deacon, that you are one of the servants here. In my father's absence I am the head of the Court."

An evil smile curved the man's Oriental-looking mouth. He had recovered from the shock of seeing her in the room, but his eyes were still puzzled though his mouth smiled.

"So you've found your way down here, miss, 'ave you? I might have known that you would ferret it out sooner or later! Anyway, you'll be sorry that you've tried to interfere with me and my duty."

Marcella's face flushed hotly—the insolence of the man's manner and speech made her tingle with rage.

"You call it 'duty' to try and force an objectionable drink down a helpless, inoffensive woman's mouth?" she said hotly. "But I will not discuss the subject with you; I shall make my complaint to——" She paused suddenly. How could she safely threaten to tell Sir Cyprian of his servant's conduct, when he must surely know of it? Her father was as much against her as he was in league with his menials.

Deacon laughed insolently. "Oh, yes, miss—I am quite ready to be sent away at a moment's notice by the master. He will do exactly as you suggest, no doubt."

Marcella looked at him haughtily. She could not deny that the man was encouraged by her father in his outrageous conduct, and she saw that to continue an argument would be waste of time. "You will please leave this room while I am in it," she said coldly. "You hear?" she flashed—"I order you out of my presence."

He made a mocking bow. "I go now, miss! You shall have no cause to complain of my disobedience!" He left the room and slammed the door behind him, and Marcella heard the key turn in the lock. She was a prisoner, then! Shut in with the trembling, weak creature who had clung to her silently throughout the scene with Deacon.

"You will stay with me now?" the woman cried, her pale face upturned to the strong, self-reliant one above her. "I was longing to see you again. I have had no one with me except Dolly."

Marcella started. "Dolly," that was the name of the dead baby-sister mentioned in her mother's diary.

"How is Dolly?" she said gently.

The weak face brightened. "Oh, she is very well. I think she has grown since you last came here. But you must let me show you the pretty things in the other rooms,"

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she went on. "There are such a lot, and they let me play with them and dust them when I am good."

Marcella followed her into the inner rooms that led out of her own, and found herself in a large sort of lumber-room, full of boxes, tapestry, iron safes, and works of art. As she gazed round her eyes fell upon a life-size picture standing behind a screen, and as she looked more closely at it, she gave a cry of amazement and incredulity. Where had she seen that picture before? It was the "Mona Lisa" of Leonardo da Vinci, and surely—surely, she asked herself with a throbbing brain, it must either be the twin one to that once possessed by Mr. Johnson, the millionaire, or—and her heart stood still with a new terror—the stolen picture must be one and the same as that in her father's lumber-room!

She turned to the babbling, laughing creature by her side.

"Go and—and nurse Dolly," she said gently. "I will come after you when I—I have examined these beautiful things."

Left alone, she went down on her knees and closely examined the picture afresh with hungry, eager eyes. Yes—yes—there could be no doubt about it. She remembered having noticed a curious crack in the canvas, and that same crack was on this picture also!

"What does it mean?" she whispered. "Surely," with a low cry of terror—"he has not known of this—this fearful theft? Impossible—and yet!" She buried her face in her hands. Incidents she had long forgotten rose before her with a new significance, revealing an awful possibility to her of fresh horror and shame. She was so immersed in her thoughts that she did not hear the outer door open, and someone enter the room.

A low, amused laugh roused her. She sprang to her feet, and met the cool, blue eyes of Sir Cyprian, watching her as a cat does a mouse. "You!" she gasped. "You!"

"Yes, my dutiful child," he said in a quiet tone. "You don't seem pleased to see your father!" He went towards her, but she beat him off wildly.

"Don't come near me! I could not bear to be touched by you!" she cried. "I know—I know—why you keep this room down here—and I will tell everyone. I will let Mr. Johnson know where his picture is—and that poor mad woman, who is she? What part has she played in your cruel plans?" The hot torrent of passionate words poured from her mouth, until with panting breath she paused and made an effort to pass him.

Sir Cyprian caught her arm in a savage grip. His face was quite pale, but his sapphire blue eyes were glittering dangerously.

"So," he hissed, "that is your game, is it, my dear? You think you have outwitted me—but—but you will think better of betraying me and shouting your mad babble to the world! Shall I tell you why no one would credit any tales you told them? Why you would end in placing yourself in an asylum!" His face was close to hers now, and his hot breath on her cheek. "Because that mad woman I keep down here is an escaped lunatic; she committed numberless thefts, but was proved insane and sent to an asylum. I shelter her here because—do you want to know why?"

Marcella fell back and her eyes met the cruel, glittering ones of the man she called "father."

"Why—why?" she said hoarsely, "tell me why?"

He drew her nearer and whispered: "If you betray what you have seen down here, the world will know it—the world will know that a convicted thief and lunatic is——"

"Ah, don't tell me," she moaned—"don't tell me!"

He smiled fiendishly, and repeated: "That a convicted thief and lunatic is your—mother!"

THIRTY-NINTH CHAPTER.

The Quest of Mr. Johnson.

"Ah, Caleb, you have returned! I was afraid that something had happened to you—you have been so long away!" and Lady Violet, the financier's lovely bride, turned to greet him as he entered unannounced, one afternoon, her drawing-room at the house in Grosvenor Place. For she still maintained a separate establishment, and with the exception of her intimate relations and servants, very few knew that she had married the multi-millionaire, Caleb J. Johnson.

It was nearly a fortnight since the financier had left her so unceremoniously to search for Marcella's sweetheart, and during that time Lady Violet had received only two brief telegrams from him. She had waited and hoped for news both of Mr. Johnson and Marcella, but in spite of having written several letters to her niece, she had not heard in reply, with the exception of one or two notes, written obviously under the supervision of a third party.

The only ray of relief that had come her way was her having seen Philip Nullius so strangely at Paddington Station, and from his presence there had gathered that he had been befriended by the financier. She had also tried to find out whether he had met Mr. Johnson, but Philip had denied seeing anyone in the person of a friend. She had carefully avoided mentioning him to her brother-in-law, Sir Cyprian Rust, when he called upon her one day, though she felt in some strange way that he knew more than anyone else about the reason for the young curate's sudden disappearance. Smiling, suave, and sarcastic, the baronet had in turn failed to elicit any information from her about Mr. Johnson's absence from town when he should have been on his honeymoon. She had given Philip that brief warning to be careful without betraying that she knew he was being hounded down by the strange, bitter hate of Sir Cyprian.

It was almost with a cry of joy that she greeted the financier as he came towards her. She had sent him on her errand in a flood of passionate revulsion against the idea of a honeymoon, when the girl who was far more to her than he could ever be was unhappy in her love. Yet Lady Violet acknowledged to herself with a sensation of surprise that she was genuinely glad and relieved to see the calm, strong face of the man she had married some two weeks ago. She put her hand on his arm, and said again:

"Caleb, why don't you speak? Tell me all that has happened and how you fared while away!"

The financier smiled grimly. His face looked a trifle more cold, and in his eyes the old inscrutable expression was intensified. But his mouth trembled ever so slightly as he answered:

"I am afraid I made but a poor sort of detective—you tried me beyond my capabilities. I did all I could to—to find Marcella's sweetheart, but when I arrived at the house he had been spirited away! I did all in my power," he said, with an odd note of regret in his voice, "but it was no good—I completely botched up the whole affair. I even went so far as to lurk about the place for a day or two, then even that

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failed to bring me nearer to the object of my quest—and so "—he sighed wearily—"I came back. You are not very upset at my failure, are you?" He took her white hand gently in his and kissed it. He did not try to touch her face, she noticed, and then it struck her that his hair was just a shade more grey.

"It has been an ordeal for you, Caleb," she said; "I am sorry I asked you to go. I thought afterwards that it was not quite fair on you—you are the king of finance—but in playing the simple *role* of guardian to the afflicted you are out of your element." She smiled suddenly. "After all, you will be annoyed with me, perhaps, when you realise that it was a waste of time to have gone at all, although I sent you because it may interest you to hear that Philip Nullius has returned to Crawley."

The effect of her words upon the financier was electrical. He seized her wrists in his, unconscious of the sudden pain his grip caused her.

"What's that! Phillip Nullius alive and well! Thank God!—thank God!" and Caleb J. Johnson laughed a tremulous laugh, that, coming from a woman, might have appeared almost a hysterical one.

"Had you any reason to suppose that he would not return, then?" Lady Violet said quickly, wondering at his strange manner.

The financier looked at her with a sudden furtive glance. "Reason!" he muttered; "no, not any particular reason, except that I was afraid that—that something might have happened to him. It was a lonely place that—and one never knows."

"Well, you will be interested to hear that I met him," Lady Violet continued slowly, "and he told me that he had had some strange experiences, but that he had got out of them single-handed, and was then returning to see Marcella. I wish," she went on quickly, glancing at the stern, tired-looking face before her, "that the poor fellow's parentage was not buried in oblivion—then perhaps Sir Cyprian would not be so set against Marcella marrying him—and I can't help feeling, Caleb, that he is a gentleman in spite of his obscure birth and being brought up in a foundling hospital. It is most unfortunate for him. But Sir Cyprian hates him for some other reason."

"So Sir Cyprian is dead against him, is he?" the financier said thoughtfully, with a peculiar smile. "He objects to Philip Nullius on the score of being of ignoble birth and a penniless curate!"

"I don't understand," his bride answered slowly, "why Sir Cyprian should hate that young fellow so. He has a chance of getting on in the Church, and then Marcella being his only daughter she will have money enough; you see," she explained, "old Sir Basil Wingate, my brother-in-law's uncle, left the whole of his money to Cyprian should his only daughter Helen, whom he had disinherited for running away with an adventurer, die without a male heir who should then come into the property and title, but if, as it happened, Helen died childless the title, with the money and estate, would revert to Cyprian and his elder daughter's son, should she marry—the old man having a hatred of any feminine creature inheriting directly. But, of course, you must be bored by all this dull family history," she said quickly, seeing the financier's eyes grow absent and thoughtful. "I forgot you would wonder who everyone is."

"On the contrary, I am much interested," he said slowly, "and will see whether I can do anything for this—this young man who is such an outcast, and unfit to mate with Sir Cyprian's daughter." He laughed suddenly, and his eyes flashed with a curious light.

"You are very good, Caleb," she said gently. "Marcella's happiness is more to me than my own. I love her as though she were my own daughter, and Sir Cyprian has no right to stand in the way of her happiness—he has obtained his present position only by the fluke of an old man's bitter jealousy, and had Helen Jerningham had a son, then Sir Cyprian would never have owned the Court!" Her dark eyes flashed. "I hate him, Caleb," she whispered hoarsely. "I hate him more than I can tell you—and would kiss the hand that dragged him down!"

"Even though it were mine?" his strong hand closed on hers.

"Yes—yours would be the right hand to wield the weapon," she retorted bitterly. "You are one of us now—and—and"—she finished with a sudden shy hesitancy—"my husband."

"Your husband! Yes, I had almost forgotten I had a wife, Violet," the financier said slowly. "I seem to have lived in a dream the last few days—a dream of the past."

She looked at him curiously. He was the same, yet different; this brusquely fascinating man whom she had married against her will—yet whom she felt she would not unmarry even if she could do so. She remembered his passionate wooing when they had returned from their wedding ceremony, and she had refused to live with him—the passion seemed to have died in him during his absence, giving way to an absent moody manner that piqued her.

"Caleb," she went up to him—her lovely face within an inch of his—"you don't regret—already?"

"Regret," he laughed, and snatched her to him. "You don't know me, Violet. I cannot regret what I went out of my way to plan and bring about, but now I know you are safely my wife—mine against all the world—I am allowing other matters to be uppermost in my thoughts just now." He looked at her with a half satirical smile. "You refused to live with me until I brought you Philip Nullius alive and well—I now intend to keep on the same relations as we are at present, until I have helped Philip Nullius to reinstate himself in the world, and prove himself worthy the hand of even so beautiful a girl as your niece, Marcella Rust!"

"You take a great interest in him," she said slowly.

The financier smiled suddenly. "Yes—you see, Violet, I owe my new *role* as benefactor to the humble through you—you sent me an unwilling slave to hunt up the curate; now I am interested in him for his own sake—as you were for your young nephew, Edward Day. I have befriended him, and I shall now make it my duty to do the same by—by Philip Nullius."

Lady Violet opened her mouth to remind him that Edward Day was not her nephew—then stopped. After all, why go into a long discussion on that uninteresting young man, of whom she hoped to hear no more? If her new husband had forgotten the occasion when she had referred to him in her first letter, and also when Sir Cyprian had called to take Marcella back with him to the Court on the morning of her wedding to the financier——

"Tell me," she said suddenly, "are you going to Crawley soon, or will you wait? If you go, Caleb, you will see Marcella; you will find out why she does not write me—why there is such a long silence between us now!" She

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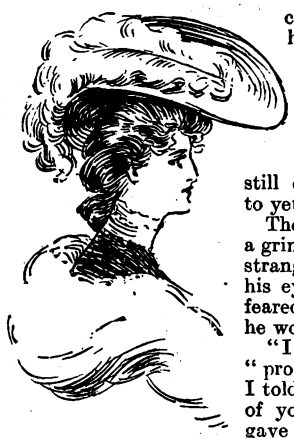

clasped her white hands round his arm, and gazed up into his face. "Caleb, you professed to love me when you brought me the news of my first husband's death! Has that love died now because I sent you away, or do you still care a little for me—enough to yet again do me a service?"

The financier looked at her with a grim smile on his mouth, and a strange expression flitted across his eyes—almost as though he had feared she would ask him a question he would rather not answer.

"I love you," he replied gravely, "probably more than I did when I told you about—about the death of your husband," and his mouth gave a queer, contorted little twist, "and whatever you want me to do you have only to command me, and I will do it."

"Then go to Crawley," she answered eagerly; "you are a man and can ask questions a woman cannot. See my brother-in-law, Sir Cyprian, and find out how he is treating Marcella—see her, if you can, and tell me how she looks—if she is ill or in any way wanting me. If I find out that that man has caused her any pain, I will not hesitate to retaliate—to strike at him in a way that will utterly ruin him."

Her eyes flashed and her colour came and went with the strength of suppressed passion.

"Caleb," and her fingers once again clutched her husband's, "you would always be very tender with me should my brother-in-law hint anything to you about my—my first husband—the days when I was first married, and—and was poor?"

He drew her to him with the old protecting gesture.

"If I hear that man say one word about you that I consider impertinent, I will make him eat his words, and thrash him within an inch of his life," he said slowly. "I will certainly go and find out how he is treating Marcella, and if I find her unhappy, she shall come away with me. She will be our daughter!"

Lady Violet's eyes flashed and her lips trembled. "Thank you, Caleb," she breathed softly; then raising her face to his, she said: "You may kiss me if you like." Very gravely and seriously the financier pressed a light kiss on her brow.

"I shall go and look up my secretary now," he said, after a pause; "then within a day or two shall go to Crawley. I shall see you again before I leave." He raised her hand to his lips and the next moment the door had closed gently behind the burly figure of the man of finance.

Lady Violet gazed after him wistfully. She did not quite understand the new Caleb J. Johnson. Something had changed him—had also aged him in a curiously sudden way, and his odd interest in Philip Nullius was almost absurd, if such a frivolous term could be used to describe any action of the financier.

She pressed her hands to her brow. Suppose Sir Cyprian refused to let him see Marcella, and in turn betrayed her secret to Caleb, her second husband, in the light that only her cruel, wicked brother-in-law could speak of!

What would happen then? she wondered feverishly—would Caleb believe it, or would he demand an explanation, and would that explanation mean a breach that would for ever stand between them? She shuddered.

Sir Cyprian Rust was a man who would strike as deeply as Caleb J. Johnson, when he opened his mouth, and his cunning would so weave the net of complicity round her that she would have no defence ready—no excuse save one of regret for the past folly that had made her barter flesh and blood for gold—to sell her peace of mind and self-respect for the life of ease and freedom from monetary distress.

She had done all that, gained the advantage of being able to pension off her incubus husband for so many years until death had rid her of him—but even that she would gladly have forfeited for the joy of having clasped in her arms the human price she had paid.

She flung herself into a chair, and murmured brokenly: "Oh, God! don't let him betray me—don't let me lose what I am trying to regain!"

FORTIETH CHAPTER.

A Face that Was Dead.

In the meantime the financier had jumped into a hansom and was being driven in the direction of the Park Lane residence, where he had installed Edward Day before leaving town.

He had given up his suite of rooms in the Dovermarle Hotel when he had been making anew his plans pending his marriage to Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox, as he had anticipated her making his luxurious town house a resort of all Society, and a brilliant success. But all those hopes had fallen through.

Somehow his plans had not matured as he had hoped they would. His bride had refused to live with him, in fact very few people knew that he had been married; then there was the loss of his celebrated picture, the "Mona Lisa." In spite of that clue of the spade guinea, the police seemed to be still baffled by the mystery.

And of late his successes in the City had had one or two unexpected shocks. A prospectus had gone wrong owing to the sudden withdrawal of two most important directors; and, above all, while he had been away, he had read in the financial papers that his cherished Ruby Duncoran Mine was tottering in public favour; the mine he had taken such trouble to have prospected by one of the best mining engineers, had not caught on; and, lastly, the man Rayne, whom he had met so fatefully on the morning that he had learnt the real identity of the curate, Philip Nullius.

He had not kept his word so far to his old enemy; it had been impossible to send him money without revealing his identity as Caleb Jerningham, one and the same with the influential city magnate, Caleb J. Johnson.

But he would keep his word; he would go to the bank now, before seeing his secretary, young Day, and send bank-notes to the value of the money he had taken from Rayne in their old days of comradeship, when they had worked side by side on the same claim. He raised the flap in the roof of the hansom, and directed the driver to go to the Bank of England.

When he arrived, and was folding the notes in his pocket-book, one of the clerks came up to him obsequiously—as the financier's big, loosely-knit figure was an object of awe and admiration to all those of his fellow-creatures who worshipped his wealth and power. "If you please, sir, would you kindly see Mr. Foster for a few moments? He is in his office."

"Oh, I am glad you have come down this morning, Mr. Johnson," said the head cashier, as the financier walked into his little den. "I was rather anxious to ask you about the signature of two cheques that have been honoured by us, but on looking more minutely into the signatures, I have noticed something a little odd—I wondered whether you had sprained your wrist, or whether you knew about them at all. They are each for £2,000."

The financier took the cheques in his hand, and one glance told him that they were forgeries. But who could have obtained access to his cheque-book, or have written his name so perfectly that even he was taken by surprise at first sight? At the sight of the name to whom they were made payable he started. It was J. Rayne!

"I am not sure," he said aloud. "I sign so many cheques in a week that it would not do to say off-hand that this is not my signature. I could swear to it in a way," he laughed, "and yet I am not certain—who cashed them?"

"A dark man, rather like a Colonial in appearance," was

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the careless reply. "He had very black hair and bright blue eyes, and his manner was most natural and easy, not as though he were afraid of being asked questions. Of course we will put it into the hands of the police, Mr. Johnson," he said eagerly.

"Ah, I should like to have these cheques for a day or two," the financier replied. "When I call again I will know how I intend to proceed, should my suspicions be correct."

As he was being driven homeward to Park Lane, Caleb J. Johnson bit his lip once or twice, and a savage gleam shot from his eyes.

On entering the large imposing mansion that seldom saw its master, he went straight to his study, and, flinging open the door, walked in.

Seated at the desk was Edward Day; he was bending over some papers, and was so intent on what he was doing, that it was not until the financier's large brown hand touched him on the shoulder that he looked up.

When he saw who it was his pale face flushed suddenly, and from his blue eyes that of late had grown hollow and bloodshot, flashed a glance of startled recognition and fear. But he pulled himself together and rose to his feet with a smile of welcome.

"Good morning, sir," he said in his well-bred tones; "your arrival is somewhat unexpected, isn't it? I thought I should hear from you."

The financier nodded curtly. "Yes, I always come and go at my pleasure. By-the-way, I want to see that cheque-book you have of mine, Day," he said suddenly, keeping his eyes fixed on his secretary's face, from which the colour slowly ebbed. "I left it in one of the drawers of that desk."

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Johnson," Edward said slowly. "I have seen no cheque-book—only notes and things are here, sir." He pointed to a roll of notes that rested on top of some papers in an open drawer.

The financier smiled grimly. "Yes, I wonder you did not use them," he remarked drily. "But there were probably not enough; you were ambitious, and wanted more than a few hundreds! But it was foolish to sign away two cheques within so short a time of each other for the same amount," he continued sarcastically; "you are a promising rogue, Mr. Day, and it will give me much pleasure to see you in the hands of those authorities who undertake to correct perverted ideas concerning other people's property.

"Come, don't dare to bluff it over me, you contemptible young cur!" he rapped sharply, seeing his secretary about to speak. "I've not knocked about the world without being able to read guilt on a face before now. I trusted you—I treated you with confidence, you unutterable young scoundrel, but I shall take good care to prevent you from continuing your brief career as a successful swindler and forger! By to-night you will be lodging in Bow Street, and I shall not be the only person to rejoice at your fate." He went to the bell, but before he could touch it a hoarse laugh broke from his secretary.

"Stop! In another moment you will regret having rung that bell more than any other incident in your life."

Mr. Johnson looked at him coldly. "What do you mean?" he said slowly. "Am I the type of man you imagine can be played upon by threats? You have mistaken your man, Mr. Edward Day. I have not the slightest intention of listening to anything you may have to say for yourself. I am a hard man, and don't intend to unbend to save the pride of such a promising young scamp as yourself."

"No, I have not the slightest idea that I could make you do anything for my sake, sir," panted his secretary, leaning across the table, a curiously ugly smile on his lips; "but I fancy you would sacrifice a great deal for yourself—even the joy of a petty retaliation."

"What do you mean?" The financier's voice sounded crisp and metallic. His hand had slipped from the bell and hung limply by his side, but his eyes never left the white face of the man who had spoken with so odd a note of triumph in his speech.

"Mean?" Edward Day laughed loudly. "Why, that it

The Unemployed.

The two words at the head of this article form what printers call a standing line. Never a winter passes without this melancholy title for a record of want and suffering appearing daily in our journals. It is a pitiable thing, an evil that the wisest statesmen and the richest and most generous philanthropists at their best seem only able to alleviate. To discover a complete remedy for the trouble passes the wit of man, and whoever looks forward to a period when there shall be profitable work always ready for the hand of he who is willing to labour is regarded as a dreamer.

But in our country there is a second vast army of unemployed whose sufferings are never discussed in the newspapers, viz., the thousands who have work to do and are anxious to do it, but who are kept away from office or workshop by ill-health. The amount of work (and therefore of money) lost in this way each year is incalculable. Nevertheless, it is an evil which might in large measure be prevented, for Mother Seigel's Syrup cures indigestion, a cause of immense suffering and loss, as well as a forerunner of many other complaints.

"About two years ago," writes Mr. David J. Thomas, of Central House, Drefach-Llandyssil, Carmarthenshire, September 30th, 1903, "my appetite failed, and I became incapable of work. A dull pain at the stomach, particularly after eating, greatly troubled me. Though I was extremely careful as to what I ate, this symptom gradually grew worse until I was never free from it. I was troubled, too, with wind and dizziness, which sometimes caused me to stagger about. Although very ill, I so far contrived to work through it all. A doctor here prescribed some medicine for me, but it did not touch my complaint, and I was not a bit the better for it. After that another doctor near Carmarthen attended me, with the same result.

"After enduring this misery for about six months, and seeing no chance of recovery under the treatment I was receiving, I one day happily thought of Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. I had often heard it spoken of favourably, and resolved to obtain a bottle of it. I had not taken much of the medicine before I discovered that it was benefiting me considerably. My appetite and strength increased daily. All the pain and dizziness left me, and in five weeks I was well and strong again, able to work with pleasure."

To be able to work with pleasure is a sure sign of health, and people in that happy condition are always the last to be numbered among the unemployed

A Victim of Fads.

Recently there died in Bradford a clothworker who was much troubled by indigestion, though not more so than many thousands of people who find their cure in Mother Seigel's Syrup. To obtain relief, he adopted a plan of life the severity of which would have frightened a twelfth century monk. He became a teetotaler, non-smoker, and vegetarian, besides being *anti* so many things that this column is too short to chronicle them in. But his heroic self-denial availed him nothing, and he died—aged thirty! Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup could have saved him. It is the only sure cure for indigestion and biliousness. Being compounded of fruits, roots and herbs, it causes food to nourish naturally, and is an unequalled digestive.

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Dupes of Destiny

(continued.)

will be foreign to your usual cleverness to prosecute me for a paltry few thousands, when I can make you sing very small in return by mentioning what I know about you, Mr. Johnson! Lady Violet, your Society bride, will feel proud when she learns what her husband is."

The financier took a step towards him, then paused and laughed; but his laugh was forced, and the large, capable-looking hand was tightly clenched.

"You speak in riddles," he said scornfully. "What do you, a penniless youth, know about me? You had better be careful, Mr. Day; you may find the crime of blackmail laid to you with the one of forgery."

Edward laughed. "I fancy you won't do that. It won't be worth your while to prosecute a penniless youth, and at the same time acquaint the world with the fact that you deserted your first wife and bought off Lady Violet's first husband at a price, thereby making her a bigamist; that is a serious charge in itself, Mr.—Jerningham."

The financier fell back as though he had been shot. His face had faded to a sickly green, and his eyes flashed ominously. "You young scoundrel!" he said between his teeth. "It was an ill day for me when I let you enter my house! So you have been prying and nosing into what is no business of yours? You have spent your time worthily! I feel a deep regret that you have no parents to take a joy in such a son; you would be a shining light to any home."

"Oh, it's all very well to sneer," Edward said carelessly; "but anyway I think you will agree with me that you had better drop the question of those cheques, and I in turn will do my best to forget that I hold any little secrets of yours, Mr. Jerningham."

"You cur!" the financier exclaimed hoarsely. "Don't let me hear that name again. It has nothing to do with guilt, but I dropped it for financial purposes."

"Yes, and to avoid being traced by Mrs. Jerningham, eh?" his secretary sneered lightly. "Did you also buy off Major Frayne-Lennox for financial purposes?"

An ugly, baffled expression shot from Caleb J. Johnson's eyes—a look that spelt murder as it was committed in the days of his youth in Australia.

"Be silent, you unlicked cub—do you hear! If I consent to be quiet on this matter, it is only because I wish to shield your aunt—not because I fear what your petty spite can do. By-the-way," he went on sharply, "you made those cheques payable to—to a man called Rayne—what were they in payment for? What dirty secret does he hold of yours?"

The chance shot went home. Edward Day's face grew suddenly livid, and a haggard, hunted look stole into his eyes.

"Secret? No secret!" he muttered harshly. "What do you mean? Do you—do you——" his voice trailed off into a whisper.

Then it was that an inspiration came to Caleb J. Johnson. He turned slowly, and said with assumption of carelessness: "That girl, the one with the yellow hair—do you treat her well, or have you deserted her?"

Edward Day bit his trembling nether lip, and glared savagely at the man who had regained his coolness in spite of the threat he held over his head. "She is no concern of yours," he retorted savagely, though he wondered what had occasioned the question. He had hoped that no one had ever seen him with the girl—the girl whom he knew he would never see again. Yet Caleb J. Johnson had evidently met them somewhere.

"No," said the financier slowly, "your love affairs are less than nothing to me, Mr. Day. But that is not the question we are discussing. For holding my tongue about your business you expect what?"

Edward looked at him slyly. "That you honour those two cheques and give me another for five thousand!" he said coolly; "otherwise I shall certainly lose nothing by going to Lady Violet, and acquainting her with the fact that you bought a cheque from an old Army man who had threatened disgrace to her first husband. Oh," he sneered, "you are very clever, Mr. Caleb J. Johnson, but I fancy I have the upper hand in spite of your brains!"

"I shall ignore those two cheques you forged," the financier said slowly, "and give you another for one thousand; but not a penny more, d'you hear? You may blackmail as much as you like, but I will put the whole thing in the hands of the police if I have any further trouble with you. Here's the cheque for the thousand," he went on, scribbling on a blank form torn from his cheque book, "and another five hundred for your salary. Now leave my house and my sight for ever!" he snarled savagely. "I won't have you in it five minutes longer!"

Edward saw that to stay and argue with the man with that iron jaw was worse than useless; besides he feared to risk too much by forcing his hand. The money he had would keep him on his feet until he had come into that undiscovered fortune which he felt was his by right.

He was slowly making inquiries, and hoped soon to be a step nearer the great truth—the truth that would give him a father's name and position. Then he would turn over a new leaf, and live a quiet, retiring life for a time—until he could forget what he had been fighting to forget for so long.

He turned on his heel and left the room, after closely examining the two cheques flung at him by the financier, who stood regarding him with a curiously intent gaze.

As he closed the door gently he laughed softly. "Old Moneybags had to pay up more than he liked, anyway. It was rather a surprise for him to discover that anyone knew of his double life, and my lovely aunt is utterly unconscious that she has been made a bigamist by her millionaire husband."

A slow smile of wicked cunning stole upon his face. "By Jove!—that's an idea! It will bring her to her senses and get my own back at the same time."

He went up to his desk and sat down. Suddenly a slight movement caused him to look up. Was it fancy, or did a shadow really fall across his letter? He started to his feet, and glanced with a livid face at the window. Who had been looking in at him?

What pale face and staring eyes were those that, shrouded in a cloud of wet, yellow hair seemed to gaze in upon him, then vanish? With a half inarticulate cry he picked up the ink bottle and flung it with all his strength at the window. "You fiend, keep away!" he muttered; "keep away!"

The sound of falling glass brought a servant into the room.

"It's all right, Simmons," he said with an awkward laugh, "I fell against the table."

The man looked at him, then retired softly, and presently the secretary left the house.

In the meantime Caleb J. Johnson was sitting with his head in his hands in the room where Edward Day had left him. "Oh, God!" he groaned, "I am not much of a praying man—my life has been too busy for that—but I thank Thee that my son is not as this young scoundrel is. At least Destiny has made a good man of him."

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

A Foolish Objection.

How very silly of your parents, "VIOLET," to expect you to cease meeting the young man simply because he is five years older than yourself! That is quite an ideal difference in ages, and I cannot understand their objection.

Etiquette of Engagements.

THE task of announcing your engagement to friends at a distance, "K. E. T.," should fall on your mother. You, of course, will tell your own particular friends of the matter whenever you like, and a formal note would not be necessary to them, if they are within calling distance. In the case of a man, it doesn't matter how the happy news gets round. He breaks it or not to his friends as he thinks fit.

* * * * *

Now, as to the other question you ask me. It *is* usual for a girl to go and spend a little time with her *fiancé's* parents, so that they may become fully acquainted with each other before the wedding. No doubt you will receive some such invitation very soon. It is not usual, by-the-way, for the young man himself to be at home while you are paying this visit to his parents. Of course, if he lives at home, it is different. But, if he does not, the etiquette is for you to spend a little time alone in the society of his parents.

How Quarrels Breed.

"MAY BLOSSOM" tells me of an affair which shows how easily a little tiff grows into an estrangement, if not carefully watched. She used to walk out a great deal with a young man, but they were not engaged. Once he met her in the street while she was talking to another man. Next time they met he passed her by in a very cool manner. "MAY BLOSSOM" was offended, and, just to show it, she went out with the other young man just as often as she felt inclined.

* * * * *

Young man No. 1 saw her frequently, and to show his own feelings he, too, took up with somebody else. Whenever the two met, therefore, they saw each other with different companions. Yet all the time each of them felt an "aching void," and wished to get back again to each other, and have done with the sham. Well, it turned out that the sham sweethearts soon parted, and once more the two were free to resume their friendship. But the young man won't speak to "MAY BLOSSOM" now, and she doesn't care to raise the question herself. What is she to do?

* * * * *

From what you say, it seems that the young man himself rather wants the quarrel to blow over. Of course, in a way, he began it by being cool to you without reason. But it was your own fault that the quarrel grew serious, as you evidently went out of your way to tease him. Why not make amends now as you were the first to start the game of bluff?

Billiards and Love.

"MY sweetheart spends a lot of his time playing billiards," writes "AMY." "Do you think this is right? Should I, as his future wife, ask him to give it up?"

* * * * *

There is nothing wrong in billiards by itself, "AMY." If your sweetheart's playing brings him into contact with bad companions, and results in his spending a lot of money, and giving way to such things as drink and gambling, then you might have something to say about it. But you could scarcely object to his playing billiards, which is, after all, one of the best of games from the mental point of view.

A Mixed Affair.

"I AM very friendly with two young ladies," writes "BOYSIE," "one of whom goes out with me, the other with a friend of mine. The girl who goes with my friend seems to have taken a fancy to me and *vice versâ*. I like both girls equally, but my friend prefers my girl. What is the best course to pursue? One is plump and skittish, the other slim and proper."

* * * * *

It seems that if your friend prefers your girl, and his girl prefers you, you might make an exchange for the benefit of all parties. As you yourself like both girls equally, the odds should be in favour of the girl who likes you best. Make friends with the latter, and allow your friend his own choice, and all should be in order.

The Backward Young Man.

"R. T." Your previous letter did not reach me. am sorry you suffer so much from shyness and backwardness. It is a good idea to have joined the Christian Association you speak of. But the fact that you do not know any of the girls there, and have no one to introduce you, should not discourage you. It would not be right to join such a society with the sole object of meeting young ladies, as seems to be your idea. You should take an active part in whatever functions are going on, and you would very soon get to know girls in that way. To look upon an association of that kind just as a meeting place is not a right view, and I am not surprised that you have so far failed to make acquaintances. There would be no harm in your speaking to a young lady there, if you had proper reason to do so, or were taking part in the same function.

A Girl with a Distinguished Name.

"I COME of a noble family," writes "EDITH," "and bear a name that is very distinguished indeed. Now, is it not hard on me in marrying, that my future husband's name is a very common one? All through my life I have been respected as a member of a great family, and now I am to be one of a hundred thousand others. I suppose, though, there is no help for it?"

* * * * *

I am afraid you could only retain your maiden name by becoming a professional celebrity, or by living in Portugal—the only country where such is the custom. To your neighbours and tradesmen you will have to be plain Mrs. (whatever your common name may be), and, when one comes to think of it, if a man's fortune is good enough for a girl to share, his name ought also to be good enough. As a final resort, there would be no harm in "EDITH'S" adding her own name to that of her husband, and making a double-barrelled affair of it. That is often done, but I rather fancy that a Mrs. Shakespeare-Smythe would be charged more for her meat by the butcher than plain Mrs. Smith. One has to live up to a big name.

Cynthia

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Constipation

If I were asked to specify THE disease or ailment of the day, I should unhesitatingly answer—"CONSTIPATION."

SO says one of the greatest medical writers of the present day, and he follows this statement by saying that women are the commonest sufferers. Undoubtedly he is right! Just imagine a town with every drain stopped. Would you be surprised to find pestilence and fever abound? Hardly! Where constipation exists, the drains which nature has provided to clear the body of its impurities are out of order, and the impurities are left in the body. The result is that every organ of the body is rendered foul. The liver and digestive organs become clogged and unable to fulfil their functions, the appetite is destroyed, the head either aches or feels dull and heavy, there is heat and feverishness, a dreary don't-care-about-anything feeling, a sensation of irritability with everybody and everything. Sometimes, also, constipation brings on piles. Now, if you have any of these symptoms, remember that constipation is their root cause. Remember, also, that the root cure for constipation, and indirectly for all these symptoms, is the vegetable essence concentrated in Bile Beans for Biliousness. So effective are Bile Beans for this ailment, that in several cases where constipation has been so neglected that it has resulted in stoppage of the bowels, they have, nevertheless, brought about a complete cure. A case of this kind, which occurred a short time back in Birmingham, may be quoted.

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(*From a photo.*)

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"In my case, acute constipation led to stoppage of the bowels. I could not take nourishment, and consequently grew too feeble to work. Having taken to my bed I got weaker and weaker. It was not thought I should live. Indeed, the clergyman of the parish came to pray at my bedside, so near death was I.

"The doctor called in a physician, and it was said my only hope of life lay in an operation, which might or might not be successful. I was taken to the Queen's Hospital, and prepared for operation, but at the last moment my parents stopped all the proceedings and had me taken back home.

"This was in consequence of what they had heard about the power of Bile Beans, and I started upon a course immediately. From the first I improved, and in a few days my bowels were acting normally. I gradually got stronger, and in a short time was back at work. Since then I have worked for twelve months, and have never had a trace of my old complaint. I was so weak at the time I was taken to hospital for the operation that I believe I should never have survived it."

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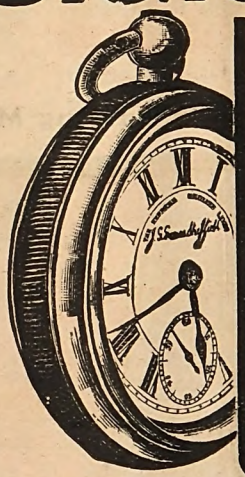

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SHORT STORIES

No. 792.] Week Ending March 5th, 1904. [One Penny.

Containing the Incident Depicted on the Cover.

Reuben Howard sat before the fire, his pipe in his mouth, and gazed gloomily into the reddening embers. His dark face, always sullen and morose in aspect, seemed to-night even more unpleasant than was usual. The black, restless eyes had in them a look of sinister and bitter hatred—hatred against someone whose name he dared not breathe.

The outer door of the little cottage was suddenly flung wide open, and a man, whistling a merry country tune, came briskly into the room. He presented a striking contrast to the other, who still sat over the fire. And yet they were brothers.

Fair-haired, blue-eyed, and frank as the day, Horace Howard was universally regarded as the friend, the confidant, of all and sundry with whom he came in contact. Country matrons thought of him, and then of their daughters, and sighed. And as to the daughters themselves, sunny-hearted Horace Howard had wrought much havoc in more than one tender young heart—unwittingly, it must be admitted, and all unknown to himself, but wrought nevertheless.

The step upon the floor had evoked no movement from Reuben Howard. He did not so much as lift his dark eyes as his brother entered the room. Yet a strange restlessness seemed to pervade him, and a close observer might have detected a certain nervous alertness in his attitude that, as yet, was unaccounted for.

Horace drew a chair near his brother's, and seated himself before the fire. For some time he was silent. But at last he said:

"Reuben, I've a bit of news for you. I don't suppose you'll be very much surprised."

Reuben fidgeted slightly in his chair, but he did not speak, so Horace continued:

"You have, no doubt, guessed already who, among our many fair neighbours, has attracted me most. I met Grace Hazel by the stile in the meadow this evening, and she has promised to be my wife. As to my own feelings—well, they are better imagined than described."

He broke off with a short little laugh. The tone was light, yet it was more than evident that he was stirred by strong emotion, which the tone was intended to cover. There was a tender, happy light in the frank blue eyes that told infinitely more than the words he had uttered how ardently he had desired that which he had now won.

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For a moment there was silence between the two. Horace looked towards his brother in some surprise. Reuben slowly removed the pipe from his mouth, and, still without lifting his eyes from the fire, said in a low, constrained tone:

"Glad to hear it, I'm sure. Suppose I must congratulate you? Does she—er—think of you as—as you do of her?"

His voice grew suddenly hoarse, and he cleared his throat. But he said no more. Horace regarded him a little uneasily. What had come over his brother? He was always sullen and morose, it was true, but he had expected a little better feeling than Reuben had as yet displayed. The question, too, was queer. He might have taken that for granted.

"Well," responded Horace, "I should think you might guess that much from the fact of her having accepted me."

Reuben's lip curled disdainfully.

"It does not follow," he said cynically. "You are good-looking, strong, tolerably well-off, and—steady. A matter-of-fact girl would consider these things before the mere question of love. Grace Hazel is no fool, and it is quite possible——"

But Horace stopped him.

"Enough of this," he said shortly. "I am sorry to find you in this mood, to-night of all nights. But, since you ask, I will admit that Miss Hazel is actuated by no such mercenary or coldly-calculating motives as you imply. I have her own words to testify to the truth of this assertion." And a glad little smile came into his face as he let his thoughts go back to that meeting by the stile not more than an hour before, when Grace had confessed her love to him and promised to be his wife.

Reuben lifted his dark eyes for an instant and caught the look. When he again turned his face to the fire it was blacker and more sinister than before. Horace rose and pushed back his chair.

"I'll just run over to the mill," he said. "I expect Tom Hardy's gone home by now. The old mill's having plenty of work lately. There's been a fresh breeze all the evening, and we can do with it, for there's grain enough to grind for the next two months."

He put on his hat, and, whistling as he went, again left the house. As soon as he was gone, Reuben rose, tossed his pipe viciously on to the table, and began to stride savagely up and down the room.

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"So you've won, have you?" he muttered, clenching his hands together and shaking them at the door through which his brother had gone. "For years you've thwarted and baulked me in every conceivable way. I have been the foil to show off your qualities, your virtues, your excellences. The memory of my dead father is hateful to me, because, when he yet lived, he favoured you, and not me. And now—now you have snatched from me the jewel I have coveted so long, so ardently, and I must stand aside and see it done. She who but yesterday smiled at me and made hope leap up within me till I thought I should have fallen. And she told you she—loved you—loved you!"

Passion had seized him now. His whole frame quivered with strong excitement. He tottered, rather than strode, across the floor. His black eyes blazed, his mouth hardened, his brow darkened. For the time being Reuben Howard was a veritable maniac.

Presently he controlled his outward agitation and once more sat down before the fire. But a glance into his dark face revealed the fact that passion still raged within. Evil thoughts chased each other madly through his disordered brain. He must find a way to prevent his brother's marriage with Grace Hazel. He would try persuasion, pleading, intreaty, not with Horace, but with Grace herself. He would humble himself, even abase himself before her. And then, if that failed, he would threaten.

Meanwhile Horace was walking briskly through the meadows towards the mill, of which he and his brother were owners. It was not yet late—barely half-past nine—and darkness had not long settled down on the quiet earth. Presently he reached the stile where, less than an hour before, Grace and he had whispered their first words of love. He was just about to mount it and cross to the opposite meadow where the mill stood, when he noticed a slim white figure close by. Turning quickly, he peered into the darkness. Then he stepped forward with a glad little cry.

"Why, Grace," he said, taking both her hands in his, "not gone home yet, dear? Is anything the matter?"

The girl lifted her blue eyes to his. The look they gave him thrilled him through and through.

"Oh, no!" she said softly. "It is only that I am very very happy—so happy that I cannot go home just yet. The night is very lovely, and I feel so loth to dispel the influence—the spell—that is upon me. It seems a new world to-night, Horace."

The young man stooped and kissed the upturned face.

"Am I in the new world, darling?" he asked tenderly.

Grace lowered her blue eyes, and the small hands trembled in his.

"You are king of it," she said shyly. "You are even more than that, for you have created it."

Horace bent his head. For a few moments there was a deep hush, and then he said reverently:

"May God help me to be worthy of your love, Grace, since it is only by my worthiness that this new and wonderful world of which you speak can endure through the years that are to come. Would that men might realise this. So long as men are good, and true, and loyal, so long will the women who love them be pure and sinless as the angels of God."

A gust of wind swept by and the girl looked up.

"I suppose I must go home," she said. "Have you told Reuben yet about—about our engagement?"

She blushed as she used the word, and Horace smiled down at her.

"Yes," he replied. "I told him not more than a quarter of an hour ago."

Under cover of the darkness he took her in his arms and kissed her. Then he put her down and watched her as she went across the meadow. When she was out of sight he mounted the stile and went swiftly over the smooth sward towards the distant mill.

* * * * *

It was a month later, and they were still busy at the mill. The surrounding farmers had brought in their corn, and the great, tireless sails of the old mill moved majestically round and round like some great aerial monster. It wa now mid-day, and the hands had gone to dinner. The two brothers were on the point of following their example when a messenger brought a note and handed it to Reuben. The latter glanced at the superscription and passed it on to his brother.

"It's for you," he said shortly. "Looks like Farmer Wood's handwriting."

Horace tore open the envelope and took out the letter it inclosed.

"Dear Horace," it ran, "Can you oblige me by coming here without delay? The matter is of the utmost importance, or I should not ask it. Don't stop for dinner. You can have some here. Please don't refuse.—Your sincere friend,

"John Wood."

"I wonder what's in the wind?" mused Horace as he passed the letter back to his brother for him to read. "However, I can't refuse, so here goes."

He hastily exchanged his miller's cap for an out-door one, thrust his arms into his coat, and hurried off. Reuben watched him as he went with great swinging strides across the meadow.

"One fool hoodwinked," he muttered. "Well, half-an-hour's walk will cool his heels. Now I've got the mill to myself for a little while." And he smiled darkly to himself as he added the last words.

Then he turned to the boy who had brought the note, and who still remained at hand.

"Wait a minute, Davie," he said, and, turning, went into the mill and up to the deserted desk.

Taking a sheet of paper from the rack, he began to write, not in his usual hand, but in imitation of his brother's.

"My Darling Grace—*Can you come to the mill at once? I have something very important to tell you. Don't delay an instant, but come. Yours always.*—"Horace."

Finishing the note, he put it into an envelope and directed it.

"Take this to Miss Hazel at once," he said to the boy. "Don't hang about on the way, and don't wait for an answer. As soon as you've delivered it, run off home to dinner. If you're quick, I'll give you a shilling."

The boy took the letter, and, waiting to hear no more, darted off. When he had disappeared Reuben Howard returned to the mill.

"It's lucky I've got the knack of copying handwriting," he said with a mirthless laugh. "I fancy I shall be able to persuade the lovely Grace into taking me for a husband instead of that school-boy brother of mine. If not, I'll use a novel argument."

A sinister gleam shone in his dark eyes, and he paced restlessly to and fro the floor. The past month had wrought some change in his face. It was not only morose, not only sullen now. It was diabolical. Had a brain specialist looked into those glittering dark eyes, he would have stated his opinion that the man was on the brink of madness. They shone with a lustre until now subdued, as though the fire that still burnt fiercely in his breast sent forth its flames to light them, too, and mount, perchance, even to his very brain.

Slowly he began first to ascend the stair of the mill to the store-room above, and then the long ladder that led up to the great iron wheels and revolving rods of the moving mill. Reaching the top, he put out his hand and slipped a strong iron tongue into the thick cogs of the main wheel. There was a sudden jar, and instantly the great mill stood still.

He descended to the road again.

Not a soul was in sight, save for a fluttering white dress far across the second meadow. An ugly smile came into Reuben Howard's face as he saw it. Turning, he looked upward at the great mill-sails. One had stopped almost directly over the doorway of the mill. He propped a ladder against the wall, so that it reached the end of the lower sail. Once more he glanced across the intervening stretch of meadow. The fluttering white dress was nearer now. He watched it as it came over the stile and descended on the other side. Then he disappeared into the mill, and, stationing himself behind the wide-open door, silently waited.

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A step on the roadway without, the gleam of a white dress through the chink of the door, and Grace Hazel, with flushed cheeks and fast-coming breath, stepped into the mill. The heavy wooden door slammed to, and the two were alone in the grey old building—face to face with each other.

"Good morning, Reuben," she said, timidly holding out her hand. "I have come to see Horace. He has sent for me. What is the matter?"

A frightened look was slowly creeping into the blue eyes. Reuben saw it and laughed a dry, mirthless laugh.

"Well, the truth is," he said, edging towards the closed door of the mill, "the letter you received was not from Horace at all, but from me."

"You!". Grace stared at him in dull surprise.

"Yes, from me. All's fair in love or war, they say, so I've sent the young idiot off on a wild goose chase, to give me an opportunity of talking with you. I needn't mince matters. You know quite well what I want—what I have wanted for years, but have been afraid to ask. I want you—you, Grace Hazel, for my wife—and—and I mean to have you."

For two or three minutes the girl stood as if spellbound, staring blankly into the dark face of the man before her. Presently she said:

"Reuben, don't you understand? Hasn't Horace told you? I thought——"

A flash of the dark, menacing eyes stopped her.

"All that goes for nothing," said Reuben positively. "He has stood in my way all my life. But there is an end to all things, and the end has been reached now. I mean to marry you, Grace, and will brook neither his nor any other man's interference."

A faint colour was coming into Grace Hazel's cheeks.

"You don't seem to consider me," she said, a little defiantly.

Reuben fixed a look upon her that chilled her very soul.

"Do you refuse to marry me?" he asked, and his voice sounded clear and hard.

"I do." The answer was low but quite distinct.

Grace took a step towards the door. But Reuben was between it and her.

"Listen," he said hoarsely, and the girl saw that he was trembling violently as though from strong excitement. "I will give you one more chance. If you then refuse, I—I will kill you. Will you have me?"

"No," she said. "Let me out of this evil place."

But the man heeded her not. With a swift spring, he had her in his strong arms, and she was on the floor of the mill. Thrusting his hand into the pocket of his coat, he drew out a piece of stout cord. With this he bound her two wrists together, leaving the ends of the cord dangling some six or eight inches beyond the twisted knots.

Then he lifted her in his arms and went towards the door. Opening it, he looked out. No one was in sight. Up the ladder with his struggling but helpless burden, till he reached the end of the great sail. And there he bound her by the cord that held her white wrists, and, descending, looked up at her with a hideous grin on his dark evil face. Cry after cry rang across the meadow, but not a soul responded. It was the hour of the mid-day meal, and no one was abroad. Reuben looked up at her as she hung, pale and trembling, from the end of the great sail.

"One more chance," he shouted. "If you won't marry me, I'll start the mill. Will you?"

"Oh, no, no, no! I can't, I can't! Oh, have mercy on me, Reuben! Think of Horace!"

Plunging into the mill, he sprang up the stairs, then up the top ladder, and forced the iron tongue from the cogs of the wheel. The machinery creaked and groaned. There was a faint sound of grinding from below, and the shadow of a great sail, slowly moving, fell upon the window. A shriek of despair rang through the air, and, with a laugh of hideous madness, Reuben rushed down the ladder and stairs and out across the smiling meadows.

And the great sails of the mill commenced to go slowly and majestically round. and, with them, that white unconscious figure, whose wrists were being slowly crushed by the tightening of the twisting cords.

But someone was racing through the meadow—his fair face pale and drawn, his blue eyes strained towards that pinioned figure on the mill-sail. By a lucky chance, he had met farmer Wood half-way between the mill and his house, and quickly learnt that he had been made the dupe of some, as yet, unexplainable plot. So he had hurried back, filled with an unknown fear, till the sight of that fluttering white dress up among the sails of the mill had sent his feet flying over the smooth green grass of the meadow. Who she was he knew only too well. How she came there, he did not stop to think. The sight of his brother, rushing, shrieking, out of the mill and across the meadow in the opposite direction struck him as strange.

His one thought was of her. Would he be in time to save her?

As he drew nearer, he saw she was unconscious. Each revolution of the great sails would give one more twist to the sharp thongs that bound her slender wrists. But a few, and the cord would cut its way deep into the fair white flesh till even the bones beneath would snap and the muscles sever. Oh, would he be in time?

Faster and faster he went—up the slope that led on to the roadway—then, with a half turn to the left, along the path to the door of the mill.

His knees shook and his breath came in choking gasps as he tore madly up stairs and ladder, till he reached the great revolving cog-wheel and laid his trembling hand on the iron tongue.

Then he glanced over his shoulder and out of the window. One sail came round. No, that was not the one. Another. No.

Still another, and it came down more quickly than the others had done. There was a clank of iron, a scraping jar, a groan, and the great machinery came once more to a standstill. Down the ladder and stairs again, and out of the mill-door.

He had stopped the mill at the right moment, and she hung almost in the very spot where, a few minutes before, she had been bound.

The ladder was lying by, and Horace placed it against the wall and was up it in an instant.

A sharp cut with his knife, and the limp, unconscious figure slipped into his arms and across his stout shoulder. Tenderly he carried her into the mill and unfastened the cruel cords that bound her wrists. The tears were in his blue eyes as he saw those two deep-red wales upon the white flesh where the cords had tightened. A few more turns—perchance only one—and they would have cut into the fair wrists and roused her to consciousness with the increasing torture. Kissing her white, set face, he ran for water, and, returning, began the task of restoration.

It was some minutes ere she opened her blue eyes. When she did, her gaze rested on his anxious face, and she smiled. For a moment or two there was silence, and then Horace asked:

"Was it my brother?"

"Yes. Did you save me, dear?"

"Thank God, yes."

There was a sound of hurrying feet outside the mill. The door was pushed open, and two men rushed in. Seeing Horace they advanced.

"Mr. Horace," said one, "we're all sadly grieved to have to tell ye, but Mr. Reuben's jumped off the top of Eagle Crag into the sea. Old Mother Martin saw him do it, and she says he was a-shrieking like a madman."

Horace turned his face away. and the men slipped quietly out of the mill-door. Presently Horace turned once more to the girl by his side. She was not slow to respond. The poor bruised wrists were about his neck and tears of sympathy were in her eyes.

"Poor Reuben," she whispered. "Do not blame him, Horace. He was not in his right mind. Let us be kind to his memory."

Horace bowed his head.

"So long as I have you," he said tenderly.

Walter J. Mowbray.

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MISS WHITE.

A Story of Last Leap Year.

It was on a morning early in January eight years ago that my office boy—I beg his pardon, junior clerk—brought me her card, upon which was simply inscribed:

"Miss White."

"Some old frump," I thought to myself, "who wants to bring an action against her next-door-neighbour for calling her bad names over the back garden wall!" I should mention that I am a solicitor, with more prospects than clients.

"Show her in," I said.

A moment later when I looked up there stood before me one of the prettiest girls I had ever seen.

"Pray be seated," I exclaimed, rising in a hurry. Breach of promise flashed through my thoughts, but then no human man engaged to so pretty a woman would ever break it off. Tall, and strikingly handsome, she showed not a trace of want of self-possession. I am a bad hand at describing a beautiful girl, so can only say that I believe I fell in love with my unknown client then and there.

"What can I do for you?" I inquired.

"I want your advice, Mr. Tremaine," she began, in a low and pleasant voice, "and so that you can quite understand it, I will begin my story at the beginning. I was left an orphan when quite a baby, and have been brought up by an aunt. I am quite independent, however, having an income of four hundred a year, to which I succeeded two years ago. My aunt has one son, who, encouraged by her, pesters me with his attentions, and has now taken to threatening me. I do not want to marry him; I hate him!" she exclaimed determinedly. "I must tell you he is only twenty—three years my junior, and has been very much spoilt by his foolish mother. And now can you advise me?"

"I can certainly try and frighten him with a warning letter couched in legal phraseology," I said; "or you can have him prosecuted and bound over."

Miss White shook her head.

"No," she said, "not that."

"Shall I write to him?"

"Please. I have written down his name and the address."

"Of course," I said, as she rose to go, "you could retaliate by threatening to leave yourself. Why not do so?"

"I have done so, and it is useless. He only says he will follow me and shoot me."

"We can stop that bluster," I said; "I will write him a letter at once, which I think will have the desired effect."

My pretty client rose and smiled.

"Thank you, Mr. Tremaine," she said, offering me her hand; "and what do I owe you, please?"

I didn't know what to say to this, and could only stammer something about leaving it for the present.

"But," she said, "I thought solicitors always charged six and eightpence for a consultation, and so much for every letter they wrote for you. You see, you are the first lawyer I have ever consulted."

She said this with so charming a smile that I fell more deeply in love with her than ever.

"We will see," I said, "what effect my communication has upon the gentleman. I assure you it is the usual custom."

My client put out her gloved hand, saying "Good morning," and I was left alone with my thoughts.

Somehow after she went work was very distasteful. I wrote to that young cub, her cousin (whose name, I should mention, was Arthur Thornton), a letter that I afterwards had reason to believe considerably alarmed that gentleman, and as I wrote it the pretty face of my new client seemed smiling at me from the chair in which she sat.

I was not a very young man, though a comparatively poor one. I was thirty, and some of my friends were kind enough to consider me good looking, and I wondered as I worked whether I should ever see Miss White again.

A fortnight later I dined with some very old friends in Kensington, whom I had known from boyhood. Almost the first person I saw on entering the room was my fair client. The recognition was mutual, and my heart gave a thrill of delight, for I fancied I saw a gleam of pleasure leap into her beautiful eyes as we were introduced.

"You appear to have met before," said our hostess, looking from one to the other. Miss White smiled.

"Only professionally, I am sorry to say," I murmured.

"Your letter has had the desired effect, Mr. Tremaine, but how long it will last it is difficult to say. Much to my relief, my cousin has been called out of town."

"Please rely upon me in every way," I said; and we drifted into unprofessional channels. To me Miss White seemed more charming than ever, and she was not only charming, but clever to boot. I fell deeper into the toils than ever, and mentally anathematised my hostess when she disturbed our *tête-a-tête* by bringing another guest to present to my companion.

"Oh, Forget-me-not," she said. "I want to introduce Mr. Clifford to you."

I fear I must have glared at Clifford by the way he looked at me. But I felt it.

He was, to a certain extent, a celebrity, having recently published a volume of third-rate poems, which had, through some freak of the public, run into a second edition. Miss White, knowing this, beamed upon him in a manner that in anyone else but herself I should have thought effusive. I left them discussing the art of minor verse; but, though I did not take her down to dinner, I had the felicity to sit next to her, which comforted me on the principle that half a loaf is better than no bread.

"May I venture to make what may seem an impertinent remark?" I said during dinner. "Mrs. Vere called you 'Forget-me-not.' What a very pretty pet name!"

Miss White's face dimpled all over.

"It is my Christian name," she said.

"Most charming and most appropriate."

"Everyone is kind enough to say so; but it was my mother's wish, and she died when I was three weeks old. After all, girls are christened 'Rose,' 'Violet,' and 'Lily,' so why not 'Forget-me-not'?"

"I consider it a most delightful name," I said, and, what was more, I meant it. That dinner was all too brief for my happiness. It made me mentally resolve to cultivate the friendship of the Veres far more than I had hitherto done. I went home to my dingy chambers feeling that my favourite flower in the world was the Forget-me-not, and I was deeply in love with my charming client.

* * * * * * *

The next morning at my office a disagreeable surprise was awaiting me. I received a visit from Mrs. Thornton, who, with unmeasured expressions of rage, demanded the reason of my interference with her son's love affair. I tried my best to

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calm the lady, expostulated with her, even attempted to reason with her, which was silly, because he who attempts to reason with an angry woman is not diplomatic. After a stormy quarter of an hour she flung herself out of the office in a towering passion.

"Here is a pretty kettle of fish," I thought to myself, ruefully. The next thing that would probably happen would be that the young gentleman himself would also come to my office and threaten to shoot me! I carefully observed the size of the office poker in the event of such a contingency. Making all due allowance for Mrs. Thornton's disappointment, I felt a deep and sincere pity for my client, and vowed to myself there was nothing in the world possible to be done that I would not do on her behalf.

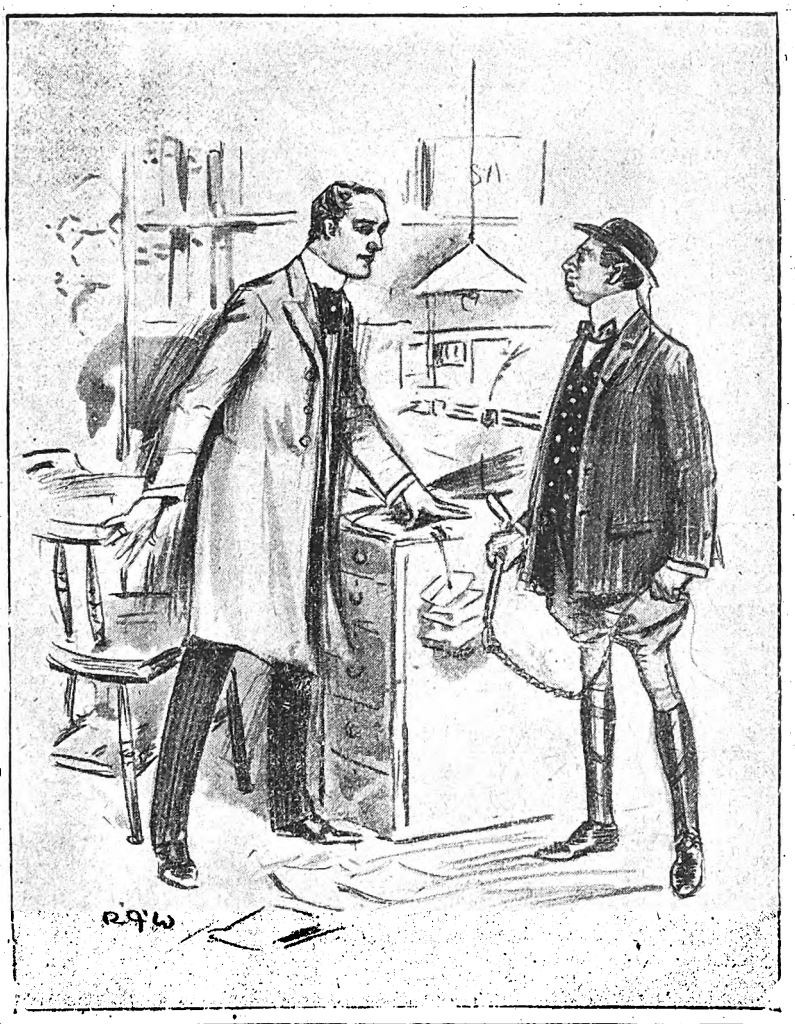
Strange to say my fears were realised within a week. One morning a card bearing the name of "Arthur Thornton" was brought to me. Bracing myself for the encounter, I ordered him to be admitted. Judge of my surprise—he proved to be a thin, plain, undersized stripling, with a vacuous countenance and an expression upon it of more idiocy than cunning.

The only redeeming feature of his face was his eyes, which were black and malevolent. He carried a horsewhip in his hand, and his first words left me with very little doubt as to his polite intentions towards me personally.

"Your name is Tremaine, isn't it?" he demanded bluntly.

"It is," I said.

"I have come to horsewhip you!"



"I have come to horsewhip you!"

I smiled, and leant back in my seat, but I kept my eyes fixed upon him.

"My dear sir, gentlemen don't do these things. I presume you are a gentleman?"

"There's a jolly sight too much presumption about you, Mr. Tremaine! You have taken the liberty of interfering in my affairs, and I mean to make it very warm for you before I have done with you."

"Your cousin requested me," I said, "to write to you on her behalf. I did so, as her solicitor. I fail to see what right you have to dictate to me in the matter at all, Mr Tremaine, that's my candid opinion."

"Right!" he exclaimed, flourishing his horsewhip. He made a lunge at me with it, but I was a moment too soon for him, and though the tip of the cord grazed my cheek, it was in my possession, and Mr. Arthur Thornton was lying, dazed, on my office floor within the space of ten seconds. Tremaine is a Cornish name, and I had done a little wrestling in my youth.

"Get up, you cur!" I exclaimed, giving him a not very gentle kick.

He crawled to his feet, looking as though he could have killed me.

"You don't suppose this sort of tomfoolery will do your wooing any good, do you?"

He made as though to rush at me again, and I pinned him by both arms into an easy chair like a baby.

"Don't be a fool!" I said curtly, "unless you want me to send for the police, which I certainly shall do if you dare to lay a finger on me. Now listen to me. Your cousin comes to me for my advice. I give it to her. She declines to marry you. That being so, there is no law in England by which you can make her change her decision. I know what both you and your mother want, and, as Miss White's solicitor, I am justified in telling you that I shall protect that young lady to the very utmost of my power."

He attempted to rise, his eyes burning with black hatred.

"Sit down!" I shouted, so loudly that my clerk, hearing, tapped at the door.

"It is all right, Jenkins; you can go away," I said; and turned my attention to Thornton again. He had sat down in the chair again.

"I haven't finished with you yet. What sort of man do you call yourself, not only to attempt to force a girl to marry you because she has money, but to be fool enough to try and take the law in your own hands? Are you aware I could prosecute you for attempted assault?"

"Where's your witness?" he muttered.

"In my possession," I said grimly, showing him the horse-

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whip; "and in my possession it will remain until you give me both an apology for your outrageous conduct and a written undertaking not to annoy Miss White after this date with your unwelcome attentions. Do this, and you can go; but you don't go till you do both. You're in a cleft stick, young man, and don't you forget it."

"I sha'n't!" he muttered sulkily.

"Jenkins," I shouted, "fetch a policeman."

The cub went white to the lips. There was a pause, during which I flourished the horsewhip ostentatiously. Jenkins tapped at the door and entered.

"Did you call, sir?"

"No," I said. "I thought I should want you, but I find I do not."

Jenkins' face when he caught sight of the horsewhip was a picture of astonishment, and for the sake of my own personal dignity, I felt compelled afterwards to explain matters to him to a certain extent. When he had retired, and closed the door, I faced my visitor once more.

"Now then," I said, "what are you going to do?"

My brave gentleman began to whimper, which was a good sign.

"Make out your paper," said he, with a poor attempt at bravado. I called Jenkins.

"Sit down, Jenkins, in my chair, and write as I dictate."

"I, the undersigned, hereby undertake never to molest or annoy Miss Forget-me-not White from this date. Should I do so, I leave it in the hands of Mr. H. Tremaine, solicitor, to prosecute me for an assault attempted to be committed by me upon him this day.—Signed."

"Now," I said, "get up and sign!" I still carried the horsewhip. With some hesitation Mr. Arthur Thornton rose to his feet and affixed his signature to the document. I promptly and dramatically locked it up in my safe.

"Jenkins, show this 'gentleman' out. His weapon is mine by right of conquest."

* * * * * * *

I did not see or hear anything of my pretty client for some time, beyond that we met at the Veres' one afternoon. I gathered from her manner then that she knew nothing of the encounter at my office. I had not supposed Mr. Thornton would tell her, and I certainly had no intention of doing so myself. She was, if possible, sweeter than ever, both kind and gracious to me, with the result that I went home in the seventh heaven of happiness.

But, alas! I awoke in the morning in the last depths of despair. Reason, they say, comes with the dawn. How could I, a struggling solicitor, barely able to earn a living, hope that "this one bright particular star" would deign to shine upon me? Forget her I never should. But I realised in the morning to the full my folly and presumption in having fallen in love with a rich woman. But all the same, I loved her, and I could not tear myself away from the Veres'. While reproaching myself for my folly, I still went there in the hope of meeting her, for I confessed to my secret heart that the world held but one woman for me, and that one woman was Forget-me-not White.

But one morning, at the end of February, I was sitting in my office surrounded by dingy parchments, through which seemed to shine the face of the woman I loved. History repeated itself, and Jenkins brought me a card with the two words inscribed upon it, "Miss White." My heart leapt, and then went still a moment later. How foolish of me, I thought. Of course she had only thought of me as a client. Of course I was bound to see her.

She entered, gracious and beautiful, and gave me her little gloved hand, then sat down in the very chair in which she had sat before.

"You are very unkind, Mr. Tremaine," she said with a delicious smile. "You have never been to see me." I stammered something about being busy, and she laughed the merriest laugh that surely ever a solicitor's office rang with.

"I have some news for you," she said. "My cousin has gone abroad. He sailed for New Zealand on the *Orinoco* yesterday. And before he went he made me a confession."

I started. What had he told her? I soon knew. My client put out her two hands to me, and I could almost have sworn there were tears in her eyes.

"Thank you, Mr. Tremaine, with all my heart, for what you have done for me!"

I would have given all I possessed in the world to have taken her in my arms and kissed her. I pressed her outstretched hands, and let them fall as quickly as possible.

"Don't look so serious," she said gaily; "I too have a confession to make." Here she hesitated a little, and I fancied I saw a blush creep over her face.

"A confession?" I echoed.

"Yes, a confession," she said. "I am thinking of getting married."

"I congratulate him," was all I could find to say.

"But you don't even know his name."

"Whoever he is, he will be lucky who wins you."

"Mr. Tremaine, I really believe you hold a very high opinion of me." The temptation was too great for me.

"I think you the most beautiful and lovable woman in the world," I said with emphasis.

Her face went as red as a rose.

"But," she said, "you haven't inquired the name of the gentleman I think of marrying."

"I would rather not know," I exclaimed. "I love you too much, but I shall pray for your happiness ever and always. Forgive me for having said so much, but I could not help it."

She gave me an adorable smile.

"If you will give me a sheet of paper and a pencil," she said, "I will sit at your desk, if I may, and write the name down for you to read when I am gone."

She sat in my chair and pushed away the parchments that littered the table.

"What a dreadful muddle!" she said. "You want someone to come and tidy it up."

My heart was beating so fast that I could not speak. She picked up a pen and wrote a name upon the sheet of paper I had given her. Then she looked up at me with a bright face.

"What is the date?" she said.

With a glance at my calendar I told her.

"There," she said, folding it carefully; "now I must go. Promise me that you will not look at that for an hour."

"I promise," I said, feeling somewhat mystified. She held out her hand to me.

"Good-bye," I said.

"*Au revoir*," was her reply, and before I knew it she was gone.

* * * * * * *

An hour later I looked at the paper. To my utter amazement it bore nothing but my own name, Harry Tremaine, and the date, February 29th. It flashed upon me with a suddenness that almost unnerved me, that the year was leap year, and that Forget-me-not White had proposed to me!

She is now Forget-me-not Tremaine, and vows that in all the eight years of our happy married life she has never once regretted that proposal of hers. The sheet of paper on which she wrote my name hangs framed in my study.

Clifton Bingham.

A HANSOM CAB AND A HORSE
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See This Week's "BIG BUDGET."
ONE PENNY.

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Exciting Series.

DECOYED!

A Striking Series of Astonishing Revelations.

Told by the Decoy Herself.

OF WHOM YOU READ.

Vivienne D'Alton, the decoy. She, an innocent girl, unwittingly leads young gentlemen of good social standing to their ruin at the hands of her father.

Beverley D'Alton, who poses as a millionaire who has made his money by judicious speculation. He assumes to lavish great affection on his daughter, from whom he has been separated for many years.

Mrs. Sherwood. A florid person, who is introduced to Vivienne by her father as a great friend of her dead mother. She lives with the D'Altons, and requests Vivienne to call her "Aunt Flora," which the young girl reluctantly does.

Annchen. A lady's maid, whom Vivienne greatly detests. She seems to be on very familiar terms with Mrs. Sherwood and Mr. D'Alton.

NINTH EPISODE.

A Letter from Viscount Broomville.

As soon as I reached my own rooms with the two letters I had secured, I locked the outer door behind me, sat down, and made myself mistress of the information intended for me.

The first letter I opened was from Sophie Melrose it ran:

"My Dear Miss D'Alton, "*It was exceedingly kind of your father to arrange all about the Specialist so promptly, though I must confess we should have been a little more grateful if we could have seen you before we left. But there was not even time to come round and inquire how your sprained ankle was getting on, for as the Specialist is leaving England to-morrow, not a moment is to be wasted. I am so thankful that you mentioned poor Alan's affliction to your father, whose kindness, in taking all the worry of arranging things off our hands, has won our everlasting gratitude, even if the great Specialist to whom he had wired instructions should not be as successful as is hoped. To-night, after he has seen Alan, I will write again, and let you know what he says.*

"*Meanwhile, I am,*

"*Yours gratefully and affectionately,*

"Sophie Melrose."

Was I very much amazed at the contents of this letter? I fancy not. But I was certainly distressed, for it is a terrible thing to have such doubts as mine resolved into certainties, and the missive, which Annchen was on the watch to intercept, told me a multitude of things.

It told me, for instance, that there had been a conspiracy to prevent me seeing the Melrose family again, and that the pretended appointment at the office was merely a ruse to keep me out of the way while my father posed as Alan's Good Samaritan. It also told me that Annchen had overheard my conversation with Sophie and that she had reported it verbatim. And, still more frightful revelation, it told me that my anxiety concerning the origin of Alan Melrose's brain trouble was only too well founded.

This being so, how could I hope that anything but evil was at the bottom of the hasty removal of the patient, or that such a person as the vaunted "Specialist" really existed? No wonder I scented danger. And no wonder that I was wildly anxious to warn the deluded victims against the enemies who were plotting their ruin.

Only too certain was I now that, if my father could prevent it, Alan Melrose would never recover his memory. For, if he did, he would be able to tell what he had done with the missing £80,000. I could have solved that mystery myself, in the light of what had happened to-day. Or, rather, I could feel sure in my own mind concerning it. But actual disclosure ought to come from the victimised man himself, and, dreadful as it would be for me, I felt that I should be compelled to indorse the proclamation of my own father's villainy!

But how to warn the Melroses that it was an enemy, and not a friend who was directing their movements, and raising hopes that were never intended to be fulfilled? There was no mention of the name of the place to which they were journeying, so I had no immediate means of communication with them. True, Sophie had promised to write again as soon as she reached her destination. But would she be in a position to do so? And even if she were successful in dispatching another letter to me, was it not probable that it would be intercepted?

I was now face to face with the fact that my relatives were nothing better than a gang of unscrupulous schemers; so, painful as it was to take sides against my own father, the only course open to me was to fight him and Mrs. Sherwood with their own weapons, and, for the present at least, to put on a mask of unsuspecting amiability.

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If possible, I must devise a means of preventing the withholding of letters intended for me, and I was trying to form a plan in that connection, when my eyes lighted upon the other missive which I had rescued from Annchen's clutches. I was both amazed and relieved when I read it—amazed at its contents, and relieved to know that its writer was safe.

For it came from Viscount Broomville, and this is what it said:

"Dear Miss D'Alton,—*If I were to tell you one half the things that have befallen me since you saved my life at Knightsbridge, you would hardly believe me to be speaking the truth. Many reasons have induced me to risk writing to you now, for the time has come when you ought to be warned that your own life and liberty are no safer than mine have been for the last few weeks. Never mind how I know this. And, for Heaven's sake, do not run away with the idea that I exaggerate the gravity of the situation. Be on your guard. Go nowhere without other escort than that of your relatives. And beware of taking food and drink that is not shared by them. If this letter reaches your hands, it may save you from danger. If it does not, it will be because restraint is being exercised upon your correspondence; so I warn Mr. D'Alton and Mrs. Sherwood that if any harm befalls Miss D'Alton, there are those who will avenge her at once. The former is the instigator of several attacks upon myself, and I am simply biding my time before I declare all I know. If that time is hastened by any doubt as to the continued welfare of Vivienne D'Alton, the first to bring her enemies to justice will be her ardent well-wisher,*

"Broomville."

So Viscount Broomville guessed the real nature of the great millionaire, too! And his fears were so strong on my behalf that he found it necessary to send me a warning which would have seemed preposterous if my own suspicions had not been already aroused. Indeed, he had so worded his letter that whether it reached me or not, it was calculated to be of good service to me, although it was hard to believe that my own father would do me an injury, for the fact remained that he had heaped pleasures and luxuries upon me ever since I came home from school.

"Please, miss, the master sent me to see if you were coming down to tea."

Annchen's voice, respectful but penetrating, was making itself heard on the other side of the locked door, and, thrusting the two letters into my pocket, I rose and turned the key.

"How long has Mr. D'Alton been in?" I inquired, with surprising nonchalance, considering the anxiety of mind I was in. Nor would one have imagined that there had been a rather unpleasant incident between the girl and myself, unless the fact that she was even more deferential than usual argued increased hypocrisy.

"Only a few minutes, miss," she answered. "He told me to say that he had good news about some friends of yours."

Without questioning the necessity of sending a message like this, I quietly went down to the drawing-room, and found both my father and Aunt Flora beaming with good nature.

"There, my dear," chuckled the former, "confess that I stole a nice march upon you this morning!"

"So I fancy. You never intended to join us at the office," was my steady reply.

"Certainly not! It was all a scheme to get you out of the way, while I packed off young Melrose and his sisters to interview a specialist in mental ailments who intends leaving the country almost immediately. I fervently hope that the poor fellow will come back cured, if only for my own sake."

"For your sake? How can it affect you?"

"My dear child, it is a matter of £80,000. Alan Melrose had made every preparation for investing that sum in one of my companies when this strange mental darkness overtook him. Meanwhile, he has deposited the securities somewhere, and they will probably remain safely hidden in some queer place until he recovers his memory. So, you see, it is greatly to my interest to expedite his recovery."

So there was no secrecy about the matter at all! Could it be possible that my mind was warped, and that I twisted every trivial circumstance into an indication of evil? My father's candour simply bewildered me, and he answered one or two more questions of mine quite frankly the while we took our seats at the table, being for a wonder without any guests.

"Bryce brought you straight home instead of taking you to see Clarissa Greatham? Of course he did. He had my orders to that effect, for I wanted you to be home in good time, so that I could tell you all about the Melrose plans before you got uneasy. They should be in Edinburgh in time to let you have a letter by to-morrow morning. Miss Melrose promised to write to you, and I suggested that she should wire on arrival."

Really, if it had not been for Viscount Broomville's letter, I should almost have felt ashamed of my dreadful suspicions. But I felt it rustle in my pocket as I happened to withdraw my pocket handkerchief and I was instantly reminded of the warning: "Be on your guard. Go nowhere without other escort than that of your relatives. And beware of taking any food and drink that is not shared by them."

"Vivienne, my child, you look quite done up, and you are eating nothing," observed my father, looking anxiously into my face. "Drink your tea; it will do your good."

While I had been toying with the food on my plate and meditating on Lord Broomville's letter, my father had been kindly thinking of my welfare, and I was mechanically about to lift the cup of tea to my lips when I happened to glance up at Mrs. Sherwood, who had sweetened it for me. Her eyes were sparkling with anticipation, her lips were parted eagerly, and there was altogether such a strange look upon her face as could only be produced by the expectation of something unusual.

Crash!

The tea-cup slipped from my nerveless fingers, and the contents were spilt on the dainty costume that had been donned for the first time that day.

"I'm so sorry," I murmured between lips that I knew to be ashy pale. "I'm afraid my frock is quite spoilt. It was very clumsy of me."

"And clumsiness isn't exactly in your line, eh?" sneered Mrs. Sherwood, who was now looking like a baffled demon. "It isn't always wise to overwhelm girls with luxuries. It makes them extravagant and careless."

"Flora, how dare you talk so foolishly? Can't you see that the child is quite ill? I've noticed once or twice that you felt spiteful towards her, but I thought you had more sense and more feeling than you are showing now."

My father had evidently lost his temper, for his voice rang out so angrily that every word must have been heard by the two men who waited upon us. Mrs. Sherwood immediately began to protest that she had not meant to be ill-natured, but I did not wait to hear the argument finished. I was almost hysterically overwrought, and, bursting into tears, I hastily made my way back to my own rooms.

* * * * *

After I had recovered my composure, I tried to realise my exact situation. In the eyes of the world, I was the petted and only child of a millionaire whose name was a household word, and who was credited with being one of the most charitable men alive.

As such I was a girl to be envied, for very few could hope to attain the pinnacle of happiness and prosperity upon which I was supposed to be securely placed.

But, in the quiet of my own room, I saw a very different picture. I was one of the most unhappy of mortals, for I must either share the awful guilt which cast its shadow about me, or I must denounce my own father as a cheat, a thief, and possibly, though I tried hard not to believe it, a murderer!

No wonder I was in a state of extreme nervous tension. And no wonder that I feared attempts upon my own life, now that I had shown myself to be so uncomfortably observant as to be a dangerous companion if only one-half of my suspicions were true.

Was there a drug of some sort in the tea which I had deliberately wasted? Or was my imagination really running away

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with me? If the former, how was I to escape other attempts upon my life or sanity? Lord Broomville, whose letter I carefully burnt, had warned me against the possibility of foul play. But how was I to avoid it as long as I remained an inhabitant of Park Lane?

This question set me thinking in another direction. I would run away and watch from a safe distance the disentanglement of the mysteries which nearly drove me distracted.

Fired with this idea I began to gather my jewellery together. It was very valuable, for costly presents had been simply heaped upon me, and I knew that it would yield me plenty to live upon until matters were solved one way or the other.

But I was not yet destined to carry out my intentions, for without even a preliminary knock, Mrs. Sherwood entered my boudoir, being immediately followed by my father and a gentleman whom I did not know.

"Ah, in your bedroom, are you, dear?" called out Aunt Flora. "Do come here a minute, your father has brought someone to see you."

Hastily thrusting my jewel-case out of sight, I went into the boudoir, and bowed stiffly to the stranger who had so unwarrantably forced himself upon my notice. I was feeling very mutinous, and very determined to show my objection to this encroachment upon my liberty, so I looked the stranger none too amiably in the face. But, strange to relate, I no sooner met the steadfast glance of his piercing grey eyes than my own dropped obediently, and, much to my subsequent amazement, I soon found myself agreeing with childish docility to the directions given me.

"I have brought Dr. Farnie to see you, Vivienne. Your nerves seem to be in a most extraordinary state, and I feel so anxious about you that I want you to describe your feelings and sensations to the doctor, so that he may know what to prescribe."

"There is no need to trouble your daughter," interrupted Dr. Farnie's voice, which was so gentle, so melodious, and so soothing, that it was a pleasure to listen to it. "I can see for myself what is the matter. She is nervous and overwrought, suffers from bad dreams, and is tormented by the malignant imagination that is such a frequent accompaniment of hysteria. But we will soon change all that. Less excitement, earlier hours, and fresh air, instead of heated rooms, will work wonders, and a simple tonic will do the rest."

"Nay, doctor, I think you exaggerate the case," remonstrated my father, who, as he sat in a big armchair, and looked with tender solicitude at me, appeared to be the personification of benevolence. "My daughter is certainly a bit hysterical, for, as I have already told you, she burst into tears because she accidentally spoilt a new dress. But she has shown no signs of being troubled by a malignant imagination, and——"

"Pardon me, I think you will find my diagnosis correct," was the firm reply. "I have had much experience with hysterical girls, and by far the most painful part of their malady is their tendency to create troubles that do not exist. Why, I knew one poor girl who actually imagined that her own mother was conspiring to murder her."

"Incredible!" exclaimed my father.

"Awful!" added Mrs. Sherwood.

And I? Well, it must be owned that Dr. Farnie's words and manner exercised such an influence upon me that I, for the time being, thankfully believed myself to be the victim of painful delusions, and cast aside the awful suspicions which had begun to make life a torment to me.

"The doctor is right," I murmured shamefacedly. "I've thought all manner of dreadful things, and my day-dreams seem to have been worse than those I have dreamt while asleep."

My father, and the doctor, and Mrs. Sherwood all smiled at me, and the doctor said kindly: "After all, Miss D'Alton, you are not so far gone in hysteria as the other young lady I mentioned, for a patient no sooner awakes to a conviction that her fancy has been playing her tricks than she is on the high road to recovery. And now to begin my treatment. Suppose Miss D'Alton goes for a drive at once, in an open carriage for the sake of the fresh air, and, while she is out, let her call at whichever chemist she prefers, and ask him to give her a bottle of Campbell's Nerve Tonic. It is a patent medicine, but it is as good as anything I can give her myself, and the mere fetching of it will benefit her."

I smiled gratefully at the doctor, for I guessed why he wanted me to fetch the remedy myself. A patent medicine in a sealed bottle could not possibly have been tampered with by anybody, and there was not even room left to imagine an intentional curb on my liberty when Aunt Flora observed: "Well, I'm glad it's something she can look after herself, for I don't want to go out again before dinner if I can help it."

I protested that there was no need for anyone to accompany me, and when, after the others had left me, Susan came in to help me to dress for the carriage, I almost felt happy again.

"Campbell's Patent Nerve Tonic" proved very difficult to procure. The first shop at which I called had never heard of it, but an assistant at the second shop thought he could get me a bottle of it the following day. I gave him an order for a supply, and then, being desirous of removing all my delusions as soon as possible, I gave the order to drive to a shop near the Haymarket.

Each time the footman saw me into the carriage again, and then mounted the box beside Bryce. It was pleasant to know that I could go where I liked without fear of restraint, and my spirits had been raised so much that I even looked forward with pleasure to the little dinner-party which was to take place at our house that night. The guests had all been invited by my father, and I had not even asked their names. But, by way of making up for previous disinclination to entertain guests I resolved to be very amiable, and was smiling with anticipatory pleasure when I again left the carriage in quest of the "Nerve Tonic."

"Had I better go into the shop, miss?" inquired the footman. "There's a perfect crowd outside."

So there was, but I saw that it was easy to pass it, and was about to do so when, moved by some central impulse, the crowd parted, and I saw in its midst the pathetic figure of an old lady whose face was the picture of misery, and whose hands were outstretched pleadingly to a big policeman who was keeping the crowd from pushing her about.

"You don't know who you are, madam? And you don't know where you live? Nor remember nothing at all about yourself?"

The policeman was putting these questions kindly enough, when a tall, foreign-looking man came forward, and said eagerly: "Ah, there she is! Poor old thing! I thought we had lost her again!"

"Why, do you know her?" inquired the policeman, and the man answered promptly: "Know her? Of course I do! Why, she's my mother's sister. But she's a bit off in her upper storey, and gives us heaps of trouble."

"Well, you had better see her safe home before she comes to grief."

The old lady looked at the man who claimed to be her nephew, and shrank back. "I don't know him!" she protested. "He is strange to me!"

"Yes, it's hard luck when you forget your own relations. But come along, Aunt Jane. It's time you were having a good feed at home."

The policeman stepped back, and the stranger was grasping the old lady's hand to take her away with him, when I sprang forward to prevent this being done.

For whether I was the victim of malignant fancies or not, I was certain of this: The old lady who had lost her memory was she who claimed to be Miss D'Alton, and the man who posed as her nephew was the "Bird of Evil Omen."

(Another instalment of this exciting series next week.)

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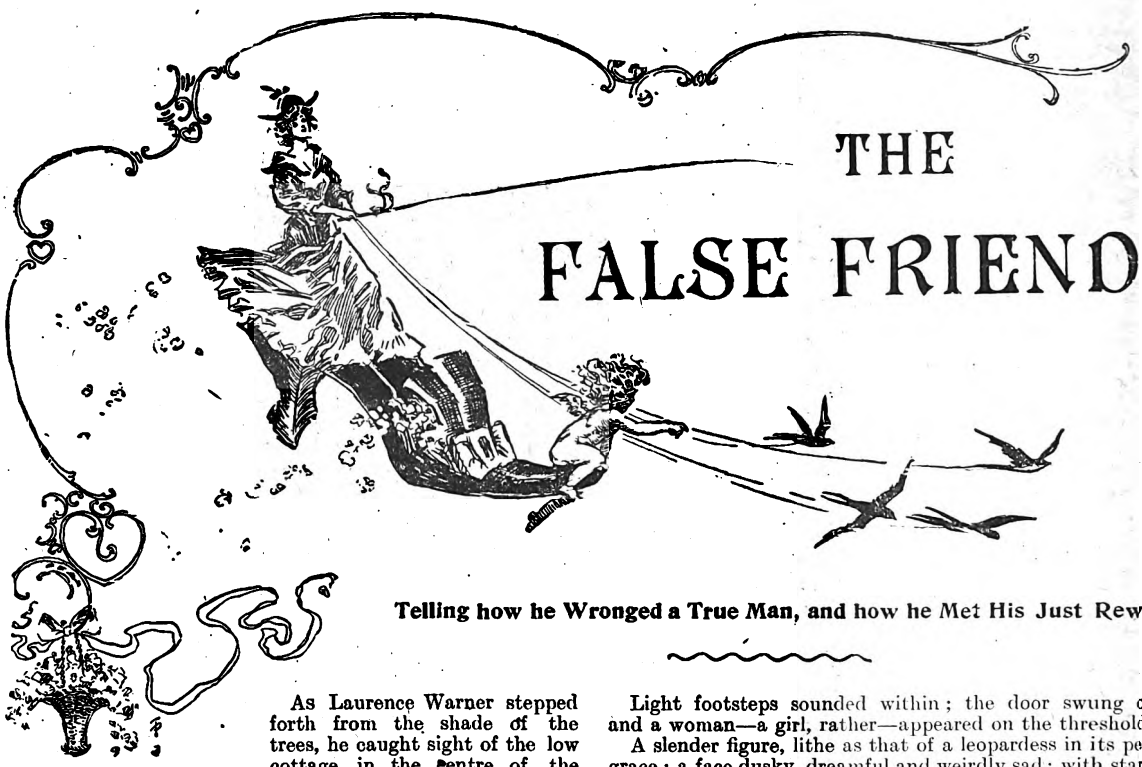

THE FALSE FRIEND.

Telling how he Wronged a True Man, and how he Met His Just Reward.

As Laurence Warner stepped forth from the shade of the trees, he caught sight of the low cottage in the centre of the grassy glade, and suddenly stopped. An involuntary cry broke from his lips.

"Is *this* the place?" he murmured sadly. "Is it here that Annie Metherell, the delicately-nurtured and pretty beauty of Wilmington, now drags through the dark days of an embittered and joyless life? And yet, however unwillingly, I was one of those who wrought this evil. Why, indeed, have I ventured here? Through your long silence, why has the voice of hope ever made itself heard in my heart? It is because, perhaps, you are life itself to me. It may be, love, that once again you will listen to my pleading."

The warm flush of hope mounted to his pale, marble-like features. He threw back his handsome, fair head, and cast a rapid glance about him.

It was a wild and lovely scene, that which met his gaze. On his left moved the dark, slow waters of the river, bathed now in waves of amber light from the rising sun. Round about, rising from the wind-stirred reeds as from a floor of emerald, were numbers of oaks, draped from the crown to the lowest bough in a floating web-work of moss, that glistened in silvery greenness beneath the dew of early morning.

The glade before him was carpeted with a grass that, growing in thick tufts, with outward falling blades, seemed at a little distance an expanse of green tulips.

In the centre of this expanse a column of blue smoke rose slantingly into the air; it curled from the chimney of the cottage referred to above.

Besides the smoke and a white curtain hanging before the window that looked towards Laurences Warner, no signs of human occupancy were visible.

These details he had taken in with that single sweeping glance.

Hesitating a moment, his hand, resting on the trunk of an oak, shook slightly, and into his dark eyes came a look of longing that was deep unto pain; then, crossing the glade with swift steps, he approached the door of the low building and rapped upon it.

Light footsteps sounded within; the door swung open and a woman—a girl, rather—appeared on the threshold.

A slender figure, lithe as that of a leopardess in its perfect grace; a face dusky, dreamful and weirdly sad; with star-like eyes; a cloud of hair, dark as the gloom of a starless tropical midnight, falling over the shoulders in thick waves.

On seeing her—this young and glorious creature—Laurence Warner, uttering a low, glad cry, involuntarily stretched forth his hands.

"Annie," he breathed, "Annie Metherell!"

She echoed his cry. Her face grew wan with a mysterious anguish. Recoiling from him, as if in fear, she reeled.

"Laurie! Oh, Heaven! Why do you come here?"

An expression of bitter disappointment darkened his face; yet the hunger in his grey eyes deepened.

He came closer to her, and would have taken her hands in his; but, with an imperious gesture, she checked him.

"Why," he repeated, "have you only such words as those for me? Oh, my love, what have I done to merit them?"

A vague, shrinking wonder looked at him out of those great magnetic orbs. Her nervous lips curled with a faint, scornful smile.

"Need you ask me, Mr. Warner? What is Annie Metherell—friendless, beggared—to you?"

"To *me?* My life, my love, my all!"

She drew her breath sharply.

"Hush! Have you come to deride me? Are you a demon, that you approach me after what has passed? And yet"—her voice sinking into the plaintive minor key of regret—"I once loved you."

"*Once*, Annie? I do not understand. You bewilder me! Tell me, dearest, what you mean."

The pleading music of that voice seemed to shake her very soul. A convulsive tremor ran through her frame.

"Laurence," she prayed, "have pity on me! I am weak—oh, so weak!—and the memories of the past still live to mock me. Leave me, I beseech you, if you would not madden one whose heart you have almost broken."

"But, Annie——"

"Go!" she interrupted brokenly. "*Remember the grave in the veld*, and——"

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She checked herself with a low shriek. Her eyes had turned from Laurence to a third person who suddenly appeared upon the scene.

"Aye!" exclaimed a deep and menacing voice at the young man's side, "false friend, hypocrite, *murderer*, that you are, begone!"

With a start of surprise, a swift pallor of anger, an instinctive clenching of the hands, Laurence swung round.

An old man, clad in threadbare garments, but of an imposing and patriarchal beauty, stood before him. One arm was lifted, as he wildly waved him back from his child. Hair and beard of hoary whiteness streamed over his shoulders and breast. His deep-set eyes blazed with the half-mournful wrath of some great prophet of old.

Seeing him, the manner of Laurence instantly changed. His face softened, and a bewildered look crept into his eyes.

"Mr. Metherell!" he said.

The blaze in those grand eyes deepened.

"I!" he returned haughtily. "Now tell me why you have followed us here?"

A moment of silence.

Laurence looked at him with the expression of one who doubted the evidence of his own senses.

"I came," he said, at last, "to claim my promised bride."

A quick, desolate cry followed his words. The beautiful eyes of Annie Metherell were riveted upon him in a horror-stricken, yet fascinated, gaze.

"Too late!" she exclaimed, in a faint and moaning voice. "Heaven, be pitiful! *Oh, my brother—my brother!*"

Laurence listened as one in a stupor. His mind was in a whirl.

The old man stepped closer to his child, and spoke in a tone of ineffable tenderness:

"Go, dear one; this is no place for you. Leave me to deal with him."

She hesitated, shuddered, and, still gazing at Laurence, held forth her delicate hands beseechingly.

"Have mercy on us!" she whispered. "Remember, he is old, and he has been deeply wronged. Do not—please do not take from me the only creature that is left to love me!"

He did not answer her. A deathly paleness had drifted into his cheek, and his face sank upon his breast.

The old man spoke again.

"Go, Annie, and fear nothing. I will be with you soon."

She bowed her graceful head, with a last look at Laurence, and disappeared into the cottage, closing the door after her. Her lover had made no attempt to detain her. He now turned to Mr. Metherell.

"Perhaps you will condescend to explain," he said wearily. "You call me an assassin — she evidently deems me one. I do not understand. I have never injured either of you intentionally. Will you kindly enlighten me?"

The old man broke into a wild and hollow laugh.

"Is this your wish?" he asked.

His companion bent his head.

"Then it shall be gratified, Laurence Warner. When you accompanied Walter to his home in Wilmington, we welcomed you as a friend. That was six years ago. You remained with us until you won Annie's love, and, believing you a man of honour, I sanctioned your suit. But you betrayed the trust we reposed in you. The war breaking out, you went where duty called you. Before you left us, however, you begged Annie to communicate with you whenever it was possible. You, it was understood, would do the same. Did you keep your promise? She kept hers. She wrote you four letters."

Laurence could not repress a slight start.

"I never received any of them," he said simply.

The old man lifted one hand with a gesture of scorn and disbelief.

"Did you not? Nor did she receive any of *yours!*"

"Ah!" The white teeth closed on the gleaming, flossy moustache. "And yet," he murmured sadly, "her faith could not have been so small. There is more to tell, Mr. Metherell."

"*More!*" A groan broke from the old man's lips. "Wretch!" he cried. "If you knew—— But, stay! You shall be satisfied. See!"

He took from his pocket a folded and torn slip of paper, and held it towards Laurence in one shaking hand.

"Look," he continued hoarsely. "Those words were written by your victim as he was dying."

Laurence took the paper, and glanced rapidly over the

"Begone, false friend and murderer!" the old man cried.

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few words scrawled upon it. The writing had been done with a blunt instrument dipped in some darkened liquid. As he gazed upon it, he grew faint, and his heart seemed to pause in its beating. He read it once again.

"*Father, I am dying. Laurence Warner is my murderer, for I——*" (*a blur*), "*in bottle. I write this with my blood.*

"WALTER METHERELL."

The paper dropped from the young man's hand. His face was ghastly. A hunted, desperate look crept into his eyes.

"And you *believe* it?" he whispered, voicelessly. "In Heaven's name, tell me who gave you this?"

"It was found," returned the old man, in faltering tones, "clenched in Walter's stiffened hand. He who gave it to me buried my boy on the veld, the night that Jackson was slain."

"He who gave it to you!" repeated Laurence. "Old man, it was *I* who buried your son."

"*You?*" with a glance of loathing.

"Yes, I!" Laurence passionately replied. "I found him, as you say, on the veld. He had been shot down by some unknown person in the darkness. He breathed his last in my arms."

"Do you expect me to credit this?"

"Old man, you *must!* Merciful Heaven!" he cried, in a voice of horror. "How can I endure such a charge—I who am innocent?"

The words were scarcely spoken when the door near which he was still standing was thrown open, and Annie again appeared on the threshold.

Her glorious face was bathed in colour; her bosom heaved with excitement; her great glowing eyes gleamed like moonlit jewels.

"Father," she exclaimed, clasping her hands, while her sweet voice shook with emotion, "I was afraid, and, listening, I have heard all. I have heard and I believe. He could not—no, no, he could not have been guilty of this crime. Laurence," she continued, turning to him almost humbly, "you told me just before you left us, that you had a friend who would see that your letters reached me. You did not mention his name, and I forgot to ask you then. Who was that friend?"

A dim but sweet hope, awakened by her gentle words, stirred through his heart. He looked at her, however, with wondering eyes.

"He is known to you, Annie. His name is Eric Devine."

"I thought that it might be so," she whispered, with a start.

"Ah!" muttered her father wonderingly. "It was he who clung to us so faithfully through all our misfortunes. He is still our friend, poor Eric!—our only one, perhaps!"

"And," added Annie, in a hushed voice, "it was *he* who brought us the tidings of Walter's death."

Her eyes, as she spoke, met those of Laurence, and something in their expression caused the blood to leap more warmly through his veins, while his face kindled into an eager, waiting beauty.

But when she turned from him a moment later to her father, that expression changed. A quick pallor shot into her cheeks and her eloquent features, one moment a-quiver with joy, the next grew rigid with horror.

"Do you understand?" she asked.

The old man shook his hoary head.

"No, child. Tell me what you mean."

"You shall soon know, father. Heaven is merciful. It has heard my prayer. Laurence"—her tones lingered caressingly on that name—"when you buried Walter you found on his person a photograph—mine—and a package of letters from his betrothed, did you not?"

The articles in question were instantly laid in her hands. Involuntarily the three drew closer together. The flush of hope on the young man's face deepened.

With an impulsive movement, unnoticed by her father, Annie stretched forth her little hand and laid it on her lover's arm.

"Do you remember," she asked, "my brother's last words?"

"Only the substance," he replied, trembling like a woman beneath her touch. "He bade me tell the dear ones at home that he died a Christian, and that his last thoughts were of you and of her whom he so devotedly loved."

Tears rushed to the listeners' eyes.

She turned to her father, her voice faltering piteously:

"Look at him," she said. "Could Walter's murderer speak of him thus?"

The old man was staggered. He moved backward a step, an expression of bewilderment settling on his face.

Then the paper that Laurence had dropped caught his eye. He lifted his head and was about to speak.

Bang!

It was the sharp report of a gun among the trees.

It was instantly followed by a loud cry of pain. Then a white puff of smoke, curling upwards, slowly dissipated among the leaves.

The three, turning at first with one impulse in the direction of the sound, then looked at each other in mute inquiry.

Annie was the first to speak. Her face had grown white to the lips. The truth had suddenly flashed upon her mind.

"It is Eric Devine," she gasped. "He has shot himself, Laurie. It is the work of Nemesis. But come, let us go to him."

With the swift grace of a Diana, she crossed the glade and disappeared among the trees.

Laurence and her father followed more slowly. A low cry of pity came back to them through the sylvan silence. They had gained the edge of the glade.

They now pushed aside the rustling reeds, and looked upon a startling and mournful scene. A tall and nobly-proportioned man, in a dark shooting suit, lay prone upon the earth, in the shade of a huge oak, before them.

His gun rested near him, entangled among the reeds. His hat had fallen back from his brow, and a gleam of sunlight, stealing through the leaves and mosses above, played over his convulsed lips the brilliant mockery of a smile.

His head was supported by Annie, who knelt like an angel of mercy by his side. She had torn her handkerchief into strips, with which she vainly sought to staunch the blood that oozed from a round, dark hole in his breast.

Her face, bending above him, was now filled with the light of tenderest pity. She felt that this poor creature was dying.

He turned his head at the approach of Laurence and Mr. Metherell, and the glazing eyes, that had a moment before looked at Annie with such agonised intreaty, were fastened upon them.

"Laurence Warner!" he muttered, in a hollow voice. A scowl contracted his handsome brows. "Do you know," he said, "that the bullet which laid me here was meant for *you?*"

Mr. Metherell started, and Annie, with a faint cry, drew back.

But Laurence, bending over him, felt in that moment only a compassion for the dying one, and smiled.

"I believed it," he said.

"I was a false friend to you, Warner."

"Yes, I know it now."

"Still, I did not wish to be your foe, if my passion for Annie had not almost maddened me. You knew how I loved you?" turning to her.

"Yes," she answered, in a low voice. "But I kept the promise I gave you when I told you we could still be friends. I said nothing—not even to him."

A dim smile touched his lips.

"It is well. And now, as I have but a little while to live, I want to make a confession. Old man," he continued, addressing Mr. Metherell, "it was not Laurence Warner who killed your son."

"Villain!" he exclaimed involuntarily; while Annie, starting to her feet, uttered a cry of joy.

The fading eyes looked up at him imploringly.

"Do not curse me *now*—I cannot bear it. Listen to me. It was all a mistake. I meant to kill Warner. He was

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A NOVEL CONTEST FOR OLD AND YOUNG.

Full particulars will be announced next week of a splendid new competition for readers of "Short Stories."

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NEXT WEEK. NEXT WEEK. NEXT WEEK.

Remember that the competition starts next week, that is, in the issue of "Short Stories" dated March 12th. Do your friends a good turn by drawing their attention to that number, and place your order with your newsagent for your copy without delay in order to avoid disappointment.

£25 IN CASH PRIZES.

near our lines that night, and I thought he was seeking Walter. I followed him into a thicket, and lost sight of him. Soon after I heard someone approaching, and, thinking it was he, I fired. A cry—it was Walter's voice that uttered it—undeceived me. At the same time the moon came out from behind a cloud and shone on his face. Horrified, I turned and fled. When I ventured near the spot next day, I saw only a newly-made grave."

His voice had sunk almost to a whisper. Shudderingly, the three drew closer to catch his words. The old man broke the momentary pause.

"But the paper," he said, "with the words written on it in blood?"

"My work—mine," whispered the dying man. "The letters, too—I destroyed them—his, intrusted to me, and hers, obtained by treachery. I managed to prevent a meeting between him and Walter, until—until—— Laurence, where are you?"

"Here—here beside you, Eric."

"It grows dark—the night is closing in. I—I would pray; but it is useless. What was I saying? When I saw you just now, I knew that all my scheming had been in vain. Mad with jealousy, I was about to fire, when the gun became entangled among—Annie, Annie! Oh, pity me. It is cold; and the starless night—oh, God!"

At that desolate cry, she clasped her hands, and looked at Laurence. He, the wronged one, was blind with tears.

"Speak to him, child," he whispered. She sank upon her knees again, with a glance that thrilled him to the soul.

"I am here, Eric. Can you not see me? Do you not feel the touch of my hands?"

His mind wandered. A cry of horror broke from his lips.

"Do you not know the spot? There is the grave. See how wanly the moonbeams tremble over it. Hear the ghostly whisper of the midnight wind. Does it whisper to him? Will it rouse him from his dreamless slumber? Last night his spirit crept into my tent, and stood beside me. I felt its icy presence—I saw the dread, accusing eyes. I—oh, Heaven, save——"

The voice died away. His head sank back. The unseeing eyes glared piteously upward, through the waving moss and softly rustling leaves.

A moment later, as Annie rose, Laurence felt a hand touch his. The old man was regarding him with humble, supplicating eyes.

"Forgive me," he said, in a stifled voice. "You have been deeply wronged; but you are generous. May Heaven reward you, Laurence."

A smile like a wave of light broke over the sweet, grave beauty of his lips.

"Heaven has blessed me," he said, "in giving me back my own."

He turned as he spoke to Annie. Her face, now bathed in tears, quivered with wordless tenderness. She drew nearer to him, and folding her hands upon his breast, laid her cheek upon them.

"Laurie," she whispered, "forgive me, and take me back to your heart."

And she felt his silent answer on her lips.

W. F. Jackson.

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The Problem Solved.

Telling of a Love that was Tardy to be Discovered.

"Do you know, Harrington, I can never tell why you don't marry?"

I laughed, but made no reply. I could not tell why myself. I had frequently had this remark made to me, and it had always set me thinking, but I never arrived at a satisfactory solution of the problem.

Everything undoubtedly pointed to me as a marrying man, yet here I was, at nearly forty years of age, still a bachelor, and, so far as I could judge, likely to remain one. It was not want of money that influenced me. I had a comfortable income, being the manager of an opulent City house, where my duties, if somewhat onerous, seldom detained me more than seven hours away from home.

I was a very quiet individual, and when I returned from the City about six o'clock daily, my chief pleasure, after tea, was to make myself as comfortable as possible in an easy-chair, with a pipe and a book.

Perhaps, in the evening, I got Maud to sing and play a little, for I was fond of music, but that was my only diversion.

I have said that I searched vainly for the causes of my continued celibacy, but nevertheless there was one thing which weighed with me to some extent. That was Maud. I wanted to see her married; then, I thought, I should soon follow her example.

Whom I should marry I had never troubled about. Some widow probably—a woman about my own age, who would attend to my comfort, and be a companion for me. I never thought of marrying for love. I was too old.

Maud was twenty-two and not engaged yet, but I had hopes that she soon would be.

This very Henry Brown, who had questioned me on the subject of matrimony, was, I felt sure, in love with my ward. I still call her my ward because, although she is of age, I still consider myself her guardian. As such I had asked many eligible young men to gather around me at my Hampstead villa, hoping that in this way I might find a husband for my girl. But somehow she had never taken to any of them, and I was doubtful even about Brown, for although he was obviously attracted by her, I had never detected anything but friendliness in her treatment of him.

She had been quite a daughter to me. Her father, a dear cousin and schoolfellow of mine, was an officer. He had married when little more than a boy, but, dying suddenly five years later, had left his wife and her one child almost penniless on the world. I had helped them as well as I could, for I was not then as well off as now, but Mrs. Thorpe only survived her husband a year or so.

Then Maud was an orphan, and I had adopted her. I had sent her to a boarding-school, where her education had been well seen to, and when she was seventeen, and her schooling over, I had quitted the rooms I had hitherto occupied in Islington, and bought the villa I still inhabit. Then I had engaged a kind of superior housekeeper in a clergyman's widow, and started housekeeping at thirty-eight.

Brown and I were alone in the dining-room. He was a nice young fellow, a clerk in our office, and I had asked him to my house pretty frequently lately. He had always seemed delighted to accept my invitations, hence my belief that he was in love with Maud. I encouraged him, for I have stated that my great wish was to see the dear child married.

After his remark as to my marrying, we puffed away at our cigars in silence for a few minutes, I watching the clouds of smoke as they ascended, and thinking deeply. Smoking always makes me contemplative. But Brown interrupted my chain of thought.

"Well, I wish I was married," he said.

"A very laudable desire," I replied; "and you can easily attain your object, I should think. Your salary is quite enough to start upon in a quiet way."

"Oh, I know that," he said; "but"—puff-puff—"the fact is, I'm uncertain as to whether she'll have me."

"Whether she'll have you? Are you in love, then?"

"Yes," he said; "there's no use disguising it any longer, Harrington. I love your Maud. May I ask her to become my wife?"

"Oh, by all means, and all success attend you," I replied gaily.

"Thank you," he said. "I will—this very evening too. I'm tired of this suspense."

Before we could say any more, Maud herself entered the room. She invited us to stop smoking and go into the drawing-room, where we were to have some music.

As I looked at her pretty figure and her masses of auburn hair, which fell gracefully over her forehead, I couldn't wonder at anyone being enraptured with her.

Then we put down our cigars, and followed her into the adjoining room. Mrs. Graham, my housekeeper, was out this evening, so when I had listened to one song, I left the two young people to themselves, and I went back into the dining-room.

"While he is proposing I will have a cigar," I thought; "perhaps I will be able to finish it before I have to congratulate them."

Would she accept him? I did not know. Why not? It would be the best thing she could do. But somehow at this critical moment I began to think how it would affect me. Things did not altogether appear in the rosy hue I had imagined they would if Maud were settled in life.

How lonely I should be! Yes; but I should soon be marrying too. But that, after all, was problematical; I might not get anyone to marry me.

The widow I had pictured as a suitable mate might not

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be forthcoming. Maud's leaving would cause a blank in my life; there was no use in trying to disguise the fact. I should have no one to care for then—no one to plan for. Yet how purely selfish it was of me to think thus; let me rather look at the matter as it would affect Maud. She had everything to gain by marriage. If she accepted Brown, I was confident that she would find him a good husband. He might not be rich; but he was a clever young fellow and sure to rise.

How it was I don't quite know, but a remarkable idea came into my head. Why had I never asked Maud to marry me? I tried to dismiss the thought as preposterous. Why, I was like a father to the girl, and she, doubtless, looked upon me in that light. Forty-three and twenty-two—it was absurd! I wished that Brown and I could have changed places; then I smiled at such a wish. I placed my hand involuntarily to my head; there was no denying it, I was getting bald. "No, James Harrington," I said bitterly; "the widow is the match for you. Oh, confound the widows!" I muttered.

The door opened. Brown, no doubt, coming to tell of his acceptance. I must try to congratulate him; but he did not come with the blithe step of a successful lover.

"She has refused me!" he said briefly.

It should not have been so, but a load seemed lifted from my mind. I said:

"I'm sorry for you."

He did not reply. After a few moments he said:

"I think, if you'll excuse me, I'll not stay any longer. A walk will do me good. Besides, I cannot bear to meet her at supper; I would look such a fool."

"He would look such a fool." Wounded vanity, I thought, rather than wounded love. I hoped so.

Somehow, I said good-bye to him with a light heart, and, closing the house-door behind him, I went into the drawing-room.

Maud was sitting at the pianoforte, playing softly. How pretty she looked! I wondered that I had never noticed her beauty so much before to-night. I went towards her.

"Maud," I said, "you have refused that poor young man."

"Yes," she said simply.

'Then you do not love him?"

"Of course not."

"Maud, I should like to see you married."

The soft music was continued for a short while, then she stopped suddenly, and said:

"I shall never marry!"

"Nonsense! Why not?'

"I don't believe I shall ever love anybody excepting, of course, my dear guardian, whom I don't want ever to leave."

"Then you do love your guardian, Maud?"

"As well as I should my dear father, had he lived."

Foolish heart! I did not like the comparison.

"Maud!" I said impulsively, "do you think you could ever alter your resolve as to not marrying, if I asked you?"

She looked up, but did not appear to understand me.

"Am I too old for you to marry me, Maud?"

She rose from the piano, and put her arms round my neck.

"No," she said; "I don't care how old you are, for I love you. Because I loved you I resolved never to marry; because you love me I will break my resolve."

We were married a month later.

When Brown and his wife come to see us occasionally he and I often laugh over that night. He was young and soon recovered from his disappointment, and his Lucy makes him very happy, he says.

It was on one of these visits, when the ladies were in the drawing-room, and he and I were in the garden smoking, that he said to me:

"I know now, Harrington, why you did not marry sooner."

"Why?"

"Because you were in love and didn't know it."

I did not reply, but I acknowledged to myself that he had discovered the true solution of my matrimonial problem.

Frank Gardivan.

Our New Competition.

You will learn all about our new competition in next week's issue. I feel satisfied that the great majority of readers will enter it, and that all who do so will derive great enjoyment therefrom. Everyone will have an excellent opportunity of winning one of our cash prizes. Do not forget that full particulars will be published in the next number of *Short Stories*. Another announcement, which tells more about the competition, appears on page 301.

Result of the Juggled Letters Competition.

Those competitors who at the close of the competition tied for the prizes were given other lists to solve, and eventually the following five competitors, who succeeded in solving the most lists, agreed to divide the three cash prizes; so a cheque for £8 has been sent to each:

Andrew Dawson, 5 Bayham Street, Camden Town, N.W.; Miss P. Nicholls, 54 Prince Street, Deptford, S.E.; F. W. Southey, 46 Woodbine Road, Gosforth, Newcastle-on-Tyne; A. Wood, Outlane, Huddersfield; Miss E. Wood, Outlane, Huddersfield.

The Billiard Tables have been awarded to:

G. W. Parker, 36 Fourth Avenue, Manor Park, E.; W. A. Rutherford, 16 Roman Road, Ilford, Essex.

As the Gramophones could not be divided, and more competitors were in the running for them than there were Gramophones offered, we have sent to each of these competitors a cheque for £1.

Winner of the Eighth Love Problem.

I have very much pleasure in announcing that James Henry Sheppick, "The Elders," Elder Road, Bramley, Leeds, is the winner of the guinea I offered in connection with the Eighth Unsolved Love Problem. Another one of this interesting series will appear shortly.

A Hansom Cab and a Horse for a Prize.

I should like to draw the attention of my readers to the fact that the Editor of *The Big Budget* is offering a hansom cab and a horse as a prize in a competition that is just starting in his paper.

Should the winner prove to be a person to whom a hansom cab would not be acceptable, a cash prize would be given instead.

A New Serial Coming.

In a few weeks' time there will be starting in this paper a grand new serial by a most popular author. The story will be one of enthralling interest. I will tell you more about this next week.

Your Editor.

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THE TWO PAPERS.

How Love Lived Through Adversity.

"Gerald Mannerley is coming back."

"What? Never!" ejaculated Tom Frankfort as he helped himself liberally to bacon and eggs.

"Yes, he is," went on the speaker, "Charlie Forsyth told me so himself last night."

"Well, he has got pluck!" returned Tom, "I should have given Odsey a wide berth if I had left it under such a cloud as he did."

"Rubbish!" said Ted. "If the chap didn't take the money, why not stick to his guns and live it down."

"Easier said than done, Ted. I fancy he'll meet with a lot of 'cold shoulders,' for, after all, one doesn't want to go hob-nobbing round with a suspected thief."

"Gently, gently, Tom," said Dr. Frankfort, a mild, benevolent-looking old gentleman, glancing reprovingly over his paper at the two frank, boyish faces. "Don't be too hard on him; after all, nobody knows much about the affair."

"No, and I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself talking about Gerald in that way, Tom; why, he couldn't possibly do a thing like that. Gerald Mannerley a common thief—oh, it won't stand talking about!"

"Nobody was talking to you, Miss Spitfire," said Tom, glancing across at his sister as he spoke. "Why, what a face you've got, you look like a boiled beetroot, and besides, what business is it of yours, I'd like to know?".

"None whatever," flashed back the girl, "but I'd be man enough not to trample on anybody who was down, if I were you!" As she spoke she rose hastily from the breakfast-table, and left the room, for the tears were perilously near Cicely's eyes, and she knew the consequences of a breakdown in the presence of her brothers. The three were absolutely devoted to each other, but in the manner common to some brothers and sisters, had a way of sparring between themselves. Let anyone else say a word against Cicely, however, and the boys would soon "have it out" with them, at whatever cost.

"Tom, you shouldn't speak in that way to Cicely," said the old man gently. "I am afraid you are very rough with her." This with a sigh to the memory of the gentle wife, whose influence he felt was sadly missed by his children.

"I didn't mean to hurt her feelings," said Tom, shuffling uneasily on his chair. "I'm sorry, dad."

When breakfast was over, Tom made his way to the large, old-fashioned garden, where he was pretty sure of coming across his sister. There she was, right enough, and Tom began his blundering attempt at an apology.

"I say, Cicely, I didn't mean to be unkind about Gerald, but you know——"

"Never mind," interrupted the girl, ready as ever to accept the olive branch. "But I say, Tom"—looking at him with intreating eyes—"be kind to Gerald if he does come home, won't you?"

"I'll let him make a door-mat of me if he likes," said the boy impulsively, "but, Cicely, don't you really think he did take that money?"

"I'm quite sure that he didn't," said the girl earnestly, "and, Tom, think what it must mean to him to be looked down upon and shunned by everybody when he is innocent, and I am sure that he is—Oh, I know it, I know it!" said the girl passionately, the tears gathering in her lovely eyes as she spoke.

"Never mind, old girl," said Tom, putting his arms round her, and kissing her in awkward, boyish fashion. "Cheer up, and as for Gerald—well, if anybody says half a word against him, I'll—I'll—knock him down, that's all," and he looked as if he meant it too.

Thus it was that Gerald Mannerley had two very warm-hearted champions down away in the old-fashioned village where his home was situated. It was quite true that he had left it under a cloud, almost seven years ago. Cicely, then a warm-hearted little tom-boy of fifteen, had been startled by the sound of gravel thrown up at the old school-room window, as she sat there curled up in a huge arm-chair, trying to spoil her pretty eyes by reading in the uncertain light of the fire. How well she remembered rushing to the window with the full expectation of seeing Gerald, for it was a common means of communication between the three merry little souls at "The Gables," and the tall, lonely, rather sad-faced youth, who was just nearing man's estate. Though several years older than any of his three friends, Gerald was very fond of looking them up, and the four together had many a long expedition round the country-side during the holidays, or whenever they could escape the vigilance of their different tutors and governess.

"Is that you, Cicely?" Gerald called up as he saw the brown head with its long, tangled curls appear at the window.

"Yes, Gerald, shall I come down?"

"I wish you would, I want to speak to you," said he, in an odd, muffled sort of voice. With careless indifference to wraps of any sort, Cicely sped down the stairs and out into the garden by the side door to where Gerald was standing in the fast gathering twilight.

"Cicely, I'm going away," he said abruptly.

"Going away, Gerald! Wherever to, and when?" asked the girl, startled by his white face and the look in his deep-set grey eyes.

"Oh, anywhere—I don't care," said he recklessly, "I've come to say good-bye, Cicely, and I want to ask you if you hear anything about—if anybody tells you that I——Oh, I can't say it, Cicely!" desperately, and then with a rush, as if the words choked him. "Will you believe that I never touched the money if they tell you about it?"

"What money, and who says you touched it?" said the girl in bewilderment.

"Some money my uncle has lost, and he thinks that I—that I——"

"The old beast—as if you could," burst in his warm-hearted little friend, incoherently.

"Thank you, Cicely, I thought you, at any rate, would believe me," his proud, sensitive face clearing a little at the girl's ready sympathy. Then, "Would you mind kissing me, Cicely, just this once—I may never see you again, you know?"

"Of course I will!" she cried, flinging her arms round his neck and kissing him—not once, but many times in hearty childish abandon.

As she did so Gerald's face flushed, but he was white to the lips as he unwound the clinging arms, and murmured—half under his breath: "Good-bye, Cicely, my little darling—Good-bye, I must not—dare not—ask you to remember me."

"Oh, but I shall!" said the girl, bursting into tears at the sight of his face. "And, Gerald, whatever they say I shall know that you are good—that you never touched the hateful money." But here she stopped, for Gerald, unable to bear any more, after holding her two hands in a grasp which made them sting, pushed her almost roughly aside, and fearing that she should think him unmanly if he betrayed the emotion he

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could no longer hide, rushed down the garden path and out at the gate.

He left the village the next day, and after the usual nine days' wonder as to his disappearance, and speculations as to its cause, his name was rarely mentioned by those amongst whom most of his early life had been spent. Left an orphan when he was six years old, he owed everything to his uncle—Roger Coventry—who was more than fond of this boy, who looked at him with eyes so like Ella Graham, that even after all these years they would bring back to the old man the memory of that "might have been," for, although he had married, and in a way been happy, the real love of his manhood had been given to Gerald's mother. It was something of a blow, then, when, after a week's absence from "Gate House," he returned to find the £100 he had left, as he thought, securely put away in his large old-fashioned bureau, gone, with not a trace to tell whose hands had removed it, or what had become of it. Thinking it over, he remembered Gerald's presence in the library as he had locked the money into the little secret drawer, depositing the key—carelessly as he admitted to himself, when he found out what had happened—in the corner of the left-hand top drawer underneath the loose papers there.

"Is that you, Cicely?' cried Gerald as he saw the brown head with its long tangled curls appear at the window.

It was not his habit to keep loose money in the house in this way, but his daughter Constance was leaving England the following week with some old friends—the Westertons—who were going out to India, and had invited her to accompany them, and he thought it might prove useful for some of her numerous preparations. Always eager for pleasure and society, Constance had worried her father into allowing her to accept this invitation much against his will. She was never happy in her luxurious though quiet home, and spent her time chiefly in a ceaseless round of gay visiting and pleasure.

On her return from London, Mr. Coventry had tried to persuade her to give up the idea of the Indian trip, and settle down quietly at home for a while. However, he found her heart so set upon going, that in the end he gave way in his usual easy fashion, although, as I have said, most unwillingly. Constance being so often away from home, uncle and nephew were thrown very much together, and were firm friends in spite of the great difference in age, and the really kind-hearted old man's somewhat irascible temper. It was with no real feeling that anything would be seriously wrong, that Mr. Coventry sent for Gerald, to question him as to the money.

"Gerald, my boy, you remember my putting that money in my little secret drawer about ten days before I took Constance down to meet Mr. and Mrs. Westerton?"

"Yes, uncle, I do," answered Gerald in an embarrassed way, flushing scarlet as he did so.

"Well, I can't find a trace of it anywhere, and——"

"Don't ask *me* anything about it, Uncle Roger, please, I'm awfully sorry I can't explain," broke in Gerald, looking the picture of miserable confusion and conscious guilt.

"You can't explain, sir? Why, what is this—explain what?" Gerald made no answer, simply standing with compressed lips as his face changed from red to white, and back again to red, while his eyes had a dangerous gleam in them which showed how great was his effort at self-control.

"You know something of this money, sir," with a keen glance at Gerald's confused face, "and you will either explain to me or leave this house," thundered the old gentleman in a fit of passion, which was made infinitely worse by the thought that it was Ella's son, whom he had cherished and cared for ever since her death, who was, thus defying him so outrageously, nay, who had degenerated into a common thief. "Why couldn't the boy have asked him for the money openly? There must be more behind all this!" The thought stung the old man almost to madness, and with his eyes blazing with wrath, he pointed to the door, saying:

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"Once more, you either explain or go; I will harbour neither traitor nor thief."

"Uncle," gasped Gerald, almost stunned by the cruel insult. "Is *that* what you think of me?"

The old man made no answer, simply stood there, pointing mercilessly towards the door, and the next day Gerald shook the dust of Odsey from his feet.

* * * * *

Barely turned twenty when all this occurred, he had a desperate struggle for the first few years of his new life. He would look back in after years and wonder how he had weathered the storm, but his was one of the characters which ripen best under adversity, and he put forth all his strength of mind and body to get the better of cruel circumstances. He drifted from one thing to another at first, until—always fluent with his pen—he was fortunate enough to attract attention by one of his journalistic articles. More work was offered him, and then, as his capabilities became recognised, a small, but permanent position was given him by the well-known firm who had helped him in the first place. Things were easy after that, but it was not until he was twenty-seven that the mantle of "fame" descended upon him. Already well-known as a clever journalist, he published his first book, and its success was instantaneous. "The Enigma of Fate" was commented upon and read far and wide, for the man had succeeded in putting something of his own strong, virile nature into it. The book found its way to brown-haired Cicely and her brothers, and also to the lonely old man at "Gate House." As he pored over the pages which could only have been penned by a noble, true nature, Roger Coventry's heart yearned for the sight of Gerald's face once more, and the longing to clasp his hand and ask forgiveness for his harshness, became so great that he procured Gerald's address and wrote the letter, which eventually brought him back again to the old home.

"Dear Gerald,—*Will you forgive an old man's hasty temper, and come and see me? I have never solved the mystery of the* £100, *but of this I feel sure—a man who writes as you do has no such sordid blot on his mind. I ought to have known you better, my boy, but—ah, well—'let bygones be bygones.' I suppose you have heard that the boat in which Constance sailed for India went down with all hands on board, so I can sign myself in all truth, your lonely, as well as repentant,*

"Uncle Roger."

Gerald's reply to this was a telegram:

"*Shall be with you next week.*"

There was a lump in the old man's throat when they met which grew larger and more uncontrollable than ever, when Gerald, his deep eyes fixed on his uncle's face, said:

"I know what became of that money, Uncle Roger. Can you trust me?"

"With all my heart, my boy," said the old man. "Let us say no more about it."

After this a very happy month ensued, and Gerald was not long in finding out that his warm-hearted little friend had kept her promise of "remembering him." Through all these years the memory of those childish words had been with him, and always, the clasp of soft arms would seem to be about his neck, in moments of solitude and remembrance. To Cicely also he had said:

"Can you trust me?" But her answer had been even more satisfactory than Uncle Roger's.

"With my life, for now and always, Gerald."

Gerald was satisfied, for he had always known that Cicely never doubted him, but as he gazed into those dear eyes, a feeling of deep thankfulness rose within him, that he was sure always of one woman's absolute trust and faith. They were in the garden, where Gerald had said "Good-bye" that night, when with such a sore heart he had sought Cicely's sympathy.

"Let us go and tell Uncle Roger, Cicely."

Cicely's reply was a brilliant blush, then she said laughingly: "How anxious you are to let people know, Gerald."

"Well," answered Gerald, "the dear old fellow will be so delighted to know that you are to reign at 'Gate House.' He told me this morning that I must never leave it again—that he was tired of being 'Master.'"

So they went happily together, and nothing could have exceeded the old man's gratification as he kissed Cicely's sweet face, and said that he must welcome her very soon to "Gate House."

"I am getting a very old man now, my dear," he said, patting her soft cheek, "and I want to see my boy perfectly happy."

With that he went for his usual nap, leaving the lovers together in the cosy, old-fashioned library. It must have been fully an hour after this, that Cicely declared: "They had talked enough nonsense for one afternoon," but, oh, what sweet nonsense it was. She loved to hear it, but, woman-like, would protest, and draw herself away, knowing that she would be quickly taken back to the shelter of those strong, loving arms.

"Isn't that the bureau where the money was, Gerald?" she half-whispered, as she nestled there.

"Yes, darling, Uncle Roger says he has never put anything of any importance in it since; he dislikes the thing so. Force of association, I suppose."

"Oh, then, I may look at it!" said the girl, rising. She pulled out the various drawers, shutting and opening them as if they fascinated her. Gerald rose, and, pushing the slide back, showed her the secret drawer where the ill-fated money had been put. It was quite empty, but Cicely pushed it backward and forward with a thoughtful look in her eyes, as if she would fain have read its secret. Suddenly the drawer jerked.

"Why, it won't open, Gerald," and then, "There is a paper behind, can't you hear the sound?" With another little jerk, the drawer was dislodged, and with it a folded paper, which had evidently been caught in the framework somehow. On the outside was written in characters which were beginning to fade: "Dear father, forgive me, but I have taken the money which you told me was here, to pay some bills I owe in London before going to India. I——"

Cicely read this much, and then stopped with a frightened look on her face.

"Gerald, what does it mean?"

"It means, my darling, that this explains the mystery of the £100. I saw Constance take the money, but I didn't know she had left this note for Uncle Roger. I felt that I couldn't say anything about it to him, much as I blamed the girl—but—his own daughter, you know, Cicely."

"We will tear up this note, Cicely," he said a moment later. "*You* know now, and it won't make things any better to trouble Uncle Roger about it. Whatever were Constance's faults, death has wiped them all away, and——"

"Give me that note, Gerald," came a stern voice from the open balcony window—the very one from which Gerald had seen his cousin take the money—and the old man, with white, set face, came forward into the room. Cicely handed him the note which he read through without a word, and then tore it slowly up, giving voice unconsciously to the very thought which had rankled in his mind when he had blamed the man before him for this same deed.

"Why could she not have asked me for it openly?" He stood for a few moments, his hand over his eyes, and then murmured: "Poor Constance—poor girl! As you said so generously just now, Gerald, 'Death has wiped it all away.' My boy—once more—you forgive me?"

I have only one other thing to say—Cicely's wedding-present from Uncle Roger was the old bureau, and in its secret drawer, on their return from their honeymoon, they found a paper, the title deeds of the "Gate House" estate, with its yearly income of £10,000.

"So you will have no need to work, only just whenever you like," said the happy little bride, after they had read the mysterious looking epistle. "This is a nicer paper than the other, Gerald."

"Yes," he answered fondly, "and one I am glad to find if only for your sweet sake, my darling."

Biddy Lamb.

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Plot and Counterplot.

The Story of a Very Close Shave.

ARTHUR FERRIS was tall, fair, handsome, and twenty-eight. He was also a possessor of a long head, inherited from the maternal side of the house. He was likewise a dutiful son.

It was the two latter circumstances that had, on more than one occasion, saved him from making a triumphant ass of himself. Just fancy! If it had not been for his long head, it is more than likely that he would have fallen desperately in love with that bewitching governess of the Hastings, with whom he had spent several weeks in the country one summer five years ago. But he had given himself time to think, and had fled between two days, much to his later satisfaction.

Then there was that dear little Miss Dixon, whom he had met at the seaside. It had been a glorious evening—that last. They were sitting on the verandah, where they might see and yet be unseen. The soft, dreamy strains of a Strauss waltz floated out from the ballroom. There was the pale, silver light of the moon, the murmuring of the waves on the beach—and all that sort of thing, which you have read about so many times that you have learnt to skip it in the novels.

Well, Elsie was going away—too, too soon. They had talked in sighs and murmurs for half an hour; Arthur's left hand clasped Elsie's dimpled right one, his right arm was about her waist; both hearts beat vigorously, as hearts will on such occasions, and Arthur had just opened his mouth to tell Elsie what she had been expecting for two weeks, when there was a step close at hand, a rustle of skirts, and the cooing voice of the maternal Ferris said:

"I beg your pardon, but will you please excuse Arthur a few moments? There are those miserable business affairs that must be attended to in time for the post."

And thus he was saved a second time, for Elsie had not a penny, and neither had he—at least, not many of them. There were several other occasions when his own long head, or his mamma's, had helped him out—for Arthur was somewhat susceptible. But it is not of these I have to tell.

His time had come. The in-every-way-desirable young person had presented herself. True, she was not so young as she had been; but, then, that was a mere trifle. She was just his own age, of as good a family as his own, and an heiress of considerable degree. She was not—well, not exactly handsome, and was rather inclined to what is politely called plumpness, but Arthur's mamma and Arthur's long head gave their approval—and Arthur did not care who she might be so long as she possessed the above qualifications, particularly the one involving a very neat fortune in her own right.

Besides, Arthur was getting a bit desperate. In fact, he had so far exceeded his own salary and the maternal allowance (which, by the way, was as large as Mrs. Ferris could afford), that nothing short of a miracle, or a matrimonial alliance such as he had been so long seeking, could save him from getting into very deep water.

And thus it came to pass that this winter found him engaged to Miss Bernice Field, much to the satisfaction of his mother, who was visiting in London, and to whom he had, like the dutiful son he was, sent the gratifying news at once.

He was disappointed, however, on one point. He had pleaded artfully for an early marriage, but Miss Field had set her foot down with much firmness, and said he must go through a long probationary period—all of which Arthur failed to understand. He had always been noted for his persuasive powers, and had flattered himself that Bernice, with her gentle, clinging, bud-like ways, would succumb at once.

Now, be it known, that Miss Bernice Field had not arrived at years of discretion for nothing. Neither had she—a not unprepossessing young person, with nearly twenty thousand in her own right—passed through the experience of ten seasons without gathering unto herself much knowledge of the ways and wiles of wicked man. She had had, as might have been expected, offers to a high number, but thus far the gentlemen concerned had failed—by reason of their unanimous desire to touch her purse—to touch, in the first place, the all-important key to it, which was hidden away in her plump bosom. And Miss Bernice Field was worldly-wise in her day and generation.

She was certainly in love with Ferris—there could be no doubt of that. It is quite as certain that she was very seriously in love with him, but, with the wisdom born of experience, she did not let him know one-half of what she felt for him.

If anyone had told Ferris that he was just now in a very shaky position, he would have scoffed. His chum, Ed. Cross, who was spending the winter at the house during Mrs. Ferris' absence, had once suggested that "there's many a slip," but Arthur merely shied a shoe at him and whistled serenely.

It was in this frame of mind that, one evening in February, he ran lightly up the steps of the Field mansion to call on her whom Cross unfeelingly referred to as his "little lady-love." It was warm, and the front door stood ajar. The footman was not in his accustomed place, so Ferris, with the air of one who knew just where he was going, stepped inside. From the open door of Papa Field's study came the sound of voices in earnest discussion, and one of them spoke his own name.

He halted, irresolute, as would anyone else under like circumstances. Papa Field was speaking.

"Of course, my dear, you are your own mistress, and I can only advise you. It seems to me, however, that you have done a very foolish thing to engage yourself to this young Ferris. True, he seems an exemplary young fellow, and he

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comes of an excellent family; but it is well-known that he has only a small allowance from the estate, in addition to a beggarly two-hundred-a-year salary. How do you know it is you, and not your money, that he wants? It is a brutal question, I know; but it is one you have probably asked of yourself half a dozen times concerning other young men."

Arthur, out in the hall, standing in much the same attitude a child assumes when speaking its first "piece" in school, winced, but waited for the answer. It came in serious, thoughtful tones, which indicated plainly that Miss Bernice also had considered this very matter.

"N—no, I am sure you misjudge him, papa. Of course I understand how he is situated financially, and all that. But I am sure he is honest and honourable, and that he—cares for me very much. There are a thousand ways by which I can learn much that you cannot, and——"

"Yes—yes, I understand. But suppose you should put him to the test, do you think he would come through—ah—er—unscathed, as it were? Suppose you should tell him that I had lost all your money and mine in unfortunate speculation—that we were beggars, and had not a penny we could call our own? Are you afraid to try him?"

There was a brief silence. Then:

"I don't like to tell a falsehood, papa; but it would be only a 'white lie,' and perhaps for the best. Yes, I'll try him to-morrow night."

"That's my dutiful girl. Now run along and let me work."

There was the sound of a kiss, and the perspiring young man in the hall hastened to get out of the house. He wanted time to think, but the first thing that entered his head as he reached the pavement was a fanciful picture of the dainty Miss Field, with her one hundred and sixty pounds avoirdupois, "running along," and he smiled broadly. Then he walked rapidly over to the next street to catch a cab to his club, there to hold a confab with Cross.

On the steps he hesitated a moment. "Had I better go back now?" he thought. "No; she won't have her little tale of woe ready, and might be put out if I call to-night. I might give myself away, too. Better have time to get my speech prepared." And this astute young man went in and proceeded to make himself comfortable.

The next evening, with his usual light heart and good spirits, he rang the door-bell of the Field mansion. "Yes, Miss Field was in," Peter said. Ferris went into the drawing-room and sat down, running rapidly over in his mind the various tender speeches he had prepared for the emergency. Bernice was a long time coming, he thought, for one who expected him.

Presently she entered—slowly—heavily. Her head bent low over her ample bosom, and her breath came short and fast. Ferris went forward to meet her, his arms outstretched. He was something of an actor himself, and he knew it.

"Bernice! Darling! What is the trouble with my little girl?" (Another good stroke. Miss Field liked to be called "little.")

"Oh, Arthur! I don't know how to tell you. It is too dreadful! Papa——"

"What? Has your father been——"

"Oh, no, not that, but—worse! Arthur, we are—beggars."

And Miss Field, delivering these last words with wonderful impressiveness, hung her head, and sobbed bitterly behind her lace handkerchief.

Then it was that Ferris, like the young man of action that he was, put his arm as far round his tearful *fiancée* as possible and with some difficulty, led her to a seat and pulled her down on his glossy shirt-front.

He was very, very sorry, as she must know. But it was nothing. Her father would recoup himself—he had many influential friends. As for her, had she not him—her Arthur? He would not, he once interrupted her to say, permit her, through a sense of false pride, to cast him off now, when she most needed him. No, never.

He had three hundred a year. It was not much, he knew, but they could live on it. And did she suppose, for one instant, that he had expected to live on his wife's money? No! A thousand times no!

"We will have a quiet little wedding, dearest, and after it is over we will go quietly to our own little cottage in the suburbs, which you and I will get ready in the meantime, and there we will be the happiest couple in the world. What! Bernice, am I to understand that you laugh at my cherished plans?"

For Bernice had leapt to her feet and was laughing heartily.

"Why, you foolish boy, I was only teasing you a bit. Don't you think I'd make a good actress? Papa and I haven't lost a——"

Here was Mr. Ferris' opportunity. She had doubted him; oh, cruel blow! If she could not trust him now, how could she have any faith in him when they were married? Perhaps, after all, it were best—

And he strode haughtily to the door.

But this was not part of Miss Field's programme, and she did what any very-much-in-love woman would do under the like circumstances, so that in a very few seconds two people were sitting on a divan, in a very lover-like attitude indeed.

* * * * *

An hour or so later, a young man, walking briskly down the street, was reflecting on the vagaries of Chance and his own good luck.

If Peter had been at the door—if he had been ten minutes later—if he had sneezed in the hall—if——

"It was an awfully close shave!" he reflected, and he stopped and shook hands with himself, much to the amazement of the policeman at the corner.

Ronald Wood.

Kitty: "Harry Dix says you are as pretty as a picture." Clara: "Nonsense! He didn't mean it." Kitty: "Oh yes, he did. But, of course, you know Harry's taste in pictures isn't anything to brag about."

"Did you tell Clarence you would cut him off without a penny, if he married that girl?" "No," answered the wise father; "the fellow would marry her in spite of that. I told the girl."

Dolly: "Fred called me an angel last night." Molly: "Yes; he told me he thought that you were rather flighty."

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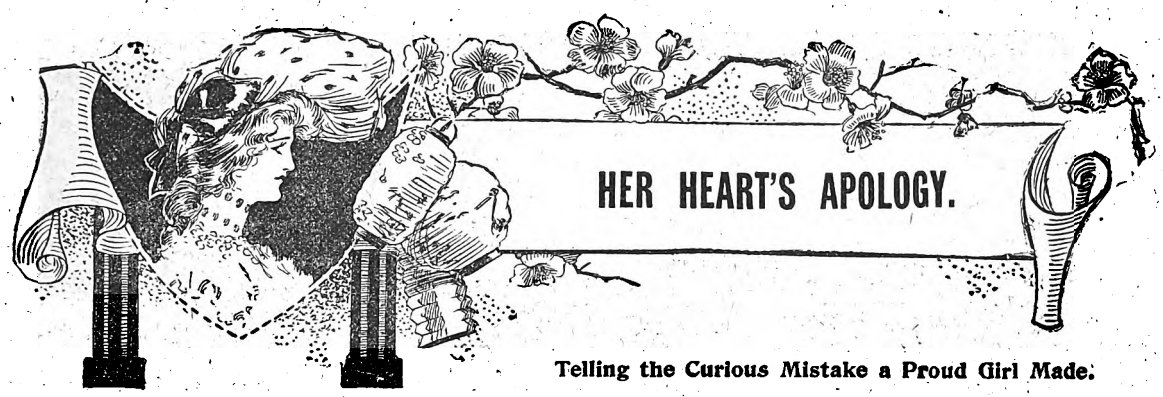

HER HEART'S APOLOGY.

Telling the Curious Mistake a Proud Girl Made.

THERE was a blaze of lights in the Arsdales' house, and the sound of music and voices came floating through the open windows and across the still night air; so that a belated pedestrian, passing down Maple Avenue, said that they were giving another of their big dances, and he wondered how much it would cost old Arsdale a year to entertain on such an enormous scale!

The passer-by was wrong, however, for this was in reality a small and entirely impromptu affair, arranged by Miss Estherina at a moment's notice, in honour of a party of friends who had come up from town to dine with them and who were going back by the midnight train.

The friends had expected to meet Mr. Arsdale in town, but at the last moment he had sent them word that he had been unavoidably detained and would not be able to come down until the 9.30 express; and now, instead of Mr. Arsdale, a boy had come with a telegram, which said: "Shall not be home to-night; staying with Judge Cavendish. Send law-papers down by Dick to-morrow."

Miss Estherina laughed gaily. "Just like poor, dear papa," she said, "not to remember that Dick has gone to Oxford for Charles Davis' wedding!" And turning to the friends from town, she added, with amusing plaintiveness: "You really ought to let yourselves be persuaded to stay here now. How can you think of going down to-night and leaving poor mamma and me, two helpless women, alone in this wilderness of a house?"

This gave rise to many jests and bright suggestions, one of which was that Mrs. and Miss Arsdale should abandon the house and accompany their friends back to town. But Mrs. Arsdale added the climax to the amusement of the party by her complacent announcement that "she should not be afraid to stay in a haunted house with her daughter, for Estherina was as good as any man."

There was at least one man among the little company who thought that Estherina Arsdale was better than any man—or than any other young woman; and he thought, too, that the object of his adoration had never looked more lovely or more unattainable than she did that night. Her black gauze dinner-gown was so wonderfully becoming to her rich colouring and majestic style of beauty; and her dark eyes were as brilliant as the superb pendant of diamonds which lay upon her perfect neck, and rose and fell and flashed its thousand points of light with her every breath and motion.

"But, Miss Arsdale," questioned a youth from the city, "if you should be awakened to-night by a burglar in the house what would you do?"

"Shoot him!" she replied, without an instant's hesitation, and Mrs. Arsdale added:

"Estherina is a good markswoman, and, indeed, I was myself in my earlier days."

Harold Ingraham lingered a moment after the other guests were gone.

"Mrs. Arsdale," he said, "joking aside, will you not permit me to stay here to-night on guard? I assure you I should be most happy——"

He spoke to the mother, but his eyes were fixed upon the daughter's lovely face.

"Mr. Ingraham, you are very kind, but I could not think of such a thing. And you must not take our jests so seriously; my daughter and I have often been alone together, both in the country and in town, and neither of us is at all nervous."

"But, at least, cannot I be of service in closing up the house?"

His eyes sought Estherina's with a mute appeal, but she only smiled and shook her head.

"Hannah always sees to the closing up; you are really very kind, but there is nothing you can do."

There was no possible excuse for lingering now, so, with a gentle pressure of her lovely but unresponsive hand, he went away; and his heart grew heavy as he traversed the few hundred feet that lay between their homes, and thought how self-reliant Estherina's nature was and how hopeless it seemed that she would ever accept his protection or his love.

After Ingraham's departure Mrs. Arsdale went at once to her room, but Estherina remained in the drawing-room for a few minutes while Hannah was locking up the house.

She bent for a moment over a jar filled with the roses that Ingraham had brought to her that night; and as she inhaled their fragrance she thought, with a mild compassion, of his infatuation for her, and wondered a little why it had not been possible for her to return his affection. She certainly liked him—but then she liked a dozen other men as well; and she tried to find some sufficient reason to explain her indifference to them all.

"It must be because I have never found a nature as strong as my own," she thought. "It would be insufferable to be tied to a husband upon whom I must necessarily look down; and it is the fate of all strong natures to be lonely—to stand apart by themselves, as if upon an inaccessible mountain height."

Looking up from her reverie, she saw Hannah struggling with a window which refused to let itself be shut.

"Come, let me try it," she said. "There!" she added triumphantly, for while Hannah held back the lace draperies Estherina had reached forward among the palms which gracefully filled the window-niches, and, with a slight exertion of her superb strength, had closed the unruly window and turned its refractory catch. Then she drew back with a little smile of satisfaction, not unpleased to have shown physical superiority as well as the mental power of which she was so proud.

She slowly ascended the broad stairway while Hannah was extinguishing the lights, and she saw with some surprise that her mother had made all her preparations for the night while she had been dreaming in the room below.

"Come, hurry a little, Estherina," Mrs. Arsdale said. "You

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will sleep in my bedroom with me to-night, and I am tired, and want to get to sleep quickly."

Estherina therefore hurried rather more than was usual with her, and in a few minutes entered her mother's bedroom, as stately and handsome in her dainty, white-ruffled wrapper, over which her luxuriant dark hair fell in heavy braids, as she had been in her black gauze evening gown so short a time before.

She carried a little case of polished wood, which she placed upon the table, saying composedly:

"Dick's revolver; it won't be needed, of course, but it's just as well to have it handy."

Then she locked the doors, and put out the light.

In the middle of the night Estherina was awakened suddenly by a sound like stealthy footsteps on the roof. Like a flash it came over her that her father and brother were away, that the jewels and the plate which they were known to have were a tempting bait, and that the burglars they had been talking about for years had come at last!

Quickly and slowly she rose, and slipped on her dressing-gown, while she awakened her sleeping mother with the words:

"Hush, don't be frightened; there's a man on the roof. If I see him I shall shoot!"

Swiftly reaching the table where it lay, Estherina caught up the revolver, and then turned to the French window, which stood open upon a tiny balcony. The whole place was bathed in moonlight. She saw a shadow pass swiftly across the roof and disappear just where a ladder was upreared outside the window of her dressing-room.

"Thieves! Murderers!" cried Estherina in a ringing voice; and the report of a revolver was heard on the still night air. Again she cried out: "Help! Robbers! Don't let them get away!"

And again and again the sharp report of the revolver rang through the night.

Answering cries were heard in the distance and soon ft approaching footsteps, and while Estherina still stood like a beautiful statue in the pale moonlight, a smoking revolver clasped in her hand, and Mrs. Arsdale crouched in the window beside her, Harold Ingraham came dashing up, the first to arrive, hastily dressed and breathless, and white with alarm.

Other neighbours quickly followed; the frightened servants came flocking down, and a thorough search was made through the house and also through the grounds, lest the thieves might still be lurking in the bushes about the place.

Estherina's statement was calm and positive; and the ladder, together with heavy footprints on the soft turf below her window, were additional and most-convincing proofs of the attempted robbery, which, as far as could be ascertained in this first hasty examination, had been without success.

After a while those who had come to their assistance went away one by one. Some went to carry the story of Estherina's bravery back to those at home and to see that their own fastenings were secure, while others had gone to rouse the sleeping village officials, so that active measures might be employed to trace the would-be robbers.

Ingraham had again offered his services to Mrs. Arsdale, and this time she had accepted them gratefully, for she admitted that she felt a little nervous now, and dreaded lest the robbers should return. So during the few remaining hours of the night he remained in the house, pacing slowly to and fro in the now dimly-lighted and quiet drawing-room, so recently the scene of brilliant repartee and mirth.

Estherina, meanwhile, sat by the window overhead, and watched the moonlight grow pale and fade away in the first dim light of dawn. She was not nervous, but calm—yes, very calm, and well satisfied that she had proved herself so efficient in the late emergency—even though in the uncertain moonlight she had missed her aim.

The pale light on the horizon grew rosy in the glow of the coming sunrise. Estherina saw that her mother was sleeping peacefully now, and she went softly away to her own room to dress and then, early as it was, joined Ingraham, who was now walking up and down the gravel path before the door.

She was annoyed to find that he had removed the ladder, though from the crushed and trampled grass she easily found the place where it had stood. As she was looking at the heavy footprints she discovered something else—a clot of red that stained the ground, and then another, and still another.

She turned to Ingraham; he, too, had seen the crimson spots, and started visibly, but he checked the words that had risen to his lips as Estherina said, in a low voice:

"Then I must have hit one of them, after all. See, you can trace him by these drops of blood here—and here. He went round the house and off in that direction."

She straightened herself, and went on composedly:

"I thought last night they had not taken anything, but I was mistaken. My diamond pendant is gone."

Ingraham started, and a curious pallor overspread his face.

"Your pendant, the one you wore last night—*gone?*" he stammered.

"Yes," she replied. "I carelessly left it lying on the bureau in my dressing-room. I never thought of it again until this morning, and then it was gone. The ladder was just outside that window," she added significantly.

Ingraham seemed so disconcerted at this intelligence that Estherina thought scornfully that he was not much of a man, and she felt something very like a contemptuous pity for him at the moment.

"Now, I wish to recover my pendant at any cost," she went on after a short pause. "I am very fond of it, apart from its value; and I am even more anxious to get it back than to have the robbers brought to justice. If I wait until papa's return to-night it may be too late, so may I ask you to put the matter into a good detective's hands at once, and also to advertise in all the papers, offering a suitable reward and no questions asked?"

"Don't do that, I beg of you, Miss Arsdale," Ingraham said impulsively.

Estherina looked at him in some surprise.

"Why not, I pray?" she asked, with a slight elevation of her beautiful level brows.

"Because I dread for you all such publicity; and—and I think the chances for the pendant's recovery are better the more quietly we can work. I wish I could persuade you to leave it entirely to me."

But the idea of publicity was not altogether distasteful to her, and when the *Weekly Gazette* made its appearance with a long, sensational account of Miss Estherina Arsdale's beauty and bravery she bought up a dozen or two copies, and sent them broadcast to her friends.

But neither the slow local authorities nor the detectives could succeed in tracing the robbers; nor did the advertisements which were repeated week after week in the papers bring any tidings of Miss Arsdale's precious diamond pendant, and Estherina had now begun to

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despair of ever seeing it again.

But the thieves had made no further attempts to enter the house, which had now been made doubly secure by the latest burglar alarms and by the presence of a fine young mastiff which Dick had brought with him from Oxford, where the news of the burglary had reached him.

The summer festivities had gone on without interruption, and every different set of guests at the Arsdales' had been regaled with the story of Estherina's bravery, until that young woman had begun to tire of all the praise that she received.

One warm afternoon she was reclining in a low deck chair, awaiting the return of a driving party of Dick's friends. Ingraham, on his way up from the train had seen her there alone and joined her.

Conversation had now languished, and Estherina was watching him from under her half-closed eyelids, half amused at his glances of undisguised admiration in her direction.

He was still her devoted attendant—her slave—upon whom she looked down, with a curious sort of pity, from her own solitary height. She sometimes even admitted to herself that she would miss not him exactly but his unfailing attentions after the inevitable question had been asked and answered.

As they were sitting thus a strange, unusual sound caused them both to turn at the same moment, and they saw Lion, the mastiff, who had been ailing and kept tied in the stable for a day or two, approaching rapidly. His head hung down, his eyes were dull and staring, froth dropped from his lips, while from his open mouth came a dull and terrible sound that struck Estherina with a sudden horror. It was evident, on the instant, that the dog was mad.

With a cry of absolute terror, she sprang through the open window, overturning the pots of palms in her flight, but never pausing until she had reached her room and shut herself safely within. Then a horrible fascination impelled her to look from her window at what was taking place below.

But she was unprepared for the sight which met her eyes. Ingraham, upon whom she had looked down so long from her superior height, had not attempted to escape, but had caught the brute by the throat, and was holding him out at arm's length, while his fingers were closing tighter and tighter, like a vice, choking away the struggling animal's breath.

But would Ingraham's strength hold out? She had never dreamt of such strength in those slim, white hands. Would not the brute, in his agony, wrench himself free, and bury his cruel fangs in the flesh of the man she—once—thought she despised?

"Ah!" She caught at the window-frame for support, for Ingraham, suddenly hurling the weakened brute to the ground, had caught up his heavy stick, and dealt a blow so swift and true that Lion neither moved nor moaned.

Still trembling in every limb, Estherina slowly descended the broad stairway. Once or twice she had to stop a moment to recover herself, and when she at last reached the foot Ingraham was gone, and two of the workmen he had sent were carrying the dead mastiff away.

Suppose, in the desperate encounter, the dog's teeth had even grazed his hand! The anxiety and suspense she felt were maddening, and she hastened in to send the first servant she could find to follow Mr. Ingraham and bring her word whether or not he had escaped unhurt.

She went into the drawing-room to await the answer, and there the first thing that met her eyes were the palms she had overturned in her hasty flight. A feeling of shame came over her and mingled with other new and unknown emotions as she thought of her sudden and cowardly retreat and contrasted it with Ingraham's instant courage.

She had lifted one of the palms upright and had turned to raise another when she saw that the jar in which it had stood had been broken in its fall and was lying now in two pieces, like an open shell. At the same time she caught sight of something sparkling, yet half concealed by the broken fragments and the earthen pot of the prostrate palm. She bent down, uttered a low cry, and rose again with her long-lost diamond pendant in her hand.

At that moment Ingraham entered the room.

"They told me you had sent over to inquire. I am unhurt, but I should be, beyond measure, happy if I thought that you really cared," he said, in tones that showed he was in earnest.

"I do care," she answered slowly, while her colour came and went. "I care very much; I think I have been looking at things all summer through the large end of the glass, and—and it has just suddenly been turned round; but—I cannot see things plainly even now."

Her upturned glance was almost appealing; Ingraham had never seen her so lovely, so gentle, before.

"Look," she continued slowly, and the diamond pendant glittered in her outstretched hand. "I have just found this; it was in that broken jardinière. There must have been just space enough for it to lie concealed."

"Ah!" he exclaimed with evident satisfaction, "I was sure it would be found at last!"

"Found!" she repeated. "Then you think it was not stolen?"

He bit his lip, but did not reply, and she went on hurriedly: "Could it not have been stolen and afterwards placed here by the thief, either out of fear of discovery or for some other reason and knowing that it would be found and restored to its owner some day? I see you do not think so, but then, how else could it have come here?"

She paused, and seemed to be rapidly considering her own question in every light; then she started, and said in a low hurried voice:

"*That* was the window I closed myself that night; it was hard to shut, and I leant far in among the curtains and the plants. Could it have been—oh, do you think that the chain could have become loosened? But, Mr. Ingraham, the ladder—the footsteps I heard on the roof? You are still silent. Do you think I could have been dreaming? Don't you think there was any robber, then, at all? Oh, what a pitiful fool I have made of myself, then; and you have known it all this time!

"But the ladder and the drops of blood—you saw that, too there must have been a man prowling about the place that night! Mr. Ingraham"—in a tragic tone—"I remember that we had painters working here then; could it have been their ladder? And the blood-drops—oh, could they have been—red paint? And you have known this all the while, and—I thought you——"

"But, Estherina, no one knew except me, and no one will ever know. My darling, it was such a natural mistake; and I never intended you to be undeceived."

Her haughty pride was now all gone, and, with a new, sweet, self-abasement, she said:

"You are the most generous and the bravest, manliest man I have ever known!"

John Sharp.

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A Near-sighted Relative.

She: "I understand that old man Millyuns is a distant relative of yours." He: "That's right. He's so distant that he isn't able to recognise me."

They Agreed.

Lodger (quarrelling with landlady): "I haven't lived in lodgings for six years for nothing." Landlady: "No, and you're not going to live here for nothing, either."

Needed Coaching.

Young Farmer (apologetically): "I know I'm a perfect bear in my manners, Miss Edna." Sweet Sixteen (hesitatingly): "No, you're not; you—you—have never hugged me yet!"

Not What She Expected.

Lady (of uncertain age): "I have put your seat next to mine, Mr. Rawlinson. I hope you do not mind?" Mr. Rawlinson: "Mind, my dear lady! You know how little it takes to satisfy me."

A Cruel Suggestion.

Elderly Heiress (sadly): "No, Mr. Jones, my heart is dead to the tender passion. The only man I ever loved, or could ever love, was killed at the battle of—of——" Mr. Jones (disappointed, and reaching for his hat): "Waterloo?"

A Relief to Him.

Old Gentleman: "Do you think, sir, that you are able to support my daughter without continually hovering on the verge of bankruptcy?" Suitor: "Oh, yes, sir, I am sure I can." Old Gentleman: "Well, that's more than I can do. Take her and be happy."

What He Thought.

"Are you aware," asked the sweet girl graduate, as they strolled along the sandy shore, "that the moon affects the tide?" "I know it affects romantic lovers," replied the young man in the scene; "but I was under the impression it lost its power after they were tied."

She Preferred a Comet.

"I wish I were a star," he said, smiling at his own poetic fancy. "I would rather you were a comet," she said dreamily. His heart beat tumultuously. "And why?" he asked tenderly, at the same time taking her unresisting little hand in his own, "and why?" "Oh," she said, with a brooding earnestness that fell freezing upon his soul, "because then you would come round only once in about fifteen years."

Q. E. D.

"Do I love George?" mused Clara softly. "Or is it simply a sister's affection I feel for——" Just then Bobby burst noisily into the room and interrupted her meditations. "Get out of here, you little wretch!" she shouted, and seizing him by the arm she shot him through the door. "Ah, no," she sighed, as she resumed her interrupted train of thought; "my love for George is not a sister's love. It is something sweeter, purer, higher, and holier."

She Didn't Mean to be Unkind.

Missionary (who is really braver than he looks): "Our station was so remote, that for a whole year my wife never saw a white face but my own!" Sympathetic Young Woman: "Oh, poor thing!"

A Worse Fate!

He: "Archibald saved the widow from drowning, you know, but he couldn't save himself." She: "You surely don't mean that he lost his life?" He: "Not exactly. The widow married him."

The Reason Why.

"Mamma seems to have a great fascination for you," remarked the beautiful girl. "She does fascinate me," he admitted, "by keeping me guessing as to whether you'll be like her at her age."

As They Do Things Now.

George: "May I steal a kiss?" Maud: "No, George. You're too old-fashioned for me!" George: "Pray explain." Maud: "If you were up-to-date you'd have kissed me first and asked afterwards!"

Ready to Start.

"If you were going to elope, which would you prefer—a motor car or——" "Oh, Charles, I never thought of doing such a thing; but if you insist, let us not wait—I'm an awfully good walker!"

The Soft Answer.

Wife: "Surely, dear, you don't mean to say that you're going to take a sea voyage and leave me behind?" "Yes, dear; the doctor says that I must absolutely keep away from all sweet things for a time!"

A Sheep as for a Lamb.

Host: "Come, come, Brown. Do go home, old man; it's two o'clock. What will Mrs. Brown say?" Brown: "Rest easy, my boy. Mrs. Brown was just as mad three hours ago as she's going to be all night."

Very Ambiguous.

She: "And are you really so much better since you returned from your trip abroad?" He: "Yes, indeed! I'm quite another man, I assure you." She: "Well, I'm sure all your friends will be delighted to hear it."

Proof Positive.

"There's one thing I will say," remarked Mrs. Showoff, "and that is that my daughter Arabella has a fine disposition." "Indeed." "Yes, the way she sits for hours listening to herself play on the piano shows remarkable self-control."

His Plan of Campaign.

"You seem to have no ambition," asserted the strenuous one. "But I have," said the indolent man; "I intend to be rich." "Then why don't you work—like Brown, for instance?" "Ah," said the indolent man, "I've had my eye on him for some time. Good fellow, Brown! I like to see him piling up wealth. He's working for me." "Working for you?" "Yes; he's killing himself making a fortune, and I am planning to get it by marrying his widow."

Gave the Game Away.

A dear little bride in a railway carriage was like most brides in desiring to avoid identification as a bride. The husband went out to smoke. An old lady opposite talked to her. "You are lately married, my dear, I know," she said kindly. "Oh, no—we have been married a long time," returned the younger woman briskly. "Ah, excuse me. You are so young, and you seem so happy." "Oh, we have been married eight, yes, eight years." "Well, well! And I thought at first you were on your wedding journey." "Oh, no! My husband will tell you—here he comes—that we have been married eight years. Haven't we, George?" "Yes—yes, certainly," he replied. "Do you know, Katie," he added with a wriggle, "I have some of that awful rice down my back yet."

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SPLENDID SERIAL.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Eardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

FORTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Two Girls.

"You are better now? Come, try to eat this," and a gentle hand raised the dark head on the pillow and put something to the lips of the girl lying there.

Marcella looked up startled, into a white face bending over her. She had been ill for some days, but did not recognise the face of the nurse bending over her. It was not that of one of the Court servants—for poor Jane was still ill—neither was it that of quite a lady, yet there was a certain refined sweetness about the expression of the mouth and in the fairness of the skin that spoke of "better days," and a superior position.

"Who are you?" she said, raising herself on her elbow and fixing her large, dark eyes on the girl. "It is only a few days since I was hurt—I think it must have been in another room, not this—and yet your face is that of a stranger. How did you come here without my knowing?"

The girl looked at her sharply. "I was telegraphed for," she said curtly. "You had fallen and hurt your head, and Sir Cyprian sent for a nurse."

A slow stain of colour dyed Marcella's face. She remembered how—in the room downstairs—her father had told her something awful—something that had robbed her of reason almost, and made her long to die! But she was alive, alive and well, and she could not stay under that roof another day. She raised herself up, and speaking hurriedly said: "Help me to dress, please. I am going away at once!"

The girl pushed her back gently. "You must stay where you are—those are the orders I have, to keep you in bed and not let you get excited. Sir Cyprian said you were to be given your medicine when you woke up."

She went to the table and poured into a glass some drops of a white-looking fluid from a bottle. Marcella put it to her lips and tasted it. Suddenly she drew back with a sharp cry of terror. "N—no, I can't drink it," she moaned. "It is nasty stuff. He is trying to poison me—to frighten me into an idiot like he did my mother!"

"Hush!" said the nurse sharply; "you mustn't talk like that, dear! Who would want to poison you? No one could wish to kill a girl who's got rich relations."

"You don't know," Marcella panted, her eyes blazing with fire. "You don't even know my name! I am Marcella Rust, and they hate me—Sir Cyprian hates me, and wishes me dead, as he wishes Philip Nullius!"

"What is Philip Nullius to you?" the other girl said quickly. "They told me you were a visitor to the Court—but, Marcella!" her voice broke off abruptly. "They say, too, that you've got hallucinations, and I mustn't listen to you."

"Ah, but you will, you will!" Marcella clutched her arm. "You are a woman like myself, and in the name of womanhood you won't stand by and see me killed. I am alone—my lover, Philip Nullius, can't know that they are trying to kill me, and my letters to my aunt, Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox, are stopped. I have no friend—none if you turn against me."

The effect of her wild beseeching words was miraculous upon the girl standing by the bed. A startled look flashed into her hollow blue eyes. "Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox, your aunt!" she gasped. "Then—then you are the cousin of—of Edward Day!"

Marcella looked at her in surprise. "No, Edward Day is no relation of mine," she said proudly. "He was adopted by my aunt out of charity, because he was a foundling, but she cast him off when he insulted me once by asking me to marry him. I hate him more than I can tell you," she continued, "but what do you know about him? What is he to you?"

The white-faced nurse's reply was a strange one. She fell on her knees by the bed, and, flinging her arms round Marcella's, sobbed: "I will be your friend, dear—your enemies are mine—yes, mine to the bitter end. Those you hate I also hate, and my hatred for Edward Day is even stronger than yours—for he is my husband!"

Marcella sat up and clutched the kneeling girl with both hands. Her face was flushed, and her fever-lit eyes burnt with excitement.

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"Your husband! Your husband!" she repeated. "Edward Day your husband! Surely you cannot mean that he was married to you when he——" She stopped suddenly.

The other girl raised her head from the bed in which she had buried it, and pushed back the loose yellow hair on her brow. Marcella noticed vaguely that she had a nasty cut on her temple, which had but recently healed.

"Yes, I understand," the girl said slowly, "he was my husband when he asked you to marry him. He planned black-hearted villany for you, and in another way for me too; but, thank God, his plans failed each time!" Her blue eyes sparkled with a strange lustre as she murmured again the words, "failed each time!"

"What was your name?" Marcella said quietly. Strangely enough she felt suddenly better now that a fresh interest had been brought into her life, making her forget her own troubles, and for the nonce play the comforter. Her quick, eager brain regained the balance it had momentarily lost under the weight of the burden of sorrow that had so nearly overpowered it. There was someone weaker than herself—more sinned against perhaps, and she would bring her wits and heart into the service of the prostrate girl whom Chance had flung across her path at the eleventh hour.

"My name was Lottie Haste," the girl answered slowly, drying her eyes that had moistened. "But my husband—Edward Day—thinks I am dead," she smiled strangely, "and now I would rather remain so for a time. I have something to accomplish before revealing myself to him as his living wife."

She turned to Marcella suddenly. "I actually thought you were an enemy," she breathed. "I hated your name when that cur lied to me about you so cruelly; I longed to see you dead even, but now," she placed her thin hand on Marcella's, "I will help you in whatever you wish; do all I can to spoil the plans of those that you say hate you. Tell me," she went on, "you mentioned just now that your lover, Philip Nullius, was hated by Sir Cyprian, who wished him dead. Why is that? What harm has he done?"

"I don't know," Marcella murmured. "I only know that for some strange reason my father wishes him out of the way. He knows Philip is my lover, and yet that cannot be his only reason for being so bitter against him. The other day he came back after having been kept away for a very long time, and though he did not tell me everything, I feel that my father was mixed up in his absence in some way, and only a few days ago I managed to prevent him from meeting a man who had met him when he was away.

"This man called him the 'Vicar,' and I heard him talk about someone called the 'Spade,' thinking Philip was one of themselves, for he had a disguise on. There is some conspiracy on foot, I know, and yet I cannot gauge my father's attitude."

Her new friend stole a quick glance at her, full of wonder and pity. She had listened quietly and intently to all that Marcella had said, and her eyes had contracted at the mention of the names "Vicar" and "Spade," but she had kept silent.

"Tell me," she said abruptly, "does Sir Cyprian have any men friends here to see him. Do you know any by sight?"

Marcella puckered her fine brows thoughtfully. "No, only the horrid doctor he brought to see me once. I think his name was Winter." She shuddered at the recollection of the cruel, soft-voiced man, who had insinuated that she was not responsible for her actions. "And then," she went on; "there is a man whose name I do not know, but I have seen him several times here; he is tall and conspicuous by a black beard and very dark hair and eyebrows; sometimes he wears glasses also. He puzzles me very much but I don't fancy he has anything to do with Philip.

"Oh, Lottie!" she exclaimed passionately, "help me—you have suffered through a man I hate—perhaps I have also suffered through a man you hate! Our lives, so long separated though running on parallel lines, have touched at last at one common junction; you won't refuse to be my friend, will you, Lottie? I—I am so afraid of some things, and I may perhaps be your friend also."

Lottie's hand closed over hers firmly; then the two faces, one dark, one fair, met in the kiss of fellowship and goodwill.

"I will do everything that I can to help you, only don't show by look or gesture that we are anything but nurse and patient. I will appear to do all that Sir Cyprian tells me, and keep our secret knowledge to ourselves. It will never do to let him find out that we are friends."

"How did you come here?" Marcella said thoughtfully. "Tell me who sent for you, or brought you to the Court?"

Lottie hesitated, then answered: "Sir Cyprian wrote to my father and asked whether I could come to look after you. I was just home from London, and although not fit for much, having had an accident," she laughed suddenly, a harsh bitter note, "I came on straight here, where I was told a young lady suffering from hallucinations was ill, and that I was to keep her quiet and listen to nothing she might say, as she was not in her right mind. Will you promise to do all I tell you, and not to question anything, dear?" she went on earnestly. "Believe me, I can and will help you to the best of my ability."

Marcella put her hand in that of the other girl. "I promise," she began, when the door was suddenly opened, and Sir Cyprian entered the room. His face was unchanged, save for one or two lines that had been added to those already round his mouth and eyes. They gave him an older look, and in his eyes themselves there was a furtive gleam as though he were on the alert for a sudden surprise. But his voice was soft and his smile gentle, as, after one flashing glance from the nurse to his daughter, he said:

"Is she taking her medicine, nurse?"

"She has only just woke up," Lottie said politely. "I have, however, given her the medicine," and she looked swiftly at Marcella; a glance the girl in the bed replied to with the slightest flicker of her long lashes.

Sir Cyprian smiled and approached the side of the bed, his blue, steely eyes shining with satisfaction. "I hope you are a good girl, Marcella, my dear," he said softly, placing one white hand on the silent girl's shoulder, beneath which she shrank as from a poisonous animal. He saw the gesture and pressed his hand more firmly on her shoulder. "You are going to be good now, Marcella?" he repeated.

"I am sure she will, Sir Cyprian," murmured the young nurse politely. "She is a little drowsy now, perhaps it is the medicine."

He started slightly and fixed his cold eyes on the fair, thin face of the girl he had secured as nurse. But it was a blank, and a satisfied smile rose to his lips. "That is well," he said slowly; "see that the medicine is given three times a day, and come to me as soon as more is required. Dr. Winter is in attendance also, but he has gone out on an errand." He moved to the door, after having stroked the shoulder of the apathetic girl once again. "Nurse, I wish to speak to you outside; I won't keep you waiting long."

Lottie followed him silently.

"Well," she said curtly, "what is it? I must get back to my patient soon."

"I want to tell you this, my dear young lady," he said, holding her arm tightly. "That if I discover you don't play straight by me, you will find it difficult to avoid a little unpleasantness for yourself. Remember, you were saved from a suicide's grave; if that fact leaked out, you might be the recipient of attentions not quite free from embarrassment—you understand?"

While he had been speaking, a strange, enigmatic smile flitted across the girl's pale, worn face, but her voice was well under control when she answered him.

"Yes, I understand, Sir Cyprian. You may depend upon me to do my duty, and I thank you for your warning," she added quietly. "I shall not forget it."

He smiled and touched her cheek caressingly. "You are a very nice little girl, but you need watching. If the truth were known perhaps you could throw some light on the subject of the missing inmate of Water Grange?"

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With the assurance of a trained actress Lottie raised her eyes to his. Her face had not changed colour, and her voice was quite steady as she said: "I was there for a few days only; I know nothing of a missing inmate. Was there one?"

Sir Cyprian bit his lip angrily. It annoyed him that he had betrayed himself to the quiet, self-possessed girl who was evidently in the dark. But his voice was light and careless as he replied: "Perhaps I was misinformed, after all. However, go back to your charge now, and see that she does not escape from her room. I want her well looked after."

As he moved away Deacon came up to him, and Lottie heard the servant say: "If you please, sir, there is a gentleman in the library who wants to see you on important business."

For an instant the Baronet's face changed its colour, and his eyes flashed a questioning glance into those of his servant. The man interpreted the unspoken question and answered: "The gentleman did not give me his card, sir, but his name is Mr. Caleb J. Johnson, sir."

The baronet breathed gently, and his face relaxed from the sudden tension that had seized it. He went down the stairs thoughtfully, and Lottie gazed after him with a set expression on her weary face. She had heard the name of the millionaire before. He was the man who had made Edward Day his secretary; she had found that out some time ago. Why had he called?

She went into the bedroom. Marcella was sitting up in bed, her eyes fixed on the door. "Who is that?" she whispered. "I heard Deacon's voice saying someone had called. Can it be—oh, can it possibly be Philip Nullius?"

Lottie shook her head. "I think not—I heard the man say it was Mr. Caleb J. Johnson, the millionaire."

Marcella sprang up excitedly. "Mr. Johnson!" she exclaimed excitedly. "I wonder why he has called. What has brought him to the Court? Lottie, come here, I want to tell you something—you can help me now if you will."

FORTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

An Unknown Champion.

Sir Cyprian closed the door behind him, and approached the millionaire with outstretched hand, and a smile of genial good-humour. "This is indeed a pleasure, Mr. Johnson. Have you come from Lady Violet?"

Mr. Johnson looked at him thoughtfully. This man with the youthful face and sparkling eyes both interested and repelled him at the same time. This was the man who for long years had enjoyed the money and position that by right were another's. But whether the baronet was ignorant of the fact was a matter that Mr. Johnson had not decided in his own mind, and which he had determined to find out. But firstly he delivered himself of Lady Violet's message. "Yes," he answered civilly, "I have come from my wife, and she desires me to say that she would like you to allow me to take Marcella back with me; she is very fond of her, and has been much worried lately at not hearing from her."

"Ah!" Sir Cyprian rubbed his soft white hands together with a pleased smile. "Is that so? It is really very good of my dear sister-in-law to take so much interest in my daughter. Marcella is also very devoted to her aunt—very, in fact," he laughed softly, "I am almost jealous sometimes, Mr. Johnson, of the affection that exists between them."

Mr. Johnson made an impatient gesture. He saw through the affectation of the man and it disgusted him. "Then in that case, Sir Cyprian," he said civilly, "you will have no objection to letting Marcella return with me to town? We will look after her well."

Sir Cyprian sighed regretfully. "If you had only come a few days ago how pleased I would have been to let Marcella accompany you, but while I was in town the last time I made arrangements for her to go to some friends of mine in the country, and she left yesterday. I am so sorry this has happened."

"What is her address?" the other man said brusquely.

(Continued overleaf.)

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SOME PLAIN FACTS.

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"ANTIPON" not only reduces abdominal fat and ugly deposits that show themselves in baggy cheeks, double chin, and bulky limbs; it dissolves and eliminates the more dangerous internal fat which clings around the vital organs and which may, if neglected, cause fatty degeneration of the heart, liver, and kidneys, a condition of continual menace to life. Difficult breathing, sudden palpitation of the heart, and other grave symptoms of disease soon disappear after a short acquaintance with the surprising curative action of "Antipon."

"ANTIPON" is a builder up of healthy muscular tissue; whilst the superfluous fat is being destroyed, the powerful tonic action of the medicine is proved by a keener appetite. More generous nourishment is taken. This makes rich blood—pure blood, the system being freed from waste fatty matter and other unwholesome deposits. That is the building process which goes on simultaneously with the clearing away of the dangerous deposits of fat.

"ANTIPON" dispenses with help from drugs of any kind—purgatives and sudorifics are alike unnecessary. No unreasonable restrictions as to living are required. On the contrary, those who use "Antipon" must "feed up," so that sound muscular fibre shall be a compensation for the loss of weight.

"ANTIPON" is a pleasantly bitter liquid, non-mineral, and certified absolutely harmless by a number of physicians who have investigated the ingredients. "Antipon" has received the written approval and warmest support of these authorities. A course of "Antipon" makes a new being of any stout person, for, with the permanent reduction of weight, there is a revivifying of the whole system—a fresh endowment of strength and vitality.

"A new preparation which bids fair to revolutionise medical science."—*Sheffield Independent.*

"'Antipon' will prove a lasting blessing to thousands."—*Lady's Realm.*

December 8th, 1903.

"The Hon. Mrs. B—— would be much obliged by the 'Antipon' Company sending off to her one large bottle of 'Antipon.' It has certainly much reduced her. She feels so much lighter and better in consequence."

"Ticehurst, March 30th, 1903.

"I received the 2s. 6d. bottle of 'Antipon,' and am very much surprised to find it so efficacious. I was fifty-four inches round the abdomen, and am now forty-eight inches only." *"E. W——."*

"Bournemouth, July 2nd, 1903.

"I have taken two bottles of 'Antipon,' and am a stone lighter than when I commenced taking it. (Mrs.) "F. R——."

"Antipon" can be had of Chemists, Stores, etc., price 2s. 6d. and 4s. 6d. per bottle, from Stock or on Order, or should any difficulty arise, may be obtained (on sending cash remittance), post free, under private package, direct from the Sole Manufacturers—

THE "ANTIPON" COMPANY,
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He was annoyed that he had once again arrived too late on another quest for the woman he loved.

The baronet smiled; he was enjoying himself hugely. He had always hated the big successful City magnate, whose path seemed one continuous stretch of gold, and he hated him the more since by making the woman whom he had for years kept under his thumb rich and independent of him, she was no longer his slave to sway to the dictation of his commands, to force to his superior will, and to dictate his own terms to as in the days before she had met the millionaire, Caleb J. Johnson. And for all the power he had lost, he hated more intensely the stranger who had robbed him of it. He rejoiced to be in the position to hurl a shaft at the head of the man, whose wealth, compared with his own, was as a vast, unfathomable ocean to a shallow pond; and he owed the millionaire one for having attempted to interfere with his plans some time ago. He had vowed to get his own back, one day, and that day had arrived earlier than he had anticipated.

"I am glad to be able to give you her address," he said slowly, "because Violet may like to write her at once. It is c.o. E. Haste, Esq., Water Grange, Berks."

"Water Grange!" the millionaire started and looked at him in amazement.

Sir Cyprian smiled. "Yes; do you know it? You appeared as though the name were not an unknown one to you."

Mr. Johnson reddened slightly. The note of mockery in Sir Cyprian's voice galled him. He felt that he had placed himself at a disadvantage in having betrayed his acquaintance with the name. He returned the baronet's gaze, however, with one as cool. "No, not that I can remember, but the name struck me as being uncommon. So you are keeping Marcella there! For any length of time?"

"Until she is better; the doctor feared that her nervous system was in danger of collapsing, but the fresh surroundings will do her good." Then, before Mr. Johnson could make any comment, he went on suavely: "I trust that you have received news of your famous picture. It must be vexing to know that all this trouble is in vain. I remember Marcella mentioning how you prized it."

"Yes," the other returned absently. "It is vexing, but the last bulletin from Scotland Yard was more reassuring. They have traced a man whom they have been watching in London to the country, and though they are not sure, they fancy he is connected with the theft in some way."

Sir Cyprian laughed. "Ah, that is most interesting! May I inquire what their waiting has brought forth? Is the man well-known to the police, or just a suspicious character who really may be quite harmless and innocent of all evil?"

"I don't know much more now than I have already told you," the millionaire replied curtly; he wanted to get away, to tell his wife that he had failed a second time in fulfilling her commands.

"Not even the fellow's description? That is always so interesting, I think," Sir Cyprian laughed lightly.

"I believe that the man the police are searching for is this wonderful 'King of Spades,'" Mr. Johnson answered. "They say he has a black beard of a peculiar shape, and is of a dark type."

Sir Cyprian shivered. "It is to be hoped that they will bring such outlaws to justice. It is dreadful that they should be at large like this; but won't you stay and lunch with me, Mr. Johnson?" he said genially.

The millionaire shook his head. He was beginning to hate his wife's brother-in-law more and more, and could not resist a thrust at him that would ease his feelings, and assure him on a certain point.

"I am afraid my time is not my own to-day, otherwise I would be delighted. By the way, what a beautiful old place this is! You inherited it after the old Sir Basil Wingate died, did you not?"

"Yes," the baronet answered carelessly. "He left an absurd will, cutting off his daughter, my cousin Helen, and her offspring because she ran away with some scamp of an adventurer. So it was just as well there was no child born to her."

"How do you know there was not?" Mr. Johnson said quickly.

Sir Cyprian shrugged his shoulders. "Because, although I was the heir I did not wish either my cousin or her children to suffer through her father's eccentricity, so I had every search made to ascertain what became of her, and heard she died in Australia childless. I was prepared to make a handsome allowance to them," he finished benevolently.

Mr. Johnson looked at him, a slow sarcastic smile curving his large mouth. "I am sure you are a very good man, Sir Cyprian, to take so much interest in the poor and needy. By the way," he added abruptly, "have you seen anything of that curate, Philip Nullius?"

Sir Cyprian raised his eyebrows in surprise. The sudden jump from one subject to another was disconcerting, but he answered politely. "I hear he is still on a holiday; I knew he had gone, because I offered him some introductions, but one fell through and I heard no more. Why do you ask?"

"Because I have some knowledge of that young man's parentage," the millionaire said slowly. "I want to see him put right in the world; he is worth it."

Sir Cyprian's fair skin paled suddenly. What did this blustering milloniare know of the secret of Philip Nullius? Why should he have sprung it so suddenly upon him? Surely he could not know that Philip Nullius was the son of his cousin, Helen Jerningham! Impossible—only he knew that, and he had resolved that the secret would die with him and perhaps the curate also. But in spite of the change of colour he laughed hardily. "Oh, well, I don't set much store on the birth of foundlings! They all claim to be heirs to peerages and similar nonsense. I heard my sister-in-law say the other day that Edward—the boy she had adopted—was a waif in reality; so mysteries can't well be wrapped round them all."

"Edward!" The millionaire started as though he had been struck. It was but a coincidence, of course, but an odd one. And he had forgotten that his wife had ever mentioned the fact about Edward Day—the rogue and blackmailer! Then his thoughts flew to the memory of Philip Nullius' face, and he rejoiced that there was not the slightest doubt about *him*. He, at least, was genuine. He turned to Sir Cyprian. "I am glad you say that Philip Nulluis is away; I heard that he had returned here the other day to see Marcella."

Sir Cyprian's face grew livid. "Who told you that? I mean how do you know that he has returned? I was away and did not see him; I was not even aware that he had returned from his holiday."

"No?" queried the millionaire drily. "I thought that perhaps he had gone back to Water Grange!"

"What do you mean? Do you intend any insinuations concerning that beggarly curate?" Sir Cyprian said haughtily. "My only objection to him was that of not having the position or money upon which to support a wife such as my daughter Marcella; otherwise I am indifferent to the young man."

Mr. Johnson wheeled round suddenly. "Then why did you take so much trouble to have his rooms searched by your menials for the papers he possessed when living near Water Grange?" he said fiercely. "They were not found, and you were disturbed by it! How do you account for that?"

A swift expression of mingled fear and hate crossed Sir Cyprian's face, but the next moment he laughed softly. "Really, Mr. Johnson, you surprise me by the interest you take in that young curate. Since you must know, I was certainly anxious to get possession of the love letters my misguided daughter had written him; of other papers I am in ignorance that he possessed any! You seem better informed than myself, Mr. Johnson." he said mockingly.

The millionaire bit his lip. "Perhaps I do," he said shortly, "more than you think, Sir Cyprian. But I won't trespass on your time now; I will go and call upon Marcella at Water Grange. Good-day."

The door closed before Sir Cyprian could retort. He ground his teeth savagely. "Confound you, you moneyed upstart. So you fancy you have got on a trail, do you, and you mean to thwart my plans, queer my pitch! That woman

(Continued on page 318.)

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shall pay the penalty; she shall fall with me—roll in the mud as well. But I shall not be defeated yet; there is nothing that fellow can trace to me. It is only supposition, after all, but how did he learn about Water Grange? How know about the papers in the room?" He took one or two impatient steps down the room, his smooth brow furrowed by a deep line of thought. Things had not gone as he had planned for a long time. Failure had dogged his intentions regarding the curate; twice had he evaded the trap that had been laid for him. Sir Cyprian could not help thinking that the hands that had saved him had been those of women. Woman's instinct was so much more alert and ready to act than a man's, and on each occasion Sir Cyprian saw the trail of the feminine instinct.

"I must stop him from knowing any more; how can I manage it, I wonder? The curate has disappeared again; he is sure to be in London, probably trying to ferret out something about his compulsory imprisonment."

He turned to the table and picked up one or two letters that had just arrived, and which he had taken from the post-bag. One was from Edward Day saying he would be calling during the week, as he was leaving London. Sir Cyprian smiled. "Ah, a good idea, I will use him to bait the other with! He is ambitious and unprincipled; he will fall in with my plans, especially as I shall offer him a very good prize. Better far that she should marry Edward Day than Philip Nullius. I will hold what I have held a little longer." He laughed again. "So Mr. Johnson anticipates bringing to justice the 'King of Spades.' I hope he will; I should like to see him in the dock—a place as yet new to him, I should fancy." Then, with another laugh, he sat down and took up his pen.

In the meantime, Mr. Johnson was waiting at the station for the up-train to London. A boy brushed past him, and when he turned to utter a sharp protest, he saw something lying at his feet. It was an envelope; he picked it up, then the train steamed into the station and he secured his carriage. When it started he opened the letter curiously. Inside was a sheet of paper, on it were the words:

"*Philip Nullius gone to London. Marcella is ill at Court. Don't trust Sir Cyprian; stay away from Court if you wish to help Marcella.*"

Mr. Johnson folded up the scrap of paper with a sudden smile. He had almost believed at first that Marcella was at Water Grange, so straightforward had Sir Cyprian seemed to be, but now this letter proved two things—first, that Marcella was being kept from her aunt for some purpose of her father's, and secondly that there was one person in that strange household a friend to the imprisoned girl.

"She will be fairly safe for a few days," the millionaire muttered. "Now to report myself to my wife, and then"—his voice softened—"and then to look for my son—my boy."

FORTY-THIRD CHAPTER.
The Stab in the Dark.

When the millionaire reached Lady Violet's house in Grosvenor Square, he was shown immediately into her presence, and, when he saw her, fell back in amazement. So pale, wan-eyed, and tragic she looked, that he guessed something had happened out of the common to make her, the Society leader, careless of her appearance. He took a step towards her.

"Violet, you are ill; what does it mean, this dreadful change in you?"

"Stop!" She waved him off passionately. "Don't come any nearer, Caleb. I—I—want to tell you something—to ask you something—you must, you shall tell me the truth."

"What is it?" he said dully. He knew that she had learnt something—something perhaps of the deceit he had practised upon her—but how much only Heaven knew.

"When you had left me the other day," she said slowly, speaking with difficulty. "I received the following letter. It told me much that had puzzled me in the past, and also showed me that the man I had imagined a man of honour was but a poor, pitiful creature, not fit for a woman's confidence or respect."

He took the letter from her. It was short and to the point.

"*If Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox were to ascertain where the body of her first husband is, she would learn that it was only his clothes that were thrown into the river—his body having been seen on board a ship in the full possession of health and a thousand pounds paid him for his silence and the promise to keep out of England. The thousand pounds was the price that was paid by her second husband, Mr. Caleb J. Johnson, for the privilege of marrying her, he having held over Major Frayne-Lennox's head the threat to use a certain dishonoured cheque that has come into his possession. Lady Frayne-Lennox is congratulated on her second marriage.*"

The face of the millionaire, Caleb J. Johnson, grew livid, and a sarcastic smile touched his lips, as he turned to the woman whom his deceit had made a bigamist. "So you chose to listen to this anonymous correspondence, rather than ignore the letter as a mad bit of spleen on the part of a man who hates me—and perhaps you also?"

She put her hand on his arm and gazed steadily into his face. "Caleb, I thought you were at least man enough to own up when you have done wrong. I can see through all this pretence, and it hurts me more than what you did. But, oh," she wailed, "why did you do such a thing—why did you commit such a wrong?"

He looked at her, a bitterly sad expression in his eyes. "Because all my life, Violet, I have let nothing stand in the way of my getting what I wanted, no matter what it was—gold, power, or love; whatever barrier stood between me and my desire I broke down through sheer force of will. I have done several shady actions in my life, of all of which now I am heartily ashamed, and wish I could wipe them out—I have wronged the dead, trampled on the weak, and——"

"And me," she cried, "you have wronged me, the woman you married, more than all."

He raised his hand suddenly and grasped her arm. "No, Violet, after all I have wronged you least of all; I put away from you the presence of a dissolute man you hated, and who was but a drag on you; I have made you my wife in name only—I sinned this time for love, like any hot-headed boy, but in all else I have done my best to make the reparation I could, Violet. Only a few knew of the form of marriage through which we went—we can drop out of each other's lives if you like, when I have done my duty."

"What duty? What do you mean?"

"I have a task before me—one just begun, and which I have neglected long enough. I will put that right, and then—"

"Yes," she whispered, awed by the look on his face she had never seen before. "What will you do then, Caleb?"

He smiled wearily. "I will put myself out of your life as ruthlessly as I entered it. I think I know the villain who sent this anonymous document to you—and"—his eyes suddenly flamed with fire—"and he shall pay for his act."

She caught his arm in hers. "No, no! Caleb, no violence! Nothing like that; promise me! I—I—was naturally horrified at first, but I will try to forgive you. We must part, but let us at least part friends, without bad blood between us, or the wreaking of vengeance on others!"

He took her hands in his and crushed them until she nearly cried aloud. "Violet, I will try to do your bidding, but tell me; if that man—you know whom—were to be really dead one day, would you marry me again? Would you be my wife in very truth?"

A slow flush coloured her cheeks as she answered. "Should you bring me news that the man had really died, I think, perhaps, that I would marry you again."

He bent over her hands and kissed them reverently.

"Let me tell you now," cried Lady Violet, "while we are both natural, and speaking as soul to soul, I once committed the most unnatural act in the world. I am a bad woman, Caleb, I let my own child——"

She stopped suddenly. The door had been flung open and a man was announced.

He came forward slowly

Then Caleb J. Johnson spoke, and his voice thrilled both his hearers; it was so full of suppressed emotion and feeling:

"It's Philip," he cried, "it's Philip Nullius!"

(Another grand instalment of this serial next week.)

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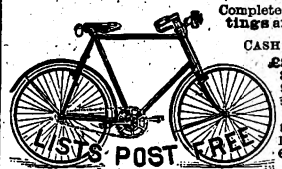

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Unwelcome Attention.

"I WAS introduced to a man some time ago," writes "EDITH," "but at the time took rather a dislike to him. I thought he seemed rather as though he might be given to drink. Well, this man seems to have taken a very great fancy to me. He never misses an opportunity of speaking to me, and often crosses the street with a view of meeting me. In fact, he is getting rather more pressing than I like. As he was introduced to me by a very dear friend, I cannot be rude to him. What should I do?"

* * * * *

You will lose nothing by being polite to him always. In fact, I think continued politeness is often the very best cure for such attentions. There is no better way of showing a man that you do not care for him than by always being polite. Try it for six months. If this does not have the desired effect, write to me again, and I will prescribe something else.

A Lax Lover.

"WE have been engaged two years," writes "WORRIED," "but so far my lover has not yet said anything definite about our getting married. When he proposed, he was not very well off, and I do not think his position has improved much since. Ought I not to ask him about it, as my family often talk about the matter, and other girls tease me."

* * * * *

It must depend on your lover's position. When he proposed to you, did he not give you some idea of his prospects? Have they improved as much as he expected? And, do you think he has been making serious efforts to place himself in a position to marry? Think it well over before you speak to him. If you do not think he has worked hard enough, and is not seriously trying to improve matters, then you should certainly raise the question.

Beginning Young.

"LOVER." So you are seventeen, and very fond of girls. You want one all to yourself, but are so shy that you have not the courage to speak to them. At the same time, you say you like reading this page very much. Well, I am glad to hear that, but I hope you have not taken it into your head that because other people fall in love very young, you, too, must do the same? At seventeen there is no need whatever for you to start sweethearting. In fact, I think it would be much better if you turned your mind to something likely to help you in life. Instead of casting about to find a girl, you should just wait until you see one who really attracts you, for whom you feel you would do anything. Don't run away with the idea that you must go sweethearting, as though it were necessary for your health. If you are of a loving turn of mind you will soon enough find the girl who attracts you, and who at the same time will be attracted by you.

A Case for Waiting.

"RONALD."—Yes, you would be doing wrong in taking your sweetheart from a good home in order to marry her, when your salary is only one pound a week. Wait until you are in a better position, unless, of course, your wife is able in any way to earn something at home. Certainly it would not be wise for her to go out to work after you are married, seeing that she has not done so before. No, "RONALD," I fear you must do what a *lot* of others have to, and that is to wait.

Marrying Beneath Him.

WHAT a long letter you have written me, "UNFORTUNATE"! I gather that you are very much in love with a girl who is rather beneath you in social position, and that, while her parents approve of you, your parents do not approve of her. Further, that it would break your hearts to separate. You are nineteen, she is eighteen.

* * * * *

Well, why be in such a hurry about it? I suppose you do not think of getting married for some years yet. It would be very foolish if you did. Why not decide to wait three years? If, after that time, you are still as fond of each other as ever, and your position enables you to marry, then surely your parents will not object simply because of the difference in social position. It is a very old-fashioned idea that people should only marry those of their own exact standing, for everybody nowadays is educated, and if a girl is able to bear herself as a lady, the man who rejected her because of trifling differences in position would indeed be a snob. I advise you to wait until you are older and better able to make up your mind as to whether you love the girl sufficiently to marry her without the consent of your parents.

On Taking Your Sweetheart to Dances.

"W.P." asks if it is correct for him to take his *fiancée* to dances. He has not done so as yet, because he hates the idea of her dancing with other men, and does not see how he could avoid such a thing. Could he take her, and arrange to dance all the dances with her alone? The girl is herself very much concerned because "W. P." has not as yet taken her to dances, while he has gone to them himself.

* * * * *

What a one-sided sort of man you are, "W. P."! You go regularly to dances yourself and dance, I suppose, with all sorts of other girls. Yet you are terrified to take your own sweetheart for fear she might dance with other men. Well, well! If she trusts you not to flirt too much, cannot you trust her? Do you not think she loves you sufficiently to be true to you, and yet have the enjoyment of dancing? And, as a matter of fact, "W. P.," dance-flirtations are as a rule dull affairs, and I don't think many hearts are stolen by them. It would be very bad manners to dance all the time with your own girl, if you should take her.

Money Presents.

"I AM to be married soon," writes "MABEL," "and a well-to-do relative asked me the other day what I would like for a wedding present. I did not tell him at the time, saying I would think it over. Meanwhile, I wish to ask your advice. I have not told this relative, but the fact is, my *fiancé* is none too well off. In fact, what we should most like would be a present of money. Do you think my relative would be offended if I hinted that a cheque would be the most acceptable present?"

* * * * *

It is quite usual for relatives to give cheques as their wedding presents to young couples. Without actually asking him for a money present, you could quite easily hint to him that the funds are not so high as they might be, and then, no doubt, he will do the necessary thing.

Cynthia

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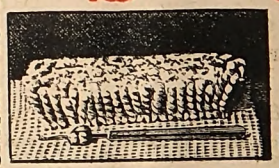

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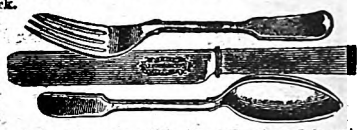

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SHORT STORIES

No. 793.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending March 12th, 1904.

CARA'S CONSPIRACY.

The Story of its Beginning and End.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

"My love—my sweet!"

Passionately Neville Dacre looked down into the darkly-fringed blue eyes, which drooped shyly beneath his ardent glance.

A pair of soft red lips met his in a long, clinging kiss, and for a few moments the lovers were silent, content to rest in that rapturous embrace.

Outside the rain fell heavily on that November day; but the conservatory in which the lovers stood was like a dream of tropical fairyland, wherein a crystal fountain rose and fell softly in its marble basin.

Muriel Vernon gently released herself from Neville's arms and returned the gaze of his dark-grey eyes with a glance of deep love.

How had she contrived to win the affection of this handsome man, the squire of Grangeside village?

Only an hour ago he had come to call nominally upon Mrs. Adair, the old and invalid lady with whom Muriel for some years had lived as companion.

But he had found Muriel alone in the conservatory which opened from the drawing-room at "Grangemount," and Neville Dacre, who had long looked for this opportunity, took the blushing girl in his arms and whispered that he loved her devotedly.

"How can you love the insignificant companion?" asked Muriel, presently, when she and Neville sat side by side on a softly-cushioned couch.

Neville glanced proudly at the lovely face that rested on his shoulder.

"Insignificant!" he repeated fondly. "My darling, I cannot allow you to malign the prettiest girl in Grangeside village!"

He kissed her again passionately on the lips.

"My sweet, I have a little confession to make," said Neville, looking gravely at Muriel, whose face assumed an alarmed expression at this sudden transition of tone. "Don't be afraid, pet. My confession has to deal with money matters."

Muriel's brow relaxed as Neville Dacre uttered those words.

"Only money," she said in a relieved tone. "I thought you were about to tell me something very serious indeed."

Neville Dacre smiled at this contemptuous reference to money matters.

"I must confess the case is rather serious in my eyes, darling," he said, lightly stroking the golden head. "But I will be as brief as possible in my narration."

For the first time Muriel Vernon then heard that Neville Dacre, in addition to his property in Grangeside, owned several coffee plantations in Ceylon.

The bulk of Neville Dacre's income was, indeed, derived from these estates; but by the last mail the young man had learnt that, owing to the systematic defalcations of his managing overseer, his revenues would prove considerably curtailed.

"In fact, my sweet, I shall have to go in person to look after things," concluded Neville gravely. "If not, I stand to lose nearly the whole of my money. I shall be absent most probably for twelve months, and at the end of that time I shall know my prospects one way or another."

Muriel raised her head from her lover's shoulder and sat bolt upright, her hands trembling, and her face blanched at this announcement.

"Neville, Neville, don't leave me!" she faltered brokenly, her blue eyes filling with tears. "I cannot bear you to go away! Never mind money; I don't care how poor you are, as long as you are with me and I have your love."

Her lips quivered as she spoke, and her pleading tones strangely affected Neville Dacre. As he took her in his arms again and whispered endearing terms of love, imploring her to be brave for his sake, the velvet curtains which divided the drawing-room from the conservatory parted in the centre, and a woman's form, erect and imperious, appeared between the opening.

As the newcomer saw Neville Dacre passionately embrace Muriel her whole face changed its expression.

With all the force and passion of her proud nature she loved Neville Dacre, and until this moment had fondly believed her love returned. The unexpected sight of Muriel resting in Neville's arms and Muriel receiving Neville's kisses roused all the fierce torments of jealousy.

As the haughty woman pressed her hand to her throbbing brow a rush of vehement hatred for her successful rival shook her frame, and between her clenched teeth Cara Wyndham vowed vengeance on the girl who had supplanted her.

"After all, Neville, twelve months will soon pass," she heard Muriel say. "I shall be here with Mrs. Adair, and you will write often to me, won't you, darling?"

"Every mail," said Neville fervently. "The time will soon pass, dearest. In twelve months' time I shall come back to claim my wife. Poor or rich, you will be true to me, Muriel, I know?"

From her hiding place Cara Wyndham saw Muriel's form quiver with suppressed sobs.

How long she stood watching the pair she could never tell.

She saw Neville Dacre soothe Muriel into a calmer mood, and heard the two plan out their future life.

"Keep our engagement secret until I return," said Neville, gravely. "As you possess no relations, I suppose you must continue to live here with Mrs. Adair. And, though she is very kind, still she might make some objections to my suit."

Mrs. Adair had fallen into the same error as her niece Cara, and that the companion, Muriel Vernon, pretty and charming

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as she was, should form the great attraction for the young squire, might prove a somewhat disagreeable revelation.

Although possessed of a generous heart, Mrs. Adair was undoubtedly eccentric, and in the first flush of anger Neville Dacre imagined that Muriel might be made to suffer for her mistress' disappointment.

Muriel also was not unconscious of Mrs. Adair's hopes, and felt relieved at Neville's wish to keep the engagement secret.

And then the moment came for the last farewell.

The secret watcher from behind the curtains clenched her hands in deadly anguish and rage to see Neville Dacre rain down kisses on Muriel's white face, and to hear again and again his burning vows of love.

"I leave England to-morrow. In a year's time I shall return to claim you as my wife. Muriel, my heart's darling, be true to me!"

As Cara Wyndham dropped the curtain suddenly and fled to the privacy of her own room Neville's last words echoed again and again on her brain.

"In twelve months' time, Neville Dacre," she cried, "you will return to make Cara Wyndham your wife. I swear you shall never marry Muriel Vernon. I will utterly destroy her happiness. She shall learn what it is to supplant a revengeful woman."

* * * * *

"Sidney, you are in love with Muriel Vernon!"

Six months had elapsed since Neville Dacre had left England, and a new visitor had arrived at "Grangemount."

Sidney Peyton, Mrs. Adair's nephew, suddenly made his appearance one day under his aunt's hospitable roof, and on being introduced to Muriel Vernon had stared at her with such marked admiration that the girl changed colour under his bold glance.

From that day Peyton, whose protracted residence in America had apparently caused a strange deterioration in his manners, openly showed his feelings for Muriel, and only awaited an opportunity to declare his love.

On that hot July evening he and his cousin, Cara Wyndham, had strolled after dinner to the banks of the little stream which flowed peacefully through the grounds.

Cara, dressed in a daffodil silk gown, which suited her dark beauty, stood in the shadow of a giant oak tree and surveyed Peyton with a certain scorn.

"You cannot deny it," she continued, as Peyton puffed moodily at his cigar and made no reply to her charge. "You are in love with Muriel Vernon!"

"I acknowledge it," he said curtly, facing Cara in the moonlight. "She is pretty enough to justify any man worshipping her."

Cara laughed contemptuously and flashed a mocking look at the young man.

"As pretty as she is penniless," she said cuttingly. "I thought you would have looked higher than your aunt's companion, Sidney."

Peyton smiled curiously and flicked some cigar ash from his sleeve.

"If Miss Vernon will have the grace to accept your humble servant," he said slowly, "I shall be the happiest man in England. By Jove, how pretty she looked to-night at dinner in that simple white frock!"

A flush of anger rose to Cara Wynham's face. She threw off the lace hood on her hair and looked at Sidney Peyton with a passionate scorn.

"How can you afford to marry a penniless girl?" she said, contemptuously. "At present your income is scarcely large enough for your own wants. How do you propose to make it answer for two?"

Her cutting tone roused Peyton's anger.

"Don't trouble yourself about my concerns, Cara!" he said, fiercely. "I intend to marry Muriel Vernon, and I will permit no one to interfere with my plans."

An ironical laugh broke from Cara Wyndham's lips.

"Never prophesy until you know," she said, taking a step nearer to the young man in order to watch the effect of her words. "Considering that Muriel Vernon is engaged to another man, I fancy someone is very likely to interfere with your plans."

A deep oath escaped Sidney Peyton. With a sudden movement he gripped Cara's arm and fixed his fierce eyes upon her.

"Engaged?" he repeated furiously. "What is the man's name?"

"Neville Dacre," said Cara, vindictively, resenting her cousin's fierce grip. "He and Muriel have been secretly engaged six months, and when Neville returns from Ceylon they are to be married."

"And how came you to learn the secret?" asked Peyton angrily. "Does Muriel confide all her love affairs to you?"

Cara Wyndham freed herself from her cousin's grasp.

"No," she said, sullenly; "I overheard Neville Dacre confess his love to Muriel."

Peyton threw a quick glance at her stormy countenance.

"You love this man yourself," he said, noting her sudden start. "And in spite of your affected friendship for Muriel Vernon you would give much to break off her engagement to this Dacre. Am I not right, Cara?"

For a moment his companion hesitated.

Peyton watched her lips quiver as if about to open.

And then Cara, with a vehement gesture, turned rapidly from him in the direction of the house.

He followed her quickly and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Come, Cara dear," he said, soothingly, "let us be friends. Perhaps my last question was rather impertinent. But if you will help me to gain Muriel Vernon for my wife I will tell you why I can afford to marry a penniless girl."

"Then there is some hidden motive in your wish to gain Muriel?" asked Cara, eagerly, her face lit up with the prospective joy of ridding herself of her successful rival. "Trust me, Sidney; I will do all I can to help you."

At that very instant it chanced that Muriel Vernon, in obedience to Mrs. Adair's request, came out on the terrace which ran past the drawing-room and searched anxiously for the two guests.

The two watchers withdrew further into the darkness of the trees, and in another moment Muriel had vanished from the terrace.

The sight of her pure beauty had aroused conflicting emotions in Sidney Peyton's breast. He turned to Cara with a harsh laugh.

"We might be the angels of darkness plotting against an angel of light," he said, with a touch of self-scorn in his tone. "Cara, shall we give up our scheme?"

A fallen tree lay in their path. Cara seated herself upon it and motioned Peyton to take his place at her side.

"Waverer!" she said scornfully. "Do you wish to marry this girl?"

Peyton smiled.

"I only wished to try you, Cara," he said, half-flippantly. "When you have heard my story you will see that, though I love Muriel Vernon for her own sweet sake, there are other weighty reasons why I am determined to succeed in my suit."

In low tones, as though afraid the very trees might hear his secret, Sidney Peyton confided his base tale to the woman seated by his side.

With a heart beating with passionate envy Cara Wyndham learnt that, unknown to all save Sidney Peyton, Muriel Vernon was the heiress to forty thousand pounds.

While travelling in America Peyton had come across a middle-aged Englishman named Forster, who was dying in an out-of-the-way district from the result of an accident.

Mr. Forster had been thrown from his horse and fatally injured.

In the presence of Sidney Peyton and the innkeeper the dying man had signed a will, leaving all his money to the niece whose name and abode were mentioned in the document.

Peyton had faithfully promised to see the will duly carried out, and Mr. Forster died happy in the thought that the niece whom he had so shamefully neglected for such a length of time would now be amply endowed for the rest of her life.

The plan of winning Muriel Vernon for his wife before

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acquainting her with the news of her wealth had speedily flashed into Sidney Peyton's mind.

This scheme it was which had induced him to prolong his visit at "Grangemount." The daily sight of Muriel's beauty and sweetness had but added fuel to his passion, and now Peyton, by fair means or foul, was resolved to win Mr. Forster's heiress for his own wife.

The two conspirators sat on the fallen tree, weaving plot after plot to ruin Muriel's happiness.

In Cara Wyndham's heart raged a storm of violent passions. To her other crime of attracting Neville Dacre Muriel had now added the wickedness of inheriting more wealth than Cara Wyndham.

The passionate woman rose from her seat.

"Trust me, Sidney," she said, clenching her hands tightly. "If you will but follow my instructions Muriel Vernon shall be your wife in less than six months."

The following afternoon Cara Wyndham, clad in a gorgeous dress, seated herself at the writing-table in her own sitting-room.

By the open window, dreamily looking out into the sunlit garden, stood Muriel Vernon. Her thoughts were far away in Ceylon. Only that afternoon she had written to Neville Dacre, telling him how daily she awaited his return, and how slowly the time passed by during his long absence.

Suddenly Cara turned round from the table and accosted her.

"By-the-way, Muriel," said Cara, pausing, pen in hand, and fixing her dark eyes on the girl's fair face, "you remember Mr. Neville Dacre, who used to visit here so frequently last summer?"

What a hypocrite Muriel felt as she forced herself to answer calmly: "Yes, Cara, I remember him perfectly well. Why do you ask?"

"Only because Sidney and I were talking about him this morning. I was rather surprised to hear that he was about to be married very shortly to a wealthy girl."

The floor reeled beneath Muriel's feet; she grasped the window ledge to support her trembling limbs.

"Married!" faltered her suddenly parched lips. "How do you know, Cara?"

Miss Wyndham laughed carelessly.

"Oh, Sidney met this girl somewhere, and she told him of her engagement to a Mr. Dacre of Grangeside. So naturally I came to the conclusion that, as there was only one Grangeside in England, the happy bridegroom must be the Neville Dacre we know."

Her cruel eyes gloated over the sight of Muriel's blanched face.

The girl had swallowed the story even better than she had anticipated.

"But, after all, Dacre is not such an uncommon name," faltered Muriel, forcing herself to speak. "I don't believe——"

Cara interrupted her contemptuously.

"My dear Muriel," she said, with an icy stare, "surely because Neville Dacre indulged in a little flirtation with you the fact of his marriage with a wealthy heiress need not excite you quite so much!"

"Cara, how dare you speak to me in that manner?" cried Muriel, suddenly roused to fury by the unexpected taunt. "Neville Dacre never flirted with me. He is my betrothed husband!"

With her blue eyes flashing wrathfully, her slight form drawn up to its full height, Muriel Vernon seemed utterly transformed from the quiet, gentle girl whom Cara knew.

A scornful laugh broke from Cara's lips

The secret watcher saw Neville rain kisses upon Muriel's brow.

"Mr. Dacre the betrothed husband of my aunt's companion?" she said, fixedly staring at Muriel. "How utterly ridiculous!"

"It is true!" cried Muriel passionately. "I am engaged to Neville Dacre, and until I hear from his own lips that he has given me up I will trust him with all my heart."

As she swept proudly to the door Cara Wyndham's sneering tones again reached her ears.

"Perhaps you are unaware that Mr. Dacre has lost his fortune, and that only a marriage with a wealthy girl can save him from ruin. If I were you I should be ashamed to drag a man down to poverty."

Scarcely had she ended her cruel speech before the door closed violently, and Cara Wyndham found herself alone.

Down the passage Muriel hastened to her own room. Her eyes were blinded with scalding tears and her bosom heaved tumultuously.

Her letter to Neville lay on her dressing-table. She took it up with trembling hands. Should she let the missive go, she asked herself, with all its words of love?

"No," cried Muriel passionately; "Cara is right! I will never drag a man down to ruin. This very afternoon Neville shall be released from his engagement."

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She dried her eyes impatiently and took out a sheet of fresh notepaper.

Fired with her sense of wrong, Muriel Vernon wrote swiftly the words which surged into her brain:

"*I give you back your freedom. From this moment all is at an end between us. I no longer love you.*

"Muriel Vernon."

Hastily she inclosed the few lines in an envelope, and directed it to Neville Dacre.

Then, in fear lest her resolution might fail, she rang the bell for the maid, and asked that her letter might be sent at once to the post.

As the maid left the room Muriel's face lost its look of fixed determination.

Her lips quivered brokenly, and with a low moan she threw herself on the bed, weeping as though her heart would break with sorrow.

Little did she guess that at the same moment Cara Wyndham was bending triumphantly over her writing-table, inditing a note to Neville Dacre on the pretence of requiring information about the climate of Ceylon.

"The sting shall lie in the tail," cried the treacherous woman, looking up as she hastily scrawled the following postcript:

"*By-the-way, we hope to have a wedding very shortly at 'Grangemount.' My cousin, Mr. Sidney Peyton, who has recently come into a large fortune, is engaged to my aunt's companion, Miss Vernon. I wonder if you remember her. She and Sidney are passionately in love with one another, and I am sure you will acknowledge that Miss Vernon will make a pretty bride.*"

"There!" murmured Cara Wyndham scornfully, stamping the letter with the seal that hung on her chain, "I think Mr Neville Dacre will be rather surprised to read that Miss Muriel has jilted him for a richer man."

* * * * *

Far away in Ceylon Neville Dacre lay tossing on his bed, delirious with fever. Every now and again his hand plucked restlessly at the coverlet, and a cry of "Muriel! Muriel!" broke from his parched lips.

The fateful letter had accomplished more than Cara Wyndham had wished. On the memorable day when the English mail had arrived Neville Dacre had hastened home in the expectation of finding a letter from his beloved Muriel awaiting him.

Since his residence in Ceylon affairs had gone ill with him. The defalcations were even more serious than at first apprehended, and Neville Dacre, in his anxiety to return to England as soon as possible, threw himself into the difficult task of overhauling his business with more zeal than wisdom. Worried and overworked, his constitution became enfeebled by the climate, and, unknown to himself, the fever already burnt in his veins.

With a strange feeling of giddiness he tore open the letter directed in Cara Wyndham's handwriting, reserving Muriel's epistle to the last.

"Muriel engaged to Sidney Peyton!" he said, mechanically, aloud, as though repeating a lesson. "Miss Wyndham is jesting. Of course she doesn't know Muriel is my promised wife."

Conscious that his brain was beginning to reel still more, Neville seized Muriel's letter and ran his eye quickly over the contents.

For a moment he stood rooted to the spot, unable to understand the full import of the words. He passed his hand over his brow in a vacant, helpless manner.

"I no longer love you—free—all at an end!" said Neville Dacre stupidly. "What does it mean?"

Then, like a lightning flash, the terrible truth burst upon him.

Muriel was false to him—Muriel, whom he had loved so greatly! No, no, it could not be true! And yet the words were in her own handwriting.

Could it be that she had preferred wealth with another man to Neville and comparative poverty? This Peyton was rich and——

His distracted thoughts proceeded no further.

With a cry of anguish Neville Dacre staggered backwards and fell senseless on the floor.

In this condition he was found by his servant, and was carried off to bed, where for many weeks he lay prostrate and unconscious with a raging fever.

In the meantime, at "Grangemount," Muriel Vernon grew daily more wretched with her own thoughts, and under the pressure of Sidney Peyton's attentions. The young man seemed never absent from her side.

One bright morning in September the three were seated at breakfast. Muriel's cheeks were thin and pale, and the dark rings beneath her eyes told of inward trouble and unhappiness.

Despite her letter releasing Neville from his engagement, the girl had hoped against hope that the next mail would bring her word from her lover, rebuking her for her words, and telling her of his faithful love.

But already two mails had come in, and no letter had reached her bearing the welcome postmark.

Silently the unhappy girl sat over her breakfast, her eyes bent on the white cloth, while Sidney Peyton took up the daily paper, and affected to be immersed in its contents.

"Come, Sidney," said Cara Wyndham, briskly, "pray tell me some news. Is there no one married or dead whom we know?"

Peyton's hand trembled slightly as he rustled the newspaper, and feigned to search anxiously down the columns.

"Alice Graham married!" he exclaimed suddenly, in an excited tone.

"Isn't that the great heiress you told me about?" asked Cara Wyndham, noting Muriel's change of colour. "Who is the lucky bridegroom, Sidney?"

Peyton affected to look again at the announcement.

The words that sounded on Muriel Vernon's ear were: "On the 12th instant, Alice, daughter of the late Charles Graham, to Neville Dacre, formerly of Grangeside, England."

"Neville Dacre!" exclaimed Cara, in a tone of affected surprise. "So he is married at last! You told me you thought Miss Graham was engaged to him."

"So I heard," said Peyton, coolly, looking at Muriel's suddenly blanched face with savage joy. "Someone told me she had met this Dacre, and he had fallen head over ears in love with her. And as she was almost a millionairess, I suppose she could afford to marry anyone she liked."

Whiter and whiter had grown Muriel's face.

At any cost she must leave the room and flee from those prying eyes of Peyton's, which seemed to guess her secret.

"Excuse me, Cara," she gasped forth, with a piteous smile. "My—my head aches; I will go to my room."

Her voice quivered brokenly.

She rose from her chair, and, with shaking limbs, tottered from the room. Half fainting, and grasping at the wall for support, she contrived to reach her own chamber.

Uttering a heart-broken cry, she threw herself down on the bed.

Neville was married! Then after all he had proved false! He had forgotten her, and this heiress was now his wife!

"My heart is broken!" moaned the wretched girl.

Downstairs, in full triumph at the success of their stratagem, the two conspirators looked at one another with congratulatory smiles.

"That was a splendid idea to insert this fictitious marriage announcement," said Cara, laughingly. "Muriel will doubtless be weeping her heart out at Neville's perfidy. It will be your task to console her, Sidney."

Peyton smiled vindictively.

"I shall do my best, Cara," he said. "I must persuade Muriel to marry me as soon as possible. It would be very awkward for me if the other witness to the will suddenly took it into his head to inquire if Mr. Forster's directions had been carried out."

The weeks flew by, bringing the fallen leaves of autumn in their train. Muriel Vernon, pale and thin, went about the

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house trying her utmost to forget her absorbing sorrow. Mrs. Adair daily grew weaker and weaker, and relied more and more upon Muriel's devoted ministrations. Cara Wyndham and Peyton appeared to have taken up their permanent abode at "Grangemount."

"Muriel is in the conservatory," said Cara, one cold afternoon in December, when Peyton had come in from a long walk. "Go and talk to her now. Perhaps she will listen more favourably to you."

Cara was seated in the drawing-room. He was about to answer her when the maid entered the room.

"Mr. Neville Dacre," she said, quietly, unconscious of the shock of her announcement. "He is in the library, Miss Wyndham, and wishes to see you immediately."

Both Cara and Peyton had drawn a deep breath of agitation. As the maid left the room the two looked at one another in terrible dismay.

"The game is up!" said Peyton, hurriedly. "He will see Muriel, and find the truth out for himself."

"No, no!" said Cara, in an agitated whisper. "I have a good plan, Sidney."

She came nearer to him, and laid her hand on his sleeve.

"Listen!" she resumed, with blazing eyes. "Neville Dacre will ask if Muriel is yet married. I shall answer 'Yes.' And to prove my words I will bring him into this room. You must go into the conservatory, and contrive that Muriel shall stand with her back to the drawing-room. I will draw the curtains away from the glass door, and, when you hear me cough slightly, seize Muriel in your arms and kiss her passionately. Neville Dacre will then believe my words."

"The game is dangerous," said Peyton, hoarsely; "but I will do anything to keep this man from making his appearance."

Cara glided into the library, her heart beating fast with excitement. At her entrance Neville Dacre confronted her, a stern, set look on his pale face.

"Miss Wyndham," he said, quickly, after the first conventional greetings were over, "I have risen from a sick bed, determined to hear with my own ears that Miss Vernon has been false to me. You were ignorant that, before I left England, she and I were engaged. I cannot believe Muriel is capable of jilting me. Tell me that it is not true!"

His voice faltered, and he looked intreatingly at Cara. Her eyes met his with a sorrowful glance, as though grieved to see his suffering.

"How could Muriel behave in that callous manner?" she cried, reproachfully. "Alas! I regret to say she is already Sidney Peyton's wife. If you will come with me to the drawing-room, you will see for yourself whether Muriel has not forgotten you."

Quickly she led the way to the drawing-room, and with a noiseless footstep drew aside the fold of the velvet curtain. As one in a dream, Neville had followed her, and now stood at her side.

"Look!" exclaimed Cara softly, as she gave a slight, warning cough. "There is Muriel, in her husband's arms!"

Yes, it was true. With his own eyes Neville Dacre beheld the girl he loved lying in Peyton's arms and receiving his kisses on her lips. The sight was too sickening. With a groan he dropped the curtain, and forgetting even to say farewell to Cara Wyndham, he rushed from the house, convinced by his own eyesight that Muriel Vernon was the heartless, mercenary woman he had hitherto refused to believe.

"From henceforward you deal with a man who has overheard all your base conspiracy!" cried Neville.

* * *

"Muriel, how do you like my gown?" asked Cara.

In the luxuriously furnished bedroom of her London house Cara Wyndham stood before a splendid mirror, arrayed for a fashionable reception. A magnificent gold brocade robed her beautiful figure and enhanced the rich tones of her wonderful complexion.

A slight girlish form, dressed in mourning, rose from an armchair and stood beside the heiress.

"Cara, you look superb," said Muriel Vernon, whose pale, sweet face wore a pathetic expression in its large, deep-violet eyes. "You will create a sensation at Lady Temple's."

The diamond tiara in Cara's dark hair flashed brilliantly as the heiress walked slowly along the bedroom, illuminated with the soft light of innumerable wax candles.

"I am glad you think my dress becoming," said Cara, fastening a diamond necklace round her throat. "To-night, Muriel, I want to look my very best."

"Good-night, Cara," said Muriel, with a depressed, tired feeling at her heart. "I hope you will enjoy your evening as much as you wish."

"Sidney Peyton is to be present as well," said Cara, coming across to Muriel and looking down into the girl's violet eyes. "Muriel, when do you intend to reward his devotion?"

"Never!" answered the girl, meeting Cara's glance firmly. "I do not intend to marry anyone, Cara."

Before Cara could answer, Muriel had left the room, and had taken her way downstairs into the street.

That lovely evening in April her thoughts were very bitter. A week after Peyton had insulted her in the conservatory, an

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insult for which he had apologised contritely, Mrs. Adair had died suddenly.

In remembrance of Muriel's devoted services a small annuity was left to her. The girl had come up to London, hoping to obtain some employment, and for the last four months had eked out her annuity by giving music lessons. Of Neville Dacre she had heard nothing further. His house in Grangeside was shut up, and when Muriel left the village it was with the thought that her former lover was still resident with his wife in Ceylon.

Cara Wyndham and Peyton had also come up to London. The former had taken up her residence in town for the season, and Peyton proved a frequent visitor.

The young man grew daily more and more bitter at his non-success with Muriel.

Time after time he met the girl at his cousin's magnificently appointed house; but Muriel still refused to listen to his protestations of love. Little did she dream that Neville Dacre was also in town, and that his name was coupled together by gossips with Cara Wyndham's.

A changed man was Neville Dacre in those last few months. Moody and cynical, he had met Cara Wyndham in town, and in a spirit of recklessness, had plunged into a desperate flirtation with her. Muriel had played him false on account of his poverty, he thought bitterly. Why should he not marry for money, then?

Peyton, of course, kept in the background when Neville made his appearance, and, owing to Cara's skilful management, the two men had never met.

At eleven o'clock that evening Lady Temple's superb mansion was thronged with a brilliant crowd, among whom Cara Wyndham moved restlessly along in the society of her cousin. As yet Neville Dacre had not appeared, and a look of angry disappointment began to creep over Cara's features.

She and Sidney Peyton were sitting together in a dimly-lit alcove, which was divided from an iron balcony by a large screen. Save for the two people the room was deserted.

"Sidney," said Cara suddenly, "I am ashamed of you! Have I not kept up a pretence of friendship all these months with Muriel Vernon simply that you might have an opportunity of meeting her at my house? How is it you have not succeeded in winning her yet?"

Her taunt aroused Peyton's anger. He leant forward, and spoke in a sneering tone.

"Why have you not succeeded in marrying Neville Dacre? Your grand idea in writing that letter hasn't quite accomplished its end. Muriel still loves that man. Suppose I tell Neville Dacre that his old sweetheart lives in London, and is still unmarried? I don't think he would be long before he found himself at No. 14 Pembroke Crescent. What would you say, Cara, if I sent him that address?"

His jeering words filled Cara with a new-born fury. Passionately she answered back, unconscious that Peyton's last words had been overheard by a man who had sauntered idly on to the balcony from the adjoining room.

As Miss Wyndham's angry tones sounded from behind the screen the listener drew nearer and nearer to the pair. His face wore a strange expression; his eyes gleamed with anger as Peyton, in bitter recrimination, recounted savagely the difficulty he had met with in keeping secret the fact of Muriel's inheritance.

"But she shall never know," ended Peyton, sneeringly, "unless she consents to be my wife!"

Suddenly from behind the screen a man's form emerged. Cara Wyndham started violently, and gazed, terrified, at the newcomer. It was Neville Dacre himself!

"This time, Mr. Peyton, you have reckoned without your host!" said Neville, in a cold, stern voice. "From henceforth you deal with a man who has overheard all your base conspiracy! Unless you give up Mr. Forster's will by to-morrow I will place the affair in the hands of the law!"

As he strode fiercely from the room Cara Wyndham sank, half fainting, on the chair. The man for whose love she had plotted and schemed now looked upon her with unutterable loathing and contempt.

Her plots were discovered, and in Neville Dacre's eyes she was for ever outcast and despised.

"Take me away, Sidney!" she gasped, looking up at Peyton with a ghastly expression on her face. "I cannot breathe!"

* * * * * * *

At ten o'clock the next morning Muriel, seated in her quiet, dingy room, heard a thundering knock at the front door.

In another moment a tall, manly form had burst into the room, and ere Muriel could speak Neville Dacre had clasped her to his heart.

"My love! My sweet!" he cried, passionately, raining down kisses on her pale face. "I have come back at last! Darling, say you love me as much as ever!"

"Neville, Neville, you have no right to ask me!" gasped Muriel, trying vainly to release herself from those strong arms. "Where is your wife?"

Neville laughed gleefully.

"Here," he said, pressing a long kiss on her soft mouth. "Muriel, sweetheart, I have much to tell you."

Leading her to a couch, he sat down by her side, and unfolded Cara Wyndham's conspiracy.

"False, malicious woman!" he cried, in anger. "She would have robbed me of my true love, and you of your just inheritance."

Muriel looked up at him with a deep tenderness in her glorious eyes.

"Dear love," she whispered, winding her arms round his neck, "we can afford to forgive her now. Out of our great happiness, dearest, let us give some pity to one who has so deeply sinned."

A great wave of love swept through Neville's heart as the sweet intercessor smiled pleadingly into his face.

"My beloved," he said, gently stroking the golden head which lay against his shoulder, "it shall be as you wish. When Cara Wyndham sues for pardon she shall learn the goodness of the most forgiving soul the world has ever contained!"

* * * * * * *

A year after a broken-down woman crept to Grangeside, and asked humbly for an interview with Mrs. Neville Dacre.

Lovelier and more radiant than ever, Muriel came into the room, and found Cara Wyndham standing by the mantelpiece.

Haggard and worn, she was changed almost beyond recognition, and the sombre black dress she wore accentuated the pallor of her face.

"Muriel," she said, feebly, as the girl came to her with outstretched hands, "I have come to ask forgiveness for all the evil I worked. Six months ago I married Sidney Peyton. My punishment was just. He has gambled away every penny of my fortune, and has now deserted me. Before I leave the country I wish to ask your pardon."

Muriel's sweet eyes looked into those of the penitent woman.

"Fully and freely I forgive you," she said, gently, taking Cara's hand. "My own happiness is too great for words, and if for the moment you darkened my life, I learnt the great lesson that the furnace of affliction only tests and strengthens the value of true, faithful love!"

Harold Prior.

Lady (engaging a footman): "Are you clever at the table?" James: "Yes, mum." Lady: "And you know your way to announce?" James: "Well, mum, I know my weight to a pound or so, but I should hardly like to say to an ounce."

"I want your daughter and a modest dowry to boot," said young Green to old Keener. "Well, I've wanted something to boot for a long time," said the old man, "and I think you'll do very nicely." The defeated suitor disappeared like a lightning flash.

"May I have the pleasure of seeing you home?" he bashfully asked. "Certainly," she graciously replied. "There is a high hill just in front of the house, or, if you prefer it, you can climb a big tree in the field. Go anywhere so that you can get a good view."

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The Handsome Neighbour.

The Story of an Unjust Suspicion.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come, Maurice!" said pretty little Emma. "If *you* can't discover what is the matter with Howard, his case is hopeless."

Handsome Maurice Aubray was the very man for an emergency, and had come to his brother's post-haste, summoned by Howard's distressed wife.

"I have just shaken hands with both Howard and your sister," said Maurice. "He looks peevish; but that is nothing new. I suppose you have not indicated the object of my sudden coming?"

"Not a syllable. Marian simply consulted with me as to what would be best. She fears he is losing his mind."

Maurice laughed a little.

"It's rather depressing here. Don't you find it dull?"

Emma blushed, and glanced along the grass, unaccountably disconcerted.

"I—I don't know. I like the country."

"This *is* the country, with a vengeance! I dare say you have no society at all. Who lives in the house next door?" asked Maurice, scanning the pretty Gothic building through his eyeglass. "A brick wall to divide the two gardens! How odd! Not an asylum, or that sort of thing, is it?"

"Oh, no," replied the young lady. "A young man lives there—a hermit."

"A hermit! Handsome, of course?"

"Oh, very handsome. He is a student, and writes."

"I see—another Tennyson?"

Just then there was a tap on the window-pane. Maurice entered the house quickly. He was met by his sister-in-law—a beautiful woman, whose face was pale and careworn.

"Maurice, your brother is ready to receive you now," she said. "I hope you will be able to clear away this terrible cloud that hangs over us. I have sent for you as a last step."

"I shall do what I can, of course; but are you sure you don't exaggerate matters a little?"

"Not the least. I begin to grow satisfied he is mad. He remains moody and sullen in his room all the time—seldom speaks to me—when a servant knocks at the door he gives way to a burst of fury—all night he paces the floor—are not these things the signs of insanity?"

"Of insanity, or dyspepsia. And can you not imagine whether there is a secret foundation——"

"None—none! I assure you there is not the shadow of a cause. We live like hermits, and under almost no expense. For several years Howard has not spent half his income."

Maurice frowned, and shook his big head

"Puzzling—puzzling," he said. "Well, depend upon me to do my best."

Howard Aubray was in his study. Slender, pale, and dark, he looked the picture of an invalid; and this effect was heightened by another fact—he was crippled. He sat in his chair, silent, gloomy, and suffering; his cheek resting upon his hand. At the entrance of Maurice, he did not rise, but peevishly offered his hand.

"I am glad to see you, Maurice," he said; "though you probably don't think so. Sit down—tumble those books off that armchair. What on earth has brought you to this forlorn place?"

"Wanted a change of air and scene," answered Maurice briskly. "My old rule, you know—bird of passage."

"You always were an active spirit, it is true; and I, passive as a stone monument. Don't you think I look like the fiend himself?"—and he cast a sour sneer at the cornice.

"You don't look well, I admit, and I know very well there is something at the bottom of it."

"There *is!*" said the invalid, clenching his fingers with sudden fury. "I am the most miserable dog alive, and I couldn't hide it if I would. It is strange I have not blown my brains out long ago."

"Well, what's the trouble? Some nonsense, I dare say."

"Yes; very foolish," said Howard Aubray, with a short laugh. "Amusing enough to others not in the same fix."

"Owe money?"

"I owe vengeance—a debt that is accumulating from hour to hour, from minute to minute, at compound interest!" he cried, rising and limping about the floor. "I have discovered that my wife is in love with my handsome neighbour! Too absurd, isn't it, to treat seriously? Such an old story, you know; but it ends tragically sometimes!"

"What *do* you mean?"

"You, perhaps, noticed the pretty house next door? A very good-looking and very fascinating young man lives there—Mr. Ashley Travers. He is not a sulky cripple like me, and the lady who passes for my wife has been discerning enough to see the difference."

Maurice heard this with alarm and pain. Of all the conjectures he had made regarding the cause of his brother's conduct, the miserable truth that he was on the rack of jealousy had never entered his mind.

"You cannot be serious," he said.

"Perhaps you will learn better soon. I am waiting, and on the watch; the drama draws to a close."

"We never had anything from each other in the old days, Howard," said Maurice, kindly. "Many a scrape we were in together, and many the licking we shared, eh? Do you remember the time we took away the eggs from old Willock's hen and put goose, turkey, and duck, and all sorts of other eggs under her? And have you forgotten old Willock's fright when his old hen came marching out of her nest one morning with almost every feathered thing in creation among her

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brood, instead of the expected Brahmas? And don't you recollect the unmerciful trimming we caught at home? My bones ache yet!"

Maurice was laughing uproariously over these reminiscences, and his mirth was contagious, for his brother laughed too, long and heartily—evidently for the first time in many months.

"Why, then, can't you trust me as fully now as you did in those times, Howard?" continued Maurice, following up his advantage. "I hope I am as true, and certainly there is no doubt I am much less giddy. I have learnt a thing or two in all these years."

"You always were shrewd and clever, Maurice, and perhaps I had better be frank with you after all. You know what a life I am forced to lead, and Marian has been forced to share it. She has not had my resignation; her love has been a woman's love—ardent enough to begin with, but cooling with time and trial. Her fidelity has changed from that pretty sentiment we read of in poetry to that other sort we too often experience—the fidelity of a slave who clings to you because he can't get away."

"This is unjust—most cruel! You wrong her; she never loved you more devotedly, Howard."

"She has been holding conference with you, I see," said Howard, with a dark, peevish smile. "What she has *said* will weigh nothing against what I have *seen*. Last night I was standing at the window at the top of the staircase. All kinds of idle fancies were in my mind. Suddenly I looked down into the garden, and—I suppose you noticed the brick wall which divides it from that next door?—two persons stood there—my wife, in her white hood, was one, lingering on this side of the wall and leaning over. On the other side stood my handsome neighbour, Mr. Ashley Travers. I watched them with a good deal of interest. It was a situation suggestive of that in Millais' picture. Presently Mr. Travers leant over and kissed my wife, she waved her hand, and they separated. These things I *saw*, remember."

Maurice looked very grave and disturbed. "But you have been troubled for weeks, they tell me."

"With good reason; about a month ago I found a love-letter, in my wife's handwriting, which first gave rise to my suspicions."

"Indeed!"

"Judge of this for yourself."

He handed his brother a note in Marian's well-known penmanship, and these were the contents:

"My Own Ashley,—*You are too imprudent; sometimes I believe we are observed. Patience, and all may yet be well. In any event, do not doubt my love and faith.*"

"I don't know what to think," said Maurice, as he handed the note back. "I thought Marian the purest and best of women. My advice is, to go to her at once and demand an explanation."

Howard Aubray laughed bitterly.

"She could explain it, of course—what woman could not? You don't know the cunning of the sex, my good brother. She would give me such a plausible explanation that I should rather doubt my own senses than not accept it. No! You know what I mean to do?"

"You must not act rashly. Come, let us take a good long drive together, and have the benefit of the fresh air. I am ready to act with you in anything that concerns your honour; but sometimes there are things done which cannot be undone."

Howard Aubray did not care to go; but his brother insisted. They rode far away together, discussing but the one wretched subject; and night had fallen as they returned. The horse and vehicle were given to the groom at the gate, and the two brothers walked towards the house on foot.

The moon was just visible through the trees. Everything round about was cut white and sharp in its brilliant light.

So pleasant was the scene that, for the moment, Howard, also, forgot everything in contemplation. There was not a chord in his nature unmoved. The air, stirred very lightly by the breeze, was full of that peculiar fragrance which belongs to a summer evening in the country. Bright as the moon was, its splendour did not dim a single constellation, and overhead the heavens glittered with the stars that had mustered there.

"Intoxicating!" murmured Howard.

They went on, passing the garden gate, the latch tinkling softly; and then quietly across the deep grass. The fire-flies were darting about, and from the distance came the deep-mouthed bay of a watch-dog.

Suddenly Howard paused.

"Look!" he said, his eyeballs fierce and round in the moonlight, and his face pale as death.

By the brick wall on this side stood a woman with a white hood on her head. It was Marian.

On the other side stood a young man, tall and dark. He held her hand, and her arm shone white as ivory under the golden shimmer that fell streaming from the stars.

Suddenly he leant over and kissed her.

With a horrid oath of fury and despair, Howard Aubray took something from his breast and held it before him. There was a flash and a report, and then a scream. The figure reeled and fell.

Maurice ran towards her instantly, and, falling on his knee, raised her up. It was not Marian—but poor little Emma!

* * * * *

Happily the wound was not serious, or the result of a hypochondriac's diseased imagination might have wrought a more costly cure than followed as soon as he had discovered the truth. That his pretty sister-in-law should, in the absence of other occupation, fall deeply in love with a handsome neighbour, was the most natural event in the world. That, knowing Howard's prejudice, she should conceal her passion, was no more strange. But at first it seemed odd that she should wear Marian's hood, though that also was presently explained when it appeared that the article was particularly bewitching to Mr. Ashley Travers' senses, and the young lady had none of her own. There remained only one dark doubt—the love-letter.

"Well," said Emma, defiantly, "everybody can't write a good hand. I never could. Marian was always clever with her pen, and I don't think it was any more than sisterly service to come to my assistance."

"Nor was it," said Howard, kissing his wife.

Walter Edgar McCann.

To Those About to Marry.

Don't let the knot be tied without knowing something about the character and disposition of each other. This you can find out by sending a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope, to Ranee, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. In return an accurate delineation of your character will be sent. If you both obtain these delineations, and then compare them, you will be able to decide whether a happy marriage is likely to result.

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Exciting Series.

DECOYED!

Told by the Decoy Herself.

A Striking Series of Astonishing Revelations.

OF WHOM YOU READ.

Vivienne D'Alton, the decoy. She, an innocent girl, unwittingly leads young gentlemen of good social standing to their ruin at the hands of the man she believes to be her father.

Beverley D'Alton, who poses as a millionaire who has made his money by judicious speculation. He assumes to lavish great affection on Vivienne.

Mrs. Sherwood. A florid person, who is introduced to Vivienne by her father as a great friend of her dead mother. She lives with the D'Altons, and requests Vivienne to call her "Aunt Flora," which the young girl reluctantly does.

Annchen. A lady's maid, whom Vivienne greatly detests She seems to be on very familiar terms with Mrs Sherwood and Mr. D'Alton.

TENTH EPISODE.

Under Hypnotic Influence!

On the instant all my old doubts and fears made themselves felt; and, hurriedly stepping forward, I put a detaining hand on the poor dazed creature's arm.

"Miss D'Alton," I murmured eagerly, "do you remember me?"

A little cry of joy answered me, followed by broken words of sorrow. "I do not know. I remember nothing! Oh, why has this terrible affliction befallen me?"

"Come, none of that," said the "Bird of Evil Omen." "Policeman, just move this crowd, till I get my aunt into a cab."

"Do nothing of the sort," I enjoined. "This lady is Miss D'Alton, my great-aunt. That man is a scoundrel, who is an entire stranger to her, and I shall hold you responsible if you let her fall into his clutches."

"But what am I to do, miss? I can't keep her here."

"No. Send that man away. Then I will tell you what to do with Miss D'Alton."

The "Bird of Evil Omen" protested against being baulked of his prey. But my dress, my carriage, my servants, and my evident wealth, carried weight, and the fellow was hustled to the outside of the crowd, where he could hear nothing.

"Here are three sovereigns," I whispered to the policeman. "If you will take Miss D'Alton where she will be absolutely safe from enemies, and will see that she is kindly looked after until I fetch her myself, you shall have ten pounds more, But, mind, don't let her out of your care to anyone but myself. I shall not send for her, nor write for her. I will come myself and will perhaps bring a doctor. You understand?"

The policeman did understand, and said so. Then he added in a low voice: "Perhaps I'd better not say where I'll take the lady. But you can find out if you will inquire for P.C. 941 at Marlborough Street Police Station."

Satisfied that the policeman was discreet, I handed him my card, and then turned to Miss D'Alton.

"If you will go with this constable, and wait till I come to you, all will be well. But please do as he tells you."

Although Miss D'Alton's memory was gone, she was sane enough to understand that I was her friend, and readily promised obedience. Then I saw her driven off in a hansom, and, forgetting all about the nerve tonic, I re-entered the carriage and gave the order to drive home.

Dr. Farnie said that I was subject to malignant delusions. But surely this could not be a delusion? Yet where did the connection between the "Bird of Evil Omen" and Miss D'Alton come in? Was it possible that somebody had been playing tricks with the old lady's memory? And was that why she never came back to dine with me as she had promised?

If she fell into evil hands soon after she visited me, that would account for her continued absence. And—sinister thought!—if she was merely an impostor, as my father and Mrs. Sherwood had told me, who could have an interest in depriving her of the faculty of memory? If, on the other hand, she was not an impostor, what else could I think but that she was being deliberately kept out of the way by—no, I daren't say the names even to myself!

Some curious feeling on the subject must, however, have possessed me when I refrained from taking the old lady home with me, and, still more strange, in spite of what had been told me against her, I no longer doubted in my own mind that she was really my father's aunt.

And the "Bird of Evil Omen." How many times had I seen him? Once this afternoon, when he was trying to decoy Miss D'Alton. Once at Knightsbridge, when he was about to assassinate Viscount Broomville. Once on board the boat in which we crossed over from Rotterdam. And once outside Rotterdam, on the night Mr. Graysworthy was murdered.

"Mr. Graysworthy! Why, he also had dealings with my father, and——"

It was a mercy that the carriage stopped opposite our own

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house, for my thoughts were swirling towards madness again, and it was almost a wreck of a girl who walked slowly indoors.

Within the entrance hall the fountain was playing. It was now dusk, and the wonderful arrangement of palms and electric lights, which converted the place into a veritable fairyland, was being fully appreciated by Dr. Farnie. He was sitting in an American rocking-chair, but he rose to his feet to meet me when he saw me enter.

"H'm!" he said, looking critically at my pale face. "I'm afraid your outing has not done you much good. You had better let me give you a dose of the tonic at once."

"The tonic?" I faltered. "Why, I forgot to ask for it."

"You forgot to ask for it? Then you have been enjoying yourself so much that you forgot your ailments?"

The doctor, as was quite natural, hardly looked pleased at my admission, but I hastened to soothe his wounded professional pride by saying: "No, doctor, that isn't it. I really tried at one or two shops, and then something happened which put self out of my head altogether."

"Won't you sit down here and tell me all about it?"

I had only about enough time to be dressed for dinner, and I knew that my father liked me to be punctual. But the doctor's manner and voice were infectiously soothing, and, with a sigh of relief, with which all my worries seemed to take flight, I sank into the chair he had just vacated. Then I told him what had happened while I was out. Still, notwithstanding the fact that I had once more relegated my wild suspicions to the realms of nightmare, I instinctively resisted the strong impulse to be quite frankly confidential, and my story had several important reservations.

For instance, I did not betray the fact that I had seen the "Bird of Evil Omen," otherwise Kaspar, at any time before this evening, and I spoke of him as a loafer who apparently wanted an opportunity of robbing the unfortunate old lady who had lost her memory.

"She came here once and claimed to be my father's aunt," I added. "But both he and Aunt Flora assured me that she was nothing of the sort. Still, that was no reason why I should leave her at the mercy of a street hooligan, so I gave the policeman some money, and told him to take her to a place of safety."

"Yes?"

Dr. Farnie was listening with an air of intense eagerness, which gave place to apparent chagrin when I answered: "That is all."

"But you must know where the old lady was taken to?"

"Indeed I do not. I left it to the policeman's judgment. Perhaps he has taken her to the workhouse infirmary."

I was firmly convinced that the answer I gave was both necessary and wise. But I was possessed by a most extraordinary feeling, which seemed to command me to be confidential against my own better judgment, and it was only by dint of determined mental resistance that I was able to be discreet.

In the light of after events I know exactly what was the matter with me. The doctor was a hypnotist, and he was trying his power upon me. To some extent he was successful. But I still retained the ability to resist his influence in part, and that accounts for the fact that he was not altogether successful in compelling my confidence.

Nevertheless, he again managed to impress upon me the idea that certain terrible doubts of mine were nothing but chimerical fancies, and when I subsequently met my father and Aunt Flora at dinner, I felt as amiably disposed towards them as I did when I went out to buy the "nerve tonic."

Both were in the best of spirits, and both inquired kindly after my health, but not with ostentatious solicitude, for we had several guests to dinner, and they naturally kept every anxiety in the background.

"This is a most delightful meeting, Miss D'Alton," murmured a stout, middle-aged gentleman who sat next to me at the dinner table, and whom I recognised as Prince Alexander Gorouki, a wealthy Russian whom I had met a few times. "I have dreamt of some such blissful moment as this ever since—since—ever since we parted, two days ago."

I glanced up at the speaker in mild astonishment, for he did not look like the kind of person to be airing "Love's young dream." But his gaze was as ardent as his words, and, though I could not help feeling flattered at having charmed so exalted a personage as a prince, I blushed with confusion at the open manner in which he showed his admiration.

Nor was my embarrassment lessened when I glanced across the table and saw Lord Balder scowling fiercely at His Highness, and my relief was great, in more senses than one, when a telegram from Sophie Melrose was handed to me.

"*Arrived Edinburgh—all well*," she wired. "*Letter to follow.*"

This telegram showed another of my doubts to have been unfounded, and I should have enjoyed the rest of the evening all right if the impetuous wooing of Prince Gorouki had not been so practically supported by my father.

In the drawing-room the Prince never left my side, and he actually contrived an opportunity to ask me to marry him. It was on my lips to say "No." For, though my girlish vanity was undoubtedly flattered, I knew I could never care for this hopelessly plain-looking man. But, strange to say my will seemed suddenly to lose control of my words. Then, as I murmured something which the Prince interpreted as "Yes," I looked up and saw Dr. Farnie's piercing eyes gazing straight at me.

What followed seems like a dream. The Prince gleefully announced my acceptance there and then. My father gave me a paternal kiss, and spoke a mixed sort of speech, in which he alternately lamented the prospective loss of his only child, and gloated over his ability to give her a dowry worthy of the rank which was to be hers.

Lord Balder had taken a hurried departure. But Aunt Flora and the doctor were profuse in their congratulations, and I went to bed that night, knowing that I had promised to marry a man I did not like, but that my will was so held captive that there seemed to be no way of escape for me.

* * * * *

When Susan came to attend to me the next morning, her face was wreathed in smiles, and she handed a tiny package to me, with the words:

"From His Highness the Prince. His man brought it just now."

I had spent a sleepless night, not in dwelling upon my coming grandeur, but in wondering how I could escape it, and in thinking how happy I should have felt if Viscount Broomville had been my promised husband, instead of the man who had won my consent through no willingness on my part. I could even yet hardly understand how it was that I found myself pledged to marry somebody whom I did not love, and it was with a painful sense of helplessness that I opened the little package that Susan had brought to me so proudly.

It contained a wildly extravagant love-letter, in which I was implored to settle the wedding-day forthwith. The ring which accompanied the letter was a scintillating diamond half-hoop, which I would fain—if I had dared—have thrown away from me, for was it not the outward and visible sign of future bondage?

"I won't wear it," I whispered to myself. "I won't wear it! I was mad to answer the Prince in so halting a fashion, that he mistook my 'No' for 'Yes.' It was wrong, too, for I can never marry him."

"And the master says, please will you come down punctually at half-past nine, miss? He wants to speak to you before His Highness calls, and that will be at ten o'clock."

Ten o'clock! And it was already eight! Was I only to have two more hours of freedom before the bargain was clinched beyond undoing? Or had I still time to escape from the net which seemed about to enmesh me?

"Susan," I said, "are there any letters for me?"

"The postman has not been yet."

"Then run downstairs at once, and be careful to secure every letter intended for me. Mind, it is important. Don't let anybody else touch them."

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Susan, who very likely wondered at receiving such an order, ran off to do my bidding, while I drank the cup of tea she had brought me. Then, both bodily and mental activity suddenly returned to me and I hastily began to dress myself, preparatory to going out.

"I have time to take a hansom and find Miss D'Alton before breakfast, and to see if the antidote will have any effect upon her. If it turns out that her ailment is not amenable to the antidote mentioned in the book of poisons. I shall then be more convinced than ever that my doubts are unfounded.

"Please, miss, I was too late to catch the postman. Mrs. Sherwood had the letters, and she says that there are none for you."

This was the message brought up by Susan, and I felt more disappointed than I could say to hear that Sophie Melrose had not written to me, according to promise. However, there were many things which might have hindered her, and I strove to make the best of my disappointment, the while I hurried softly downstairs, and watched my opportunity to slip out unobserved.

In this I was successful, and, walking up Park Lane, I took a hansom at the Marble Arch, and was soon on my way to the Marlborough Street Police Station. Arrived there, I made inquiry for P.C. 941. He was not on duty, but he had evidently expected me, for he had left a message to the effect that if I would call at his address, I should find my relative all right.

The place was not far from the police station, and I was just about to give the cabman the order to drive thither, when my attention was attracted to two men across the street, both of whom seemed to be considerably interested in watching my own movements.

One of them was unknown to me. But the other was the "Bird of Evil Omen," and I guessed at once that he was biding his time to discover what had become of Miss D'Alton. It had no doubt been easy enough to connect the policeman with the police-station. But, in the density of traffic which prevailed at the time Miss D'Alton was driven away, the fellow must have lost track of the hansom, hence his espionage of the police-station.

Now, the sight of this man had exactly the opposite effect to that produced by Dr. Farnie. The one laid all my doubts to rest. The other revived every one of them in full force, and I knew that his near vicinity prognosticated disaster to somebody.

In this case I believed Miss D'Alton to be the victim aimed at, and, with overpowering force, there came to me the conviction that she must, after all, be a person of some importance. Otherwise, what reason could there be for pursuing her?

"I will get the antidote prepared at the nearest seed shop," was my instant determination. "If I can restore the unfortunate old lady to her normal senses again, she will be able to denounce her enemies and keep out of their clutches."

"Drive to the nearest place at which I can buy some bulbs," was the order I gave, and I soon found myself entering an establishment at which it would be easy to procure what I wanted.

But, oddly enough, I did not appear to be alone in this intention. The "Bird of Evil Omen" had been equally expeditious. So had the other man who seemed to be watching me at Marlborough Street. And, still more curious, their business took them to the same counter to which I was shown!

I tried to appear to take no notice. But I was shaking all over, and even my voice trembled as I asked for some tulip bulbs. There was a basket of these on the counter, side by side with a basket of lily bulbs and another of hyacinths. Without asking the price of any of them, I took three big tulip bulbs and asked the assistant to put them in a paper-bag for me. I intended to visit a chemist next, to have the juice properly expressed, but was wondering all the time what the person at my elbow meant to do with the hyacinth bulbs he was buying.

Could there be any special antidotal virtue in the latter? Or was Kaspar Krause merely planning to keep me in sight, so as to prevent me from carrying out my purpose?

I carefully kept my back turned to the fellow. But I knew he was there, and I was undoubtedly frightened of him. Still, I did not actually see how he dared harm me in broad daylight, and in the presence of other people, and I was just turning to pick up my purchase, after paying for it, when there was a stifled exclamation, a muttered oath, and a short scuffle, followed by the violent expulsion of the "Bird of Evil Omen."

"I beg everybody's pardon, more particularly yours, Miss D'Alton," said the man whom I had already fancied to be watching me, and whose voice I joyfully recognised as that of Lord Broomville, though his outward disguise seemed still perfect. "The fact is," he continued, as he grasped my hands warmly in his, "I knew that fellow meant fresh mischief, and I have kept him under surveillance this last day or two."

"But that does not excuse you from violently ejecting a customer from our shop," interposed the angry manager, whose wrath was, however, appeased on the instant when Lord Broomville presented his card, with the words: "Sir. I will gladly pay any loss you may have suffered. But I thought it time to interfere when I saw your customer slyly changing his packet of bulbs for those bought by this lady."

"Did he do that?" I exclaimed, in greater excitement than ever. "If so, there can no longer be any doubt that it is important to secure some tulip juice at once. Listen, Lord Broomville, I have a strange tale to tell you."

Drawing his lordship out of hearing of everybody else, I began a rapid and succinct recital of my reasons for wanting to experiment upon Miss D'Alton, but without implicating either my father or Mrs. Sherwood, and explained how the "Bird of Evil Omen" seemed to be trying to baffle my attempts.

"He shall baffle you no more," was the assurance given me. "I have been on his track for awhile, and he is just about at the end of his tether."

"And so are you, impostor, and rogue that you are!" interrupted my father's loud, angry voice, and heavy hands were simultaneously laid upon both Lord Broomville and myself. "Constable, do your duty! Arrest the cheat who palms himself off as Lord Broomville. As for you, Vivienne, you will yet live to be thankful that I traced you before your elopement was an accomplished fact. Dr. Farnie, take her home."

And then, though my whole nature tried to resist the baleful influence brought to bear upon me, I had no sooner met the gaze of Dr. Farnie's mystic eyes, than I was powerless to do anything but allow myself to be taken homewards, while my unfortunate champion was forcibly handcuffed and hustled into a four-wheeler.

(Another instalment of this exciting series next week.)

Farthest South.

A wonderful story of the perils, hardships, and privations endured by explorers in the Far South is told by Lieutenant Shackleton, of the "Discovery," in the current number of *PEARSON'S MAGAZINE*. The "Discovery" was fitted out by the Royal Society and the Royal Geographical Society, and dispatched to penetrate as far as possible towards the South Pole. Though the ship itself became frozen in, Captain Scott, the Commander of the Expedition, headed a sledge expedition which actually penetrated to within 463 miles of the Pole, beating all existing records by over 200 miles.

Lieutenant Shackleton made one of the party, and he tells us how they spent Christmas Day on practically the most southerly point of the earth's surface trodden by the foot of man. No one should miss a chance of reading this wonderfully interesting narrative.

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KITTY THE COOK.

And How She Married Her Mistress' Son.

WHEN Harry Calton and his bosom friend, Jack Manners, on the same day, in the same church, married Mabel Lawton and her dearest friend, Fanny Keywood, a contract was made between the two couples. It was this: They bound themselves that if one family had a son and the other had a daughter, that son and daughter, when they arrived at a proper age, should become man and wife.

There was nothing novel or original in such an agreement; if there had been, the parties to the contract would never have made it, for they were neither novel nor original in anything—they were simply maudlin with romance, and this covenant was merely the effect, of which a strict attention to novels, love tales, and plays was the cause. So much by way of prologue.

Now for our story.

Calton and Manners had died full of years and gout and rheumatism, and each had left a large fortune to his wife.

They had each left, as well, a child—Calton a daughter named Kitty, Manners a son named Richard, otherwise Dick. The old men had forgotten, long before their deaths, all about their agreement on their wedding-day; but not so with the mothers. They had been in correspondence for the last five years about nothing else.

The children had now reached their majority, and the mothers were anxious for the consummation of the plan.

"Mother," said Dick, at the breakfast-table, "there is no use in urging that girl Kitty's suit, for I will never marry her."

"How do you know, my son? You have not seen her for twelve years, and you might be delighted with her," returned Mrs. Manners coaxingly.

"I know I shouldn't," Dick said. "She was a red-headed abomination when she was a child, and I'm certain she's the same now."

"Oh, Richard!"

"Even if she was as handsome as Eve, I wouldn't marry her. I'd feel disgusted the moment I met her, and so would she if she had any sense. We'd be introduced, we'd look at each other, and say to ourselves, 'And this is the person I've got to marry!' and then we would hate each other."

"Well, it seems to me, Dick, that you might at least wait until you see each other, before you make up your mind. This is too bad," whined Mrs. Manners, wiping her eyes with a napkin, and not discovering her mistake until she rubbed some mustard into her blue orbs, which occasioned the use of her handkerchief in good earnest—"just when I thought I had such good news for you!"

"What is the news?"

"She's coming here."

"Who? Kitty Calton?"

"Yes. I received a letter this morning from her mother, saying Kitty would start in a day or two."

"Oh, Heavens," groaned Dick. "You must stop her," he said seriously. "If she comes, I go. I know what she'll be; a little stuck-up person, full of the French airs she acquired by studying abroad for twelve years; she'll say, *Mon Dieu*, and *ma foi*, and she'll talk about her *naiveté* and *gaucherie* and her *chic*; she'll speak bad French in the present tense, indicative mood, of the first conjunction, and she'll commence all her questions with *Est-ce-que*, and then stick like the young man at the Veneerings' party. I sha'n't see her, that's settled. Write to her mother and say we are going on a visit, and we don't know when we will return; or, better, go to town, see Mrs. Calton, explain openly that I will never marry a Frenchified wax doll, but that I want a wife who knows how to keep a house in order, can cook, preserve, sweep, bake, darn, sew, mend, dust, and, as the advertisements say, 'make herself generally useful.' In short, a woman like my respected mother; and, so that you may kill two birds with one stone, find a cook who can cook, and fetch her back with you."

An idea seemed to strike Mrs. Manners, and she answered gaily:

"Well, Dick, everything is for the best. If you won't marry her, you won't; so I'll do as you say."

After breakfast she made a hurried toilette, and took the first train for the city.

Towards evening she returned with as pretty a little piece of femininity as Dick had ever seen before. The dainty, curly-haired little woman straight-way went to the kitchen, and then Mrs. Manners informed her son that she had made matters all right with Mrs. Calton, and that the pretty conglomeration of muslin, curls, pink and white, was a new cook she had engaged.

With the advent of the new cook came luxuries such as had never been seen on the Manners' table before. The *cuisine* was perfect. Richard's stockings were mended so neatly that an old pair of socks was better than a new pair. His shirts, too, were washed and ironed so perfectly that their whiteness and gloss caused envy in the bosoms of all his male friends.

But another change had been effected by the cook. The pink and white young lady, whom the hottest fire never made red and white, was accustomed to take a seat in the sitting-room in the evening and attend to her sewing—the kitchen being locked up—to save gas, Mrs. Manners said; and Dick remained at home at nights, something unusual for him.

In fact, Dick was in love with the cook, and he found a hundred excuses a day to go to the kitchen and have a word or two with the curly-headed little woman.

At first she was very cold to him, but gradually, as she saw his respect increase with his love, the ice of her reserve began to melt under the warmth of his passion, and the young man was correspondingly happy.

At length Dick found himself so entangled in the net of love that nothing but marriage would free him; so he entered the kitchen one afternoon, and, with a preamble, proposed marriage.

"Will you marry me?" said he.

"No; I will not," she answered.

"Why?"

"I'm a cook, and you're a gentleman."

"You're a lady as well as a cook, and fit to be a gentleman's wife."

"I daresay I am; but I don't want to be a cook all my life."

"Then marry me."

"And work to support you?

"Why, my dear, I'm rich!"

"You mean your mother is."

"Well, she would deny me nothing."

"I don't know about that. You don't know how she'd act if you married her cook. Besides, I've no fancy for a man

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who can't support himself and his wife without help from his mother. I understand you, Dick, and I admit that I love you."

"My darling!" he cried, embracing her.

"There, now, stop. You wouldn't marry a wax doll of a girl who couldn't keep a house in order, cook, carve, preserve, darn, mend, sew, dust, and sweep. I heard you say so."

"That is true," ruefully remarked Dick.

"Well, I will not marry a man who cannot support me by his own labour. I don't want a club-house swell or a man of Society for a husband; I want a real man, a hard-fisted workman, who can knock down a giant if he harms me; a good honest son of toil, one whom I'll be proud to point out as my husband, and on whose shoulder I can lean my head, and, confident of his strong love, know no fear in the world."

"What do you want me to do, my darling?"

"Learn a trade; be a man—an independent man. When you have earned enough money to buy a set of furniture, and can show me that you are able to support me, I'll say, 'Dick, I'm yours.'"

"I'll do it," cried Dick.

Next day, without a word of opposition from his mother, which he thought rather strange, he left home, went to the City, and made arrangements with a friend of his, a carpenter and builder, to learn a trade.

Dick was a natural mechanic. No workman was ever needed at home; he mended everything. There was no tool he couldn't use, and, therefore, at the end of six months there was not a journeyman in the shop that could compare with him for good work. Then he rented a little shop, and set up for himself.

Strange to say, his first order came from Mrs. Calton to thoroughly repair three of her new houses.

Mrs. Calton recommended him to all her property-owning friends.

At the end of a year he had a really good business.

Then he went home one Saturday night, with a bank-book and a plain gold ring in his pocket. He went in the kitchen; no one was there.

On his way upstairs he met his mother. Embraces followed, and he asked:

"Where's Kate?"

We have hitherto neglected to mention that the cook's name was Kate.

"Not in," answered Mrs. Manners; "but Kitty Calton is upstairs; come and be presented."

"Hang Kitty Calton!" said he.

"There need be no embarrassment, Dick; she's engaged."

"Oh, she is, eh? Well, come along."

"Miss Calton, my son," said Mrs. Manners, presenting him

Dick looked up.

"What!" he yelled, looking at the lady. "Kate, by Jove! what does this mean?"

"I'm Kitty Calton and Kate, the cook, too. I tried you, my dear, and you stood the test nobly. You've proved yourself my ideal of a man. Take me, if you will, my darling."

And he did take her, while the old lady discreetly looked out of the window, and thought of her youth.

"And you were all in the plot against me, eh?" asked he.

"Yes," exclaimed the ladies, half frightened now they were found out,

"Well, I'm glad of it. Kate, you've made a man of me. I insisted on my wife being a worker, and it's a poor rule that won't work both ways."

Three days after, the little village church—but, pshaw! the intelligent reader can guess the rest.

R. Durrant.

The young man was talking to the wealthy widow on the absorbing topic of marrying her daughter. In fact, he had gained the widow's consent to the match, and she was adding a few flourishes to the daughter. "You know," she said, rather diffidently, "that my daughter is not poor." "Oh," he responded, encouragingly, "don't worry about that. I'm poor enough for two."

Our New Competition.

You will find full particulars of our new competition on page 337. I hope that you all will enter it. There is absolutely no reason why you should not, for everyone has an equal opportunity. The competition will form a profitable and fascinating pastime. Before you start, however, read the conditions carefully. They are quite simple and straightforward. No correspondence in connection with the rules can be entered into, but should any point of importance arise it will be dealt with in *Short Stories*.

A Splendid New Serial.

In a very few weeks' time now there will start in this paper a grand new serial story written by the well-known author, Arnold Bennett. This is a story of very strong force, and its plot and characters are interesting in the extreme. The heroine is a young lady who, the daughter of a multi-millionaire, is accustomed to have her own way in everything, at the same time, however, remaining a most lovable personage. I feel sure that Mr. Arnold Bennett's story will be highly appreciated by all the present readers of the paper, and at the same time will attract a great number of fresh subscribers. Next week I will tell you something more about it.

The Tenth Unsolved Love Problem.

"The Heart of Claire Gilchrist," which will be the tenth in our series of our Unsolved Love Problems, will appear next week. I shall offer a prize of one guinea in connection with it. The problem is a very pretty one and nobody should miss reading it or refrain from attempting to solve it.

As soon as possible I will publish the name of the successful competitor in the Ninth Problem Competition.

A Japanese Cover.

The cover of next week's number will be an exceedingly pretty one. It will illustrate an intensely dramatic Japanese love story, written by a favourite contributor to this paper. Nobody can fail to like either the daintiness of the cover design nor the power of the splendid tale. Look out for it on the bookstalls and in the newsagents' windows

A Prize of a Hansom Cab and a Horse.

The Editor of *The Big Budget* is offering the above novel prize in a competition that has just started in his paper. Procure a copy of this week's *B.B.* and read all about it. It may be worth your while.

Your Editor.

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THE HOUSE IN THE CORNFIELD.

Telling How the Scheme of Wild Kate Failed.

"Oh, dear!" uttered a sweet, distressed voice, so suddenly and so distinctly that Ray Braddon reined in his horse, with a muttered exclamation of surprise, for he had believed himself to be quite alone on the dusty highway.

What he saw, on turning his head a little to one side, was a demure little creature with big blue eyes, red, ripe, strawberry lips, and rippling, fair hair.

She was half sitting, half reclining on a mossy bank, and it needed but that first startled glance to assure the young man that she was in trouble of some sort. In an instant he had leapt to the ground, rushed to her side, and was asking anxiously:

"What is the matter, miss? Are you hurt?"

Her big, frightened eyes scanned his face earnestly, for a few fateful seconds, as he bent over her, and then she cried, with a half-repressed moan of pain:

"Oh, my ankle! I'm afraid it is broken."

Her head dropped back, her eyes closed, and she looked so white, and lay so motionless, that Ray felt sure she had fainted.

He was mistaken, however. Feeling greatly distressed and perplexed, and not at all equal to the emergency, the young man had scarcely begun to think what available resources were at hand, when the long lashes lifted again, and a second searching glance was flashed into his face.

"You must think me very silly, sir," and a flickering smile parted the tempting lips. "But I'm not used to pain, and am such an arrant coward——"

"Pray don't speak of it," Ray interrupted, more earnestly than he was aware. "But if you will tell me what I can do to save you I shall be much obliged."

"My friends will be dreadfully frightened."

"Shall I find them, and send them to you?"

"And leave me here alone until they can be brought?" she cried, in a dismayed voice. "Oh, no, no!"

Observing his wondering stare, she added:

"I must have lain here an hour already. I slipped down a little way off, but managed to crawl to the roadside. Oh, you don't know how dreadful it is—the loneliness, and the—the—pain, I mean! I was getting more nervous and hysterical every minute."

Covering her face with both hands, she began to sob piteously. The sight of her distress stirred Ray's chivalrous spirit as nothing had stirred it for many a long day.

"Never mind, I won't leave you," he said, reassuringly. "But I suppose something must be done. If you could only ride my horse, now——"

"How good you are!" she exclaimed, lifting a face in which smiles were already chasing away the tears. "Yes, I'm sure I can ride, and then you need not leave me——"

The rose-red flush that crept up to the softly-flowing hair aided the sentence more eloquently than words could have done.

"Are you strong enough?"

"It isn't far, and I would suffer anything rather than remain here."

Ray said no more, but raised her slender figure in his arms as gently as he could, and after several awkward attempts (for even a little woman of eighteen is not a burden to be despised) he managed to lift her into the saddle, where she easily supported herself by clinging to the pommel.

"This is so nice," she said quite gleefully. "I begin to feel like myself again."

"Does your ankle still pain you?"

"A little. But it is easier. I hope it is only sprained, after all."

Ray was gazing straight into her pretty face, and had unclosed his lips to make some reply, when he paused, startled by the ashen pallor that had suddenly overspread her piquant features.

She was looking down the road with a frightened glare in her lovely blue eyes. Turning in that direction to ascertain the cause of her alarm, Ray saw only a very pretty, stylish-looking young lady in a dark-green riding-habit, mounted on a grey mare, who was slowly approaching.

"Do you know that lady?" Ray asked. "Shall I appeal to her for assistance?"

"Oh, no, no! Not for the world."

Her alarm was genuine. Ray saw that very readily, so he only bowed in reply, and stepped a little to one side for the newcomer to pass; though he *did* feel greatly surprised at his companion's reluctance to have anything to do with the lovely stranger.

As the latter drew nearer, she appeared to look sharply at the little tableau in the shadow of the hazel-bushes, and a contemptuous smile curled her lips. It vanished instantly, however, when she had obtained an unobstructed view of Ray's face, and stopping short, she cried out breathlessly:

"Ray Braddon!"

The name seemed to have escaped her lips involuntarily. As soon as it was uttered, a flush of annoyance mounted to her forehead.

"Do you know me?" exclaimed the young man with dilating eyes.

"I—I—have seen your photograph," the lady stammered in reply.

A good deal startled, Ray was about to question her further, when a low moan from his companion called him to her side. She was reeling in the saddle, and could scarcely maintain her position.

"I'm faint!" she gasped. "Support me."

Thus commanded, he could do no less than offer his shoulder for her to lean against, and slip one arm about her waist.

She seemed to recover very rapidly.

They had not occupied this position many consecutive seconds ere, relieving herself, she again assumed an upright posture.

"Thanks!" she murmured. "I'm afraid you find me very troublesome."

"Not in the least," he responded gallantly.

Being once more at liberty to devote some attention to the other young lady, he was about to address her, when he discovered that she had ridden on, and was already some yards distant.

"I'm glad she's gone," said his companion, in a tone of relief.

"How extraordinary that she should have seen my photograph!" exclaimed Ray. "I was never in this part of the country before, and I'm sure her face was strange to me."

"Heaven grant you may never know more of her than at present."

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"What do you mean?" he asked, startled by her earnestness.

"I know that creature by sight." Her voice fell. "They call her Wild Kate here. That is all I am willing to tell you about her."

"Ah-h!" uttered Ray, and involuntarily he sighed, for the young lady's face had greatly pleased and attracted him.

"What was that name by which she called you?"

"Ray Braddon."

"Then my ears did not deceive me. I am very glad to see you," and she held out her hand, smiling sweetly. "I am Blanche Gordon."

The young man was surprised and delighted. He could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses. It was a mission to Blanche Gordon that had taken him into this unknown country—a very odd mission, by-the-way.

A mutual friend—an eccentric old man—had died only the week before, leaving ten thousand pounds in available cash to Blanche, and he, Ray, had undertaken to convey the money to her, and deliver it in person.

It seemed a little singular, to say the least, that he should meet Blanche and form her acquaintance in this romantic manner. But he felt greatly pleased that it had so come about.

"This *is* a surprise!" he ejaculated, raising her hand to his lips.

"I hope we will be all the better friends for the circumstances under which our meeting took place."

"It will not be my fault if we are not," he said, warmly, adding, after a slight pause, "I suppose you received my letter announcing Mr. Graham's death and the bequest he had made in your favour?"

"Oh, yes! Ten thousand pounds was the amount, I believe?"

"Yes. I have the money and shall be happy to resign it to you at the earliest practicable moment."

She turned away her face—perhaps to conceal the strange glitter that came into her velvety eyes.

"You don't mean to tell me that you have the whole amount with you?" she asked, very low.

"Yes."

"It seems a large sum to carry about."

"True. But I took care that no one should learn the fact save the cashier of the bank who paid me the money. I had written to you beforehand to announce my intention, and, as you will remember, cautioned you to say nothing about it."

"Yes."

"It was Mr. Graham's dying request that I should bring you the money."

"You were very good to undertake such a responsibility for a stranger," she murmured, her lips strangely white.

"I'm glad I did undertake it."

The glance that accompanied these words was expressive enough to recall the crimson to Blanche Gordon's lovely cheeks.

"I can see the hand of Providence in all this," she faltered.

"So can I," Ray responded, driven beside himself by her beauty and winning ways. "Mr. Graham was my friend as well as yours, and I know he cherished an ardent hope that we might be mutually attracted when we made each other's acquaintance; and Providence seems to be furthering his wishes."

The lady who approached cried out: "Ray Braddon!"

It was a foolish speech, and Blanche's cheeks flushed redder than ever at all it implied.

"Come," she said rather nervously, "why are we lingering here? You are to take me home, you know."

"Certainly."

He grasped the bridle-rein, which was hanging loose, and they set out at once, traversing the highway a few hundred yards, and then turning abruptly into a rough cart-track nearly overgrown with grass and weeds.

"My home is poor and forlorn," she said, with a smile that seemed constrained. "But I shall soon change it for a better one, now that my ship has come home, you may be sure."

Ray made no reply. Just at that instant he caught a glimpse of the stylish-looking young lady in the green habit halting at a bend in the road and looking back at them very earnestly. There was something in her behaviour that struck the young man as being very peculiar.

Blanche had not seen her, however, and as the overhanging shrubbery shut her from view almost immediately, he did not speak of her.

The way seemed lonelier and wilder as they proceeded. After a lapse of about fifteen minutes, they emerged from an avenue of trees and came suddenly upon a cornfield of about two acres in extent, in the middle of which stood a two-storey, unpainted house, whose broken windows, dismantled shutters, and ruinous chimneys presented anything but an inviting aspect.

"Yonder is my home," said Blanche. "A dreadfully lonely place, isn't it?"

Ray was too polite to utter his real sentiments, so he answered:

"It has not the appearance of being inhabited at all."

"Oh, the best rooms are in the rear of the house, and we occupy those."

At another time our hero might have experienced some

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misgivings. But with this fairy-like vision at his side, and claiming his protection, he could think of little else.

To be sure, it did strike him as singular that Blanche should remain in so secluded a spot, but Mr. Graham had told him nothing about her except that she was poor, and an orphan, so he speedily dismissed the perplexing subject with the mental decision that necessity, and not choice, compelled her to abide there.

As he led the horse up to the house along a very narrow path through the corn, he could not help remarking the deathlike stillness that reigned everywhere.

"The house *is* deserted!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, no. I will soon prove to you the fallacy of such a conclusion."

Very shyly she put out two beautifully-rounded arms, and Ray, yielding again to the subtle spell with which she seemed to have enthralled him, lifted her from the saddle and bore her to the stout oaken door.

Producing a key from the pocket of her dress, she let him into a dark, dismal-looking passage, along which he carried her, kicking open a door at the other end with his boots.

He found himself in a large, square apartment very rudely furnished with a lounge, a table, and a few dilapidated chairs. An unprepossessing man of about fifty sat near one of the high windows, smoking a dirty black pipe. Ray scarcely looked at him until he had carried his burden to the sofa and left her there. Then he turned to him with a muttered apology for his abrupt entrance.

"I hope you will pardon the seeming rudeness——"

"Never mind, youngster," interrupted the man, in a guttural voice. "No harm done. We don't stand on ceremony in these parts."

His manner was meant to be conciliatory, but in spite of this fact Ray took a sudden and strong dislike to him.

"This is my uncle, John Gordon," said Blanche, in her sweetest tones. "He has been like a father to me all my life. I love him dearly."

This last was uttered half in deprecation, as if she were aware of Ray's distrust and found it necessary to give a reason for having a protector so manifestly uncongenial.

"Ah, yes, to be sure."

"Uncle John," she added, in the next breath, "I was unlucky enough to sprain my ankle while rambling in the woods. But I ought not to term it an unlucky incident, after all, for it was the means of making me acquainted with this kind gentleman, who brought me home. I'm sure you will be as much surprised as I was to learn that he is Mr. Braddon."

"Mr. Braddon!" ejaculated John Gordon. "Well, I declare, if this isn't a curious circumstance! I am delighted to see you, sir, de-lighted!"

Out went his horny hand, which Ray was compelled to take, and the grip of those muscular fingers could only be compared with a vice.

"Mr. Braddon has brought the money that eccentric Mr. Graham left me," said Blanche, after a pause.

"All of it?" questioned her uncle, an evil glitter in his wicked black eyes.

"Every penny," answered Ray.

"Hum! Ten thousand pounds is a fortune. Won't you look grand, Blanche, when you have so much money to spend? You'll buy no end of silks and laces and ribbons, I suppose?"

"As if you needed any such furbelows to enhance your beauty!" murmured Ray, close to her sea-shell ear.

She lifted a coquettish glance to his face.

"*Am* I beautiful, Mr. Braddon?"

"Incomparable!"

"I'm afraid you are a sad flatterer. It is wrong to teea a simple girl's vanity." And she shook her head reprovingly. "You should not do it."

"How can I help telling you what must be palpable to every observer?"

"But I'm not accustomed to compliments."

"That is strange."

But we will not transcribe the whispered dialogue that went on. This is a specimen of its tenor, and I spare Ray the mortification of seeing it in black and white.

Nothing was done to relieve the pain one would naturally suppose Blanche must suffer with her sprained ankle. Indeed, she said not another word concerning it, and Ray's head was so completely turned that he forgot all about it before he had been in the room fifteen minutes.

Nearly an hour passed, and presently John Gordon seemed to wax uneasy, for some reason or other. He rose from his chair and began to walk the floor with hurried, impatient strides. At last he paused in front of Ray and said, more roughly than he had yet spoken:

"Where's the loot, young man?"

Ray's eyes dilated a little, seeing which Blanche hastened to explain.

"He means the money so generously bequeathed by Mr Graham. I think he finds some difficulty in believing in its reality before he has seen it."

"I beg your pardon. I was in danger of forgetting my errand entirely."

Rising as he spoke from the seat he occupied at Blanche's side, he stepped to the table, and produced a large roll of bank notes from an inner pocket.

"Here is the money. It is in one thousand pound notes. If you will be good enough to count it——"

At this moment, hearing a rustling movement just behind him, he turned his head a little, and saw Blanche not more than three feet distant, standing as firmly upon her feet as he stood on his.

The human mind is such a mystery! Somehow the recollection of the pretended sprain came back to Ray's just then like a flash, and with a torrent of the wildest suspicions.

"You!" he gasped. "Why, how——"

He got no further in what he was about to say. There came a whizzing sound in the air, and a heavy blow, dealt from behind with a stick wielded by John Gordon's muscular arms, felled him, stunned, to the floor, but not before he had heard voices and a scurrying of footsteps in the passage that led to the outer room.

When Ray's senses returned, he was lying on the couch, and the young woman in the green riding habit sat beside him, bathing his face and temples with water.

"Where am I?" he asked, faintly.

"Hush! I will tell you all you wish to know when you are more fully recovered."

Glancing past her, his attention was arrested by a group at the other end of the room, and he beheld "John Gordon" and "Blanche" sitting on the floor, with their arms secured behind them, looking very fierce and crestfallen, while several men stood near, as if to guard them.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

He was soon put in the possession of a few startling facts. It was the real Blanche Gordon who sat beside him, and the other was Wild Kate, who, as an unprincipled associate, had laid a deliberate plot to rob and murder him, making the house in the cornfield the scene of the meditated exploit.

It came out afterwards that the mails had been robbed, and Ray's letter to Blanche had never reached her, but had fallen into the hands of Wild Kate, who, of course, at once gathered all the particulars concerning Mr. Graham's bequest, that she was able, with the view of retaining the ten thousand pounds for her own benefit.

When the real Blanche met Ray in the highway, she was not aware of her benefactor's death, but she recognised the young man from a photograph of him which Mr. Graham had sent to her a few months previously.

Wild Kate she knew by sight, and, suspecting foul play when she saw the two take the path leading to the house in the cornfield, she had instantly summoned help and followed them.

Need I add that Ray married Blanche? Scarcely. My story would be incomplete without this ending.

B. Winwood.

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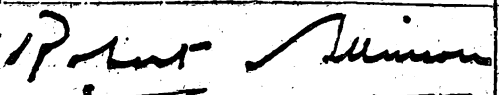
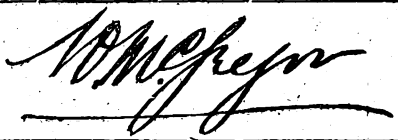
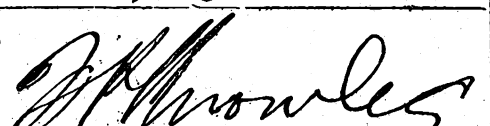
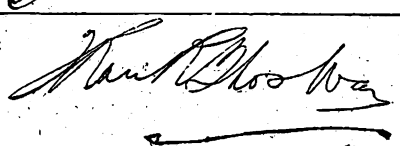
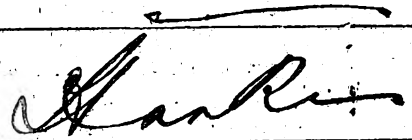
No. 2. 	
No. 3. 	
No. 4. 	
No. 5. 	
No. 6. 	

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Mysterious Mr. Brown.

Telling How He Made a Noble Resolve.

WHEN he first came to Greenford, no one could understand who or what he was, and, what was worse, no one, in spite of all their endeavours, could find out.

This was sad, because scandal-loving Greenford always held that a mystery meant something suspicious, and when Greenford gossips could not discover what the something suspicious was—at any rate, to their satisfaction—it was worst of all! Mr. Brown simply came there one day, took a small furnished villa from an agent, had his modest luggage sent up from the station, and settled down then and there.

He was an unpretentious little man, about fifty, grey, and scrupulously neat in his attire and person. He paid a month's rent in advance, and ordered dinner at seven o'clock of the housekeeper who had been left in charge of Eglantine Villa. Having taken a walk, he returned, dined, sat and wrote letters, and went to bed respectably early.

It was Mrs. Gittings, the housekeeper, who started the mystery. Though self-styled a housekeeper, she was not above gossiping with servants of lesser rank in domestic servitude, and when asked by the "general," who was in the employ of Mrs. Lancaster, a dozen doors off in the Station Road, for particulars of her new master, she frankly avowed herself puzzled.

This was some days afterwards, and Mrs. Gittings had had opportunity to study Mr. Brown.

"He don't grumble, he don't give no trouble, he don't worry about what I gets him. He's a perfect mystery."

"Is he married?" questioned Mary Jane.

"He ain't got a wife with him," said Mrs. Gittings solemnly, "and when he's at home he writes letters by the score."

"Perhaps he's a hauthor," put in Mary Jane.

"Letters, I said, not books and things. Oh, and I forgot," burst forth Mrs. Gittings. "He asked me yesterday where your people lived, and I happened to be clearing his dinner-table when your Miss Ada went by, and I pointed her out to him, of course asking him to excuse the liberty, and he was smoking in his arm-chair, and he jumped up quite interested like."

"They've got a huncle in foreign parts," said Mary Jane, much impressed. "I wonder if it is him come home? I hear them a-talking about him sometimes, saying how rich he is, and that he ought to give some of it to them, to help them find theirselves husbands, I suppose."

"I've heard of that uncle before to-day, or someone very like him," remarked Mrs. Gittings, rather oracularly, "and it would take a precious sight of ready cash to gild your two eldest, Mary Jane. Now, if it was Miss Amy, now——"

"She's a darling," broke in Mary Jane, "and there ain't a blessed thing as I wouldn't do for her. But the other two—well, there!"

And Mary Jane sniffed contemptuously.

Perhaps it is unnecessary to add that the gist of this conversation was promptly repeated to the Lancaster household by the judicious Mary Jane before very long had elapsed.

"What is he like?" demanded Mrs. Lancaster, who was not above talking gossip with her inferiors.

"I haven't seen him, ma'am, but he saw Miss Ada, Mrs. Gittings told me."

"It can't be my poor husband's brother come home at last, Ada," said Mrs. Lancaster, later on; "he would surely come and see me at once."

"Us, you mean," put in her eldest daughter disagreeably.

"I haven't heard either of him or from him for twenty years," went on Mrs. Lancaster calmly. She was accustomed to her daughter. "I wish I could find out if it is really he."

"Call on Miss Jackson, she knows all the talk of Greenford," said her daughter Annie.

"My dear, the poor man hasn't been here a week yet."

"That doesn't matter, mamma—to Miss Jackson."

"I wonder where he deals?"

"I wonder which church he will go to?" "I wonder——"

"If his ears are burning!" said Amy Lancaster saucily, speaking for the first time. She was the youngest of the three, and the prettiest, with a trim, rounded little figure and a curly head, well balanced on a pretty pair of shoulders.

"Have you done those curtains for Mr. Townsend's bedroom, Amy? If not, go and get them done at once."

Amy pouted, but she obeyed her mother. It may seem a strange thing to say, but Amy's two elder sisters could not forgive her for being pretty! They were tall, angular, and flat—I had almost said scraggy; Amy was plump, soft, dimpled and enticing. She never went out, or but rarely. When asked why Amy had not come to some evening party, concert, or entertainment, Mrs. Lancaster would reply:

"Oh, she is too young! Besides, I could not possibly inflict you with all three girls."

"But Amy plays so charmingly!" one lady ventured to remark.

"I do not care for her to 'show off' in public," replied Mrs. Lancaster coolly.

So it will be seen that poor little Amy was something of a Cinderella in the Lancaster household. But she found comfort and consolation in her piano, and did everything that fell to her lot to do—and that was by no means a little—uncomplainingly and smilingly. She had another kind of comfort—but of this later on.

Mr. Brown had been in Greenford quite a fortnight, running up to town two or three times a week, walking briskly now and then over Greenford Common, living a perfectly peaceful existence.

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But though he did not know it, he was much talked about in Greenford, and, though they did not know it, he was well acquainted with the four members that constituted the Lancaster family. He had met them at intervals, but whether by accident or contrivance, who could say? Even Mrs. Lancaster herself never guessed that the little grey man who rode up to London in the same compartment as herself one morning was the mysterious Mr. Brown.

But one afternoon, visiting at the vicarage, she found that little grey man chatting pleasantly to the vicar's wife:

The introduction nearly took away her breath, and the shock of bitter disappointment she suffered did not help to bring it back again.

This her husband's brother? Good gracious, no! The notion was too ridiculous. However, she swallowed her disappointment, made herself most agreeable, and presently invited Mr. Brown to call upon her, and meet her daughters.

"Who knows," she thought to herself, "he might be a chance for Ada or Annie." She had very adroitly learnt the fact that he was a widower from his own lips.

She little guessed that Mr. Brown was secretly amused at her scheming, saw completely through her, in fact, and that to be invited to call at 70 Station Road was the very thing that he wanted.

"Girls!" cried Mrs. Lancaster, on her return. "Who do you think is coming to call upon us?"

Ada and Annie looked interrogation. Amy went on playing softly on the piano.

"The mysterious Mr. Brown," said Mrs. Lancaster triumphantly.

"Oh, when?" cried Ada and Annie in a breath.

"Why is he mysterious, mother?" said Amy.

"We know so little about him, dear, who he is, and where he came from."

"Well, do we want to know?"

"My dear child, go on making that noise, and don't be so ignorant," said her mother snappishly. And Amy turned round again to the piano, and went on playing, with a tender little smile creeping round her pretty mouth. Two or three days later Mr. Brown availed himself of Mrs. Lancaster's kind invitation and called at No. 70. He was received most cordially by all three—mother, and her eldest daughters. But in spite of cordiality and leading questions, very little personal information could they extract from him beyond that which he chose to give them. How were they to know that he knew what they were aiming at? With extreme tact, Mrs. Lancaster managed to lead the conversation to her dead husband's brother Richard.

But Mr. Brown merely remarked "How strange!" in an uninterested manner.

"Mrs. Lancaster, I am told that you have a daughter who plays very charmingly," he remarked presently. "I am so passionately fond of music. Which of these young ladies is it?"

Ada and Annie could have bitten their lips in vexation; this was what Mrs. Lancaster had wished to avoid if possible.

"Mrs. Preston, the vicar's wife, told me," said Mr. Brown.

"It is my youngest, Amy, Mr. Brown," smiled Mrs. Lancaster. "I don't know where she is."

She had ordered her not to appear lest she should spoil Ada's or Annie's chance, and she had replied promptly that she didn't want to meet the old frump.

"Ada, or Annie, will one of you find her?" said Mrs. Lancaster sweetly.

"Oh, bother!" said Amy when found. But she put a mutinous little curl, that would stray over her forehead, into its proper place, and came downstairs.

"Will you play something for me?" said Mr. Brown, when he had been introduced. "Mrs. Preston tells me you play beautifully."

Amy Lancaster coloured with pleasure. Praise to her was a rare thing, and she was proud of her playing, and knew, too, that she could play well. Mr. Brown listened to her with the close attention of the true lover of music. He crossed the room at the close.

"I have heard that played in many lands," he said, "but never with greater feeling. Young lady, you are an artist. I most sincerely congratulate you. Mrs. Lancaster, will you do me a great favour, and allow your daughters to come and see me sometimes, and give me the opportunity of hearing Miss Amy play? I am a lonely man, a lonely old man—and I hope you will not refuse."

Mrs. Lancaster consented graciously, but she was not feeling very gracious, as Amy well knew. And poor Amy, too, knew of the petty slights she was likely to undergo because of her success.

"I shall be delighted," she murmured, with a blush that made her look prettier than ever. Then Mr. Brown took his departure.

When he had gone, Mrs. Lancaster sat thinking. "Why not Amy?" ran the burden of her thoughts. "If Mr. Brown loved music, why not Amy?" But Ada and Annie were furious, though they only vented their spite by sarcastically

He suddenly came across Amy sitting on a secluded rustic seat with a handsome young man.

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congratulating Amy on her prospects of becoming an old man's darling. You see, neither they nor their mother knew anything about Jack!

* * * * *

Two or three days afterwards, Mr. Brown was taking his customary constitutional over Greenford Common, when he suddenly came upon Amy, sitting on a quiet and secluded rustic seat, with a rather handsome young man, who was not only talking to her very earnestly, but holding her little hand closely in his. Mr. Brown lifted his hat and would have passed on, but Amy impulsively jumped up, and he paused.

"Oh, Mr. Brown!" exclaimed Amy, "please do not tell mother you have seen me! Let me tell you. This is Jack—Mr. Meredith, I mean, and we are secretly engaged, and, oh——"

She covered her pretty face with her two hands to hide her confusion.

"My name is Brown, Mr. Meredith, and I am pleased to meet you. I congratulate you on possessing a most charming little sweetheart, and I hope you'll deserve her."

"I intend to, sir," said Jack in a manly, pleasant voice. "We were just speaking of you and your admiration of my little girl's playing. It is not my fault our engagement is a secret," he went on frankly, "we both thought it wise to wait until I am in a better position before I go to Mrs. Lancaster. She would only refuse to hear me now, and we should be parted. As it is, we can meet like this occasionally—and we can wait."

Amy looked up in her lover's face with tears in her eyes.

"Spoken like a man and a lover," said Mr. Brown. "Tell me—what are you, and where are you?"

Jack Meredith told him.

"Thanks. Now, good-bye. Go on with your courting. It is the Spring of one's life, the love-making time! I was young once, and in love, too, long ago. I'm an old man now! I'll keep your secret, never fear!"

"Don't go!" cried Amy, "please!"

"I said I was an old man," said Mr. Brown with a smile, "but I'm not so old as to forget that two used to be company in my young days, and is so still, I fancy!" and he walked briskly away, laughing.

"Well!" said Amy.

"Well!" replied Jack.

They sat and discussed Mr. Brown for a little while, then the conversation, after the fashion of lovers' talk, drifted back to themselves.

* * * * *

That was Amy's comfort, though the secret engagement now and then marred it. They had met when Amy had been visiting an old school friend in London, and what Jack had told Mr. Brown fairly explains their position. He was poor, too poor to dream of marrying, but if Amy would wait for him, he would work for her. Would Amy wait for him? What a foolish question to ask. Jack managed to steal a few hours now and then to spend with his sweetheart, and the old rustic seat where Mr. Brown had surprised them was their trysting place, where they met and parted, when Jack went back to smoky London, and Amy returned home, happier, yet sometimes to shed a few tears in her own little bedroom.

* * * * *

"What a good thing it would be for Amy—for all of us," thought Mrs. Lancaster. "Mr. Brown must have money, he is a gentleman, and not so very much older than Amy. But I do wish it had been one of the others!" with a sigh.

After this Mr. Brown and the Lancasters met frequently, out of doors, for it was summer-time, and Ada and Amy had been twice or thrice to Eglantine Villa, and Mr. Brown had listened with keen delight to Amy's playing. It occurred to Ada that he watched her, as a cat does a mouse, with bright eyes that let nothing escape their observation.

She told her mother this, and Mrs. Lancaster was delighted. But if she had only known it, Mr. Brown was watching her too! He had now quite established himself in Greenford society, such as it was, and his ears were always wide open at the mention of the Lancasters.

He even saw through Mrs. Lancaster's plan for him to fall in love with Amy, and the thought of this often made him give a quiet chuckle. He remembered Jack.

He noted Ada's veiled bitterness, though she always wore her most pleasant manner for his benefit. He saw through Annie's selfish disposition perfectly; and he formed a pretty correct notion of Amy's life at No. 70, though he never said a word to her when chance happened to afford an opportunity of doing so, and Amy herself never alluded to the snubs and slights that were her daily lot.

Amy came down to breakfast with a very bright face one morning. There was a letter in her bodice, not far away from her beating heart.

"Good news?" asked Annie, sourly noticing her happy face and shining eyes.

"Only a letter from—Nellie Bowman," said Amy, colouring.

"She writes to you very often," said Ada.

"Twice a week. We arranged that when I was in London."

"Oh, Amy, that letter so close to your heart is in a masculine handwriting!"

"You never show us her letters."

"You were not at school with her, so they would not interest you."

"I insist," interrupted Mrs. Lancaster, who had been listening to the conversation, "upon you showing your sister that letter, Amy!"

Amy half rose from her seat, with her hand on her precious possession as if to protect the secret. Mrs. Lancaster little knew what result her insistence would have.

"After breakfast," Amy faltered.

"At once!"

After all, thought Amy, remembering the splendid piece of news concerning Jack and herself, the great and glorious unexpected thing that his dear letter told about, the "scene" would have to come sooner or later. So she slipped it from her dress, and handed it, not without a trembling sensation at her heart, to her mother.

"A love-letter!" almost shrieked that horrified lady, when she had read the first words.

"Yes," said Amy boldly, "from the man I am engaged to and am going to marry."

"Go to your room!" exclaimed Mrs. Lancaster, almost beside herself with anger; "you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Amy walked proudly out of the room, holding her curly head like a princess, and Ada and Annie were left to bear the brunt of their mother's rage and disappointment.

"To think that she should deceive me under my very eyes! I shall consult Mr. Brown!"

Ada laughed bitterly.

"Our refuge in distress!" she said; "he won't sympathise with you, mother!"

Mrs. Lancaster gave a shriek of horror, and sat down suddenly, grasping the letter in her hand.

"What is it now?" asked Annie, who was not sorry to see Amy in disgrace.

Mrs. Lancaster had been perusing the letter.

"He knows him—Mr. Brown! It says so here. It's a plot! Listen." And she proceeded to read from the letter in her hand. "Great news, my darling." Here Mrs. Lancaster shuddered. "I have been offered a berth in the Perpetual Insurance Company's offices, at a salary of £300 a year. I shall come and see your mother at once now, and ask her for you. Do you think Mr. Brown had anything to do with it? You remember that day at our seat he asked me where he could find me. It certainly seems like it."

Mrs. Lancaster could only sit and gasp.

"Three hundred a year is not to be sneered at," said Ada Lancaster.

"But, Mr. Brown," began her mother.

"Pooh!" exclaimed Annie, "she would never have

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married him even if the writer of that letter hadn't been first in the field."

"I would have made her!"

"Nonsense. That sort of thing is only done in books and plays, not in real life," said Ada sagely.

Mrs. Lancaster finished the letter, then sat and thought for a few minutes.

"Go and tell Amy to come down," she said at last. Annie went, but returned quickly with a frightened look on her sallow face.

"She's gone!" she said.

"Gone? Impossible!"

"Her hat is not there."

"But where can she have gone?" the mother demanded.

"To Mr. Brown, of course," said Ada. At that moment a knock at the front door proved the truth of this remark, for Mr. Brown entered the room, holding Amy by the hand.

"I have brought this naughty young lady back to say she is sorry!" he said; he spoke quietly, but there was a kind of twinkle in his eyes.

"I am sorry, mother, but I intend to marry Jack all the same!"

At this defiant speech Mr. Brown's twinkle developed into a smile.

"I see nothing to laugh at!" said Mrs. Lancaster indignantly.

"No, indeed," echoed Annie, and received a sharp glance from her mother.

"I know Mr. Meredith," said Mr. Brown, "and think very highly of him, so highly that I have obtained him a berth in a company with which I am concerned, at a handsome salary—quite enough for him to marry on."

Amy threw a grateful smile at Mr. Brown, and pressed the hand that still held her own.

"I leave this young lady with you, Mrs. Lancaster. If you take my advice, let her marry Mr. Meredith, and say no more about the past."

"It's the only thing to be done, it seems," said Mrs. Lancaster despairingly. All her castles had crumbled to the earth.

'I have only one other thing to say," Mr. Brown continued, "and that is to tell you that your husband's brother, Richard, will call upon you at four o'clock this afternoon."

Mrs. Lancaster gave a startled cry of utter astonishment, and sank into the nearest chair.

"You know him?" she faltered.

"Intimately. He has been my closest friend for eighteen years. Good morning." He put Amy's hand to his lips and was gone.

"Oh!" was all Mrs. Lancaster could say. But it meant volumes. Mr. Brown had been no doubt keeping a watch upon them all, and reporting his opinion to Richard Lancaster. This was in fact just what Mr. Brown had been doing, but Mrs. Lancaster would not have felt very happy or flattered had she known in what terms he had expressed himself.

Mrs. Lancaster struggled to her feet, and tottered from the room.

"I shall go and lie down," she said; "I cannot see this man." She still held Amy's love-letter, and she handed it to her again, much to Amy's joy—"Tell him I consent."

Amy kissed her mother tenderly at this, and would have helped her from the room.

"No," said the mother, "not you. Ada?"

* * * * *

The rest is soon told. Jack Meredith arrived, glowing with the good news, and found Amy waiting to rush into his arms and impart her own good news. What they said what they did—well, is it not written in the chronicles of lovers for time immemorial?

Richard Lancaster that same afternoon had a brief and business-like interview with his dead brother's wife, at which Mr. Brown was present. He had sent, he said, his friend Mr. Brown to Greenford, when, on his arrival in England, he found out where Mrs. Lancaster was living—in order to learn such truths, either pleasant or unpleasant, as it would be improbable, even impossible, he, a rich man, could ever find out for himself and personally. He had received Mr. Brown's reports, and had formed his intentions for the future upon them to a great extent. He quite approved of Amy's suitor. In fact he was a large shareholder in the company. He intended to allow Mrs. Lancaster £500 a year until her death, her two daughters Ada and Annie £1,000 each, as a marriage portion.

Mrs. Lancaster stared at him in stupefaction.

"Then you must be very rich, Dick," she stammered.

"I am. Somewhere about a quarter of a million, I think, isn't it, Brown?"

Mr. Brown nodded. He was quietly enjoying the whole thing.

"Your daughter, Amy, I shall adopt, and as I am never likely to marry again, and am childless, I shall make her my heiress, allowing her £500 a year for her marriage portion."

And then Mrs. Lancaster fully realised how badly she had played the good cards she had held, and how much she had lost.

* * * * *

"You will marry me still, Jack!" said Amy, when she heard the news, and only Mr. Brown was within hearing.

"I ought to say no," said her lover, "but I cannot!"

"And I wouldn't let you if you could!"

They moved away together hand-in-hand.

"How happy they are," mused Mr. Brown, watching them with a strange look in his eyes. "He will make her far happier than I could have done. It is better so. And yet—I should have loved her very dearly!"

Clifton Bingham.

'Take Care of No. 1.'

That is a very old piece of advice, "take care of Number 1," and a very important one.

Moreover, it applies equally well to other things, and in certain cases well repays one to follow it.

There is, for example, No. 1 of **THE RAPID REVIEW,** the New Magazine which has taken the reading public by storm. In a few years the early issues of **THE RAPID REVIEW** will be decidedly valuable, and they will always be very interesting possessions, enabling you to compare them with the current number at some future time, noting the various changes and improvements which have taken place.

So remember, if you have got No. 1, to take good care of it. If you have not got it, try your best to obtain a copy, and finally, to make certain of getting No. 2, which is out on March 12th. Price Sixpence.

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She Knew.

Young Hobbs: "Mamma, what animal is the king of beasts?" Mrs. Hobbs (with a significant look at her husband): "Man!"

His Discovery.

She (reproachfully): "Before we were married you used to say you couldn't live without me." He: "A man never knows what he can do till he tries."

What She Meant.

"She is a very sweet girl." "Why, the heartless flirt had promised to marry four different men." "Well, that's what I mean; her manners are most engaging."

A Delayed Luxury.

"Here we have only been married two days, Clarence, and you're scolding me already." "I know, my dear; but just think how long I have been waiting for the chance."

Thoughtless—or Cruel?

Miss Oldgirl (who writes): "I am thinking of writing a love story founded on my own experience." Miss Maybudd: "Oh, dear me! Couldn't you bring it to a happier ending?"

He Could.

Practical Father: "If he says he loves you I suppose he does; but can he support you?" Daughter: "Why, papa! You must know that it wasn't his fault that the chair broke."

It Was Admirable.

The Fiancée: "I'm sure that you would be cool in the presence of danger." The Fiancé: "Well, I don't like to boast, but you should have seen the way I kept my nerve when I called on your father."

An Old Adage.

"It can't be possible that Hardup's going to marry Susie Banknote. Money enough, I suppose, but an ugly, shrivelled-up little thing, as thin as a straw." "But have you never heard that drowning men catch at a straw?"

Careful.

Paul (aged ten): "Gladys, do you truly love me?" Gladys (aged nine): "With all my heart." Paul: "Then let us fly together to the end of the world." Gladys: "But, dearest, I haven't learnt my to-morrow's lessons."

His Reward.

"I thought," he said, "that I knew how to make love." "And don't you?" "Why, it didn't seem to work right when I told Rose she was the only girl I had ever loved." "What did she say?" "She said she'd never marry a liar."

A Honeymoon Experience.

The Groom: "Would you mind if I went into a smoking compartment, dear?" The Bride: "What! to smoke?" The Groom: "Oh, dear no. I want to experience the agony of being away from you, so that the joy of my return will be all the more intensified."

A Convincing Argument.

Flipper: "Why does he object to his wife going out alone in her motor?" Flapper: "Because he can't see how one unmanageable thing can manage another."

Temperate.

Guest: "I hear your husband is a spiritualist. Have you ever seen any sign of a spirit?" Domineering Wife: "In my husband? Well, I should hope not!"

What She Feared.

Clare: "He pressed me to tell him if I really and truly loved him." Maude: "And did you tell him?" Clare: "Not I. I was afraid if I did he might stop the pressure."

Well Defined.

"I say, pa," queried little Billy Eagerlearn, "what's an echo?" "An echo, my son," replied the old man, with a sigh long drawn out, "is the only thing that can diddle a woman out of the last word."

His Ardent Desire.

Mrs. Homeleigh: "There is one certain thing about our girls—they are always self-possessed." Papa Homeleigh (grimly): "Yes; they're too self-possessed. I wish they'd get someone else to possess them."

A Bad Outlook.

Daughter (pleading for her lover): "But, father, I am positive that it is not my money he is after. He says he would marry me if I were ever so poor." Stern and Prosaic Father: "Yes, he looks as if he had no better sense."

His Request.

She (bored): "No, Mr. Lytely, I can never love you. I honour and respect you. I am sure you would make some other woman a good husband. I——" He: "Well—er—could you—er—give me a letter of recommendation to my next place?"

A Wilful Misunderstanding.

Young Miss Lookout: "Where are you going, papa?" Rev. Mr. Lookout: "To the Temperance meeting. We intend to inaugurate a movement to save the young men of the country." Young Miss Lookout: "Try to save a really nice one for me, will you, papa, dear?"

He Was Sure of That.

"I don't believe," said Mrs. Sentimental, fishing for a compliment, "that I am as dear to you as I used to be." "Dear to me!" repeated her spouse, "dear to me! Almira, you grow dearer and dearer to me every year of your life!" And, glancing sorrowfully at the bills the postman had just handed him, he hurried away to catch the next train.

Rather Annoying.

Young Lady: "Now, Jane, I repose great confidence in you. If you see young Mr. Brown coming up the garden path about dusk tell him not to enter the porch, but wait for me at the side wicket-gate." Jane: "How awkward, miss!" Young Lady: "And why awkward, Jane?" Jane: "Because that's the very place my young man's in the 'abit of waiting at!"

The Final Twist.

Gussy: "Good gwacious! Cholly, whatevah is the mattah with you?" Cholly (pale but collected): "Not much, old fellah; but I have just left Miss Silverton's. I was about to propose to her when her father entered the room and asked me my business. I fully explained, and he laughed in my face, pulled my nose, made a corkscrew of my hair, slapped me on both cheeks, temporarily made a doormat of me, turned me upside down, almost inside out, called me a 'jumped-up cad,' and then threw me down the stairs and into the street; but, by Jawve! if he had done any more he would have woused the Bwitish lion within me."

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Her Father's Daughter.

An Episode in the Life of Olga Barotski, Russian Subject.

"And so your good father is dead?"

"Yes, sir!—and as among his papers I found the letter—addressed to your Highness—which I have just had the honour to hand to you, I thought it better to——"

"Quite right, Mr. Thorne!—quite right!—I am very glad to see you! Your father, you know, was for many years not merely my secretary but my friend. I mourn his loss—learnt now only from you—more, far more than I can say. For his sake—for your own—I welcome, with all my heart, his son—my godson!"

"Your Highness is very kind," said Maurice Thorne deferentially, but with a manly directness of manner not unpleasing to, or lost upon the distinguished-looking man to whom he was talking.

"Not more so, I am sure, than your father's son deserves. But pardon me a moment while I read this letter once more."

The handwriting was shaky almost to illegibility, indicating that the writer must have handled the pen with distressful difficulty:

"Your Highness,—*I am relying upon the fact of a life spent in your service to win me forgiveness for addressing you from what I know to be my deathbed. When I left you a year ago I was practically a dying man with but one anxiety, one care—the future of my only child—my son Maurice. It is, then, of him that, with your gracious permission, I wish now to speak, seeing that hours only now remain to me.*

For reasons which I cannot state here I am leaving the lad without means of any kind. Profession he has none, for—criminally, as I now see it to have been—I have kept him at Oxford, hoping against hope that I might live till he took his degree. Now all that is at an end, and, unless my one desire is accomplished, he will have, at eighteen, to face the world, not only a pauper, but educationally unfit to battle with it.

For the sake, then, of the father, who, I venture to think, served you long and faithfully, will your Highness befriend the son? Maurice is a good lad, a true and honest lad; and, upon my dying word, has never forgotten that he is godson to a Prince of the House of Romanoff. I think your Highness will find him useful, for he is well read and speaks both Russian and French as perfectly as it is possible for an Englishman to speak them.

One thing more. Years ago your Highness intrusted me with a secret, which I need not say has inviolably remained with me ever since. Five years later I visited St. Petersburg in your Highness' interests, on a mission known only to yourself and to me. While there I became possessed of certain information concerning this secret which I here confess I refrained then from communicating to you, fearing to add to your already heavy burden of sorrow. Now, when I would divulge to you the truth—which is contained in a paper delivered to me by one now dead—I cannot; for on another and subsequent visit to Russia—which your Highness will doubtless remember—this paper, which never left my person, was stolen from me on my way from Moscow to Warsaw.

I have reason to believe that both thief and paper are at this moment in London, and that machinery—of a wild and dangerous socialistic character—will shortly be set in motion to offer you the document—at a price.

And now, solemnly warning your Highness—as one who, when you receive this, will have solved the greatest secret of all—that the welfare and happiness of you and yours depends upon your possession of the paper I speak of; and once more committing my dear son to the consideration which I feel you will not withhold, I bid your Highness a grateful farewell, being now, as I have ever been proud to be, your Highness' humble and obliged friend and servant,

"Gilbert Thorne."

To His Highness The Grand Duke Ivan Nicolavitch.

"Do you know the nature of the contents of this letter?" asked the Grand Duke.

"No—except that I suspect they in some way concern myself."

"You are right," was the reply. "Your father has here asked me to do what I can for your welfare. I am glad to be able to realise his wishes. I am a childless man, and an exile. From henceforth be to me as a son. You are at Oxford?"

"Yes," said Maurice, "at Christchurch."

"Very well, then; you will return there next term, as usual, and for the future regard this house as your home."

For the moment the contrast between the little house on the borders of the New Forest and the palatial building in Park Lane staggered the boy a bit. He had, of course, heard his father many a time talk of the Tsar's brother, who, two-and-twenty years before had been suddenly deprived of all his State offices and of his rights as a Russian subject, and exiled from his country indefinitely; but he had been too young to understand, or to take an intelligent interest in the details, even had they been explained to him. His disposition, however, was eminently adaptable, so that though this was his first visit to the Prince's house, he quickly accustomed himself to the new order of things.

* * * * *

The Grand Duke Ivan Nicolavitch was, in the year 1880, commander of the Imperial Guard and military Governor of the Capital.

A great favourite with the reigning Tsar; he was also, in addition to being enormously wealthy, secretly opposed to aristocratic influence and to the despotic system of government.

The Tsar, however, was not altogether ignorant of his brother's unorthodox opinions, and, desirous of binding him, if possible, more closely to his own order, proposed to him a marriage with a princess of a reigning German family. This

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alliance the Grand Duke, much to the Tsar's astonishment and displeasure, declined, assigning no reason.

Determined to get to the bottom of things, the Emperor set his Chief-of-Police to work, to discover such evidence, if any, of his brother's private mode of life, as should explain the motive of his refusal to accept his august relative's proposal.

The evidence, thanks to the spy system, was not long in being forthcoming.

It had long been remarked that the Prince had been in the habit of making periodical visits to Moscow, and of remaining there, sometimes for a week. It was now discovered that for three years he had been the husband of a lady—one Kaniska Barotski, an opera singer of some reputation in the old Muscovite metropolis—but that the couple were childless.

Relentlessly angry at the news, the Tsar, not only as has been said, deprived his offending brother of all his rights, privileges, and State offices, but, in addition to exiling the Prince, had his unoffending wife seized and deported to Siberia. For the Grand Duke this was the last straw; and once in his adopted home in England he once and for all cast himself adrift from all the traditions of his race, and threw himself into the hands of the moderate socialists of his own nationality, who had their headquarters in London.

Fortunately for himself, and as foreseeing that which should come upon him, his wealth, except, of course, his Russian landed property, had for years been invested in British and American securities, thus enabling him to keep up his position as a great Russian noble.

He was a man of great intellectual gifts, and of a charming personality. Now about fifty years of age, he looked ten years younger, and many were the fair British maidens who would have been delighted to console and comfort the solitary man, and to share with him his London palace and that still finer place in the northern part of the kingdom, Bayard Castle.

Such was the man with whom Maurice Thorne, his late secretary's son and his own godson, was suddenly, by a turn of Fortune's wheel, called to dwell. Most people said it was "extraordinary luck" for the lad; while youngsters of his own age raised their voices in vain wishes that they had "that beggar Thorne's chance."

One person there was to whom this social promotion of Maurice Thorne's did not come as an unmixed blessing.

This was a certain young lady of Maurice's acquaintance with whom, indeed, he had had a tender understanding, ever since the day, two years before, when he had, in veritable knight-errant spirit, rescued the sixteen-year-old damsel from under the hoofs and horns of an infuriated bull in the forest.

With Maurice's departure for London, Enid Eskeet's love-light went nearly out.

Here was Maurice in the very vortex of social delirium and dissipation, with neither time nor, perhaps, inclination to think of the little girl in the old Hampshire town, who had nothing to put in the place of the pleasantly sweet daily association of the past two years. But at least there were his letters—and such letters—full of boyishly enthusiastic love—after all, the purest and the best, in this selfish, hard-living world of ours.

By-and-by she came to regard the position of affairs, as between herself and Maurice, with more equanimity until a certain day, when Maurice had been four years with his adopted father.

All through this time it may be said that the Grand Duke Ivan Nicolavitch was ever restlessly expecting and looking for the event which should place in his hands the mysterious paper.

As yet, however, its present holder had made no sign, although the Prince had spared neither money nor time in seeking to discover the name and whereabouts of that individual.

It was his nephew now who sat upon the Russian throne, so that although his implacable hatred of his late brother survived that brother's death, there was just a chance that he might accept the Imperial invitation to resume his position, social and military, at the Russian Court, should such an invitation, as was not unlikely, be extended to him.

Then occurred that which altogether altered the aspect of everything, alike for the Prince and for Enid Eskeet's young but whole-hearted lover.

* * * * *

For weeks the hoardings about the West End of the Metropolis had blazoned forth, in rainbow-hued fashion, the coming to London from the Continent of a bright particular star in the theatrical firmament.

This was no other than the famous Russian singer and dancer, Olga Barotski.

In St. Petersburg, as indeed, in every city throughout the Russian empire, this lady with the wonderful voice, with the inimitable grace of motion, and the possessor of the finest diamonds in Europe, reigned as queen without the shadow of a rival near her throne.

Previously tempted in vain to visit London, she had at last, by an offer of unexampled magnitude, consented to accept a six weeks' engagement at a big house near Leicester Square.

But it was not alone as singer and dancer that La Belle Olga sought to capture the plaudits of her audiences. She sang and danced in a cage of six full-grown Bengal tigers!

Round the ring, ascending from below, was built up a railing of solid, bright steel bars, within which the growling beasts, and the lovely, supple-limbed performer were electrically thrown into brilliant relief.

The promised show create dquite an anticipatory thrill amongst the lovers of the sensational, although the ever-watchful philanthropist was already stirring to protest.

Maurice happened to be "up" from Oxford on the occasion of La Belle Olga's London *début*, and expressed a strong desire to witness the fair Russian's performance.

Always ready and willing to give pleasure to his adopted son, the Prince, himself having also a curiosity to see this strange product of his native country, proposed to accompany him, a box being secured on the grand tier.

"What a splendid creature!" exclaimed the Prince, "and," after a few seconds' steady regarding of the performer, "how like!—how like!"

"Like, sir! Like whom, or what?"

The other did not reply for the moment, but continued to gaze fixedly at the tall, stately woman in the ring, as she burst forth into a perfect flood of song; one of her hands resting upon the head of the most magnificent tiger of them all.

Then again did the exclamation escape him, his eyes the while fastened, as by invisible fascination, upon the face of the venturous yet apparently fearless singer.

"Kaniska's image!"

Maurice saw, then, that for some reason, his companion was deeply

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moved, so that he refrained from speaking, until it should please the Prince to break his reserve.

Then it was that, her song finished amid a storm of applause, La Belle Olga turned and directed her gaze full at the two men in the box.

The effect upon each was altogether different.

It was now the turn of Maurice to be silent, and to regard with rapt, whole-souled eyes the woman before him.

As for the Prince, rapidly taking a card from his case and scribbling upon it a few words in Russian, he opened the door of the box, called an attendant, and bid him take the pasteboard round to the lady's dressing-room, so soon as she could reach it.

The attendant knew the Prince's identity, and was all respectful eagerness.

"Does your Highness wish for an answer?"

"No! My coat and carriage! Come, Maurice!"

At that moment La Belle Olga slowly left the ring, the quick clang of the steel gate behind her sounding to Maurice like the shutting of the gate of Paradise itself.

"Maurice," said Ivan Nicolavitch, breaking the silence as the carriage drew up at the Park Lane house, "I expect a visitor to-morrow afternoon. What say you to a run down to Southampton. Your Enid will be glad; and—and I wish to be alone."

"Very well, sir!" replied Maurice wonderingly. "If you wish it, of course; but I thought that you and I had arranged to go to Lord's, for the Oxford and Cambridge?"

"Yes, yes—I know! but—well, you can go without me to Lord's. Yes, that will, perhaps, be better, as I may want you before the evening."

* * * * *

In her dressing-room at the theatre sat La Belle Olga—alone, with, between her dainty, jewelled fingers, the card of His Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Ivan Nicolavitch. Her face, with the contracted brow and the compressed lips, was full of anxious thought. There was no hardness in her eyes, as some, envious of her professional and social triumphs, had spitefully maintained; while just now, there was an especial tenderness, a wistful, far-away expression of intense longing about them which contrasted with her somewhat bizarre, if gorgeous and be-jewelled, costume, which was absolutely pathetic.

"And he comes to me first—my father! My father!—of whom I have never even heard till that villain Bouteneff—who stole, among other things, the paper from the old Englishman Thorne, thinking it was of monetary value—told me of his existence. Why did the Governor of the Russian Prison, when in St. Petersburg, four years before then, seek out this man Thorne and give him this paper? I don't know! I don't know! but I *do* know that I outwitted, at the point of the knife, Bouteneff the cunning! and took from him the paper which told me—told me—— But I will wait until I meet my father to-morrow!"

* * * * *

In the library at No. 106 Park Lane, the master of the house sits, watching and listening for something—somebody who shall change for him the whole course of his life

A card is brought to him.

"Olga Barotski."

If he lives to be a hundred, Ivan Nicolavitch will never forget that first hand-clasp—that first kiss from his daughter's lips.

"How like! how like!" he still repeats.

And she!—she nestles up to him with that passionate gratitude for protection—the protection Nature ordained for her.

"Tell me," said her father, "tell me of—of your mother!"

For answer she gave him a paper in an open envelope.

"I will leave you while you read it," she said.

"Nay!" he answered. "I need you! stay by me—Olga—my child!"

But the strong man well-nigh miscalculated his power of self-restraint

The paper was in Russian, and in his wife's handwriting. It ran:

"Beloved,—*They have killed me! But I bore it—for you. But, oh! the knout!* ("And I—I live to read it!") *Ivan! I am leaving you, and my little Olga. The Governor, who knows you, will see that you get this. Oh! my husband! continue to love me in your heart as I die loving you! I cannot write more. Farewell.—Your one love and wife,*

"Kaniska."

"And my brother ruled Russia by the grace of God!"

It was all he said. Then Olga stole gently to his side and in almost whispered words told him how an escaped convict from the mines had, after her mother's death, carried her away, and brought her up to animal training and a professional life generally. Becoming acquainted with her birth and her father's name and rank, he had played a waiting game, until Olga's promptitude had wrested the paper from him, circumvented his plans, and once more consigned him to Siberian capitvity.

It was while she was recounting the adventures of her life, and listening to his story of his own lonely existence, that Maurice, sick of a lonely afternoon, entered the library.

"Maurice," said the Prince, taking Olga by the hand, and presenting her to the young man, "this is my daughter—given to me, as I feel, from the dead!"

She was all graciousness, as befitted the child of kingly race.

"My father," she said, "has told me of you, and of the Enid you love in the town by the sea. I want to see her, for she will be my sister, this beautiful Enid of yours!"

And so it was that he awoke out of his feverish dream. Olga, his adopted father's daughter, was lovely, queenly, good, but—she was not for him. His loyalty to his little English rose returned in full force, and he was only grateful to this beneficent and beautiful being who had so well and truly brought him to his right mind.

* * * * *

Ivan Nicolavitch never returned to Russia; although repeatedly urged to do so by his nephew the Tsar. He lives in contentment with his daughter, who, to the philanthropists' satisfaction, appeared no more in public, after that first night's performance.

Maurice is now secretary in his father's place, and with his pretty little wife makes up the happy quartette which meets once a week at dinner at No. 106 Park Lane.

Maurice—who knows—invariably reminds his wife, after every one of these social meetings, that things are as they are because Olga is as like her mother, as she is "her father's daughter."

T. H. Latham.

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FORTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.

Connecting the Links.

When Philip had reached London after burning the papers that had so filled him with horror and dismay, he went straight to the Foundling Hospital, where he had been brought up from a baby, and saw the superintendent. He was an old man now, with a kindly, time-worn face, and his eyes lit up at the sight of the boy who had blossomed forth into such a promising man, and become a credit to the hospital. Philip had asked him at once to tell him all there was to tell about the occasion when he had entered the home, whether there was anything on him, or sent with him, that would give him some clue to the unknown past. It was more for Marcella's sake than his own that he had begun the quest, for he had determined that, once he could prove himself at least clean from any disgraceful stain, he would take the girl he loved from the atmosphere of the Court, in which her beautiful, pure nature was being crushed by the pernicious influence of Sir Cyprian and his friends.

"All I can tell you, lad," the old superintendent said, "is that you came here with a few rags on, much worn and of no importance. The only thing of any value was a gold locket."

Philip uttered an exclamation. "A locket! Why was it not given to me before—it was mine—my mother's; perhaps it contained her photograph."

The superintendent shook his head. "No, Philip, we opened it and it was empty—the glass on both sides being smashed as though someone had deliberately torn whatever it had contained out of it; but I will see where it is and bring it to you. It must have been forgotten when you left us, but it is safe enough." He brought the locket to Philip—a tiny gold pendant of no value, except that it once was his mother's—that intangible link that connected him with the shades of the past—the past that had held those shadowy shapes of his unknown parents. For Marcella's sake he hoped to know that the mother who had worn it was one worthy that niche he had always reserved in his heart for her. He touched it softly with his fingers, then put it in his pocket. He was disappointed that there was no face upon which to feast his eyes. He turned to go, when the superintendent called him back.

"By-the-way, Philip, a gentleman called on me some weeks ago, and asked me some of those same questions. He happened to be the doctor of the ship where you were born, and he also asked me whether I knew anything of your baby-brother—the twin with yourself, whom some passenger had taken up. I did not know anything of the matter, so he went away very disappointed."

"My brother!" Philip exclaimed. "To think that all these years I have had a brother in the world with myself, perhaps yearning to meet someone belonging to him. Perhaps—God help him!—starving for food, ill and no one to comfort him! Tell me the name of that doctor?" he said quickly. "I will go to him at once."

He left the home with the address of Dr. Slade in his pocket, but when he reached it, he was told that the doctor had left England for an indefinite period. He turned away disappointed—then a sudden thought struck him. He would go to Marcella's aunt, Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox. She would let him talk freely to her. She knew Marcella loved him.

When he arrived he found Lady Violet talking to the financier and millionaire, Caleb J. Johnson.

"I am afraid I am intruding," he said politely. "I came to talk to you, Lady Violet, about Marcella."

Mr. Johnson put his hand on his shoulder. "We were talking about you, Mr. Nullius, some time ago," he said, in a voice that slightly trembled. "I—I am glad you came in, and so is Lady Violet."

Philip gazed from one to the other wonderingly. The storm cloud that had swept over them had left its mark on their faces. The millionaire especially was suppressing some deep emotion. Philip wondered what it was.

"I came," he said slowly, "to beg of you, Lady Violet, to get Marcella away from the Court. My hands are tied; I am powerless to move," he went on passionately, "for until I have some name to offer Marcella how can I ask her

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to be my wife? So I want you, Lady Violet, to take the place of Marcella's mother, and bring her away. She is, as you know, unhappy, and lately she has been frightened several times by a mysterious man with a black beard and blue glasses who lurks about the Court. It's not safe for her to be there alone."

The effect of his words was peculiar. Lady Violet started, and uttered a low cry of pain and horror; while Mr. Johnson said in a loud, excited tone:

"A man with a black beard! Why, there is a man of that description whom the police want in connection with the theft of my 'Mona Lisa'!"

Lady Violet laughed harshly. "Not that, Caleb—don't say—don't say—that." Then she fell insensible between the two men.

Between them Mr. Johnson and Philip Nullius raised the unconscious woman, and laid her gently on the couch.

"Shall I ring?" Philip queried, wondering at the pallor of the financier's face. It was as though some hideous doubt had suddenly clutched him by the heartstrings. Yet how could anything he said have brought that look into the great financier's face?

"No, don't ring," Mr. Johnson said slowly—his eyes glanced at the white face of the beautiful woman whom he had of his own folly dragged into a bigamous marriage—"I think she will come round soon, and servants chatter."

"I am sorry," Philip began, an apologetic note in his voice; "it was my fault for blurting out so suddenly what I should have kept to myself. I forgot for the moment that Lady Violet was so deeply attached to Marcella that the very idea of there being a mysterious stranger frightening her at the Court was enough to terrify her out of her life."

The financier looked at him oddly. "Naturally," he said quickly. "Women are much more easily upset than men; but tell me, Mr. Nullius, have you also seen that man with the black beard? He seems to have taken upon himself the *role* of bogey!

"Yes," Philip answered gravely. "I saw him quite accidentally once, speaking to a man who had done his best to keep me in durance vile for some strange reasons of his own, and again I saw him that same day on the platform at Paddington with——" He stopped suddenly. Good Heavens! What had he been going to say? To tell the man who was the husband of Marcella's aunt! As a lightning flash the memory of that late afternoon came back to him, and he saw that he had completely forgotten the incident of the meeting he had witnessed as the train had borne him slowly out of the station.

The woman speaking to the man with the black beard had been none other than the financier's proud Society bride!

He understood her sudden collapse in the middle of his speech to her husband, but why had she withheld her knowledge so long, unless it was for the sake of her niece?

Philip thought he could understand the reason for silence, if, like himself, the poor woman was the bearer of so sinister a secret that honour forbade speech. He glanced up and caught the financier's eyes fixed upon him with a searching expression in them.

"You saw the man with the black beard with—whom?" Mr. Johnson said slowly. "Why did you pause so suddenly unless you had a reason in doing so?"

Philip flushed hotly. He felt the note of suspicion in the financier's voice, and it hurt him. He had almost thought that Lady Violet's husband had unbent a little from his distant brusqueness of their former meeting. His voice was, however, cool and collected as he replied:

"My reason for pausing, Mr. Johnson, was that I was not quite certain whether the person with the man was a friend or just a casual stranger asking a question. The train had gone before I could watch them any longer."

The financier frowned thoughtfully. Why had his wife—for so he still regarded her—cried out at the mention of that mysterious bearded man? She in her purity and goodness could not have been otherwise than shocked at the thought of Marcella being frightened by a man looked upon as a member of a dangerous gang. Yet he had felt strangely upset at the few words that had dropped from her lips before she fainted. After all, they might have been just the result of an overwrought brain.

He turned to Philip suddenly. "You mentioned something about trying to find your name—er—Mr. Nullius—the name of the parents who left you in infancy. Have you any clue to their identity?"

Philip shook his head regretfully. "I'm sorry to say I have not, sir. The few things I possessed of any value were stolen from me some time ago from the lodgings I had in the country. I felt it sorely, because although they were only one or two odd love letters of my dead mother, I prized them for her sake, but," he added, "I don't despair of finding out one day; the grave even cannot hold a secret when God means it to be revealed. And now I learnt for the first time to-day from the authorities at the Foundling Hospital that I also had a——" he stopped abruptly, and glanced at the couch. Lady Violet, recovered from her faint, was gazing at him with a peculiar intentness in her great mournful eyes, as though she was trying to find out whether he had mentioned the name of the person who was on the platform with the man with the black beard. A swift exchange of glances passed between them, one of supplication on the woman's part and one of reassurance on the man's.

"Caleb, I will go to my room now," Lady Violet said, forcing a smile to her lips. "I am sorry I made such an exhibition of myself, but I have been taxing my strength rather. I will talk to you about Marcella to-morrow, Mr. Nullius; we must get her away from the Court at all costs," and a slight shudder shook her delicate shoulders. "Good-bye for the present."

She put her hand in his, and as Mr. Johnson went to open the door for her, she whispered softly:

"Don't judge too harshly—I am more sinned against than sinning!"

When she was in the privacy of her own room, Lady Violet turned the key in the lock, then went slowly to her dressing glass, where she gazed feverishly at the haggard-eyed, white-faced creature that looked back at her. None of her world—the world that bowed down to the laws of gaiety and wit—would have recognised in the worn, harassed, middle-aged looking woman of that moment the brilliantly gay and beautiful leader of Society.

"He will know soon," she muttered, "and then I shall stand revealed in my real colours. I shall be equal in iniquity with—that other—my evil genius!" She clasped her hands passionately. "Oh, dear Heaven, grant that I may not lose everything! That I may at least cling to some little bit of driftwood in the wreckage of my life—that at some future period, when the approaching downfall has become a thing of the past, I may yet hide myself with one tender memory!"

Like a butterfly broken on the wheel of Fate, she saw herself being cast from all that the heart of woman holds dear, and having kept her eyes so long closed against the inevitable, the sudden startling awakening—when the scales were being forcibly wrenched from her eyes, she was appalled by the vista that lay before her. As she moved away from the glass she still looked pale, but round the full curves of her mouth was a strangely set smile.

"He threatened that when he fell I should come down with him," she muttered. "So, if I let him know that I no longer dread the ordeal, he will take more pains to avert it for his own sake."

In the meantime Philip was still with the financier in the drawing-room. After Lady Violet had left the room a feeling of constraint had fallen between the two men. Philip saw that Mr. Johnson was trying to ask him a question that came with difficulty to his lips, and fearing that it might be one that for Lady Violet's sake he could not answer, Philip was eager to get away. Suddenly the financier spoke, and at the sound of his voice Philip started. It was abrupt and harsh.

"You have no notion as to either of your parents being

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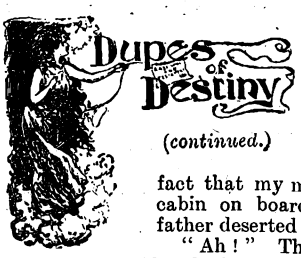

(*continued.*)

alive, I suppose, Mr. Nullius? For Marcella's sake, I think I should like to help you in your quest."

Philip flushed. "Thank you, Mr. Johnson," he said gratefully. "No, I am only possessed of the fact that my mother died in a third class cabin on board a liner. I am afraid my father deserted her," he said bitterly.

"Ah!" The financier winced. "But have you considered what you would do if you discovered your father was not dead and eager to befriend you, Mr. Nullius?" He spoke with feverish haste, and Philip, looking at him, was surprised at his interest. It had almost a personal note in it.

"I am afraid that is far from likely, Mr. Johnson," he said wearily. "So many years have passed since then that the man has probably followed my mother to the grave."

"But, for the sake of argument," continued the financier with a half laugh, "suppose he *were* alive—stranger things have happened, you know—and you found him a man of decent position, able to help you and push you on in the world, and eager to make what atonement he could for the past; would you hold out your hand to him and be known as his son?"

Philip's face grew strangely set and cold. He did not see anything strange in the financier's questions. He thought them prompted by affection for the girl who was his niece by marriage.

"No," he answered curtly. "I would take no money nor patronage from a man who had left my mother to starve for all he cared. I would just satisfy myself that I had the right to an honest name, which I could offer to the woman I love, and then I would forget that the man existed."

The financier turned towards the window and gazed out into the street, and when he spoke again his voice had an odd note in it, as of a man crying out when his fingers are losing their grasp on the last straw that links him with life.

"Are you not hard? There may be extenuating circumstances."

A short laugh burst from the younger man.

"No, Mr. Johnson; no circumstances can be so extenuating that they can forgive a man for sending a woman adrift as my father did my mother. But I must be off now," he said in a different tone; "I have much to do with my time. I hope Lady Violet will be better soon."

Mr. Johnson did not reply, and Philip thought he had not heard him. His face was still turned to the window, and he appeared lost in thought. "Good day, sir," Philip said again.

Without turning round the financier said curtly: "Good day." And feeling himself dismissed, Philip slowly made his way down the long room.

When he reached the door, Mr. Johnson wheeled suddenly round. "Philip!"—and then he pulled himself up with an awkward laugh—"Good-bye, Mr. Nullius—forgive my abstraction. I—I hope you will soon be able to change your name from Nullius, 'the son of no one,' to some other more happy cognomen!"

As the door closed upon the young curate the financier fell with a groan into a chair. His face was ashen, and he looked very old and burdened as with a weight that hung heavy on him.

"Lost!" he muttered hoarsely, "lost to me as though he were dead! But I will make amends—I cannot divulge my secret yet—he would refuse my help, and that must not be. I will make over a deed of gift to him, anonymously, under some other name, and then when the time is more ripe I may win him over to me; once his regard is mine, the rest should be easy. I have never yet tried to win affection in vain—and I must—oh, Heaven!" he burst out passionately, "I must win the love of my son. The want of it has taken the place of all else."

FORTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Breaking of the Storm Cloud.

The following day the financier went into the City to look up his broker. He had neglected his correspondence for a long time, and since he had dismissed his secretary, Edward Day, he had let matters go with a fine indifference. But now he meant to place things on a very different scale. The Ruby Duncoran shares had all been bought up as soon as the public had learnt that the great millionaire had headed the list of directors, and the financier intended to buy other shares in the name of Philip Nullius that would put money at the back of the son who, had he known it, would have repulsed him with scorn and loathing for the sake of the dead mother that stood between them.

Caleb J. Johnson reproached himself for having been too lax in the arrangement of his affairs, and he remembered, with a cynical grin at his own expense, that he had not turned the leaves of a financial paper for quite a long time. In his position of a made man he was invulnerable, and the winds of finance that blew, now hot, now cold, could not stem the course that ran pure gold for him.

When he reached Messrs. Lobb and Rusch, the world-famous brokers, he noticed that mingling with the glances of admiration the clerks usually bestowed upon him there was a new, almost imperceptible, atmosphere of subdued and chastened sorrow.

"Ah, Mr. Johnson!" Lobb, the senior partner, said, greeting him heartily. "I am glad to think that your financial bark is too tough to be turned aside from its course by the first adverse wind that blows."

The financier raised his brows. "What wind is that, Lobb? I must confess that of late weeks I have let you take matters into your hands—I have been too busy to even think of the success of the Ruby Duncoran."

Mr. Lobb looked at him curiously. "Oh, that's going very well," he answered drily. "But do you remember my wiring to you about the South African 'Dancing Girl' mine, just before the slump set in, in fact, when it was threatened? I telephoned to you as well to Park Lane, and to my surprise your secretary, Mr. Day, sent your instructions that I was to stick to them instead of selling out at the price they were then quoted at. I was surprised, I must confess," he went on, "but I was obliged to obey your instructions, and a few days later the mine was flooded, and, of course, you have sustained a monetary loss, Mr. Johnson, that would have taken away the ground from under the feet of any other man than yourself."

"My secretary," Mr. Johnson repeated slowly. "He sent you instructions that you acted upon without further inquiry?"

The broker reddened. "I certainly thought you were there, Mr. Johnson, or, of course, I would have hesitated to act upon any orders but those coming straight from you."

"Oh, yes—yes," the financier interrupted quickly, with a deprecating smile on his large mouth. "I was there all right; Mr. Day acted on my instructions. I was rather hopeful of those shares—even then."

"By-the-way," Mr. Lobb continued, "that Mr. Day has a head on his shoulders, and no mistake! I have just discovered that while he has been your secretary he has been buying and selling shares with remarkable cuteness, but what I can't quite understand," he went on thoughtfully, "is why he should have sold out himself that very day some of the selfsame shares in the 'Dancing Girl' mine, just after I had rung you up on the telephone. It looks to me rather fishy, Mr. Johnson, although if you are satisfied, it's not my place to interfere. But if I were you I would keep my eyes on that secretary. He is a little too smart."

Caleb J. Johnson, the man who had never been "done" in his life, laughed harshly. He remembered the day very well now. It was the one after he had dismissed the secretary from his service, and he had probably returned and, out of revenge, had sent those instructions that had so nearly beggared him—while profiting by the information himself.

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Yes, certainly Mr. Edward Day had a decided talent for winning the odd trick, and it galled the proud man that the person who had scored off him three times running had been a beginner in life's race instead of an old veteran. Yes, Edward Day was very smart, and a smouldering rage rose up in the financier's heart as he realised that the outcast he had befriended was not only a liar and a forger, but that he had made a very decent income in a moment's hazard while trying to beggar the man who had dealt leniently by him in the first place. Then the financier thought of the plans he had made for his own son, Philip Nullius, and he reviled savagely under his breath the cunning of the ex-secretary who had outwitted him.

When he left the brokers he realised that he had gone down a degree in the estimation of his former admirers. But that was not the only blow the financier was to receive. Two days later he dropped another small fortune, and again on inquiry he found that his ex-secretary had been before him, and while doing his best to ruin the man who had let him off easily, had laid the foundation of a fortune for himself. It was a few days after the second blow to his vanity as a company promoter and man of business, that Mr. Johnson met Edward Day coming out of the doors of one of the most important brokers in the City. The older man would have cut him, but with an insolent laugh Edward Day stood in front of him and said:

"Hallo, Johnson, old man! You seem to have had a change of luck since we parted. Don't you think you had better get hold of a smart secretary who can keep you on the lines—you are losing your head, you know—you won't be able to stand many more such losses! And once your credit goes in the City, the end will soon follow, and then think how awful it will be for Lady Violet!"

"Confound you!" burst from the financier savagely. He was thunderstruck by the unutterable insolence of the smiling, youthful face that mocked him by its assumption of pitying superiority. "Get out of my way, you young hound, or I'll kick you out."

The other man laughed. "Oh, come, Johnson—all's fair in love and war, you know," he sneered gaily. "I want to have your congratulations on both events in my life—I have won in warfare in the City, and also in Love in the country."

"What do you mean?" and the quick, suspicious eyes of the financier flashed into the smiling blue ones of the latest man of finance.

"I mean that I am engaged to the most beautiful and the most fair of ladies, Marcella Rust to wit," was the reply that sent the financier staggering against the wall in amazement.

"You infernal young liar!"

Edward Day laughed amusedly.

"I have just come from the Court, and return there again when I have attended to some little business matters connected with some shares in which I am interested," a mocking note in his voice stung the silent financier. He recognised in it the contempt for the man who had let himself be done by an amateur in the money world. "You must be proud, Johnson," the cutting voice went on, "that my very short stay with you has made me into so good a financier. I have profited by your example."

"Profited by your thefts, you mean," burst from the man suddenly. "You are a born thief, Day, as incapable of understanding the claims of gratitude as you are of loving anyone but yourself! And as for your lying boast about Marcella Rust, let me ask first two questions that may concern you."

Edward Day raised his brows superciliously. "What are they? Look sharp, anyway; I have an engagement."

"Has Mr. Philip Nullius been acquainted with the fact of your engagement to Miss Rust?" the financier began slowly; "and also where is the girl with whom you were always about before coming to me as my secretary? Does Marcella know about her? I shall immediately inform her of it and do all I can to stop this rumour."

Edward's fair, effeminate face grew livid, and a patchy, grey-like shadow showed round his mouth.

(Continued overleaf.)

Wesley's Theory of Earthquakes.

"*The cause of earthquakes,*" said John Wesley, "*is sin.*" How he reasoned it out is not easy for the average sinner to see. The idea of such a tremendous physical convulsion as an earthquake resulting from the violation of moral law is nonsense in the eyes of modern science. The reverse is more often true. "The cause of a deal of sin," said Hannah More, "is bile." *That* we can see through. Bile poisons the brain, and the brain is the organ of the mind. It is certain that all the earthquakes that ever shook this wicked world never did half the damage that is done every year by sleepy stomachs and lazy livers. Generals have lost battles, statesmen have been beaten in diplomacy, workmen have been thrown out of jobs, clergymen have preached poor sermons, and husbands and wives have quarrelled for no reason under the sun but a "touch of liver complaint." The crust of society can never lie quiet with such a force as biliousness under it.

Writing of a time five years ago, a lady asserts that she had not strength to work. She suffered acutely with a sharp stabbing pain down the right side and between the shoulder-blades. Her appetite failed, of course, for Nature never calls for food when she is not in a condition to use it. Still, a trifle of sustenance must be taken. The lady took it, digested a bit of it, and suffered great distress from the presence of the rest in the torpid stomach, when indeed, it was not vomited, as was often the case. We need scarcely add that her sleep was disturbed and failed to refresh her. To quote her own words, "I arose in the morning with a splitting headache and a feeling of utter weakness and prostration. My tongue was furred, I was tired, lacked energy, became irritable and bad tempered, and could have quarrelled with my best friend."

Now, what sort of a life is this to lead? What is anybody good for while in such a state as that? What would you wager on your own success in business if you had to pit yourself against other people's sharpness, while you had to fight with a poison-soaked head and a stomach that refused its breakfast? Not a crooked sixpence.

Our correspondent continued: "The doctor told me I was suffering from an enlarged liver, but his medicines gave me no relief, and I began to give up all hope of ever getting better, when I was advised by a friend to try Mother Seigel's Syrup. Before I had finished the first bottle my health improved. As I continued taking the syrup my health was gradually restored, and I have had no recurrence of my complaint since. If ever I feel run down I take a dose or two of the Syrup, and it seems to put new life into me. Signed, Agnes Gatley, 3 Boundary Terrace, Moss Nook, Nr. Cheadle. Ches."

The success of Seigel's Syrup in curing this malady is due to the fact that it goes straight as an arrow to the very root and source of it, the paralysed digestion.

Whatever may be the true theory of Earthquakes, we may be sure of one thing anyway—namely, that bile in the blood, arising from an arrest of the digestive function, is the hot-bed of more sorrow, pain, and death than all the powers at the interior of the earth ever scattered over its surface.

An Old Fallacy.

People sometimes talk of being happy as a king, yet to serve as the target for the revolver practice of every crank who nurses a grievance is not quite the life a wise man would choose. The man who enjoys good health, if not already happy, is certainly on the high road to happiness. Whoever lacks health lacks everything. "Some years ago my life was rendered miserable by indigestion and biliousness," says Mr. Harris, of Market Hotel, Birstall, near Leeds. "I was always low and weak—too ill to work well, not ill enough to lay up. Whatever I ate caused me pain, though my appetite was very small and my food carefully chosen. After other treatment had failed, Mother Seigel's Syrup cured me—made a new man of me. I know of no medicine equal to it."

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"I don't know what you are talking about," he began blusteringly, when a man coming out of a bank close by stopped suddenly and looked at him with a curiously mocking expression in his big, humorous-looking eyes, and the sight of the stranger froze the words on Edward's lips. He turned his back abruptly, and before the financier had any idea that he was going, he had hailed a passing hansom. As he sprang into it, Mr. Johnson, who had not observed the mutual glance of recognition between the two men, drew back sharply into the shadow. A man was standing on the footboard of the hansom that his ex-secretary had entered.

"Why," he murmured, "that's Rayne. I'll bet a thousand pounds to one! What does he want with Day, I wonder? I'm glad he did not see me, but I suppose he has gone after that young blackguard for information. Yet how could he know that I had changed my mind. I sent him the money I 'borrowed' so long ago, and now owe him nothing."

He strolled on, then a flash of light illumined the dark corners of his brain, and he remembered what had so puzzled him. "Why the young cur's forgeries were made payable to a man called Rayne! By Jove! that's it. Rayne has the unscrupulous young thief in his power, and it's a case of the blackmailer blackmailed." He laughed grimly, and one or two acquaintances passing him, thought that they had never seen the face of the well known "gold king" look so savage and haggard. They attributed it to his inexplicable losses in two great deals, and remembered that the name of Caleb J. Johnson did not stand so high in the City as that of younger and more daring men. Like all great "stars" his place in the financial firmament was being usurped by a man whose young brain was showing remarkable gifts of finance worthy of watching.

In the meantime the man on the footboard of the hansom had signed to the driver to stop; then he leant forward to the white, angry-faced man leaning back against the padded leather and laughed softly: "So—wanted to slip off, eh? Afraid to meet the man who, by lifting one finger, could put you in a cell. That's not wise, Mr. Edward—Day! Ah," as the sullen face flushed suddenly, "you did not know that I should find out your real name, did you, although you signed that of the financier, Caleb J. Johnson, on the cheques you gave me! You seem to cultivate as many crimes as you can, Mr. Day. Now, perhaps, since you are making such a pile, you will kindly let me have five thousand."

"Confound you!" Edward muttered, between his teeth; "I shall do nothing of the kind. Get off!"

The other raised his hand. "I shall call the nearest policeman and give you in charge, then. Choose!"

Day bit his lip and gazed at the ever-recurring traffic without speaking. After a pause he said slowly: "Very well, then. I'll give you a cheque of my own this time. Wait a moment. What's that?"

As the man turned his head in the direction Edward had indicated, the latter leant forward, and one swift movement sent the man off his uncertain footing into the road, just as a motor-car was approaching.

Edward flung up the flap of the hansom. "Quick—Paddington—I've a train to catch! Five pounds if you get there in time. Stop for no one!"

FORTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.
The Listening Woman.

"It amounts to this, Rust; we must get the girl away and hide her before any attempt is made to take her from us. Lady Violet and Johnson, to say nothing of that cleric, Nullius, will not be put off much longer, and once Marcella is in their hands, good-bye to her marrying me!"

Sir Cyprian Rust smiled slightly. Edward Day had just arrived from London, and the baronet was not ill-pleased to see him back. He had been strangely unlike himself for some time, and even his devoted servants had wondered at his nervous irritability; the old buoyant expression had left his blue eyes, and the slamming of a door made him jump like a cat

"Is that so?" he said, quietly eyeing the flushed face of the man he had taken into a sort of partnership regarding his enmity towards Philip Nullius, the lover of his daughter, who still lay ill upstairs. "I don't fancy that they will succeed, but we will arrange something by which we may give them a little trouble."

"Take her nurse with you," Edward suggested, "in case they buy her over, and the sooner we go, the sooner we shall succeed in outwitting them. Then I can marry Marcella, while you give her away. Get her down to that place where you say the curate was, and when once Marcella is my wife I can laugh at them all!"

Sir Cyprian smiled amusedly. There was something in the unscrupulous young man before him that reminded him of his own youth. Like he had been, he was a free-lance, an Ishmael with every man's hand against him, and Sir Cyprian had a certain respect for a man who could, through sheer force of will, rise superior to the lot Fate had cast for him; whether the means by which he rose were honest or otherwise, it mattered not to him. And there was the sense of dealing a hard blow to the pride of Lady Violet in forcing Marcella into marrying the man they both hated most, and at the same time cheating Philip Nullius—the man whom he feared and hated above all others—of the girl he loved.

"Are you sure the nurse is reliable?" Edward asked again.

Sir Cyprian laughed. "Very—I hold a certain secret of hers that would make it awkward were she anything else than faithful."

Day raised his brows. The secrets of a nurse did not interest him in the least. He had too many of his own.

"I am making a good position for myself 'on 'Change' now," he said arrogantly, "and can afford to give Marcella a decent home. Remember, Rust, if she is well enough, we must get away to-day."

"All will be arranged," was the quiet reply. "Marcella shall be your wife within twenty-four hours, Day!"

The window was half open, and the blinds were drawn, so neither men saw a white, fair face, with an ugly scar on the delicate temple, pressed against the open venetians, listening to each word that came to her wafted on the mild Spring air. As they talked the woman's face grew hard, and the scarlet line that marked her mouth parted in a slow smile of scornful hate.

"In twenty-four hours Marcella shall be his wife!" she murmured; then raising her eyes she looked at a light that shone from one of the bedrooms. "Dear," and the whisper sounded like a sob on the night air, "I shall save you from that; at least, I can spare you that shame!"

And inside the room the two men discussed their plans, which, unknown to them, had a listener in the woman outside.

Presently she stole away, and, entering the Court, crept to the door that communicated with the forbidden corridor. Under the guise of friendship, which she knew so well how to assume, she had won the confidence of Deacon, who, now that the young mistress was confined to her room, was not so careful as of old with the keys. Lottie found the door locked, but a search under the rug placed her in possession of the key. She entered the wing, and then locked the door on the inside. Feeling her way softly, she came presently to the room where Marcella had twice seen the pitiful woman whose once bright mind was like a glass on a misty day, blurred and indistinct. She entered, and the woman, whose white face was more frail-looking than when Marcella had once seen it, rose timidly at her approach and looked at her with tear-dimmed eyes.

"I have come from her," Lottie said, speaking as one would to a child, "and she says if you do all I tell you, and make no noise, you will get away from here to where people will be good to you."

"The pretty lady says that," and the wan face smiled faintly. "I will do all she says, because I want to get away from here. I want to see the fields again, and show 'Dolly' the flowers," and as she spoke Lottie noticed the large wax doll in her arms.

(Another grand instalment of this serial next week.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

A Parent Problem.

"WHAT is to be done?" writes "B. R. T.," "in the following case? I am engaged to a girl, and in a position to marry her. But her people, though they have not been in a position to object to the match, as she is over age, have never invited me to their house, and never expressed a wish to know me. The girl always keeps silent on the matter of her parents. Now, how can I marry her, unless her people alter their attitude towards me?"

* * * * *

They seem to be most curious people. Have they given formal consent to your engagement? If so, surely some kind of understanding has been made as to the date of the ceremony? That being understood, they must be making some arrangements for it to take place. That they have not invited you to the house is mysterious. But that is not altogether unusual in parents. Possibly, it is not you personally they object to, but the idea of the girl getting married at all. I advise you to write formally to the father or mother, telling them that you and the girl wish to fix a date for the wedding. You will then get a reply consenting or otherwise. Upon that reply you must base your conduct. If it is cordial, then I should certainly endeavour to pay them a visit; if otherwise, then evidently they do not wish for any social relations with you. You must put up with that as best you can, contenting yourself with such visits as are necessary just before the wedding.

Six Years and no Proposal.

"I HAVE been keeping company with a young lady for six years," writes "SEYMOUR," "but not being in a position to ask her to marry, I did not propose to her. Some time ago she failed to answer my letters, and I later on discovered that she was walking out with another young man. I am very much in love with her, and although my love has been returned, I am not certain she cares for me now. Perhaps she has grown tired of waiting."

* * * * *

I should think so indeed! Six years, and you have never said a word in the nature of a proposal? Now, if she loved you ever so much, don't you think any girl would expect a man to say something on the delicate subject of marriage before that time? I am not surprised that she is going out with another man. Now, don't suppose that I am harsh on you. No doubt, as you say, you have not been in a position to propose marriage, which shows that you have wished to deal straightforwardly with the girl. But when you ask me to sympathise with you, I fear I cannot. A girl can claim her freedom if a young man, after six years of courtship, says no word about marriage. It would be expecting too much from her to bind her to you, unless you can give some pledge. Write and tell her your exact prospects in the future. If you see a chance of making her a proposal in a year's time, ask her if she will trust you till then.

Young Married Man and Old Friends.

THE position of the young married man is very difficult. "G. P." asks: "Ought I to give up my old friends altogether. For instance, my old football club, which I gave up on marriage, has occasional 'smokers,' to which I am asked. I have declined many of them, but now and again I think I should like to revive some of my old acquaintances. Yet my wife is always terribly upset if I am away from her in the evenings, even for an hour or so. What is the right thing for me to do?"

* * * * *

It is very hard indeed to say, "G. P." You have taken a girl away from her old home, and for your early married life you are her all-in-all. You represent everything to her. If you are away during your leisure hours she feels slighted and lonely. That being the case, to go to such affairs as you mention may seem unkind to her. That is her view of the case, and you have done well to respect it. But my own opinion is that a man should be allowed a certain amount of freedom. Certainly, he should not drop his old friends. A casual visit to such a "smoker" as you mention would do you good. I should quite kindly tell your wife that you wish to go to the affair, and if possible, arrange for a relation of hers to be with her while you are away. Don't leave her alone. In time, you should accustom her to your being out sometimes, and she will not notice it. Don't be away too often, but it is quite right that you should once in a while have a little enjoyment on your own account.

An Extraordinary Young Man.

"JENNY" has a candid lover, whom, I must say, I rather like. The two are devoted to each other, and have no idea whatever of parting. The other day, however, he came in and told "JENNY" that he had a dreadful secret to tell her. When she asked him what it was he said: "For the moment I am madly in love with another girl." It turned out that he had been paying attentions for awhile to somebody else. "JENNY" was amazed at first, but the young man next said, "But it will be all over in a fortnight at the outside. I don't think I am really in love with her, but for the present she is everything to me." "JENNY" asks me what I have to say to such extraordinary conduct.

* * * * *

It is not impossible, "JENNY," for a man's affections to be really given to one girl, and yet for awhile to have a passion for another. As your love seems to be of the sensible kind, it seems most likely that this might occur in your lover's case. As he has been candid enough to tell you the whole affair, don't you think you might trust him? Such an affair as his courtship of the other girl may be nothing more nor less than a huge joke. In the fortnight he may be thoroughly ashamed of himself for having been so foolish, and will come back to you repentant. I wouldn't advise every girl to be so tolerant towards a faithless lover, but in your case, he seems such a frank sort of person, that I really should believe what he says as to its only being a passing fancy, and let matters run their natural course.

Young Men who Stare.

DON'T worry about the young men who stare at you, "R. E. P." You say you are pretty. Well, young men stare at a pretty girl out of mere natural curiosity. It does not mean that they are in love with her, or even wish to make her acquaintance. If one of the staring young men does want to know you, wait until he shows it in a more definite way.

Cynthia.

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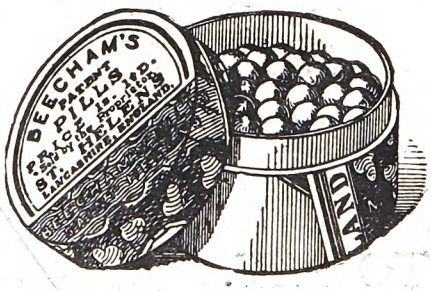

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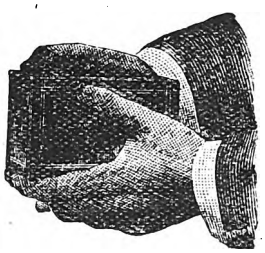

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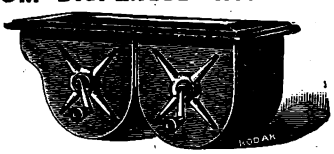

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SHORT STORIES

No. 794.] WEEK ENDING MARCH 19TH, 1904. [ONE PENNY.

The Geisha's Choice.

Telling How a Japanese Girl Had to Choose Between a British Sailor and a Japanese Soldier, and How She Sent One Lover on a Terrible Journey.

Containing the Incident Depicted on the Cover.

"WHAT is the matter with you, my dear fellow?"

The question was asked in perfect English and with but the slightest trace of a foreign accent, yet the inquirer was unmistakably Japanese. His name was Hosaki. He was a man of forty, of striking features, dressed in European costume.

He addressed a younger man than himself. This was Lieutenant Ralph Thornton, of His Britannic Majesty's Navy; he was not more than twenty-five, with frankness and courage written on every part of a handsome face. A captivating face, as Hosaki admitted to himself; an attractive man altogether. It did one's heart good to have a grip of that hand, which could be as soft as silk when touching that of a lady, and yet could grip a man's with a force that made one wonder if one's fingers were intact after the ordeal. Ralph Thornton was staring vacantly in front, with knitted brows, and his partly-smoked cigar had gone out. He aroused himself with a start as Hosaki's words fell upon his ears.

"Eh? Er—I really didn't hear what you said!" he remarked in confusion.

"You appear to be in dreamland, my friend!" returned Hosaki, smiling gravely. "You were as lively when you came to Tokyo as you were when I knew you in your own great country; but during the last few days you have been dreaming. Are you worrying lest your country should be drawn into the war which little Japan is about to make against the northern trespasser, Russia?"

Ralph Thornton's lip curled scornfully. "Why *worrying?*" he asked. "Have we not shown that we can play our part, friend Hosaki?"

"Yes!" The word came emphatically, yet quietly. "Ah!" continued Hosaki, his eyes kindling. "One day—one day the glorious little Land of the Rising Sun will be as great as Britain has made herself! But enough! To speak plainly, something is troubling you, Thornton. What is it?"

"Oh, I think not!" cried Ralph; but his face flushed a little.

Hosaki's keen eyes were fixed full on the Lieutenant's face; a gleam of understanding came over the countenance of the Jap.

"I think I can guess, and I am not surprised, although I think you are foolish, my friend!" he said slowly. "You have been thus since you saw Ashkita! The geisha has captivated you!"

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"And what if she has?" inquired Thornton defiantly. His secret was discovered, and he faced his interrogator boldly.

"I think you are foolish!" came quietly from Hosaki's lips.

"Have you anything to say against her?" asked Ralph haughtily.

"Nothing!" was the emphatic rejoinder. "She is lovely, accomplished, pure; she is of noble descent, a granddaughter of one of the feudal lords who gave up his lands in the Revolution and died poor. Ashkita has to earn a living, and she does it well and honestly by singing and playing. She would make a good wife, but are you serious in thinking that you would wed one of the women of my race?"

Ralph Thornton reflected. It had hardly occurred to him to think of aught but of his love for the lovely girl whom he had seen for the first time nearly a week previously in a house in the southern Ku district, and whom he had seen every evening since, although Hosaki did not know this last fact.

"Yes, I would!" he said with deliberation. "I confess that I love her; it is no infatuation, for I have had time to think. I am not imbued with the prejudice of many Europeans against your race, Hosaki; your people have proved themselves to be great! Moreover, Ashkita is not a mere automaton, as some of your women are—I mean no offence, but you recognise the truth of my remarks, for you have not allowed all your women to have fair play. Ashkita is a woman whom anyone, unless he had no heart or possessed one of stone, could not help loving. She is a descendant of a Daimyo, and in our Society at home she would take a prominent place."

"I believe all that!" assented Hosaki gravely. "Yet I question the wisdom of your choice. Think well before you decide. Remember the ordeal to which she would be subjected if you placed her in English Society. You must reflect before you break her heart!"

"Hosaki, I have seen her every day since that evening!" said Thornton, rising and placing his hand on his friend's shoulder. "Whenever I go abroad in the streets of your busy capital, which resembles a European rather than an Eastern city, I look for her. In the glorious five-mile avenue which you call Mukojima, in the jinrickshas and the modern trams and omnibuses, on the banks of the Sumida, everywhere. The Spring is coming, and I may not be here when the cherry-trees bloom and you hold your pretty festival in honour of the blossom, but I shall picture Ashkita and the cherry-blossom together, a fitting pair. That is," he added quickly, and with a sharp inhalation of his breath, "if I cannot persuade her to come with me when I go!"

Hosaki smoked his strange little Japanese pipe; his imperturbable face betrayed nothing of the workings of his mind.

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"So be it!" he said suddenly. "I have told you! You will remember, also, that she is not of your religion; that she is of the old religion, which you would call heathen! Let us go out."

They left the house and made their way to the Government quarter of the city. It was a quaint scene, for Tokyo still has much of the ancient, in dress and manners, among the modernity which has taken possession of it. In the course of their stroll a jinricksha passed them, and they saw Ashkita in the curious two-wheeled carriage with its human draught animal. She waved a salutation to them and was gone.

"Is she not lovely, divine?" demanded Ralph Thornton enthusiastically.

His companion assented; there was no gainsaying the beauty of the girl, for she was little more. It would have been difficult not to agree with Ralph's assertion that Ashkita would become a queen of Society if the opportunity were given to her.

"I must see her again, see her where I can speak to her!" declared Ralph Thornton decisively. "Can you help me, Hosaki?"

"Yes. I will conduct you to where you will see her," said Hosaki, with his usual gravity. "But," he added, not without a sign of hesitation, "suppose that there is another who loves her, and suppose that she——"

"You know my motto!" cried the Lieutenant, with true sailorly spirit. "I will not go round the corner to meet troubles, and I trust to my own resources to get through them when they do come. Whoever he is, if he exists, I shall pit myself against him."

Nevertheless, like a true lover, he could not prevent a feeling of uneasiness during the rest of the day, and that feeling was increased when, on seeing Ashkita in the evening, he intuitively detected his rival in Captain Nakamurah Iyayogo, a dashing military officer of a crack Japanese regiment. The revelation was none the less disagreeable from the fact that Iyayogo was an old friend, whom he had also met in England. It is some satisfaction to a lover when his rival is a stranger, because he feels fully at liberty to hate the fellow.

There was a large party, and several accomplished ladies were entertaining the guests. Ashkita was in a secluded corner when Thornton interrupted the quiet conversation between Captain Iyayogo and the geisha.

"You have come again!" said Ashkita, her face lighting up, as Thornton placed himself by her side, after having exchanged a hearty greeting with his old military acquaintance. "And have you any news of this terrible Russian Bear? Captain Iyayogo tells me that war is about to begin."

"What is she worrying herself about him for?" thought the sailor in vexation. "I suppose she thinks he will get killed! He is a good fellow, and a splendid soldier, I should say, but I don't want him here!" Aloud, he answered: "I have no news. I do not desire any, for an outbreak of war would mean that I must leave here, and——"

He did not finish, but a look more eloquent than spoken message caused Ashkita to drop her eyes and Iyayogo to knit his brows.

"War would take me away also," said the last mentioned. "Would that grieve you?"

A quick uplifting of the geisha's eyes to meet his, and then Ashkita laughed to hide her agitation.

"I should be sorry to lose you both, you are my good friends!" she smiled, speaking in Japanese, but so distinctly that the young sailor had no difficulty in understanding.

As she dropped her eyes again the two men shot angry glances at one another, but the geisha noticed this and made a move towards another part of the immense room.

"Let us go with the others, sir!" she said in pretty English to Ralph. And she turned to Iyayogo without observing that her attractive style of pronouncing his mother tongue had heaped a little more fuel on the flames of love.

Lieutenant Thornton, with the alertness of a British sailor, watched for his opportunity, saw it, and seized it. Before Captain Iyayogo realised it, Ashkita was being guided to another corner by his rival, and he himself found that he was button-holed by a comrade in arms.

"Ashkita!" cried Ralph ardently. "Why do you look so vexed at the thought of Captain Iyayogo going away? He surely does not love you as I do! Listen to me!" he cried, in an impetuous undertone. "You have taken my heart from me; can you give me yours? Will you be my wife, will you come with me to England, the friend of your country, where you would be a very queen of beauty among women? I can give you wealth and position, but I know you do not want these."

Ashkita was unable to follow all the words of this passionate appeal, but the tone of voice and the look in the Lieutenant's face supplied the deficiency. Her bosom heaved, and she hid her face for a moment or two in her hands.

"You do not mean what you say, I fear you do not!" she cried appealingly. "Why do you torment me with insincere words?"

She looked boldly at him now, hope and fear mingling in that gaze.

"I mean it, every word!" vowed Ralph warmly. "I have been in love with you since the first day I saw you. Will you come with me, Ashkita?"

He bent forward eagerly, pressing for a reply. Ashkita sighed heavily.

"I cannot believe that you would care for me, that you would like to stand by my side in your English Society! And I am sad of heart for another reason! But you cannot understand! No, leave me and forget me!"

"Never!" he whispered almost fiercely in his love for this beautiful Eastern girl. "I would face anyone, anything for you, Ashkita! I would die for you!"

She interrupted him with a gesture.

Leave me now!" she intreated. "I do not know, I cannot think! It is too difficult!"

Hosaki and Captain Iyayogo were approaching. The latter wore a smile on his face, and he tried to hide his annoyance at Ralph's having had a private talk with Ashkita.

"Let us be going, friend!" said Hosaki, taking Ralph by the arm. "Come!" he whispered, as the sailor would have resisted; "we must be going, and you will have to leave Japan, as you are still in the British service, for war is as good as declared!"

"Is it really so?" queried Lieutenant Thornton sadly. "Then I wish indeed that I were in the service of Britain's ally, for I cannot bear to think of leaving Ashkita!"

Hosaki led him gently away, and Ralph had the annoyance in his turn, of seeing his rival in full possession of the field.

"Why do you encourage him?" demanded Captain Iyayogo, almost angrily. "Ashkita, whom do you love? Is it possible that you can prefer a man from the West to one of your own race? Ashkita," he went on, in a soft, caressing tone, "Ashkita, is my love for you all in vain? Listen to me, let me plead with you!"

"Nakamurah," said the girl, placing a delicate finger on his arm, the mere touch of which sent a thrill through his entire frame, "he is brave, he is devoted to me! He says he would die for me, if I called upon him to do so! How can I help admiring him? He comes of a great race and he would take me to live among the highest in his own land! Here I am only Ashkita. Yes, I admire him, and admiration, like pity, is near to love!"

"It cannot be, it shall not be so!" he burst forth passionately. "I care not if you are only Ashkita! But you are of noble birth, and I am just as able to give you position as he, and that position will be with your own people! Ah, I see that you waver! Which of us do you really love?"

"I cannot say, I will not say!" she cried in anguish of spirit. "War is declared; I caught Hosaki's words! And I am troubled! Our country is fighting for its freedom; if it loses this fight, where will it be? Tell me!" she added impulsively, "would *you* be willing to risk your life for me?"

"Yes!" he said simply, but decisively. There was no bravado about it, but there was no mistaking the intensity of the tone in which it was uttered. "What will life be without you?"

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"Then come to me to-morrow! I have something on my mind. You know where! And bring the Englishman with you. Nay, be not angry! You are friends, and you are both good men and true. Come together!"

Captain Iyayogo bowed and left her. His heart throbbed at the thought of war, because for nine years it had been expected, and now Japan had the chance of driving the aggressor backwards! But his fierce joy was tempered by his love for Ashkita; he was troubled, he had a rival who was likely to be successful! For a moment he felt that he could hate the handsome Britisher, but his sterling better nature prevailed immediately.

"He is brave and honourable! I like him!" he murmured. "We will fight the battle of love fairly and the defeated one will take his defeat gallantly. I know him, and I can emulate the spirit of the British!"

Ashkita was sad and wept several times during the ensuing twenty-four hours; after the manner of her own religion, she prayed, and turned her face in the direction of the sacred volcanic mountain that towered into the clouds and from which the war-god, the first of the sacred line of the Mikados, came to rule Nippon. She started in fear and turned to fly when, at the appointed hour, the two friends and rivals paid the visit which she had asked for.

"Can I face them? What am I about to do?" she moaned. "Yet it must be done!"

She nerved herself for what was to follow, and met them with a gracious smile that had something wan about it, in spite of herself; she welcomed them, and then addressed them in a firm voice:

"War is declared. I feel that it will be a great struggle, and one in which our land will require all the help it can obtain! I am of the old religion; both Westerns and my own modernised compatriots may laugh at me, but I firmly believe in the things which were taught me! I believe that the gods will listen to one who will go to the top of one of the sacred mountains which still burns with the holy fire.

"I know that you Europeans call them volcanoes, but they are more than that! You do not understand! To him who will go to the top of such a mountain, of which we have yet many, and who will descend into the hollow and offer up the prayer which I will teach him, to that one will come a certain death, but his action will bring an answer to that prayer! My prayer is that Japan shall win! Alas, I am not strong enough to climb, and I turn to one of you and ask that he will do this for me, that I may save the country I love because it gave me birth! Which of you loves me well enough to die for me?"

Iyayogo understood the awful significance of her request immediately, but Thornton had to reflect ere it dawned upon him. Poor child of superstition! How he would teach her that such beliefs were nonsense, gently, tenderly, as he would a little child! How sweet would life be with her, training her simple nature to a knowledge of what was real!

Ashkita waited, anxiously, breathlessly, for a sign from either. The two men looked at one another with understanding glances; it was the crucial test! Each had sworn that he would die for her, if need be, and she was calling for a fulfilment of that vow! It was death on the volcanic mountain, or life with Ashkita!

"Do you wish me to go?" asked both men simultaneously.

Ashkita wrung her hands in despair.

"We are both ready!" said Thornton calmly. "Choose between us! Send to his doom the one you love less, and let the other enjoy bliss with you! It is for you to choose! The one whom you do not love well enough to marry had better die, for life would be worse than death without you, and he will at least be doing you a last service."

Nakamurah Iyayogo bowed his head in agreement with Thornton's words.

"Choose!" he said simply. "We are ready! It will prove our love!"

It was a terrible dilemma for Ashkita; in her extremity she could not decide, for it seemed to her that she loved both! Yet she must propitiate the gods—it was necessary! The fate of both brave men depended on her answer. Whom would she choose?

Both men watched her with that awful mingling of hope and anxiety that fills the heart of men who are waiting to hear a verdict that will send them to death or release them to live a life of happiness; yet there was a sentiment of rivalry even to be sent on a fatal errand, and an observer might have been inclined to think, from the attitude of the men, that they were about to fight for the privilege!

Ashkita seemed for a moment to lean towards Thornton, and the men listened for her words; was it to ask him to go or stay?

"It is hard for me to decide!" she cried. "Yet," she placed her hand on Thornton's arm, "I must send Nakamurah!"

Iyayogo started in spite of himself; he had expected, from her last movement, that she was about to send Thornton gently to his death and give herself up to the love of her own countryman; and now——

"Be it so!" he said, resigning himself with a great effort and presenting a stoical demeanour. Even although he had lost faith in the old superstition, yet he loved this girl so deeply that he would die for her, as he had said. "I will go! Success to Japan, and happiness to you both!"

Thornton involuntarily stretched out his hand, and the two men exchanged a firm grip. Then Captain Nakamurah Iyayogo turned on his heel, and with a low bow to Ashkita, went forth to meet his fate!

"I have sent him to his death!" she cried, bursting into tears. And she sank into the arms of Ralph Thornton!

Ralph caressed her and tried to soothe her, but it was quite two hours later when he was able to leave her; Ashkita's eyes were red with weeping, and her face appeared to have assumed a fixed cast of melancholy.

He was in a whirl as he returned to his own lodgings in the house of Hosaki. It was weird, terribly weird! It was foolish superstition and a man had been sent to his doom to gratify it! Yet it was hardly that; it was that a man had gone willingly to his death to prove his love for a woman!

"It requires more pluck to do that than to win the V.C. in the excitement of battle!" muttered Thornton. "And, by Jove, I envy him the chance of showing his grit!"

Three days passed, and Thornton could not see Ashkita; he wished to ask her to accompany him, for he was leaving Japan, and to be his wife in fulfilment of her promise, but it appeared like gloating over his friend's untimely end. And then there came reluctantly into his mind the thought that Ashkita was sorry for her choice! That uncontrollable fit of weeping! Had she, like other women, discovered the real state of her feelings by the revealing agency of loss?

He gained admission to her this time, and the red eyes, indicative of recent weeping, confirmed his suspicions. His heart seemed to turn to stone. She loved Iyayogo, and he was dead.

"Ashkita," he said tenderly, "you loved him better than me; you were mistaken?"

"Yes!" she cried. "And I killed him!"

"I wish I could take his place," said Thornton, and he meant it. "Perhaps he can be saved!" he cried, a moment later. "I will use every effort!"

She shook her head sadly, but he hurried from the room and into the street. Hosaki would help! He hastened to his lodgings and burst unceremoniously into the apartment where Hosaki was talking. Hosaki and his visitor turned as he entered, and Thornton uttered a cry. It was Iyayogo!

Safe! He had accomplished the strange mission and had escaped as by a miracle!

"She wants you!" said Thornton, seizing his hand and pushing him to the door. "Go to her and make her happy. I am so glad!"—and, as Iyayogo left the house with all speed, the sailor said, with a curious lump in his throat—"And I am so sorry!"

He left Tokyo the next day, and joined his ship on the China station, but his fellow-officers wondered what had happened to the light-hearted Ralph Thornton. **Geo. Day.**

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LIGHT OUT OF DARKNESS.

Being the Love Story of Owen Merritt.

"By-the-way, Maria, I met Owen Merritt in the street to-day. It's the first time I've seen him since he got back from the Continent. I invited him down for a week or two," said Mr. Frank Mallory to his wife, one evening in early September.

"Ah! I'm glad you did," was the quick response.

The same thought seemed to be present in the minds of both husband and wife as their eyes met. Mr. Mallory was the first to give it utterance.

"Merritt's a fine fellow," he said; "rich, too, and got a splendid practice besides. Louise couldn't do better."

"Did he say he would come?"

"Yes; he will come home with me to dinner. Now, Maria, you must do your level best to bring about a match between him and Louise."

"Trust me for that," replied the lady, laughing. "You say I am a born matchmaker. But"—she added curiously—"why are you so anxious about it?"

"Oh, I've reasons. Never mind just now; I'll tell you some other time. I must be off."

Mr. Frank Mallory was a prosperous merchant—so people said—doing business in the City, and living for eight or nine months of the year in a beautiful country seat in Norfolk The balance of the twelve was usually spent in London in a fashionable hotel, where his wife and daughter were free to indulge in all the gaieties of town which lie within the possibilities of the purses of prosperous men.

Meantime the estate in Norfolk was left in the care of the servants, who were presided over by a niece of the gentleman, who had "generously" taken her into his family on the death of her father, when she was but eight years old, and given her a home.

But wherein the generosity consisted it would have been hard to tell, as she was really only an upper servant and nursery governess to his little deformed son, whose affliction was the great disappointment of his life. It might have been in the privilege of sharing Louise's lessons, including music, French, and German, which they were in a measure necessitated to allow her, since Louise resolutely declined to study alone; and equally, perhaps, in the privilege of wearing that young lady's cast-off clothes, the two girls being nearly of an age and size.

Louise Mallory was quite a belle in the circle in which she moved. Rather above the medium height, with a well-rounded, graceful figure, an abundance of glossy black hair, which she wore according to the latest vagaries of fashion—each new style seeming more becoming than the last had been—a clear, olive complexion, touched with a brilliant crimson in cheeks and lips, and a pair of flashing black eyes with long, curling lashes, completed the list of her personal charms.

In conversation she was bright and witty, quick at repartee, and generally the life of any circle in which she chanced to find herself. It is not wonderful, therefore, that the possessor of so many charms should have many admirers, but somehow or other it happened that she had passed her twentieth birthday without having her beautiful hand ornamented by an engagement ring, much to the vexation of her scheming mamma.

"I don't see how it is," observed that lady to her husband in a provoked tone one day; "I thought Louise had De Barry at her feet, and here invitations are out for his wedding with that Laura Stone! She isn't to be named in the same day with Louise. He's worth a million, too, they say. I declare, it's too bad!"

"Louise will overstay her market if she isn't careful," remarked Mr. Mallory sententiously.

"She's had plenty of offers. Harris, Longcope, Milliman, and that young Smythe have all proposed. But they're all too poor. Louise has got too much sense to fall in love with a poor man. I really think, though, that she had a fancy for Smythe; but I nipped that in the bud."

"I don't think you did a nice thing, then. Smythe is a rising man, and will some day come out on top in his profession, just mark my words," said Mr. Mallory warmly.

"That may be, I don't dispute it," replied his wife coolly; "but he's poor now, and I prefer Louise should marry a man who has a fortune in hand rather than one in the bush."

This conversation had taken place just previous to their flitting back to their country home, which they always did at the beginning of Lent, thus balancing the account of their gay, worldly life by a strict, religious observance of the forty days of fasting.

Shortly before this flitting a new star had arisen on their social horizon in the person of Owen Merritt, a young and wealthy lawyer, who had opened an office in the City.

Mrs. Mallory hailed the advent of this new "catch" with secret delight, and immediately set to work to weave about her unwary prey a silken web, which she meant should prove strong enough to bring him a willing captive to her daughter's feet.

Before much headway could be made in this direction, however, the time for their return to their country home had arrived. But she did not allow this rather unfortunate circumstance to interfere with her plans, and enlisting her husband in a good work, contrived to carry on the campaign, though, naturally, at a considerable disadvantage.

During the early summer, garden-parties, picnics, and fishing parties innumerable had been arranged, to all of which Mr. Merritt had received pressing invitations, some of

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which he had accepted, and had, as she fondly hoped, been quite impressed with Louise's many attractions.

But in the latter part of July he rather unceremoniously dashed cold water upon her hopes by suddenly and unexpectedly running off to the Continent. However, he was now safely back, and with renewed vigour she prepared to resume the siege.

Louise, herself, to her mother's great displeasure, seemed quite indifferent, and declined to put forth any effort to secure the prize held up before her in such a tempting light, which her mother actually feared was owing to a lingering attachment for "that young Smythe," and she forthwith set herself to eradicate it, root and branch.

Louise, however, had taken the surest way, intentionally or otherwise, to attract Owen Merritt. He had had more than one young lady "throw herself at his head," and had become quite accustomed to the arts of designing mammas.

He saw through Mrs. Mallory's clever little ruses to get him and Louise together with a feeling of amusement, but that young lady's air of cool indifference piqued his vanity, and when he accepted the invitation for a fortnight's visit he mentally resolved to captivate Louise.

In this he had no wicked design, for Owen Merritt was not in any sense of the word a flirt. He honestly admired Louise Mallory's beauty and wit, and was in that susceptible state when admiration might easily develop into love, and might as easily, also, be turned into disgust and loathing. He was no greenhorn, either, and having reached the mature age of thirty years, concluded that if ever he meant to settle down in life, now was a very good time.

"Ring the bell for Mary, Louise."

Two, three minutes passed, and the summons was still unanswered.

A frown, black and ominous, gathered on Mrs. Mallory's brow, but remembering that a lady should always maintain her composure, no matter what domestic complications may arise, she merely motioned to Louise to repeat the signal, which that young lady did with considerably more energy than she had used the first time. A moment after a young girl hastily entered the room.

"I beg your pardon, aunt. I heard the bell the first time, but Ernie had accidentally set fire to some paper on the carpet, and I had to stop to put it out."

Mr. Merritt, who was engaged in conversation with his host, looked up in surprise, just in time to catch an angry glance at the speaker from Louise's superb eyes, while a deep flush rose to Mrs. Mallory's sallow cheeks.

"Explanations are not necessary," she said coldly. "Attend to your duties."

Tears sprang to the girl's eyes at the tone, and Mr. Merritt, who could not forbear a second glance, saw that only a resolute will was keeping them in check, as she quickly and deftly performed the duties for which she had been summoned.

He had never seen the girl before, and would not have done so to-day, had it not been for the sudden indisposition of the servant whose place she was required to take, for it was part o Mrs. Mallory's tactics to keep her entirely in the background not wishing her guests to know of the existence of a "poor relation" in her elegantly-appointed establishment.

As he looked up, she had paused for a moment behind Louise's chair, and he could not help being struck by the contrast between them.

They were apparently about the same age and size, but Mary's figure had a lithe suppleness about it that Louise's lacked, and her carriage was perfectly natural and graceful.

Her features were rather large and irregular, but she had a clear, white complexion, large, dark, hazel-grey eyes, with long, curling lashes, and a magnificent mass of rich, dark, auburn hair, which was drawn as plainly back as its wavy nature would allow from the low, broad forehead, and wound in a loose coil at the back of her shapely head.

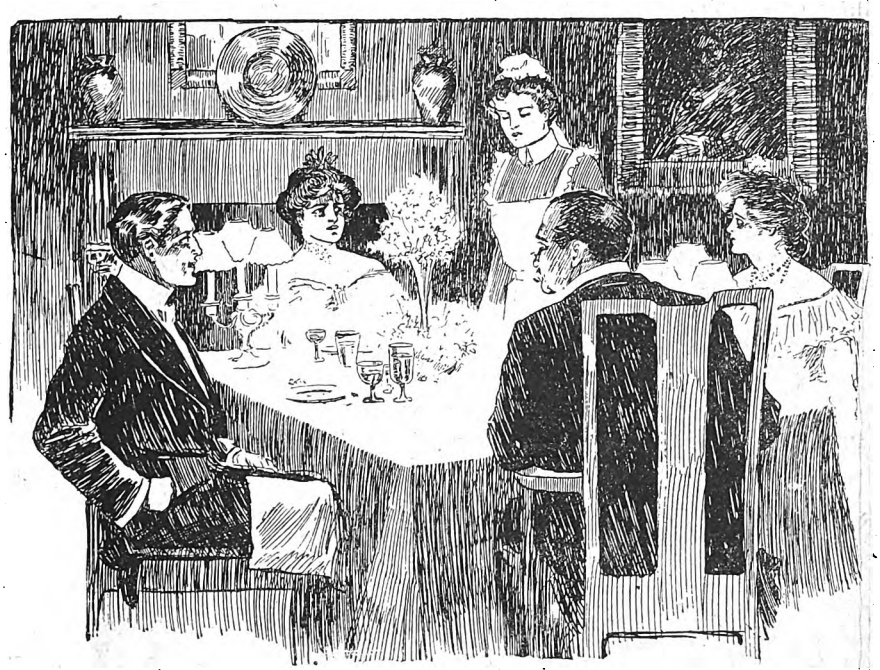
The contrast in their dress was equally striking.

Louise was attired in a robe of cream white cashmere, the low corsage filled in with rare old lace, while diamonds sparkled in her ears, and on her hands and arms. Mary, on the contrary, wore a neatly-fitting plain dress and white apron, with a simple linen collar fastened by a small gold pin, her only ornament. As she deftly plied the crumb-brush, he noticed that her hands were small and well shaped, and her wrists were as white and as beautifully rounded as Louise's own.

She did not once look at him, and although her brightened colour showed that she deeply felt the humiliation of being reminded of her inferior position in the presence of a stranger, she performed her menial duties with a quiet dignity that excited his admiration.

After dinner was over, and they had returned to the drawing-room, Mrs. Mallory seized the first opportunity which presented itself to make an explanation.

"Mr. Merritt," she said, "you must have been surprised to hear one of the servants address me so familiarly. The truth is we took her when she was a child, and brought her up in our family, and I very foolishly allowed her to call me



Owen Merritt looked up just in time to see Louise flash an angry glance at the maid.

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'aunt.' I have told her that she must not do it now, for it is rather embarrassing to be addressed as aunt by one's servant."

Mr. Merritt made some light reply, and Mrs. Mallory, seeing a shade of displeasure on her husband's face, hastened to change the conversation, and proposed a stroll along the river. The others assenting, she and her husband led the way, but pretty soon she pleaded fatigue and turned back, and as Mr. Mallory could do no less than accompany her, Mr. Merritt and Louise were left to continue the walk by themselves.

"They must 'make hay while the sun shines,'" Mrs. Mallory said, as soon as they were out of hearing of the young people. "Next week the Ewings will be here, and then there will be an end to *tête-à-tête* walks. I want to get in as much of that kind of work as I can—I have to manage it all myself," she added grumblingly. "Louise seems perfectly indifferent, and won't help me a bit."

"It's the best plan she could take with a fellow like Merritt," observed her husband. "Let her alone and she'll make better headway than you will with all your planning and contriving. If he should see that she was aiming to catch him, he'd be off like a shot."

Somewhat comforted by this view of the situation, his wife went in search of Mary, to whom she proposed to read a lecture. She found her in the nursery singing Ernie to sleep. The poor little cripple, who was ten years old, though he did not look more than five, clung to Mary with a tenacity of affection pitiful to see, for it spoke eloquently of neglect on the part of the father and mother, who should naturally have had the first place in his heart.

Waiting out of sight of the child, until she saw the white eyelids close over the large blue eyes, Mrs. Mallory motioned to Mary to step into the next room, and then seating herself in state, while Mary stood like a culprit before her, began severely:

"I was astonished and mortified at dinner to-day, that you should forget what I have so often told you, that you must not address me as 'aunt' in the presence of visitors. As it seems that you cannot remember, it will be better for you to drop the title altogether. So, after this you will simply address me as Mrs. Mallory."

For a minute or two Mary could not speak. Then she said with what calmness she could command:

"I wish you would tell me, aunt—Mrs. Mallory—why there has always been such a difference made between us. My mother was Uncle Frank's own sister, and of course Louise and Ernie are my own cousins, yet I am made to occupy the place of a servant in the family where I should be an equal."

For some minutes Mrs. Mallory sat speechless with indignation, then recovering the use of her tongue, she exclaimed:

"You ungrateful minx! Haven't we given you a home all these years—and an education? You want to live like a lady, do you, while your uncle supports you?"

"I do not find any fault with the work I have to do," replied Mary quietly; "it is not difficult, and I would rather earn what I get under your roof, but I am not willing to be treated as if I were inferior to my cousins, when my blood is as good as theirs."

"You don't know what you are talking about!" cried the lady excitedly. "If you are not satisfied here you will have to find some other home. I shall tell your uncle of this!" she added, and she swept angrily from the room, leaving poor Mary almost broken-hearted; for in spite of the many hardships she had to undergo it was her home, and she could not bear to think of being obliged to leave it; for that they would send her away she had no doubt.

The week had nearly passed; it was now Friday, and Mrs. Mallory could not see that any headway had been made towards the fulfilment of her cherished plans. Louise appeared to be as nonchalant as ever, and she could not discover that Mr. Merritt was any more lover-like than he had been at first. He was an enthusiastic sportsman, and the greater part of the days had been spent in roaming over the adjacent fields and meadows with his host in search of game, and they were usually successful in bringing home full bags.

She had contrived that the young people should spend the evenings together in rides or drives or rows upon the river.

Next week the house would be full of company—among them several young men—and Louise, as hostess, could not, of course, bestow her company exclusively upon any one of her guests. If the desired result could not be brought about before then, it was not likely it would be at all, and she was beginning to feel quite disheartened. If she could have looked beneath the surface into the two young hearts she would have taken courage.

Mr. Merritt, who had been gradually becoming more and more captivated by Louise's beauty and wit, had quite made up his mind that the time had come for him to speak, and had determined to do so that very evening.

Not that he was very deeply in love. Indeed, he had come to fancy that he was past the age to feel "a lover's sweet pangs," and that the most ardent feeling he should probably ever have for any woman was calm appreciation.

He admired Louise intensely. She was beautiful, accomplished, witty, and for aught he had seen to the contrary, amiable in disposition; while in point of wealth and social station she was fully his equal. He could see no reason, therefore, why they should not be happy together, in that friendly, matter-of-fact sort of way that seemed to characterise the relations between most of the married people of his acquaintance.

Her careless, indifferent manner did not trouble him in the least now that he had become better acquainted with her. It was her way, and—well, he did not care for honey and sugar; too much of either was sickening. He liked her better so than if she had been more demonstrative.

As to Louise, she hardly knew what her feelings on the subject were. Whatever it was in her moral anatomy that took the place of a heart belonged to Mr. Smythe; but Mr. Smythe was poor. He would have to fight his way in the world, and although she did not doubt that he would ultimately win both wealth and fame, she did not feel inclined to help him fight; her nature was too ease-loving.

Mr. Merritt, on the contrary, had both wealth and station to place at her command; and her mother had so ceaselessly dinned into her ears the advantages of such an alliance, that she had at last resolved to say "Yes," whenever he should ask her to become his wife, which of course he would do sooner or later, for Miss Louise had been taught to believe that her charms were irresistible.

So it happened that the thoughts—hopeful or otherwise—of the whole quartette were turned towards that fateful Friday evening, when the young people were to go out for a row upon the river after the moon had risen.

At eight o'clock that evening Owen Merritt sat alone upon the balcony waiting for Louise, who had gone indoors for her wraps. The moon was just rising above the tree-tops on the opposite side of the river, and throwing her silvery beams athwart the rippling water. The day had been rather sultry, which made the cool, balmy evening breeze seem very refreshing. The long French windows stood open to admit as much of it as possible to the heated air within the house.

Close to one of these windows Mr. Merritt sat, swinging slowly backwards and forwards in a low rocking-chair and thinking earnestly. The seriousness of the step he was about to take impressed him deeply, involving as it did the weal or woe of himself and Louise for the remainder of their lives, when his reverie was suddenly and abruptly broken in upon by voices almost in his ear.

It was Mr. and Mrs. Mallory, and they appeared to be continuing a conversation begun elsewhere, for the first sentence from Mr. Mallory was:

"Well, if they don't, there'll be a pretty kettle of fish. Mary will be of age in less than three months, and then that fellow, Gibbs, will insist on settling up the estate, of course, as he is joint trustee with me of her property. If it wasn't for him she need never know anything about it, for she was too

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young when her father died to know that he left her any money."

Not wishing to play the part of an eavesdropper, Mr. Merritt was about to make his presence known, when the next sentence transfixed him. It was from Mrs. Mallory, and was spoken irritably. "I don't see," she said, "what that has to do with Louise and Merritt."

"Well, you will see presently. The arrangement was that, I being her uncle, Mary was to be brought up with my children, and I was to have the use of her money, paying interest for it, of course. Well, the fact of it is that I speculated with it and lost every penny, and to-day I'm virtually a bankrupt. Now, Merritt's got pots of money, and, if he marries Louise, he would rather help me out than have the scandal it would occasion if it were known. I can manage to keep myself afloat till then, and meantime I shall have to throw myself on Mary's mercy, and get her to satisfy Gibbs, or he'll prosecute me as sure as can be."

"Well, do leave the interesting *dénouement* until we get Louise off our hands," said his wife irritably. "No doubt that ungrateful minx will want to turn us out of house and home!"

"It's precious little she has to be grateful for!" said Mr. Mallory, rather bitterly. "I tell you, Maria, you have carried things with too high a hand in that matter. I don't see what you were thinking of. My conscience pricks me that I've allowed it to be done!" he added in a lower tone.

Owen Merritt had heard enough of these miserable confidences, and, rising quietly, he stepped away noiselessly, feeling utterly disgusted and indignant, yet thankful, though, that he had escaped, though so narrowly, being made the tool of a knave, and having his bright, fair name tarnished by such an alliance.

Presently Louise, with a soft, white wrapper thrown over her hair, and a shawl over her arm, came to the door.

"Is Mr. Merritt here?" she asked, for they had not yet rung for lights, and the room was in shadow.

"Why, I thought you'd gone long ago!" exclaimed her mother. "Merritt!" said her father in a startled tone, and stepping hastily to the window, adding immediately in a tone of relief, "Oh, there he is, in the rose walk!"

He stood watching them till they disappeared from his view, and then, stepping on to the balcony, paced thoughtfully up and down its length.

Louise could not understand her companion at all that evening. The revulsion of feeling had been so great that it was utterly impossible for him to keep up the light, bantering conversation such as he had been wont to indulge in when in her company, more for the sake of hearing her bright, quick repartees, than because he considered her incapable of more profound trains of thought, and he was so very distrait, that finally she became silent, and the walk from which both had anticipated such pleasing results, ended with a feeling of coolness and constraint for which Louise, at least, was utterly at a loss to account.

When they reached the house after an almost entirely silent walk, Mr. Merritt informed her that he had quite unexpectedly discovered that it was imperatively necessary for him to return to town by the early morning train, which being the case, he would leave his apologies for his hasty departure with her, and would now bid her *adieu*, as he should probably be gone before they were up, whereupon *adieux* were coldly exchanged, and each retired to their respective rooms, though not to sleep.

Louise immediately extinguished her light and sat down by the open window, through which the glorious moon was pouring her beams. Scarcely had she done so when there came a knock at her door, and without waiting for an answer her mother entered. She had been awaiting their return with almost feverish anxiety, hoping to hear that her fond expectations were at last realised, and had been considerably surprised and mystified by their early separation, for it was not much after ten o'clock.

Louise looked up coldly and inquiringly as her mother came and stood beside her, not daring to ask what she so much wanted to know.

"Haven't you anything to tell me?" she asked at length.

"Nothing in particular—why do you ask?" replied Louise, indifferently.

Poor Mrs. Mallory! Her high hopes were dashed in an instant.

"Where's Mr. Merritt?" she asked despairingly.

"In his room, I suppose. He said he must retire early, as he is obliged to take the early train to town, and you know that leaves at a quarter past five o'clock."

"Is he coming back to-morrow evening?" almost gasped her mother, awaiting the answer breathlessly.

"No. He said that unforeseen circumstances obliged him to cut his visit shorter than he intended, and he left his apologies to you for going so unceremoniously."

"And he has not asked you to be his wife?"

"Mother!" said Louise, suddenly facing round and confronting her mother with flashing eyes and flaming cheeks; "you have made a perfect fool of yourself—and me! I am sure that Mr. Merritt must have seen what you were plotting—you have made it plain enough. Now I give you fair warning that after this I shall manage my own love affairs without your assistance."

Mrs. Mallory broke down utterly at this, and sinking down upon the carpet at her daughter's feet, hid her face in her hands, too miserable to weep.

"You don't know what you are talking about," she said, in a dull, muffled voice.

"What do you mean?" asked Louise, startled and somewhat frightened at her mother's manner.

"I mean this," said Mrs. Mallory, removing her hands from her face, and speaking in deep, tragic tones; "I wanted to bring about your marriage with Mr. Merritt to save us all from disgrace and poverty!

"Disgrace and poverty!" repeated Louise, bewildered.

"Yes. Do you know that we are beggars? Your father has speculated and lost everything—*everything*; and worse than all, he has lost Mary's money, too; and in a few weeks she will be twenty-one, and he will be called upon to settle up his accounts with Mr. Gibbs, the other trustee, and then it will all have to come out."

For some minutes Louise sat aghast. "I never knew that Mary had any money," she said at length.

"Yes, she had. Her father left her a large sum, and your father was appointed her guardian and joint trustee with Mr. Gibbs of the estate. This house belongs to her—or did. Of course we can't expect any mercy from her. She will be too glad of the opportunity of paying us out for making a servant of her in her own house; and there is nothing before us but ruin and disgrace." With this Mrs. Mallory got up and left the room.

For a long time Louise sat as if stupefied. The magnitude of the misfortune that had overtaken them seemed to crush out all power of thought. At length when the gong of the hall clock struck the hour of two, she rose, and, chilled and shivering, crept miserably into bed without undressing.

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When Mrs. Mallory returned to her own room after her visit to Louise, her husband started feverishly up and uttered the single monosyllable: "Well?"

"We built our castles in the air," was the expressive reply.

With a groan he sank back upon his pillow, and uttered not another word.

* * * * *

The weeks passed on, slowly to some, but to others, who were trembling with "a certain looking for of judgment," they seemed to flash by with lightning speed. One morning, in the latter part of October, the social and business circles of London were shocked by the following announcement in large head-lines in the daily morning newspapers:

DISAPPEARANCE AND SUICIDE.

Three days ago the beautiful daughter of one of our wealthiest and best known merchants, Mr. Frank Mallory, suddenly and mysteriously disappeared from her home, leaving no clue to her whereabouts. Yesterday morning the body of her father was found by one of the servants lying on the floor of the library in his beautiful country residence in Norfolk, with the blood oozing from an ugly hole near his left temple, while one hand tightly grasped a small revolver. He was breathing faintly when found, but died before a physician could be summoned. It is supposed that grief over the disappearance of his daughter, who was well known and much admired for her beauty and wit in social circles, was the cause of the rash act. His wife is prostrated with grief over her double bereavement, and is lying dangerously ill at her residence.

Of the hundreds who read this paragraph, one only understood its real significance. Owen Merritt's cheek blanched, and his blood curdled with horror as he perused it. "He could face death easier than disgrace," he muttered to himself. "Poor Louise! the sins of her parents have no doubt driven her to destruction. What has become of the poor girl, I wonder?"

Two weeks later the announcement of Mrs. Mallory's death followed. There was the usual nine days' talk, and then the waves of oblivion rolled over them. "Their dear friends," pausing to utter a sigh of pity, rushed on as madly as before in the pursuit of the butterfly of pleasure.

It was a cold, blustering day in November Owen Merritt was sitting at his desk in his private office, busily engaged in preparing briefs for a case which he was to plead the next day in court, when a knock was heard at the door, and a clerk put his head in with the announcement:

"There's a lady here to see you, sir, in answer to your advertisement."

"Show her in here," said the busy lawyer, without raising his head. "Take a seat, madam; I'll be at liberty in a moment," he said as she entered, still busily scratching away.

Several moments passed. Then he laid down his pen, sat back in his chair and looked at his visitor. As he did so he was very nearly guilty of the rudeness of uttering a prolonged whistle.

The lady before him was attired in deep mourning, which showed to advantage the clear, white complexion without a trace of colour except in the lips, which were full and red, but the lovely, rich auburn hair quite supplied that lack, and its glittering waves made a beautiful framework for a face the principal charm of which was a pair of dark grey eyes, which were now looking straight into his with an almost pleading expression in their steady gaze.

He recognised her instantly, but as it was evident that she did not know him, he suppressed any sign of recognition, and, assuming his usual business tone, he said:

"You called in answer to my advertisement for a typine?"

"Yes, sir," she replied with dignified simplicity and straightforwardness; "I would like to have the employment, as I need it very much."

"I have no doubt you will suit me," he said with rather reckless haste, which caused her to look at him in some surprise.

"Have you ever done this kind of work?" he asked, more because he saw that some formalities were expected of him, than because he cared to know, for he had decided that she should have the place, competent or not.

"Only occasionally—for my uncle," she replied rather hesitatingly.

"Ah!—was your uncle a lawyer?"

"No, sir, he was a merchant." A painful flush flamed into the white cheeks at these questions, and Mr. Merritt did not pursue his investigations any further, but muttering to himself, "The villain!" proceeded to arrange the details of their business relations, naming a sum as compensation for her services which was considerably above the usual rates, and was rewarded for his generosity by a look of gratitude from the beautiful dark eyes, that caused a warm spot to glow in his heart, when he thought of it, for hours afterwards.

"Oh," he said with sudden recollection, as he was about to bow her out, and smiling at the omission, "I have forgotten to ask your name."

The young lady laughed, a low musical laugh which quite charmed Mr. Merritt, who was rather fastidious on that point, and who would not have admired the veriest beauty if she had had a coarse voice and been guilty of the heinousness of a loud laugh.

"Stanley—Mary Stanley," was the answer.

"Your hours will be from ten to four," he said as he held the door open for her to pass out, "and I would like you to come to-morrow if possible."

"Certainly, I will come," she said, and with a graceful bow took her departure.

"Did you get it, Mary?" said a weak, childish voice as she entered a rather small back room in a dingy house in a still dingier back street.

"Yes, Ernie, dear," said the girl, quickly crossing over to a couch where, propped up with pillows and cushions, sat a small childish figure, and bending down she smoothed back the soft hair from the high, pale brow of the little deformed cousin, and kissed him tenderly. "Yes," she repeated brightly, "and I am to get enough money every week to keep us comfortably."

The boy laughed merrily, though it was a weak, pitiful little laugh. "That will be fine," he said.

"Yes. And, Ernie, do you know what I think we can do? You remember, don't you, dear, those two nice little rooms I told you about, that I saw when I was out 'house hunting,' but I could not afford to pay the rent, you know? Now, if you don't mind staying alone a little longer, I will go out and see if they are still to let; it's not very far from here."

"Of course I'll not mind, you dear good Mary," said the boy impulsively, throwing his arms round her neck and giving her an affectionate hug. "What would I do without you? You're both papa and mamma to me."

"Well, then, I'll go," said the girl, returning the hug; "and if I get them we'll move this afternoon, for I have to go to work to-morrow."

"I hope you can, it will be much nicer to have two rooms; for then, you see, when you're away, and I get tired of one, I can get on my crutches and go into the other, and it won't seem so long."

With a great throb of loving pity welling up in her heart for the poor little unfortunate, Mary settled his cushions more comfortably, kissed him very tenderly, and left him.

Six months passed rapidly away, and Mary Stanley still occupied a desk in the office of Owen Merritt. The shapely head, with its beautiful crown of auburn hair, seemed like a ray of sunlight in the rather dingy room, and was always the first thing that gentleman's eyes rested upon when he entered it. How much he would have missed it, if some morning he had come and found it absent, he never stopped to inquire. They had grown to be great friends; and yet he would no more have thought of using any familiarity towards her than if she had been the grandest lady of his acquaintance, so perfectly was she hedged about with maidenly dignity and reserve.

As Spring advanced, and the coming Summer sent in now and again an advance-guard to warn the denizens of the busy city of hot weather close at hand, he began to notice, with some anxiety, a careworn, troubled expression gradually

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creeping into the fair, sweet face, until at last it seemed to have taken possession, and he racked his brains to devise some means of finding out what was troubling her.

"Why do I care so much?" he suddenly asked himself one day when he had been rendered really miserable by seeing, while surreptitiously watching her as she bent over her writing, two large tears splash down upon the page before her, over which she hastily laid a blotter in a frightened sort of way. There was but one answer which he could give to this question, for in an instant a veil seemed to be snatched away from before his mental vision, and he knew that he loved this girl with a pure, deep love, such as he never could possibly have felt for Louise Mallory.

His visitor was Mary Stanley.

Mary herself at last volunteered the information he was so anxious to gain. One afternoon, after putting her desk in order, which he noticed that she seemed to be doing in a lingering, pre-occupied sort of way, she approached his table.

"Mr. Merritt," she began, in a hesitating way, "do you think you can fill my place here by next week?"

She did not look at him—or she would have seen that he turned very pale—but pulled nervously at some pieces of paper she held in her hand, and scattered them in little bits on the floor, in a manner quite at variance with her usual quiet self-possession and neat ways.

"Are you going to leave me?" he asked, trying hard not to let the pain in his heart show itself in his voice.

"I shall be obliged to," she replied, speaking rapidly, feeling that she must get through quickly or she should break down. "The doctor says that Ernie must not remain in the City during the hot months, and that I had better take him to the seashore."

"Who is Ernie?" he asked, with some constraint in his tone.

"I forgot that you did not know him. He is my little crippled cousin. His father and mother are dead, and he has no one but me to care for him."

"Is he your uncle Mallory's son?" Mr. Merritt asked, in surprise.

It was Mary's turn to be surprised, and she raised her eyes for the first time and looked at him.

"How did you know?" she asked.

He was vexed at his own incautiousness, but thought it best to make an explanation. "I recognised you instantly," he added. Mary dropped her eyes again, and a faint colour stole into her cheeks.

"And you have been supporting the son of the man who robbed you, and allowed you to be so shamefully treated!" he exclaimed, with a thrill which she might have understood if she had but looked up, for all his heart was in the tender, admiring gaze he bent upon her.

"It was not Ernie's fault," she answered softly, "and he is all I have in the world."

If Owen Merritt could have followed the dictates of his own heart at that moment, he would have taken her in his arms and assured her that she was all the world to him, and that without her it would be a waste, howling wilderness, without a ray of sunlight.

"What are your plans for taking him to the seaside?" he asked, in a controlled, business tone.

"My landlady has a sister who keeps a large boarding-house at Bournemouth. She says she can get me a position to take charge of the linen-room, where I can have Ernie with me."

"Miss Stanley," said Mr. Merritt, after a few moments' silence, during which he had been considering the best way to approach what was beginning to seem a very delicate and difficult subject, "may I call upon you this evening? I would like to see your cousin. I had a little brother who was a cripple from infancy, but died when he was eight years old."

Mary could not withhold the desired permission, and promptly at the hour agreed upon Owen Merritt stood in her little "drawing-room," as she and Ernie playfully called it. The furniture was most of it old and faded, but a few handsome pieces, which she had saved from the wreck of her home, and a stand of choice plants with a bird-cage above it, gave it an air of elegance and refinement.

This call paved the way for another, and then another, in which he told Mary of his love, in a manly, straightforward manner, and asked her to be his wife, upon which, with some tears and many blushes, she confessed that her heart had been in his keeping for months, and that she had gladly availed herself of the excuse the doctor's advice in regard to Ernie offered, in the fear that she might, in some moment of weakness, betray her secret.

They were married quietly, and then they gave Ernie the benefit of a sea voyage, and took him to a German Spa.

Only after her marriage did Mary confide to her husband a secret known to but a few, the fate of poor Louise.

"A few days after her father's death her body had been found in a small cove, where the pleasure boats were moored. At first foul play was suspected, but there were no marks of violence, and I have no doubt she chose death rather than face the contempt of Society. Poor aunt was very ill, and I sent immediately for Mr. Gibbs. With great difficulty we succeeded in keeping an account of it out of the papers."

"Out of misery is happiness born," said her husband, drawing her fondly to him. "It was a sad, a terribly sad affair, but it has brought me the great happiness of my life."

George Barnes.

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Exciting Series.

A Striking Series of Astonishing Revelations.

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OF WHOM YOU READ.

Vivienne D'Alton, the decoy. She, an innocent girl, unwittingly leads young gentlemen of good social standing to their ruin at the hands of the man she believes to be her father.

Beverley D'Alton, who poses as a millionaire who has made his money by judicious speculation. He assumes to lavish great affection on Vivienne.

Mrs. Sherwood. A florid person, who is introduced to Vivienne by her father as a great friend of her dead mother. She lives with the D'Altons, and requests Vivienne to call her "Aunt Flora," which the young girl reluctantly does.

Annchen. A lady's maid, whom Vivienne greatly detests. She seems to be on very familiar terms with Mrs. Sherwood and Mr. D'Alton.

ELEVENTH EPISODE.

A Friend in Need.

So strange an effect did Dr. Farnie's influence have upon me that I actually began to think that I must have been dreaming, and I was altogether in such a state of mental and physical collapse that I hardly remembered reaching home again.

In fact, I was ill. So ill that I had neither strength nor brains to do anything but lie down on my couch, and yield myself to the ministrations of Mrs. Sherwood and Annchen, who both quoted Dr. Farnie's orders.

I tried hard to collect my thoughts, so as to understand what had really happened. Was it true that my father had accused me of intending to elope? If so, how was it that he happened to know that I was in the seed shop? It was all very strange, and I felt so faint that I had willingly partaken of a restorative which Annchen solicitously pressed upon me.

But, somehow, the so-called restorative lacked the power to stimulate my brain into its wonted activity. On the contrary, I felt sleepy after it. And I also began to feel so tranquil that I made no effort to keep awake, for it was a delicious kind of drowsiness which possessed me, and under its influence every shadow of trouble seemed to vanish into the misty regions of the past.

"How is she doing?"

The question was uttered in a faint whisper by somebody within the room, and I knew that it referred to me. But my bodily powers were so held in thrall that not even the fluttering of an eyelid betrayed the fact that my senses were already recovering sufficiently to enable them to grasp the present again.

"She'll do beautifully. I've worked the oracle, and another dose will stop her meddling for ever."

It was Mrs. Sherwood who now spoke, almost in as low a whisper as the questioner, who was no other than my father.

"That's right. Whoever expected that she would turn out to be such a meddlesome little cat, and almost ruin everything by her peeping and prying?"

"Who expected? *I* expected. I've told you over and over again that she was not the right sort to hoodwink long."

"Well, I only intended it to last till we had got the settlements out of the Prince. They could both have gone the way of all flesh then."

"Well, you'll have to let the Prince slide. It's too risky to keep this game on. And, even if it wasn't, I'd stand it no longer. I was a fool to agree to play second fiddle to a chit of a girl. You could easily have pretended that you had married twice, and that I was the girl's step-mother. That would have saved me some of her insolence. But there is one thing to be thankful for—she'll give me no more of it."

"No. But I can't help thinking that it is a great pity. Why, she might have raked in millions for us, if she hadn't inherited the stupid prejudices of the D'Altons."

"Oh, well, it's no use crying over spilt milk. We may thank our stars that we have stopped her tongue in time, and that Kaspar had the sense to let you know that he was being shadowed by Lord Broomville."

"Yes, that was what saved the whole situation. I was only just in time with my bogus policemen, and nobody thought of interfering when they produced the sham warrant. Broomville has been a tough customer, but I think he won't trouble us again."

"He hadn't need! Fancy him discovering that Kaspar and Annchen Krause are both related to me, and that——"

"My patient. How is she?"

It was Dr. Farnie who thus broke in upon a conversation that filled me with nameless horror, which was all the greater because I was still utterly incapable of making a movement.

Clearly, my death was intended! And, this being so, I no longer tried to believe that Beverley D'Alton was my father. For, if he had been, how could he have plotted with my enemies against me? Besides, was not the father of my recol-

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lection a very different man? And had I not been greatly disappointed at the alteration in his appearance?

In this manner my reasoning faculties were trying to keep pace with the conversation that was being carried on in my room, when Dr. Farnie inquired after me.

"She has fallen into a pleasant sleep now," was Mrs. Sherwood's gently spoken reply. "I hope, when she wakes again, she will behave more like a sane person."

"Your influence doesn't go for much," sneered my father. "You told me that you could hypnotise the girl into doing anything that I wanted her to do."

"And I induced her to consent to marry the Prince, whom you were so desirous of securing for a son-in-law."

"But you failed to keep her thoughts in the groove I wished them to be kept in, or she would not have been so ready to elope with the fellow who calls himself Viscount Broomville. And as you have not fulfilled your part of the contract, I shall mulct you in half the honorarium I promised you."

"I hardly think that you will do that, sir, for it would not conduce to your popularity if I were compelled to have recourse to the law to make you keep your promises. But why take it for granted that I am unable to recover lost ground? Let me try my powers again, and I will either succeed absolutely, or I will forfeit every farthing of my promised honorarium. Surely, that is a fair offer, sir?"

There was a moment's silence, broken at last by Mrs. Sherwood, who put in a protest against the hypnotist.

"I think we had better drop that nonsense altogether," she said firmly. "I won't allow dear Vivienne to be tampered with any more, for the sake of pandering either to your greed or her father's ambition. I shall take her to visit some friends of mine in Holland. They will soon restore her to bodily vigour, and with the return of health, she will begin to see that we have only her welfare at heart."

These words could not have sounded kinder if they had come from my dearest friend. But they filled me with more acute anguish of mind than ever, for only too well did I foretell the treatment which her friends in Holland would accord to me. Of course—at least, so I thought—she was alluding to Herr and Madame Althaus, whom I no longer hesitated to connect with the tragic death of poor Mr. Graysworthy.

Therefore, strange though it may seem, I was desperately anxious to be given over to the tender mercies of the hypnotist, rather than to be abandoned to the boasted solicitude of Mrs. Sherwood.

My father seemed to be thinking deeply. But when he spoke again, I was so wildly thankful, that I felt my hands twitch convulsively beneath the embroidered satin eiderdown which had been thrown over me, and this brought me face to face with a new discovery. The enthralment of my physical powers was waning, and I could now move if I liked. But it was all-important to me to appear as limp as I was believed to be, and I prayed wildly for the power to foil my enemies.

My success must have been almost as great as the mental effort which produced it, for not a muscle of my face moved, even though the next words I heard indicated a respite from the fate which Mrs. Sherwood had planned for me.

"Vivienne will be happiest if she lives to be a princess," said my father. "So there is no reason why her ultimate happiness should not be our chief consideration. I tell you what, Dr. Farnie, I'll accept your challenge. But I shall rely on your honour not to allow my daughter to hold communion with anybody else, or to leave this house except as the willing bride of Prince Gorouki."

"Very well, Mr. D'Alton; I give you my word of honour that Miss D'Alton will comply with her father's wishes in every respect. She shall not leave this house again without my permission, and I guarantee that she will go to the altar a willing and a happy bride. If I fail in any item of these promises, I absolve you entirely from your part of the contract, and you will easily understand, that I, being a poor man, will not forfeit ten thousand pounds if I can help it."

"Then it is a bargain, and we will leave you to your task."

"One moment, Mr. D'Alton. The fewer people there are about Miss D'Alton the better, until I have moulded her mind to the desired shape. I have noticed two maids are often in attendance upon her. Which of them does she like best?"

"Annchen is the most suitable maid for her, under the circumstances," answered Mrs. Sherwood. But the doctor insisted upon his question being carefully considered from his point of view.

"Certainly," was his bland response. "We will have Annchen if she is Miss D'Alton's favourite. If she is not, we must have the other, for I have too much at stake to risk losing the game by having disturbing influences to contend with."

"Then you shall have Susan here," decided my father, in spite of renewed protest by his accomplice, and all three left me for a while.

No sooner was I alone than I tried to piece into coherent form all that I had learnt. Dr. Farnie was to have £10,000, if he could hypnotise me into being dutiful enough to marry Prince Gorouki, and both the Prince and I were "to go the way of all flesh" as soon as Mr. D'Alton had secured the huge fortune which was to be settled upon me by my affianced husband.

It seemed to me that in any case I was doomed. For if I resisted all attempts to make me marry the Prince, Mrs. Sherwood's method of extinction would be used on me just the same.

But at present, in spite of the gravity of my situation, my greatest anxiety was on account of Lord Broomville, whose zeal on my behalf had resulted in his capture by the enemy. I trembled to think of the fate in store for him, and, no longer restrained by the necessity of keeping my emotions in check, I yielded to a fit of bitter weeping.

This lasted till I heard myself addressed in a gentle, compassionate voice, which caused me to sit up in the wild hope that it was really a friend who was speaking to me.

* * * * *

Alas! there was nobody here but Dr. Farnie and Susan, and I did not expect them to be of much use to either Lord Broomville or myself. But they were certainly not aggressive, and I could almost have fancied that neither of them was hypocritical.

But I had heard the doctor's compact with the man who might, or might not be, Beverley D'Alton, and I was not inclined to be too trustful.

"Miss D'Alton, pull yourself together and listen to some good news," said the doctor, and once again I felt compelled to acknowledge his power to soothe me into comparative tranquillity.

"Good news?" I queried mournfully. "Do you think that it is good news to know that you intend to make me marry Prince Gorouki?"

"I intend to do no such thing," was the smiling reply, and my voice was as contemptuous as I could make it, as I retorted: "Dr. Farnie, if you think that you can hoodwink me, you are mistaken. I heard every word you and those wicked people said just now."

"Those wicked people? Do you mean your father and your aunt?"

"No. I mean the impostors who pretend to be my father and my aunt."

"By Jove! Pardon me, Miss Vivienne! But I am really so astonished at the extent of your information that I hardly know what to make of it."

"Then you do not deny that they are impostors?"

"On the contrary, I hope to help towards their exposure."

This was such an unexpected answer that I could hardly believe my ears, and I began to put several eager questions, all of which were, however, denied an answer just then.

"You must be fainting for want of nourishment," said the doctor, "so I want you to do justice to a meal which Susan will bring you."

"I'm not a bit hungry. I want neither food nor drink."

"My dear young lady, you cannot live on nothing."

"Neither could I live on the fare Mrs. Sherwood is likely to send me."

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This answer was significant enough to show the depth of my distrust. But I was soon reassured.

"Susan," said the doctor, "go downstairs and fill a tray for Miss D'Alton. Select the things yourself, and do not, on any account, allow either Mrs. Sherwood or Annchen to come near the tray."

"I'll be very careful, doctor," promised Susan.

"And mind, not a word to betray what I have said to you."

"I'm too fond of Miss Vivienne to bungle. You may trust me to help to save her."

This little conversation almost completed the growing conviction that I had some friends on my side, and while Susan was away, my doubts on the point were entirely set at rest.

"I daresay you are wondering which of my promises are intended to be kept," began the doctor, and I instantly retorted: "I heard you give your solemn word of honour that you would make me comply with Mr. D'Alton's wishes in every respect."

"Not exactly. What I said was this: 'I give you my word of honour that Miss D'Alton will comply with her *father's* wishes in every respect. She shall not leave this house again without my permission, and I guarantee that she will go to the altar a willing and a happy bride."

"Well?"

"I shall not forfeit my word of honour, I assure you. For, in the first place, the man to whom I pledged it is not your father. In the second place, you already have my permission to leave this house as soon as ever you and I have finished the task which still requires completion. In the third place, I was not thinking of Prince Gorouki as your future husband, but of a dear friend of my own, who lost his heart to you the first moment he saw you, and who is responsible for my presence here. Can you guess whom I mean?"

I felt myself flush scarlet, for I knew that he meant Viscount Broomville, and I should have been wild with joy if the latter had not been in grave danger.

"Oh!" I ejaculated, "he will be killed! He has been arrested. But they were sham policemen, and the warrant was a forged one! Those awful people will never let him escape again!"

"Oh, yes, they will, for they cannot help themselves. This business has been a case of diamond cut diamond all through, and Broomville could not be spirited away without his friends knowing exactly where he was. There has been no money spared, and there are several men constantly watching Broomville. Wherever he is taken, they will follow, and you need not be uneasy on his account, even though I appeared to be working against him."

"And did he ask you to come here?"

"Yes. After several attempts had been made on his life, he determined to obliterate himself for a time, and discover the source of his danger. He saw the man you christened the 'Bird of Evil Omen' talking to your maid Annchen, and he then pursued his investigations so ardently that the whole castle of cards will soon fall round the ears of the so-called Mr. D'Alton and his wife."

"His wife?"

"Yes, she is his wife, and, if possible, she is more wicked than he is."

"She is awful! She has a book on poisons, and she managed to give me a dose. That was how I was so helpless and stupid for awhile. But I heard every word that was said while I was lying here, and I know that she intended to kill me."

"I know that, too, for you were too keen of intellect to be a mere careless tool. The post of decoy should be given to a really wicked woman, who has neither heart nor conscience. Unfortunately for this colossal scheme of swindling, you have both a heart and a conscience."

"Ah! What is that?"

There was a slight rattle at my outer door, and Doctor Farnie smiled reassuringly.

"It is only Susan with your lunch," he said. "I took the precaution of turning the key after her, to guard against surprises."

And there was need of caution, for Susan had surprised Annchen so intent upon trying to listen at the keyhole, that she had not time to get away before she was observed. Happily, we were talking only in whispers, for each knew the desperate need of caution, and we were quite convinced that not a word of what he had said could be overheard.

"Keep a sharp look-out, Susan," enjoined Dr. Farnie. "Neither Annchen nor her mistress must be allowed to enter these rooms. But it will not do to arouse suspicion against me, so if any questions are asked you, you must say that Miss Vivienne is already quiet and cheerful. And tell Mr. D'Alton that everything is going on satisfactorily. He will know what you mean."

When Susan had gone again, I began to eat my lunch, for I felt the need of it, and, while I ate, Dr. Farnie answered more of the questions which I eagerly put to him.

One of these was put with a sudden doubt in my voice.

"After all," I said, "how do I know that you are not hypnotising me this minute into believing whatever you choose to tell me? It is what you are here for."

"I can quite understand your doubts, Miss D'Alton," was the grave reply. "But I swear to you that you are now in an absolutely normal state. I have experimented a good deal in hypnotism. But I am a failure as a perfect hypnotist, for I have been unable to influence you to the total exclusion of your own will. Broomville saw some of my experiments, and that gave him the idea of making me useful here. He thought that some kind of villainy was sure to be brought into play against you, and that it was just as well that one of the villains should be somebody who would really befool Mr. D'Alton into believing his plans to be progressing satisfactorily."

"One moment, Dr. Farnie. Is it quite certain that Mr. D'Alton is not my father?"

"The man who poses as your father is not in the least degree related to you. Nor is his wife."

"Then they had good reason to fear what Miss D'Alton could tell about them! And that is why they robbed the poor old lady of her memory! But we must lose no more time in restoring it. I will leave this house at once. She shall be cured this very day."

My words had a strange effect on Dr. Farnie. He almost gasped for breath, and looked at me in such an anxious way that I thought he must have been taken suddenly ill.

"You say that Miss D'Alton has been deliberately robbed of her memory?" he cried, "and that we must lose no time in restoring it? Are you speaking at random? Or are both statements true?"

"Perfectly true," I answered firmly. "The fiendish stuff which Mrs. Sherwood uses is described in her book of poisons, and I was actually buying the antidote for it when I was forcibly removed from the shop."

"Ah! That explains something I did not understand! But it also opens out such a possibility of joy as you have not yet dreamt of. I know somebody else whose memory is a blank, and if it can be restored, there will be no more mystery in either your life or his."

There was so solemn and significant a tone in Dr. Farnie's voice that a wild thought rushed into my mind.

"This other person whose memory is a blank," I panted—"has he aught to do with me? His name—tell me his name."

"Yes, I will tell you his name," was the triumphantly spoken answer. "His name is Beverley D'Alton, and he is your real father."

(Another instalment of this series will appear next week.)

HANDWRITING DENOTES YOUR CHARACTER.

And if you wish to learn what this is send a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope, to RANEE, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. A reliable delineation of your character will be sent in return.

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The Mistake They Made.

Being the Love Story of Roberta Bond.

Dr. Bond found his eyes weakening, and discovered that he could no longer, even with glasses, place before the printer that fine "copy" for which he was renowned, and as his great work on the Mysteries of Science was not yet half-completed, he advertised for a "secretary," and from the long and seemingly never-ending train of men—young, old, well-dressed, and shabby—who, for two weeks, answered his advertisement—selected one, a delicate young fellow named Burnet, with a pretty rather than a handsome face, a coat that had done service, and boots that needed mending.

The secretary was to live in the house, and partake of the family meals; and Dr. Bond's selection, which was supposed to be based entirely on handwriting, was secretly biassed a little by the harmlessness of this young person.

Dr. Bond had been a widower for three years, and had two daughters, between whom their deceased mother's large fortune was divided equally.

He had desired to engage a foreign-looking professor, with wild hair, moustaches, and a great gift of speech, but bethought him that he would certainly make love to the girls.

A young man, who evidently thought himself like a portrait of Lord Byron, he rejected because he feared Bella might fall in love with him.

As for Roberta, it never occurred to him that she would, as he expressed it, make a fool of herself again. She was thirty years of age, had been "engaged" to somebody once, and they had quarrelled and parted, and Roberta had fallen ill, and it was not at all pleasant. He believed that Roberta would stay with him always, and take comfort in the independence her fortune gave her.

She was a handsome woman, and greatly admired, but it is to be doubted if her father knew it. But, at all events, this small, slim, light-haired secretary, with his retiring manner and solemn, owl-like eyes, would not be a bait for hearts.

So it proved when the secretary appeared at the dinner-table. He was so much alarmed when spoken to that Bella and Roberta, both large women with decided manners, and a strong sense of humour, looked at each other with glittering eyes.

"Oh, isn't he funny?" cried Bella, when once they were alone. "And how we frighten him! I felt like guying him. It's so absurd for a man to be like that. I hope he is not a girl, and will not turn out to have applied for the secretaryship to make love to poor papa, like the pretty pages in the old romances."

"Really, he is like a girl," said Roberta. "But he won't be at all in the way, and I can't think even you will flirt with him—which is a blessing."

However, Roberta was very much more motherly in her emotions than was Bella, and very shortly she began to pet young Burnet, as she might a boy on a visit home from school.

He was very grateful, very amiable, and returned her kindness in a thousand of those little ways that so please a woman. But whatever he did, wherever he was, the young man always seemed to be unhappy. Once or twice, when she came upon him suddenly, she saw tears in his blue eyes. It troubled her; she liked him so much. She longed to ask him what it was that troubled him. Perhaps he missed his home. It seemed strange to her that so gentle and easily-pleased a creature should have any secret woe to brood over. Still she could not guess what it was, until one day chance——But let us see what chance did.

Dr. Bond, like most literary men, hated to have his room "tidied up." Still there were periods when dust accumulated to such a depth on everything that his daughters and their servants raided the place in his absence, and, working in fear and trembling, did all that broom, and duster, and soap-and-water could do to the neglected study, which their father instantly set to work to throw into its old state again.

Such a day came. The rush was made. Bella and Roberta worked with the servants. At last all was fresh, bright, and purified, and Roberta lingered behind the others in the study to arrange some books more prettily on their shelves. Some of these she set on young Burnet's desk for a time, and in doing so her eye rested on the large sheet of blotting-paper that covered it. Certain words were reversed upon it.

Roberta looked, blushed, laughed a little; replaced the paper with a new sheet, and carried the marked one to her own room. There she held it before a mirror, and read these words: "Roberta—Roberta—Roberta," written over and over again. Then: "Oh, my Roberta! If I only dared! If I only dared!" And after this: "Never—never! Oh, poverty!"

Roberta folded the paper away in the recesses of a private drawer, and sat down trembling and excited, to think it all over. So this was the secret: he loved her—and, being poor, dared not tell her. Lovers always did these things. During the brief period of her engagement, did she not write her lover's name—Charles Lawrence—whenever she took a pen in her hand? And so it was *this—this*—and being this, she could make him happy, drive away his sorrow—she!

Sunk in the cushions of a great chair, she thought it all over until thinking was a pain. Charles Lawrence was the only man she could ever love—but she liked William Burnet. Perhaps she could come to like him well enough to marry him. To be loved, even if one cannot love, is something, and he would never know. She would try. She laughed as she rose to dress her hair and to arrange her costume for the evening; but she repeated—she would try.

She did honestly. And it makes ever so much difference in a true woman's feelings to any man to know that he loves her.

Time passed. Roberta really felt that there was much to like and respect in this young man. She encouraged him to cross the debatable land between friendship and love, but he still lingered on the margin. At last she took the first step.

They were alone one evening. He had come into the drawing-room to get a book, and she had asked him to sit down. His face was so sad, his manner so despondent, that, involuntarily, she drew nearer to him and put her hand on his arm.

"You are in trouble," she said.

He sighed.

"Can I help you?" she asked gently.

"No," he answered. "If I could become a rich man, that would help—nothing else; but I never shall be that. I have no energy, no talent, no physique. I—I wish I were dead."

He almost sobbed.

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Roberta drew nearer.

"Coward!" she said softly.

"I believe I do deserve the name," he answered.

"You do," said Roberta, smiling. "Why should you fear to tell a woman you love her, because she is rich, and you are poor? You see, I know all."

She looked at him rather as a gallant cavalier might regard a loving maiden than with the gaze a woman gives her lover, and his pale, boyish face flushed, and his eyes filled again.

"I guessed," she said. "And then I saw the name you had written so often. I understood. You should not have been so doubtful of me."

Then William Burnet quite understood.

The instinct of a gentleman taught him what to do. Many a less bashful man would not have known, but he did.

He sank upon his knees at her feet and took her hands.

"You are so good—so kind!" he said. "You quite sympathise with us, I am sure. You are much my superior, and even hers, in every way. Her name is the same as yours—Roberta; and she is only seventeen. Not very pretty, but I love her so! But about being rich, you are mistaken. She is as poor as I—poorer—dependent on a miserable uncle. You know all now. Oh, how good you are! I am so glad you spoke of it to me."

But he knew—he knew, and he kept wondering at it all to himself as he went quietly out of the room, after Roberta had forced herself to say:

"I shall try to help you to find something better, so that you shall be able to marry my little namesake."

Afterwards she went through an awful struggle with self-contempt and shame, and could have beaten herself for her folly. She remained in the firelit room alone, and did not call for a lamp. She paced the floor, and seated herself only to rise again. She had trained herself to love this boyish, weak, helpless man for his sake, that she might be good to him, and out of gratitude for the secret love he felt for her; and here was a *dénouement*. He had never loved her at all. It was a silly little Roberta, with a foolish mouth and seventeen inexperienced years, for whose sake he bemoaned himself—a penniless girl, with no beauty, and she had almost offered herself to him.

The ringing of the bell startled her from a dark reverie. She fancied her father and sister had returned, and remained where she was; and the door opened, and a servant entered bringing a card, which the low fire-light did not enable her to read.

And someone had followed the girl—a large man with a beard—a presence grand and impressive—that seemed strange, yet familiar.

"Roberta," said a voice.

It came out of the midst of a never-forgotten past.

"Who speaks?" she cried.

Then she knew. It was Charles Lawrence. The servant brought the lamp in and retired.

They looked at each other.

"Roberta," he said, "I have come back again. Are you angry?"

She trembled so that she could not speak.

He took her hand.

"I deserved punishment," he said. "Heaven knows I have had it in this exile from you. Is it not proof enough that, after all these years, I return to ask for pardon? Can you not forgive one who repents so deeply?"

And then he told her the whole truth of a certain story, the warped version of which had parted them, and she blushed for her wrath and for her cruelty, and believed in him once again.

Clasped in his arms, and happy as a woman could be, Roberta remembered the scene of an hour before. What misery had been hers, had she received from William Burnet an avowal of love in reply to her words: "If he had really loved her, or, tempted by the bait of wealth, had said so."

A few days after this Roberta called young Burnet to her and told him, in quite a motherly manner, that the gentleman she should shortly marry could offer him a place which would enable him to marry his little lady-love. She was beaming with happiness as she spoke, and young Burnet was greatly puzzled.

"Of course I was a fool to think such an absurd thing," he often says to himself. "I fancied she thought I loved her, and even liked me, but it could not have been. I am so glad it was not."

He lives happily with his Roberta. The other Roberta thinks herself the most blissful woman under the sun; and all is well that ends well. **Stanley Hammond.**

A Word of Advice.

The second list of signatures in connection with our new competition appears on page 369, and I should advise all my readers to turn to it immediately and make up their minds to try for one of the splendid cash prizes that are offered. The first coupon was published in our last number, and the others will appear week by week. If you have not got last week's *Short Stories*, procure it at once, else you may experience some difficulty in getting a copy. It would be wise to tell your newsagent to send you this paper every week—at least, until the competition ceases. In this way you would make quite certain of having all the necessary competition numbers, and I trust that by that time you would have developed such a liking for the literary contents that you would continue to subscribe to it for their sake alone. Try it and see.

A New Serial.

"Dupes of Destiny," the fine serial written by Blanche Eardley, and which has been so popular, will be concluded very shortly. Readers have followed the story with keen interest, and many, no doubt, will be sorry to part with the characters. Still, all good things must have an end, and you have further compensation, insomuch that in its place an exciting new serial, written by Arnold Bennett, the well-known author, will commence. It will be a stirring tale of plot and power, of cunning and crime, of love and loyalty. One of the premier black-and-white artists of the day, Mr. Reginald Cleaver, will illustrate it with profuse sketches. Remember that this new serial will commence in the number of *Short Stories* dated April 2nd.

"The Heart of Claire Gilchrist."

The above is the title of the Tenth Unsolved Love Problem, which you will find on the opposite page.

I will award a prize of one guinea to the reader who sends in what I consider to be the best solution to the problem. Replies must not exceed one hundred words, and should be written on one side of the paper only. The last day on which I can receive replies will be Friday, March 25th. None arriving after that date will be considered. Address your envelopes to the Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Mark the top left-hand corner "Tenth Love Problem." **Your Editor.**

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UNSOLVED LOVE PROBLEMS.

A Prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

No. X.—THE HEART OF CLAIRE GILCHRIST.

THROUGH the half-opened church door came the pealing notes of an organ, and the fair girl who stood without paused, for a few minutes, with her hand on the heavy latch.

She was a perfect Saxon type, such as has decided the type of English beauty for all time; tall and nobly proportioned, her skin exquisitely fair, and her eyes deep blue; while one might be forgiven for imagining that the gold of her hair lighted the gloom of the old porch. It was summer-time, and her dress, simple as it was, showed evidence of both wealth and taste. Her head was bare, for all her walk, except the churchyard path, had been through her father's property. She was Claire Gilchrist, daughter of Sir Mostyn Gilchrist, of Mellor Park.

As she stood listening in the doorway, loth to interrupt the player, the pealing notes were changed to sounds of poignant sweetness, that again melted into a minor key of infinite sadness. The ready tears that started to her eyes showed a nature sensitive to music, and then, as though unable to bear it any longer, she pushed open the door, and hastily twisting her lace scarf over her head, entered and moved swiftly up the aisle.

The church seemed almost in darkness save where the chancel windows flooded the pavement with many-coloured glories, and as she reached the chancel step the light fell upon her, and the player at the organ turned and saw her.

It was a grandly-shaped head that looked at her with deep, dark eyes into which, as they met hers, there leapt a strange flame, and the music changed its character.

Triumphant, passionate chords crashed out till Claire stood transfixed, feeling herself surrounded with a glowing passion of love; then they stopped abruptly, and she shivered at the sudden removal of the heavenly light and warmth that had enveloped her. She moved forward timidly, but at the same moment the organist rose, and, shutting the instrument, came towards her.

Then it was seen that he was lame and stunted in figure. The grand head, with the powerful though irregular features, seemed as if it should belong to another body, for his was thin and insignificant, almost shrunken, while a club foot caused a lameness painful to observe.

"Mr. Rhys," said Claire, "I have a request to make."

"Certainly, Miss Gilchrist, I am at your service; we will go outside," he replied, standing aside to let her pass before him down the quaint little village church.

Not a word was said as he locked the church door, and placed the ponderous key in his pocket. Claire still felt the glamour of the music, but could no more allude to it in spoken words than if it had been a veritable declaration of love, such as it sounded to her heart.

In the churchyard she led the way to a low wall under an old yew tree, and here she seated herself, and motioned to him to do likewise, but he preferred to stand, leaning against the tree, seeming wilfully to display all the disproportionateness of his figure.

Out in the open, away from the impressive gloom of the little old church and without the flood of passionate music or the compelling gaze of the fiery Celtic eyes, Claire was once more the "lady of the Manor," and Owen Rhys was the organist.

Now, however, she turned to him, and said, with the air of one asking a favour.

"It is my birthday next week, and I am going to have a garden-party. Will you come?"

"To play?" he asked.

"No," she replied—"as a guest."

"I never go out," was all his answer.

Claire was evidently accustomed to this abruptness, for she took no offence; she only said:

"Do come!"

He turned on her almost passionately.

"Why do you want to make me come where I know I shall only be out of place? I cannot talk, I am ill at ease away from my music, and I am not the latest London furore that I might fatuously imagine I did these ladies and gentlemen sufficient honour in allowing them to breathe the same air with me. I am only the lame organist of Mellor parish church."

"That is your own choice—you might be anything you chose," she replied, somewhat hastily, and regretted the words almost before she saw the gloom that overspread his expressive countenance.

"Might I—with this misshapen body?" he asked, with a contemptuous gesture.

"Yes," she went on boldly, determined to say out what had long been in her mind. "Who would see the shortcomings of your body when you can draw the very soul out of them with your music? If you had had the courage to face the world as you are, believe me, there would be no one whose fame or riches would exceed yours, no man or woman who would not be proud to receive a word of love from you!"

Here she stopped abruptly, appalled to see whither her pent-up feelings had led her.

His eyes flashed at her words, but he replied in a restrained manner:

"You may call it cowardice, and I have no right to contradict you. I have no wish for riches, and what is fame when there can never be anyone to make glad by it? For never would I wish to trick man or woman by the glamour of my music into a love that they could not otherwise have for me. Owen Rhys, as I am, body and soul. I am and must remain one apart; my life cannot be arranged on the same lines as any other man's."

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Claire was too much abashed by the thought of the "too much" she had said to him to be able to reply, as she felt she ought:

"This is morbid; your deformity is much less than you, by long contemplation of it, have grown to think."

Besides, she knew that to his beauty-loving artist's soul, any deformity was repulsive and humiliating, so she only stammered:

"I beg your pardon."

Owen bowed; and then, with a return to a more conventional tone, he said:

"Still, Miss Gilchrist, if your father would like me to come and play to his guests, I will do so gladly, for the sake of a talk with so scholarly a gentleman, and so enthusiastic a musician as he is."

"Thank you," said Claire coldly; "I will tell him."

Poor Claire was deeply wounded. "He would not come as my guest and because I asked him, but he will come to oblige father and play. Is it pride, or is it what he really feels?"

A few minutes before, as he played with his glowing, passionate music, she felt as sure as she felt of anything in Heaven or earth, that he loved her, and yet directly after he was his usual impassive self, coldly putting aside her personal wishes, and making her feel that she had laid claim to an intimacy that did not exist when she criticised his plan of life.

And the same thing had happened so often, and the question that she ever asked herself was no nearer being answered than before: "Did he love her, or did he not?"

For imperious Claire Gilchrist, whom half the neighbouring youths had striven in vain to soften, had unreservedly given her heart to this poor, lame, village organist.

It was not, however, a fancy of a moment. For five years he had lived there almost in intimacy with her father, who liked the man and adored his genius. From the first she had seen through his cold manner, and discovered the fiery heart of gold that beat beneath his rugged exterior. With the patience of true love she had penetrated his reserve and found the noble spirit in which there was nothing small, or mean, or selfish. But she found, also, the simple nature that saw only two courses, right and wrong, and the iron determination that would never deviate from a course once decided on as right.

Her birthday came, and though her question was still unanswered, Claire, amongst her flowers and her friends, was apparently the gayest of the gay. In spite of her coldness to suitors, she had many friends amongst her own sex, who loved her perhaps all the better that she did not use her advantages of wealth and beauty to draw all the young men into her train.

She was in the midst of a laughing, chattering group, when her father, Sir Mostyn Gilchrist, approached, and said in a courtly manner that always suggested the elaborate ceremonial of a bygone age:

"Mr. Owen Rhys has done us the honour to consent to play to us, and at his own suggestion he will come into the garden for that purpose. All, therefore, who wish to take advantage of his kind offer will assemble under the large beech tree at five o'clock."

Claire swept him an elaborate courtesy, and replied:

"Good, my lord father—we will attend."

The others laughed at the appropriate reply, and he, calling her "a saucy minx," passed on to make a similar announcement to the other groups.

At five the many-coloured, laughing group under the beech-tree awaited the musician to whom all were prepared to accord admiration and applause, even those who knew nothing of music and cared less, since it was the fashion set by Sir Mostyn Gilchrist.

Claire expected him to sit and play his 'cello as he had so often done before, but what was her surprise when he appeared, limping slowly over the lawn, carrying in his hand a violin. Never had she heard him play that instrument, which must necessarily show to the greatest disadvantage all the defects of his figure.

Silently he took his place before them in the now slanting sunlight, his head bare, and his long, nervous, musician's fingers clutching at his violin. Then, with no other preliminary than a bow, he began to play.

And what music it was!

He first crashed out discords such as made his hearers writhe, and then came a wail of sadness that swelled and grew till it was a passionate cry to Heaven for pity. His dark eyes, looking straight in front of him, encountered Claire's, and she knew that it was to her he was speaking. The discords were his deformity, then came his cry for mercy, but after there followed a soft, tremulous note as of sunshine breaking through storms, melting the clouds, and turning turbid waters to gold with its gleam and promise, and this theme grew till it dominated everything; there was no more darkness or sadness, all was grand, and bright, and beautiful, and she knew that it was love, the beautifier, the illuminator.

Louder and more insistent grew the music till it was Love triumphant, Love, who rendered all things beautiful, even his deformity, and made him in the strength and beauty of his love worthy to mate with wealth and loveliness; but then the brightness and the glory died away, the chords sobbed and moaned under his touch till they suggested the slow recognition of a great grief; then there was a horrible wrench of pain, but at the last, renunciation, resignation, and peace.

As the last notes died away on the quivering air, Claire came to herself, and she felt that Owen's soul had spoken to hers in the music as it never would by words. Surely her question was answered, he loved her, but with a morbid horror of his deformity, he did not think it right to tell her of his love openly, and had therefore put it all into his music, knowing that if she loved him she would understand. She longed to be alone with him that she might say to him, "No need—no need for renunciation. In love all are equal, let the soul and heart be pure, and what matters the shape of the body?"

But then she caught his voice speaking calmly and naturally in reply to her father's congratulations and questions.

"It was only a fantasy I composed for Miss Gilchrist's birthday. I am glad that it has pleased you."

"It is magnificent! Come here, Claire, Mr. Rhys has indeed honoured you; come and thank him."

Claire came forward trembling, but his cool, composed glance fell on her almost like a dash of cold water, all the fire was gone from his eyes, and he received her thanks with the polite pleasure of an everyday acquaintance.

And then her father broke in:

"Yes, yes, I am sure I understand what you mean by it. You should call it 'Life,' the pangs of birth, the tranquil joys of childhood, the passionate loveliness of life in youth, old age approaching the pangs of dissolution, resignation to the will of God. Let me have it published—it will make you famous."

Owen bowed. "You do me too much honour, but, unfortunately, the score got burnt last night."

Sir Mostyn exclaimed in horror:

"But surely you can re-write it?"

"I do not think I could," he replied, and turned to reply to the thanks and compliments that the guests were crowding round to deliver. As soon as he had replied to all their more or less felicitous remarks, he became immersed in a discussion on the music of the masters with Sir Mostyn, and seemed to have already forgotten about his own composition, and Claire.

Claire, her whole spirit in a tumult, could not understand his calmness. That he could pour out his soul in a passion of love and longing and five minutes later there would be no sign of the slightest emotion even in his eyes. Was it all wonderful self-control, or was her father's interpretation the right one, and had she entirely misunderstood the meaning of his music!

If he really loved her, but would not declare his love on account of his poverty and deformity, ought she not to let him know that she loved him, as he had said, "himself, body and soul," and that her only happiness would be with him. But did he love her? Dare she risk it?

L. Hughes.

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£25 IN CASH PRIZES!

1st Prize, £10. 2nd Prize, £5. 3rd Prize, £2.

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WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below you will find six signatures. Each of these signatures is the ordinary signature of the person to whom it belongs. The writing is not assumed for the occasion; it is just the way in which each of the persons signs his name to letters or to cheques. The first set of signatures appeared last week.

What you have to do is to print in the space opposite each signature the name (initials, Christian name and surname) which you think it to be. Many of the names will be those of well-known people, others will be names of ordinary folk like yourself. No one but the Editor is in possession of the correct names of all the signatures shown. If you are in doubt as to the correct rendering of any signature or signatures ask some of your friends. When you have filled up the coupon to the best of your ability, cut it out and keep it by you, with the other coupons, until you see an announcement in SHORT STORIES telling you to send them in; together with the coupons which will appear in SHORT STORIES.

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(1) The name must be clearly printed in ink opposite each signature.
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(3) No alterations are allowed in the words.
(4) When you have filled up your coupon, cut it out and keep it by you, together with the coupons which have appeared and will appear in SHORT STORIES.
(5) Each competitor may send only one set of coupons, but all the members of one household may compete. Each set will be accepted independently.
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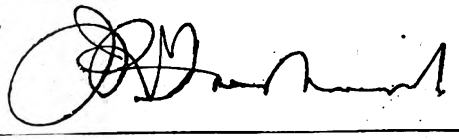
No. 7. 	
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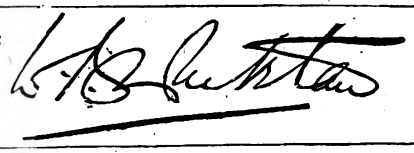
No. 11. 	
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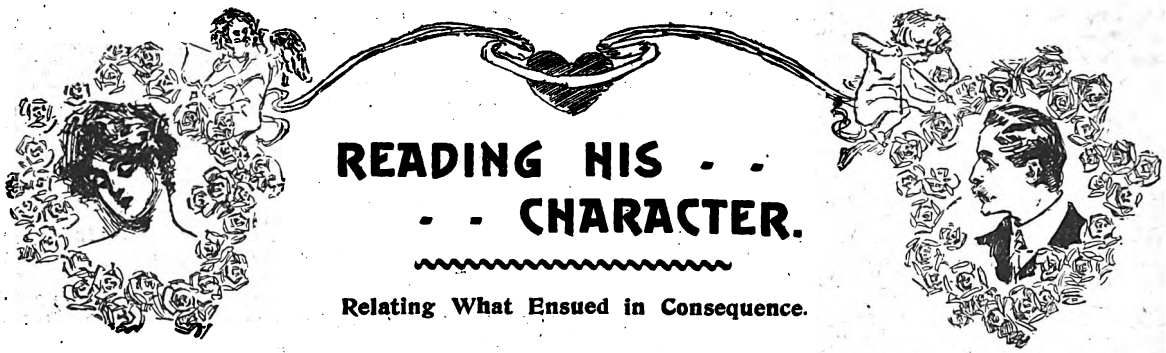

READING HIS - - - - CHARACTER.

Relating What Ensued in Consequence.

THERE was the usual amount of noise, bustle, dust, and confusion that is always attendant upon the departure of a railway train. Dr. Hartwell's large, portly figure completely blocked up the entrance of the compartment as he stood taking leave of his patient. He had at last accomplished a result for which he had worked hard. No one would suppose, in looking from him to the frail, delicate young girl who, clad in deep mourning, was lounging back among cushions and shawls, that there ever could have been a contest between them. It seemed as if a breath might crush her, she was so very fragile; yet, as she raised her face to his in talking, and one caught a full look at it, the firm, resolute mouth and chin betrayed the undeniable fact that Leslie Graham had a very strong will of her own.

She had been ill with a long, nervous prostration following her father's death, and it had required all the skill of their old, faithful family physician, and the most assiduous care and nursing, to bring her back to life. Now, although it was two years since her father died, and her physical strength had in a great measure returned, she was very sad and morbidly melancholy. In the hope of rallying her, Dr. Hartwell had insisted on her going to the seaside, and had finally prevailed.

Now, when bidding her good-bye at the station, he took out of his pocket a little red morocco note-book, with her initials, L. R. G., stamped upon the outside cover, saying:

"Here is my prescription, and all the medicine I shall give you. I do not want you to read, or sew, or think at all. I want you to lounge about among the rocks, and drink in the sea air, and eat and sleep all you can. This book is for your observations of the people around you Your amusement and your medicine are to consist of studying the characters and the characteristics of your fellow creatures. Write down your first impression of a person, and the ideas you form of that person at sight; then, as your knowledge increases, you can see how far your intuitions were right. Of course, you will make some grand mistakes, but keep on, and your facility in reading character correctly will increase. You must forget yourself entirely, and occupy your mind with all the strange people that I hope to find written out here when you come back."

The guard blew his whistle.

"Good-bye," said the doctor. "Oh, by-the-way, my nephew, of whom you have heard me speak, has returned from Cyprus. He was in town the other day. I wanted to bring him with me, but he couldn't stop. He was in a hurry to join his mother and sister. I am sorry you did not meet him. Perhaps, though, I can interest him sufficiently in your case to induce him later to visit you in my stead."

"Dr. Hartwell, you will do no such thing!" Leslie exclaimed, indignantly. "I will not have a spy sent down to watch me. Your nephew may be the prodigy you think him; but I shall not like him; I have not the slightest desire to see him."

Dr. Hartwell was very much amused. This was quite like the old Leslie, who was always taking strong dislikes to people.

"Well, my dear, you needn't worry about it now. It is likely enough you will meet John some day. I certainly mean you shall, and when you do, you will be surprised to find how well you get on together."

The railway journey was not a very long one, but Leslie grew tired before she reached her destination. The breath of the sea, which occasionally stole in through the windows as they approached the terminus, was very refreshing.

Leslie was perfectly delighted when she found they were to stay at the "Bedford," situated close to the front. When they woke, in the night-time, they could hear nothing but the deep under-tones of the sea, and the splashing of the waves. Really, Dr. Hartwell had been very considerate about her after all.

She was too much fatigued that night to think of her prescription. She was scarcely conscious that there was any one in the large dining-room but her Aunt Harriet, who had accompanied her, and herself; and she drank her tea, and ate a slice of dry toast, oblivious of the many glances bestowed upon them. The slight, graceful figure, and the pale, delicately-moulded face, with large, blue-grey eyes, would have attracted notice anywhere.

There was a party of five seated opposite, a little below them, who seemed to regard Leslie with a great deal of interest Aunt Harriet thought. The group comprised an aged lady, two young ladies, and two gentlemen. One of the young ladies was tall, dark, and very stylish; the other was small, fair, and evidently an invalid, for a crutch rested behind her chair. One of the gentlemen was very brilliant and talkative, the other remained silent, but every time Aunt Harriet looked towards the group, his eyes were either fastened intently upon Leslie, or just turning away. She thought perhaps he knew her; but his face was perfectly inscrutable, and she could not make out whether recognition, admiration, curiosity, or all three, prompted his steady gaze. She told Leslie about them, after tea.

"I think, dear, they are very nice people," she said, after finishing her description of them.

"Well, I hope they are, if we are to sit so near them," Leslie replied. Then, brightening up a little, she continued: "I suppose I can begin my character study with them; they will probably be as interesting, from what you say, as anybody here. I feel very sorry for the young lady who is lame."

Leslie went down to the breakfast-table, the next morning, with her mind ready for its first encounter. She looked over at her neighbours opposite rather timidly, and after a little while, decided to begin with the young man who sat nearest, as his attention was entirely taken up with the lame lady.

He did not notice Leslie in the least, nor show any uneasiness under her close scrutiny. She had nearly finished her observations, and made up her mind in regard to him, when he suddenly turned and looked straight in her face, with an amused, questioning gaze, which said almost as plainly as words:

"Have you finished with me?"

Leslie was mortified and provoked. He had been aware, then, all the time, that she was looking at him, and had purposely kept his attention the other way. This was likely to prove a dangerous amusement, she thought, and one that

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might lead her into uncomfortable straits. Her face flushed very perceptibly, and in her embarrassment she caught the handle of her coffee-spoon in her sleeve, and overturned her cup. She was thoroughly angry now, but pride came to her rescue. She would not allow this trivial occurrence to discompose her. Surely she had sufficient dignity to sustain her in a moment like this.

"What a stupid performance, Aunt Harriet, is it not?" she said.

If it had been the young gentleman who was studying character he would have had a rare opportunity. The metamorphosis was wonderful of that quiet, subdued, sad-faced little girl of the night before. The features seemed to stiffen and grow cold, her eyelids drooped a little, her eyes became quite dark, her lips compressed, and her chin looked as if chiselled out of marble. She seemed "every inch a queen."

Soon after breakfast Leslie went to her room, and entered the following in her note-book—

"*July 8th.*—Made an attempt this morning, according to the doctor's prescription, to study a gentleman opposite us at table. He has a splendidly-formed head, the forehead jutting over, deep-set eyes—dark-blue, I think—large nose, mouth, and chin, light hair and moustache. He has a way of taking in everything with one glance, and knowing all that is going on in the room; also the power of seeing, apparently, out of the back of his head. His manner is commanding and rather overbearing, though not really ungentle. I should say that he was born with a feeling of superiority. He likes to place people at a disadvantage, and then be magnanimous. He could never stoop to ask a favour, he would ask it as his right instead. He is not quick-tempered. On the contrary, in a quarrel he could be exasperatingly cool, while he would make his opponent's blood boil with rage and fury. Altogether, he is quite disagreeable, and I hope that I shall not have to make his acquaintance. He turned to me with a most provoking look when I finished studying him, as if he knew just what I was doing, when, of course, he could not; to crown all, I upset my coffee. I suppose he thought he had produced quite an impression, to cause so much confusion. He is horribly conceited—not of his looks, but of his power over people. I shall grow to detest him if he stays here long. I wanted to study the nice old lady, and the lame girl, who has a lovely, sweet face; but I shall not dare to molest them while such an ogre mounts guard."

After the disastrous result of her first attempt, Leslie had not the courage to pursue her study any further. She tried not to notice these people at all, but she could not help meeting them on the stairs, in the hall, or out on the pier, and once or twice it seemed as if the lame young lady was about to speak to her.

Leslie found a delightful sheltered little nook, far out on a peninsula of rocks, where she and Aunt Harriet could lounge all the morning. She would spread out her heavy travelling-shawl and lie here for hours, lazily watching the vessels as they passed, till their white sails were lost in the distance.

It was impossible to withstand his pleading looks. One glance into his earnest face disarmed her entirely.

One day, while they were in this favourite haunt, a breeze suddenly wafted into Leslie's lap a dainty light-blue veil. A moment more, and it would have found a watery grave, but Leslie caught it.

She turned to see if the owner were near, and beheld the lame young lady at some little distance higher up on the rocks. The latter nodded, and beckoned with her hand, so there was nothing for Leslie to do, but clamber up the steep ascent and restore the property.

"What a tiresome breeze that was," the young lady began. "I thought I had tied my veil quite securely, when away it went all of a sudden, before I could catch it. Thank you, very much!" Then, in a rather hesitating, timid way, she said, looking up into Leslie's face: "Won't you sit down a little while? I am quite alone. My brother is reading his papers, and I came out with Arthur and Helen; but they saw some friends who were going out for a sail, and wanted to go, so I made them leave me, and told them I did not care if I was alone. But I should like very much to talk to you, if you do not mind."

This was all said so sweetly, that Leslie could not refuse, so she sat down beside her, and Aunt Harriet, seeing them enter into conversation, went up to the hotel, leaving Leslie to her fate.

It does not take two girls very long to become acquainted

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when one is frank, cordial, and communicative, and the other is a sympathetic, appreciative listener. In little more than half-an-hour, Leslie knew all about Alice Rogers, for that was her name, and almost everything that had ever happened to her. She learnt, too, all about her brother, Dr. Franklin Rogers, the subject of her study, who had been abroad ever so many years, studying medicine, and was very learned. He was Alice's half-brother, as her mother had been a second wife, and he was the son of a former marriage. She also learnt that the dark, stylish young lady was Helen Spencer, one of Alice's intimate friends, and the young man so devoted to her was Arthur Campbell. He was very much in love with Helen; but Alice thought she could not quite make up her mind to have him, although he was wealthy. Helen had had so much attention, and so many offers, that it was hard for her to decide the momentous question.

They were chatting away, when they heard footsteps approaching. Alice turned, and saw her brother close behind them.

"Frank, I want to introduce you to Miss Graham. I have got acquainted with her, and we are already very good friends."

He raised his hat with a courteous bow, and seated himself.

"I am afraid, Alice, you have taken by storm what some persons have to toil years for. I should judge that Miss Graham's friendship is not always easy of acquisition."

And he looked at her inquiringly.

"But you are altogether and entirely wrong, Frank," Alice went on, in her perfectly child-like way. "She was not hard to get acquainted with, and I did not have to do it all, as you said I should."

He laughed at this, but did not seem in the least disconcerted.

"My dear Alice, you should not betray me in this manner. It was very foolish of me to make such a remark, and I beg Miss Graham's pardon most sincerely."

Leslie Graham was a remarkably truthful person. In her heart she knew that his judgment of her was correct. She did not make friends easily, and she was too honest with herself not to acknowledge that he was right. The most provoking part of it was that, notwithstanding his apology, his look into her face seemed forcing her to the confession that he was correct. After a momentary struggle, she said, with a sort of proud defiance:

"You are perfectly right, Dr. Rogers; I do not make acquaintances easily. It is quite wonderful to me, I assure you, the way your sister has succeeded with me in so short a time. I never knew such a thing to happen before."

He received her admission with a satisfied smile, which did not tend to lessen her indignation towards him. They talked a little while longer, and then, gathering up their shawls and wraps, they went back to the hotel. She could not help noticing how carefully he guided his sister over the rough rocks, lifting her in his arms over all the hard places. He was so very careful and tender with her that Leslie was forced to make an amendment in his favour, mentally.

After this, there was no more of quiet solitude for Leslie. She was constantly with some of the Rogers family. She and Alice grew to be very fond of each other. The physical affliction of the one, and the sorrow the other had passed through, drew them closely together, and a secret bond which neither could explain or understand united their hearts.

There was little time for character study outside the Rogers group. She made a few sketches, but did not have opportunities of following them out. Of Helen Spencer and Arthur Campbell she made very correct estimates, changing nothing in her first sketch, as her acquaintance progressed. With Mrs. Rogers, too, and Alice, she thought she did very well, but Doctor Rogers completely puzzled her. One day kind, thoughtful, deferential, and exceedingly entertaining; the next day commanding, tyrannical, quarrelsome, and altogether disagreeable. Sometimes she thought her first judgment had been absurdly harsh and unreasonable, and again she would think it not half severe enough.

He took it upon himself to look out for her, and care for her comfort in manifold little ways, the same as he did for Alice. It was very aggravating to Leslie, just after he had provoked her almost beyond endurance by some of his ironical speeches, to see him perform some unusually kind and thoughtful act for her. As such times she would either receive his attentions haughtily, or reject them entirely. Finally he said, one day, after such an occurrence:

"You do not like to have things done for you—to be waited upon—do you, Miss Graham?"

"No. I prefer always to wait upon myself." Then, thinking this might sound a little rude, she added: "I am quite an independent individual, and have always been used to looking out for myself."

"Yes, I have discovered that. Well, I do not like to be thanked for every trifling service I render, so let us make an agreement. You shall allow me to wait upon you, and care for your health and comfort, as I think the occasion demands, and you shall receive it all as a matter of course, and I will not look for any thanks or expressions of gratitude till the end of the season, when you can render them wholesale."

Leslie glanced up at him quickly. She suspected that he knew it was irksome to her to be under obligations to him, and hence the agreement he had proposed. But he was looking out on the water, and she could tell nothing of the tenor of his thoughts.

Once he was telling her of an adventure he had had in Cyprus, when the thought suddenly occurred to her that perhaps he had met Dr. Hartwell's wonderful nephew, so she asked:

"Did you ever meet a Dr. John Hartwell abroad? He is my doctor's nephew, and I have heard a great deal about him. That is—I presume his name is Hartwell—I don't know why I should, either, for now I think of it, I have never heard him called anything but 'my nephew, John.'"

"Dr. John Hartwell? Let me see," and he kept his head bent down over the stick he was prodding the sand with, his hat shielding the amused look in his eyes. "No. I do not remember meeting anyone of that name. Is he clever?"

"His uncle thinks he is; but I have no doubt his talent is over-estimated. Liking will go a great way towards prejudicing one's mind," Leslie said.

"Yes, that is very true, and so will dislike," and he looked at her significantly as he spoke.

What could he mean? She bit her lip with vexation, and turned away. He was accustomed now to all her changes of moods. He delighted in bringing the angry flush to her cheek, and the darker light to her eyes. He liked to watch the small lips grow stern, and the slight figure draw itself up into cold stateliness. He knew just what turns in the conversation would do all this, and he was proud of his knowledge.

The summer wore away to its close, and Leslie Graham was very much improved. She was really sorry that her stay was nearly at an end, and that she must part with these friends whom she had learnt to like so well.

Yes, she liked them all, not even excepting Dr. Rogers. Her sketch of him had undergone many changes. She had crossed out, rewritten, added to, and taken from, all the characteristics she had at first given him. But now, at the last, she decided that she had been very unjust to him, and that she had treated him with undeserved rudeness many, many times. She knew now that he had been very kind to her, and that he had done a great deal for her comfort and enjoyment. She was too intrinsically noble to let him go away without telling him as much. They might never see each other again, and he would always have the remembrance of her temper and unladylike behaviour.

On the last afternoon Dr. Rogers crossed the hall, looking quite disconsolate, just as Leslie was coming downstairs. He brightened up when he saw her.

"Oh, Miss Graham, you are the very one I want to see. Do come out rowing with me. Alice is taking a nap, and Helen is off somewhere with Arthur. I know you don't like sailing, so we will have a boat, and I will row. This is the last afternoon we shall have, you know," and he waited with an eager, intreating look, for her answer.

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Yes, she would go. It would be such a good opportunity for her to say what she desired, and apologise for her rude behaviour. They might not be alone again.

When Dr. Rogers had rowed some distance out, Leslie, who had been rather silent all the way, began, with her head half-turned away from him:

"Dr. Rogers, I have something that I must say to you, before you go away; I owe it to you, and to myself also. I want to thank you now for the many kindnesses you have done for me, and for all your care and attention, which, at the time, I received so ungraciously. I was really grateful then, only my pride kept me from acknowledging it, and if you will add your pardon for my rudeness to you, I cannot be too grateful."

She was going on, but he stopped her.

"I am well aware why you did not like me to care for you. I knew it was hard for you to accept favours from me, so I arranged our little agreement. It is all right, and please don't say any more. I have never thought you rude, Miss Graham."

So, then, he would not permit her to apologise.

She was not satisfied with this. She had meant to humble her pride, and if he would not let her do it this way, there yet remained others. She had not understood the full meaning of his remark. Perhaps he did not intend that she should.

"You do not understand me, Dr. Rogers. It was not because I did not like to receive favours, but because I did not like you. I took a great dislike to you, that first morning, at breakfast, when I spilt my coffee—do you remember?"

She was approaching dangerous ground. Since their acquaintance, she had forgotten her feelings on that memorable morning, and her idea that he had suspected she was studying him.

"I do understand you. I knew perfectly well that you hated me, that morning, but I would not stop on that account."

Leslie began to be frightened. Did he know everything under the sun? Did he know of her note-book, safely locked in her drawer at the hotel, and what was inside it? He was the hardest person to accept an apology that she ever knew. She leant over the side of the boat, and dipped one hand in the water; then laid it upon her hot face. She was uncertain what to do now. At last, with a desperate effort, she took a rash step.

"You are right. I hated you thoroughly, that morning. Dr. Hartwell wanted me to study people's faces and characters, and gave me a little book to write down my observations in. I began with you, with what success, you know. My first impressions, after you startled me so, were not very flattering, as you may suppose; but I have since changed my mind," and she gave a nervous little laugh.

Dr. Rogers turned to her a radiant, triumphant face. He had been waiting for this. In a low, trembling voice, he said:

"I knew all that, too, Miss Graham."

Leslie was very angry now. She had meant to ask forgiveness for having wronged him; now she was sure her first judgment was correct. With flashing eyes she said:

"Dr. Rogers, you will turn this boat round and row back, and, when we land, you will please understand that we are to meet as strangers, henceforth, for ever." Her voice was quite tragic, and freezingly cold.

In an instant the reaction came, and she covered her face with her hands, crying bitterly. She felt as if she should like to drop over the side of the boat, and find a hiding-place in the dark waters. She could not think what it all meant, he was so disappointed, so baffled, and perplexed.

Dr. Rogers had become quite pale at her last words; but he laid down the oars, and came and knelt beside her. He took one of her hands away from her face and kissed it many times. She dropped her head on the railing in the stern, hiding her face from him, but did not take her hand away.

"You did not mean those dreadful words you said?" And the love in his voice could be disguised no longer. "How can we meet as strangers, when you are more to me than all the rest of the world? My darling, I know it was dreadful to deceive you so, but look up, and let me tell you all. Please!"

She lifted her head and looked drearily at him through her tears, as if he were a long distance off. It seemed as if nothing whatever that he could say would ever affect her again. She was unconscious that he still held her hand.

"I was sure that you would find me out long before this. I am Dr. Hartwell's detested nephew, but my name is not Hartwell, as you innocently supposed, one day. It amused me so, that I was on the point of letting out my secret. Dr. Hartwell is my own mother's brother, and the only one of the family who calls me John. I met him in town on my way here, and he told me about you, and of his plan respecting the character study. He did not know where to send you, and I suggested this place, and agreed to look out for you a little. He told me you were not over-anxious to meet me, and so together we formed this scheme; but I did not dream but that you would see through it, as soon as we became acquainted. When I first saw you, I repented heartily of the part I had agreed to play. Still, the temptation was very great to make you take some notice of me, aside from my character of Dr. Hartwell's nephew. It was cruel, and I cannot hope for your forgiveness; it is too much to ask; but if you will let my life, my love, my whole heart and soul make atonement, I shall be perfectly happy."

It was impossible to withstand his pleading look. One glance into his earnest, glowing face disarmed her utterly. After all, the one most to blame had been Dr. Hartwell, who wanted her to like his pet nephew, and knew she never would, unless her prejudice were overcome.

Her face softened. Perhaps the best way to gain ascendency over this man, who was kneeling at her feet, would be to accept his love, and be his queen for ever. In her weakness and doubt, this seemed the easiest way out of her difficulty. She was afraid, too, that she was beginning to love him a little; that is, before all this happened—now she did not quite know——

He was very quick to perceive her relenting.

"My own, my own," he cried, in his joy, "you are not going to send me away—you will keep me here for ever, close beside you, and take my whole life and love into your dear hands. You are mine now for ever and ever, and nothing can part us," and he folded her in his arms.

Long before Dr. Rogers had rowed the boat back to the shore, all Leslie's hauteur was gone, and perfect peace reigned between her and her lover. If you had seen the tenderness with which he assisted her to land, and the shy consciousness with which she accepted his aid, you would never have supposed that she started out with the intention of breaking off with him for ever.

Dr. Hartwell was perfectly satisfied with the result of his prescription. He often teases Leslie Rogers about it. But her husband never seconds him, for it came near proving a fatal prescription—to him, at least. Among his choicest treasures, he carefully and tenderly guards his wife's wedding gift, the little red morocco book, which contains the portrait of himself, drawn by her hand.

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Condemning it.

"AFTER all, love and war are the only proper themes for a poet." "Why do you say love and war? Why don't you just say marriage?"

It Was a Match.

HE had lent her his fountain pen to direct an envelope. She: "Why, doesn't it write beautifully? I declare I'm in love with this pen." He: "I'm in love with the holder!" She saw the "point."

Silence is Golden.

WITHERBY: "I made the mistake of my life this morning. I told my wife I didn't like her new gown." Plankington: "Was she angry?" Witherby: "Oh, no, it wasn't that; but she wants another."

Cause for Annoyance.

YOUNG MR. GRASPER (fondly): "You know, darling, that if I were to die all I have would be yours." Young Mrs. G. (poutingly): "What's the good of saying that? You know you're not likely to die yet!"

There were Defalcations.

CASHIER: "I wish to marry your daughter, sir. May I have her?" Proprietor (who has just been examining the books): "Well, I suppose I'd better give my consent. I want to keep the money in the family."

It Was!

"WILLIAM," she said gently, and yet in accents of reproof, "you remember that I gave you several letters to post last week, don't you?" "Y-yes, I remember it." "But this is the first time you have remembered it since I gave them to you, isn't it?"

Her Reason was a Good One.

"YES, George asked me how old I would be on my next birthday." "The impudent fellow! Of course, you said nineteen?" "No; I said twenty-six." "Mercy, girl, you're only twenty-four." "I know, but George is going to give me a cluster ring with a diamond in it for every year."

Why He was Happy.

"HALLO, Charley! What's up? Never saw you looking so jolly and happy!" "My girl has just got married." "Got married? Why, man, is that anything to be gay and festive over? You ought to be in the last stage of melancholy." "That's all right. You see. I'm the fellow she's married."

He was Indeed Sympathetic.

"It's a solemn thing, young man," said the broken-hearted father, "to come into the house of an old man and take away his only daughter, the light of his household and the prop and solace of his declining years. But you have my blessing, and I wish you every joy, and——" "But I won't take her away, sir," interrupted the young man, inexpressibly affected. "We'll both stay here."

A Delightful Compliment.

"Do you ever gamble?" she asked, as they sat together, her hand held in his. He replied: "No; but if I wanted to, now would be my time." "How so?" "Because I hold a beautiful hand." The engagement is announced.

No Cause for Alarm.

SHE: "Mrs. Moffat's such an odd woman! She's fond of meeting clever people, you know, and she never opens her lips, but listens to every word they say, and puts it all down in a diary after!" The Chump: "Haw—by Jove! I shall take precious good care what I say before her!"

Then He Understood.

YOUNG HUSBAND: "Isn't there something peculiar about the taste of these onions, my dear?" Very Young Wife (anxiously): "Oh, I hope not, dear! I took such pains with them. I even sprinkled them with lavender water before I put them to boil, to take away that unpleasant odour."

Time's Work.

YOUNGLOVE: "I suppose I'm foolish, but I can't sleep at nights. I'm so afraid that something unexpected may happen to prevent my approaching marriage." Oldtimer: "Well, after awhile you'll lie awake at nights regretting that it didn't happen."

The Way of Women.

ETHEL: "Why, Maudie, you've been crying!" Maud: "Yes, it's all the fault of Tom." Ethel: "Oh! what has he been doing?" Maud: "Well, we had a little bit of a tiff last night, and I told him he was simply an unendurable brute, and now he hasn't had the decency to send me a letter of apology."

Circumstances Alter Cases.

"WHAT do you want?" asked the servant who answered the ring at the door. "I want to see Mr. Edward Annan." "What for?" "It is in relation to a promissory note." "Mr. Annan went out of town yesterday." "That's too bad. I wanted to pay him the amount I owe him." "But," quickly added the servant, "he returned this morning."

His Last Resource.

HE had put the fateful question to her on the grand stand at the races, and she answered "No." "Is there no chance of you ever loving me?" he pleaded. "The odds are a thousand to one against it," was the pitiless reply. He sighed, then braced himself up. "It's a long shot," he said, at last; "but with nothing else in the field I'll take it."

What the Trouble Was.

FIRST YOUNG MAN: "Why don't you get married?" Second Young Man: "I have made several attempts, but none of them have been successful." "What's the trouble?" "Well, you see, as soon as a girl pleases me well enough to marry her, it is just my luck to meet some other girl who pleases me better. It has been going on that way with me for the last twenty years."

A Great Man.

"DOES your wife ever pay you any compliments?" asked Frederick Jimson of his friend Benderly. "Never," replied Benderly. "Well, mine does. She flatters me." "Often?" "Oh, yes, frequently; particularly in winter," replied Frederick. "Why does she flatter you more in winter?" "Whenever the coal fire needs replenishing she points to the fire-place, and says: 'Frederick, the grate.'"

The Warning Had Its Effect.

"THERE is something about your daughter," Mr. Wanshop began reflectively; "there is something about your daughter——" "Yes," said old Mr. Thistlepod, "there is; I have noticed it myself. It comes every night about eight o'clock, and it doesn't get away usually till about eleven o'clock. And some of these evenings I am going to lift it all the way from the front door to the side gate, and see what there is in it."

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SPLENDID SERIAL.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Eardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

FORTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.
The Face Behind the Veil.

Lottie's eyes filled slowly with tears. "Yes, yes," she said gently. "You will be able to show Dolly the flowers; only you must be very quiet, for if anyone hears you, you might be prevented from coming with me."

A look of cunning sharpness crept into the big, bright eyes of the mad woman. "Oh, yes, I will be very good!" she answered quickly. "See, I will put something in my bed to make Deacon think I am still there, when he pays his last visit." She hastily rolled some white, filmy garments round the bolster of the bed, and placing it between the sheets, covered it up, then, to the amazement of the waiting girl, she took a pair of scissors and cut off the long mane of dark hair which she so arranged on the pillows as to make it appear that a live woman was sleeping upon them.

Then a few moments later two figures, one clasping a doll in her attenuated arms, crept up the stairs. The key was placed under the mat again, and then they proceeded on their perilous way until a door in another wing was softly opened and bolted immediately afterwards.

* * * * *

Towards midnight Sir Cyprian sent for the nurse and gave her a few curt orders. "You will follow immediately afterwards, you hear. We start at dawn. I shall require you to dress her and send her down here—by herself—you understand? I want no prying glances, and I shall expect you there by the next train. I have my reasons for not wishing you to accompany us. But, as you know, I possess a little secret of yours, Miss Haste, that is better where it is than spread abroad." He smiled coldly. "You may go now; only, remember, at dawn to-morrow morning she must be ready."

"I understand," Lottie answered slowly. "I shall not fail you, Sir Cyprian; all shall be as you desire."

When she had left the room the baronet drew aside the blind and looked out of the window. It was a clear night, and the blue sky was studded with stars. As he stood looking out, a shadow that seemed to rise from the ground approached the window and stared into the room. For a moment the eyes of the two men met in a long, keen glance, then the man outside vanished; and Sir Cyprian fell back with a hoarse cry. The face that had looked in on him was the face of the man who had betrayed his knowledge with the sign of the mysterious spade that night long ago, when he had dined at his sister-in-law's with Marcella, and had met for the first time the financier, Caleb J. Johnson.

"Flash Dick!" he muttered, with trembling lips. "Why has he come back? I thought he had forgotten that incident when he darted from behind the palms. Is this to be a case of the best man wins, I wonder?" Then, feeling in his pocket, he drew out a large silver revolver, and looked at it thoughtfully. "Yes, the best man wins, and the presence of my friend Flash Dick here points to the wisdom of leaving the Court soon."

* * * * *

At daybreak a silent trio left the Court, two men and a woman, heavily cloaked and veiled, whose slender arm was held by the taller of the men, a darkly-visaged person with an abundance of black, greasy-looking hair showing under his broad-brimmed hat, but the rest of his face was clean-shaven, and of an olive hue. A dog-cart took them to the station at a large junction, where less comment would be created by their unusual appearance. The woman was put into a first-class apartment, which was reserved, the two men going into an adjoining smoking apartment, where they conversed in low tones. But the woman remained quite quiet, neither moving nor raising her head from where she had laid it, except once when she touched with thoughtful fingers the low white brow that was covered by a mass of dusky hair. When the journey was over there was another long, silent drive across country until finally the huge gates of a grimly forbidding house, standing behind a dense growth of trees, was reached.

The man with the white face and black hair hastily pulled the slender, timid figure from the trap, and urged her before him as he would have a frightened animal. They took her into a room that was destitute alike of comfort or furniture.

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Then the elder man turned with a snarling laugh to the one that followed on his heels.

"There, she is safe now, the precious creature! She has caused me more trouble than anything else. Go and prepare her, Day, my boy, for the wedding ceremony!" Then, with a laugh of ironic triumph at the silent figure standing like a statue, he left the room.

Edward Day glanced keenly at the girl whom he had vowed to humble in the dust one day, and whose pride he meant to bring low. Her scorn and loathing of him were so many baits to his vengeance upon her and the other woman who had cast him off like a dismissed servant.

"Marcella!" he said softly. "You are mine now; you remember my vow to win you! I have kept it. Look at me, my proud, beautiful Marcella—we are to be married to-day! We shall leave here man and wife!" He laughed exultantly, and his blue eyes shone with excitement. He had won; yes, in the face of all obstacles he had attained his heart's desire. He had humbled the financier, silenced his blackmailer, shamed his benefactress, and shaken off the millstone that had hung round his neck; and, lastly, had won the woman he wanted.

He went nearer to her. Her silence irritated him. He would have preferred tears, scorn, anything, but this baffling silence. "Come, kiss me, my bride!" he whispered, drawing her to him.

Then with one quick gesture she flung back her thick veil and stood face to face with him.

"You!" he gasped, falling back a step, his evil, sneering face growing livid with fear and horror, as his eyes, instead of seeing those of the dark, imperious woman he had plotted to win, met instead the mocking blue ones of the woman whom he had thought dead, and for whom, oh, bitterness! he had been afterwards tempted to forgery!

He had been duped by the clever rogue who had twisted him round his finger to the tune of several thousands, and who also had made his life hideous with threats.

Now the woman herself, the incubus whom he had hoped, yet feared, was lying at the bottom of the river that told no tales, had in her turn outwitted him in his moment of supreme triumph!

From the waters that had sucked her down in their close embrace she had risen to confront him—not only as the woman whose death he had sought to bring about, but as a would-be bigamist.

"You!" he said again, moistening his trembling lips. "What fate dragged you from the place where I last saw you?"

"You mean surely the *grave* where you flung me like the coward that you are!" she said, in a low, intense voice; "your wish would have been accomplished had not another man, with as black a soul as your own in some respects, had sufficient humanity in him to pull me out. So you see I have conquered this time, my dear husband. I have watched your plans and stepped in between them."

The white, cruel face of Edward Day took unto it a sinister look of hatred and spite, as he said slowly:

"So another scoundrel pulled you out, eh? I think I have had the honour of meeting that gentleman, and the occasion of our last interview was not a very pleasant one for him." Then he added with a snarl: "Are you aware that you have done a very foolish thing in flinging yourself across my path again? You forget that I am still capable of wiping you out of my way!"

Lottie Haste laughed bitterly. "Yes, I know that I am here, and that you are capable of any villainy even in my father's house! Ah!" as he started, "you did not know that Water Grange was my home? You thought of marrying Marcella Rust with the 'Vicar' as officiating clergyman; but, thank God, I have prevented you from committing that crime. She is where neither you nor her worthy father can harm her."

"Where's that?" he said sharply. "I shall find her wherever you have hidden her—you need not imagine that I shall allow anything to stand in the way. If you wish to get away from here alive, you will reveal the whereabouts of my cousin, Marcella Rust, otherwise"—he shrugged his shoulders—"you will be sorry that the other man saved you from the river."

"Your cousin!" she repeated, looking at him with fearless eyes. "Why do you lie like that now? You know perfectly well that Marcella Rust is no relation of yours. You were adopted and then cast off by Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox. You see I know all your history from the time that you were a foundling on board a ship."

He flushed dully, and the light of hate gleamed in his eyes. He saw that the cold, contemptuous woman was not the tender, yielding girl he had so easily removed from his path before.

"What do I care what you know?" he snarled between his teeth. "It's nothing to me whether all the world knows that I was born in a third-class bunk on an Australian liner. I shall shortly prove my right to a better title, which I shall take jolly good care will not be shared by you."

He had raised his voice unconsciously, and the last sentence rang out sharply and reached the ears of a man who was strolling to and fro in the hall outside: "It's nothing to me whether all the world knows that I was born in a third-class bunk on an Australian liner. I shall shortly prove my right to a better title."

Sir Cyprian Rust caught his breath quickly. Those words conjured up in his mind the words of a dying woman, whose end he had hastened, and had forgotten as unworthy of note. She had said that the stewardess had told her of two children born to the runaway wife of the adventurer Jerningham, and he had imagined it to be the fancy of a disordered mind.

Then he had found out the truth about Philip Nullius, and no thought about that other claim had occurred to him. He had been too concerned as to putting the curate out of the way to even attach any importance to the suggestion that there might be another rival to the riches he held.

But now, as Edward Day's clear, scornful voice fell upon his ears, it all came back in a rush of memory. He recollected how he had paid no attention to the rumours he had heard from time to time that the handsome young secretary was of humble origin, and it was with a curious tightening of his mouth that he suddenly realised that the man he wished to tie Marcella to in a loveless marriage was joint heir with that other, and that after all he had been outwitted by Fate.

Instead of bringing the pride of the sister-in-law, whom he hated, down in the dust by marrying Marcella to a "nobody," he was precipitating her into the arms of one of his unconscious enemies. He was helping to raise her to a position above his own head, instead of levelling her into the gutter.

Since the day when she had made her will in his favour, his hatred had increased by slow degrees, and all the frustrated attempts to gain by that will had intensified that bitterness of hate. He hesitated outside the door, as all these thoughts flooded his brain, then he decided upon a bold move.

He pushed open the

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door and walked in. Lottie had quickly turned her back on his entrance, but Edward Day faced him with a sarcastic grin.

FORTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.
Laying the Trap.

Sir Cyprian gazed from one to the other. "I thought I heard you speaking rather loudly—er—Day," he said slowly. "Has Marcella refused to listen to you, or does she, like a sensible girl, agree to forget the curate, Philip Nullius?"

Edward laughed vindictively. Although he was cheated himself he did not object to seeing the suave baronet also made a fool of by Marcella and the woman he had hoped dead.

"I'm afraid, sir," he said harshly, "that we counted our chickens before they were hatched. Turn, 'Marcella'!" he laughed again, "and show your sweet self to your adoring parent. He will be almost as overjoyed as I was to see your face."

With a sudden movement Lottie wheeled round, and as Sir Cyprian saw the face of the woman whom he had imagined was an obedient tool, he reeled against the wall with a muttered imprecation.

"So," he said thickly, "you have betrayed me after all, have you, you spying little kitchen cat. I suspected you at first, then thought your previous experience would have taught you a lesson. Where is she? Do you hear?" he snarled savagely; "you had better not try to lie to me, or you will regret it."

Lottie flung back her head, and her blue eyes flashed triumphantly into those of the two desperate men whom her sharp wit had baffled.

All thought of her own danger in being there, in that lonely house, at the mercy of such unscrupulous blackguards, never, for one second, occurred to her.

She was glad that she had fought them, and won in the contest of wits, and to the consequences that would result from her action she was both indifferent and callous. It was enough that she was mistress of the situation—that, for the nonce, she held the ribbons in her own strong, young hands.

"Where is she?" and her voice was low and yet firm.

"To which particular 'she' do you refer, Sir Cyprian?"

The baronet started, and looked at her searchingly.

"I refer to my daughter, Marcella Rust," he said deliberately. "You have hidden her, I suppose—but admirable as your plans may have been, I fancy, dear Miss Haste, they are bound to create merely a postponement of my first intention. Now you understand what you are requested to tell me at once, or my little threat concerning a little attempt at suicide on your part will be the means of an unpleasant inquiry."

A short, scornful laugh broke from the girl's lips, and she flashed a mocking glance at the sullen, white face of Edward Day, who stood aside, biting the ends of his moustache with ill-concealed irritability.

"And I conclude, my dear Sir Cyprian, that you will go into the witness-box on my account? Surely that would be rather unwise just now! I will tell you with pleasure where Marcella is," she added, as the baronet winced suddenly under her words.

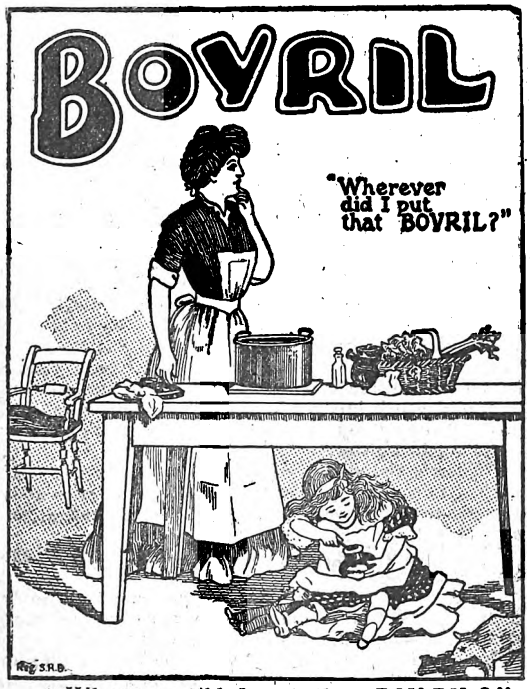
"By this time I hope she is safe where your cruelty cannot touch her, nor that"—pointing to the other man—"unspeakable cad can dare attempt to add bigamy to the list of his crimes. You are a charming couple, but at any rate you have lost what you have plotted to win, and I thank God that I have been instrumental in stopping your villainy."

Sir Cyprian's lips parted in a hideous grin, and his eyes glittered angrily.

"I presume you allude to Mr. Day," he said, in a quiet tone. "May I inquire why he should be so honoured by your attentions?"

"Because he is my husband!" was the steady reply. "Because he is a would-be murderer!"

Sir Cyprian drew in his breath with a sibilant sound. He



"Wherever did I put that BOVRIL?"

A spoonful of

BOVRIL

doubles the quantity of gravy, and makes it much more delicious.

"Tell the Cook."

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had not expected that Edward Day would have made such a fool of himself as to marry. He had credited him with more brain and perhaps more villainy. This girl, then, held him in her power—in fact both of them, so far, but he knew the art of wriggling out of tight corners, and the excitement lent a zest to his blood.

It reminded him of the days of his youth when, before stepping into his uncle's shoes, he had been living by his wits—a free lance of the law—and he had always come out on top; and it would amuse him to let this slip of a white-faced, defiant girl hurl her puny strength against his. He would know how to crush her, when she bored him!

He laughed softly, and said:

"Ah, indeed! I think you will have a little difficulty in establishing your claim, and, also, you may find it awkward to get away from here."

Lottie looked at him, the ghost of a smile on her lips, and lurking in the depths of her tired, blue eyes.

"You cannot frighten me, and I have insured myself from harm in a way you don't know of. Both yourself and my most affectionate husband will be disagreeably surprised should you attempt to silence me after the methods dear to ur hyoearts. Marcella is safe with her aunt by this time—so you may give up that game and look after yourselves. You will need it—soon!"

Edward sprang forward, an evil look in his eyes.

"You little cat!" he snarled, grasping the girl's arm tightly. "So you have sent her there, have you? You have dared to play into the enemy's hands, and to twit us with it!" He raised his clenched hand and struck her savagely across the mouth, raising a deep scarlet weal that stood out like a flame against the background of the white face.

She reeled with a little cry, and fell heavily to the ground. As the enraged man was about to repeat his blow, his arm was caught by the Baronet.

"Come, Edward," he said quietly, "it is hardly worth while you continuing that sort of thing. It is apt to become awkward, you know."

The girl on the ground raised herself on her elbow, and glanced up at them, a smile of agony distorting the expression of her mouth. "Yes, it will be very awkward, Sir Cyprian," she said slowly. "Marcella did not leave the Court alone; she went with——"

A curious change crept over the Baronet's face. It aged suddenly. "With whom?" he said hoarsely.

Moving her lips with difficulty, she answered:

"With the woman whom you kept in the hidden wing!"

"Ah!" the word was breathed deeply between the Baronet's firmly-closed teeth, as though he had been stung, and when he turned towards Edward Day his face was grey, and a steely light flickered in his eyes.

"I will leave you to have a chat with your wife, my dear Edward," he said softly, "only don't be long. I have some important news for you. And remember—no violence."

He left the room, and closed the door softly behind him, with a gentle smile.

An hour later he was talking in a low, cautious tone to the younger man, who listened to him with exultation and suppressed excitement.

"I know," Sir Cyprian was saying, "that that curate is scoring off you in more ways than one. He has Marcella, and, unless you fight him with strategy, he will gain your inheritance as well. Your birthright will go—he will have everything!"

"What do you mean?" Edward said sharply. "How do you know about that? I thought I alone was aware of my mysterious birth!"

The Baronet smiled. "Philip Nullius also is of ambiguous birth. Supposing I knew that he was the eldest born, and all the gain was to him, with but a mere pittance to you as the younger son? You would win no position that you desired, even though you gain money in other ways. Philip Nullius, who knows nothing of this fortune waiting for him—once out of the way of ever learning of it—would clear the way for you."

"What do you mean?" Edward said hoarsely. "He is with the Frayne-Lennox set now. It is too late to see him; Marcella is there also, according to that wretched spoil-sport in the other room. I'm afraid we are too late for anything."

"No. I have received information that Philip Nullius returns to his curacy this week," replied Sir Cyprian slowly. "A wire telling him that Marcella wants him will place him at our mercy—we will arrange where afterwards. That will do as a bait—and then——" he paused.

Their eyes met in one significant glance.

"And then!" Edward Day muttered with a grim smile.

FORTY-NINTH CHAPTER.

The Two Women.

Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox, as she still was called, in spite of that marriage ceremony with the financier, Mr. Caleb J. Johnson, paced the floor of her drawing-room with quick, impatient steps.

She had been for several days too unwell to leave the house, but had been in daily correspondence with the man whose wife she had become in name only. He had been very thoughtful and considerate for her, and in spite of his great wrong in marrying her through a fraud, she could not rid herself of a feeling of dependence upon his strength.

It was some days after the sudden disappearance of Philip Nullius, and she had not seen Mr. Johnson since that date either. But she had that morning dispatched a message to the financier, asking him to call round, and now it wanted but a few moments to his arrival.

She was distraught at the idea of what might have taken place at the Court, the place where Marcella lay ill, and which she dared not enter for fear of bringing down upon her head an avalanche of shame and fear.

As she aimlessly wandered from one end of the large, handsomely furnished room to the other, she paused abruptly. The bell had rung, and her unerring instinct told her that it was Caleb J. Johnson—the man whose name had been bestowed upon her while her first husband was still alive, and yet, in spite of her horror and amazement, she could not feel other than dependent upon him.

The door opened and the financier entered.

"Well, Caleb!" she said feverishly. "What news?—tell me quickly."

He looked at her without speaking, and it struck her, even in the midst of her personal fear and anxiety, that he seemed strangely unlike himself, and there was in his face the look of one who had staggered beneath a crushing blow.

"What—what is it?" she murmured, putting out one trembling white hand and touching his arm. "Caleb, what has happened? Tell me."

A grim smile twisted the lips of the man before her.

"Only the inevitable, Violet—the inevitable reckoning that Fate withholds for perhaps years, or only days, but which in the end is just as crushing and distasteful to meet. Defeat, Violet, has met me at last! I have turned all the corners in my life with almost unnatural success, and now, at the eleventh hour, I have been floored—humbled in the dust—and by a boy not more than half my age!"

He laughed bitterly.

"There's the sting—an ignorant boy has pitted his skill against mine, and by the free use of an unscrupulous brain and cunning, has won over my head, and beaten me at my own game!"

"You mean that you have lost money, Caleb?" she questioned gently.

"Lost money!" He laughed again. "Not only is it money I have lost, Violet, but my name in the City! The fortune I built up so proudly has gone, and with it my power; to-morrow I shall be known as a failure, and a man who could not meet his liabilities. Then will follow the bankruptcy of the Gold King."

(Continued on page 381.)

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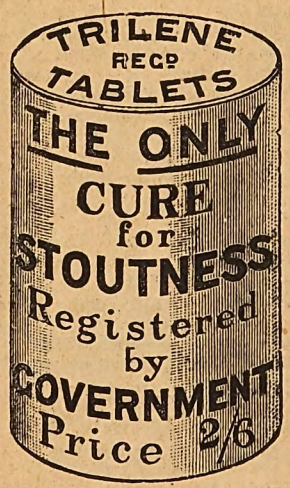

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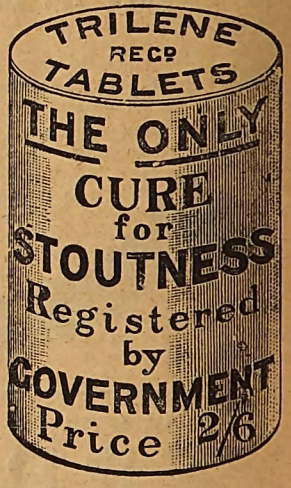

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.
Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.
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COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."
"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Liatorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure."

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st. and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

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"Ruined!" she murmured. "How awful for you, Caleb. I am so sorry." She placed her hand again on his arm, and looked up at him regretfully. "Believe me, I feel for you more than I can say."

He looked at her dark, wistful face, that in spite of being careworn and somewhat haggard, was yet lovely enough to send a thrill of pain through him. "Yes, ruined!" he repeated bitterly. "It is as well that you are not really my wife, Violet—like the rest, you can leave the sinking ship to go down alone."

A slight flush stained her pale face. "Though there is that wrong on your conscience, Caleb," she said gently, "I do not reproach you with it—now—you may at least count me as a friend—and you know," she went on timidly, "that if what I have is of any use to you, it is at your service."

His face softened. "I have not sunk so low that I would take your money, Violet. I—I——" he stopped abruptly; the most bitter drop in his cup of humiliation was the know-knowledge that he could not help the son he had discovered.

As a rich man and a power in the City, he could have loaded that struggling son of his first wife with money and influence; but instead he had only a heritage of poverty to hand over to him.

To appear at the eleventh hour before his son as a bankrupt father was not the *rôle* he had marked out for himself. He had imagined, with a curious thrill of joy, revealing himself to that son as the parent who could make smooth the hard way of penury, and put before him the golden vista of speedily claiming Marcella as his wife.

But now that was all changed. In place of the influential father, holding out position and name to his son, he, Caleb J. Johnson, was a man cast from his high position in financial circles, and no more a byword for envy and adulation; rather a butt for scorn and ridicule.

He would not reveal himself now—what was the use? As a wealthy father, Philip Nullius might have overlooked his shortcomings, but a disgraced bankrupt was no acquisition to own as a parent.

"You mentioned something about a boy not half your own age. Who is it?" Lady Violet said suddenly, "and how has he beaten you?"

"Who is it?" he repeated slowly. "That arch liar and unscrupulous young scoundrel whom I took as my secretary at your own recommendation, Violet. That is the only bad turn you did me."

"Edward Day!" she winced, and her hand fell from his arm. "I do not understand! How could he have ruined you?"

"Like this." He laughed cynically. "I took an interest in him on account of the glowing letter of introduction you sent with him, and then let him have the control of my correspondence when I went—into the country. He forged cheques in my name, then when I charged him with it on my return, he blackmailed me with the knowledge of how I married you—which secret he gleaned from my private correspondence!"

He shut his teeth with a savage click, at the memory of how he had been outwitted by the cunning young secretary, whose brain had taken him up the scale, while he had traded on the knowledge of the financier's business secrets to betray him.

"If the letter of introduction you received with Edward Day was eulogistic in tone, then all I can say is that it was also a forgery," Lady Violet said slowly. "I might have known that he was bad enough to doctor a letter, but I am deeply regretful that he should have had the chance of hurting you still further."

The ex-Gold King smiled grimly. "Yes, he holds the winning card—at present, but when we meet I think that I shall get back a little of my own again." Afterwards he remembered his words with a thrill of horror, for it was murder that was in his heart when he spoke.

"Ah, Caleb, don't think of revenge now," she said suddenly. "Tell me instead what news you have of Marcella. I have written to—to my brother-in-law and sent two telegrams, but have received no answer. I fear," she shuddered, "God knows what I fear, but I can't wait much longer in suspense. I had hoped that Philip Nullius would have come to-day with news, but he has not."

"Is he in London still?"—the financier spoke sharply. He longed, yet feared, to meet the son he dared not own, and who, in spite of his father's fall from the ranks of the wealthy, was entitled to the position of a titled man on his mother's side. The fact that he could never owe anything to himself was gall and wormwood to the bitter man.

Lady Violet did not reply to his question. Her eyes were fixed on the door with a curiously listening look, and the pallor of her face was intensified.

"There is someone coming upstairs," she said in a low tone. "Oh, Caleb, can it be news of Marcella, do you think?"

"Perhaps," he answered reassuringly; "on the other hand it may be a message for me. I left word that I should be here in case an urgent caller arrived. They are, at last, really getting track of that mysterious man in the black beard."

"You mean—you mean——" she stammered; then, just as she was about to reply, the door was flung suddenly open and a tall figure swayed on the threshold, while, behind, another stood wrapped in gloom.

"Aunt Violet—oh, dear Aunt Violet!" and then before the stupefied woman, or the man by her side could utter a word. Marcella had run forward into the room with a little cry, and flung herself into the arms of Lady Violet.

"Marcella! Child!" the elder woman cried. "Oh, thank God! you are here—safe and—yes, and well!"—after a swift glance into the white face that rested on her shoulder. "How did you get here, my darling?" she went on; "I was just speaking to Mr. Johnson about you."

Marcella raised her face and glanced at the man who had taken a few steps away from her and her aunt.

"How did I get here?" she repeated in a low, vibrating tone. "Through the courage and devotion of a good woman who has suffered even more than I have! She sent me here while she took my place and went away with those men who wished to hide me from you."

Lady Violet's arms tightened round the girl's slender figure. "Thank God, my darling, that you are here—safe and well," she murmured brokenly; "but, but who is your friend? Bring her into the room, Caleb," she said, turning to the financier, who had remained a silent spectator of the meeting between aunt and niece.

"No—no—I will bring her to you myself," Marcella said quickly. And before the ex-millionaire could interfere, she had reached the side of the shrinking figure in the black cloak and heavy veil that concealed her face, and, taking her by the hand, led her forward into the room.

"Aunt Violet, be kind to her for my sake," she said in a low trembling voice. "She has only me now to look to. I dare not let her go back into his hands—I am afraid of him; he would be cruel to her—even more than before."

"Who is she?" Lady Violet said slowly, placing her white hand on the girl's shoulder. "Anyone of whom you are fond is sure to find a home with me."

"She is my—mother," Marcella answered, and, not hearing the sharp cry that came from her aunt, she flung back the thick veil that covered the woman's face. "See—Aunt Violet," she whispered, "the light has gone from her eyes—the windows of her soul are no longer clear, but I am all she has now. I cannot leave her—she is my mother!"

"Look at Dolly!" the woman said suddenly, her pale, wondering face breaking into a soft smile. "They said that Dolly died, but she didn't—oh, no, Dolly didn't die."

"She is thinking of my little sister who died years ago," Marcella murmured brokenly.

Lady Violet did not seem to hear her. Her large brown eyes were fixed with a look of amazement and stupefied joy in their depths upon the face of the woman who clung so childishly to the hand of Marcella.

"Laura—Laura!" she said in a hoarse whisper, "not dead—not dead! Then he lied in that as in all else; oh, my

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dear, my dear!" She took the frail figure in her arms and pressed her lips to the white brow, great tears standing in her eyes the while.

"Violet, is that poor creature Sir Cyprian's wife?" the voice of the one-time Gold King spoke sharply. He had followed with unerring perception the tragedy underlying the meeting of the women.

She nodded silently; somehow tears were choking the words that she would speak. She could only press her lips again and again to the brow of the woman in her arms. Even Marcella was forgotten for the moment.

Marcella turned to Mr. Johnson. "I am so glad you are here," she said simply, reaching out her hand to him. "I can never go back to my father, Sir Cyprian; he has been cruel to me, and to my poor mother. He told me that he had hidden her for years at the Court because she was an escaped—criminal—lunatic. My mother to be that!" she broke out passionately. "And my father——" she shuddered, and, burying her face in her hands, burst into a storm of piteous tears.

The woman in Lady Violet's arms raised her head at the sound of the girl's weeping, and, with one of those swift flashes of intuition that often are the peculiarity of the mad, said suddenly: "The man with the black beard frightens us and Dolly; in the room of beautiful things he often stays, and I play with them and look at all the pictures."

Lady Violet suddenly drew back from the clinging, babbling creature, and, placing her in a chair some distance apart, said in a low tone of intreaty: "Marcella, where is Philip Nullius? Is he with you? I must speak to him."

"With me?" Marcella shook her head in surprise. Then her face flushed warmly as she went on. "But in future, Aunt Violet, Philip can be nothing to me—think what I am and who my poor mother is! I have no right to let him marry me."

A low cry rose to Lady Violet's lips, and she swayed towards the girl with outstretched hands. To the silent man looking on at the scene, it seemed that she was inspired by the spirit of sacrifice.

"Marcella, I cannot let you live in another moment's ignorance of the truth. You can, with a free conscience, be the wife of any man, for neither that poor soul hugging the waxen image of a child, nor Sir Cyprian, are your parents; you have been deceived, my darling, and I—God forgive me—have been forced into countenancing the deception."

Mr. Johnson, as he listened to the firm speech that came from the desperate woman's lips, forgot that he himself held a secret—not indeed one, but many. He was amazed that it could be possible for the lovely Society woman to also have a skeleton within her cupboard, of which he was not cognisant.

He began, with the wisdom of understanding, to perceive the drift of her confession—much that had puzzled him in the past was now being made clear. He seemed to have been forgotten by the two women who faced each other with wide eyes and white faces.

"Not my parents!" Marcella pushed back the heavy hair from her brow, and repeated the words mechanically. "Not my parents! I don't understand; then who am I, Aunt Violet? Who is my mother?"

There was a pause in which the ticking of an ormolu clock was the only sound in the room; then, low and distinct, came the answer for which the girl waited:

"I am your mother, Marcella!"

The ex-City magnate gripped the back of a chair with unconscious force. At last he knew the secret that had eaten the woman's heart out as a canker in a rose. Then he remembered the face of the man he had paid to get away from England. The man who had consented to bribery was Marcella's father!

"You—my mother!" a little laugh fluttered to the girl's lips. "I don't understand."

"Listen, dear one, let me tell you," the elder woman pleaded; "don't judge me until you have heard. When you were a little baby I was left suddenly without any money; my husband—your father—was a bad man; he deserted me. Then the man who married my only sister, Sir Cyprian Rust, offered me a yearly income on the condition that I let him bring you up as *his* daughter in the place of his own who had died, as I believed, with the gentle creature in that chair whose bright mind he blighted with a fearful shock."

She paused, as though to take breath, and her eyes, so like those of the white-faced girl opposite her, shone with a strange light.

"Child, *my* child, Marcella, can you forgive your mother?" she whispered. "Think of my loneliness all these years that you have been growing up, and I was denied the precious name of mother from your dear lips! Think of what I have suffered when, as each year passed by, I saw that that man was trying to put barriers between our meeting each other—holding over my head the price that he had paid for you! Oh, my dear, my dear! It is the way of the young to judge hardly the faults of others, but be gentle with me, for I am your mother—and I love you."

She sank on her knees at the feet of the girl whose face had ever and anon quivered as a note was struck within her by that low, vibrating voice.

The action of the figure at her feet roused her from her lethargy.

Mr. Johnson had slipped from the room a moment since, and the woman on the chair still played with the doll in her arms.

Marcella touched the shoulder of the kneeling suppliant for her love. "Mother! Mother!" she whispered, "don't kneel to me, dearest. It hurts me to see you—there. It is not fit; I want you, mother, to kiss me as your child."

With a glad little cry Lady Violet rose, and the next moment the arms of mother and child were clasped round each other in an embrace that said more than all the words and phrases in the world.

A few moments later Mr. Johnson re-entered the room. Lady Violet held out her hand. He took it, and pressed it gently to his lips. "I understand," he answered gently. Then he turned to Marcella gravely:

"Child, I have a telegram for you. It has just come with one for myself, concerning the imminent arrest of the man with the black beard at last. Open it and see what news it contains."

Paling with a sudden thought, Marcella drew closer to the side of her new-found mother. What could that telegram mean but news of the man she loved? Mr. Johnson, watching her, also grew nervous. Some instinct told him that the telegram was about Philip Nullius.

"*Philip Nullius—treachery—go Danger Point—urgent.*"

The telegram fluttered from the girl's fingers. "Philip is in danger," she cried; "treachery is luring him on to Danger Point. I know it. I was nearly killed myself there."

"Courage, darling," Lady Violet murmured; "he will be saved," and her eyes met Mr. Johnson's in a significant glance.

He smiled grimly and moved to the door. His small blue eyes flickered with a steely light, and his brow was suddenly moist.

"Where are you going?" Marcella cried eagerly.

He turned slowly.

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(Another long instalment of this serial will appear next week.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Love Not Always Passionate.

"WILLIE'S" young lady is of the unemotional kind. She says she is very fond of "WILLIE," but when he writes her passionate love-letters, she only laughs, and he cannot make love to her in a proper way, for the reason that she seems to take nothing seriously. "WILLIE'S" question is: "Does this mean that she does not care for me? Surely a girl really in love would not laugh at her lover?"

* * * * *

I have no doubt she is as fond of you as she says she is. Perhaps, in reality, she loves you as much as she could love anybody. It is not always well to be too passionate. Passionate lovers often prove to be the most fickle, and soonest tired of their sweethearts, while such girls as yours when they really have allowed themselves to get fond of a man, very often remain constant to him always.

The Age for Marriage.

"I AM twenty-five, and not in love," writes "HERBERT." "I have decided not to marry, or get entangled with any girl, until I am thirty, when my position should be secured. Am I wise in this decision, or do you think I should seek a sweetheart now?"

* * * * *

I think you are wise. If you have not fallen in love by now you cannot be of a very susceptible nature. Marriage without love is not to be advised, so I should just wait until the young lady of your heart appears, and marry her right away. Thirty is quite a good age for a man to marry, but you must remember that the girls are not so easily attracted as a man gets older, so you may be losing opportunities.

Non-Dancers at Dances.

"W. I." likes girls, but doesn't know where to meet them. "Should I," he asks, "go to dances? I don't dance, and don't care for dancing, but I should like to meet the girls. Do men who don't dance go to dances, and, if so, how do they get on with the ladies? I ask for information, as I know nothing about the matter."

* * * * *

I should not recommend a non-dancer to go to dances. Of all the figures not to be envied, I think the male wall-flower is the worst. If the girls take any notice of him at all, it is always with a touch of pity and patronage, for a man who dances badly, or not at all, is regarded as lacking in a great accomplishment. So I do not recommend you to go to dances, if your wish is to make the favourable acquaintance of some nice girls. Try some other method.

The Despondent Lover.

"MY lover gets despondent often," writes "PAULA." "There has been insanity in his family. Do you think I ought to break off an engagement?" "PAULA" should not do so unless she has good ground for believing the despondency to be caused by mental disorder. It may be due to liver, or natural character. It would not be a bad idea for her to arrange somehow that he should meet a doctor friend of hers, or, at any rate, somebody able to form a good judgment about the young man's state of mind, and take their opinion on the subject.

* * * * *

It would be quite wrong for "PAULA" to jump to the conclusion that mere fits of despondency are caused by insanity. A man may have insanity in his family, and be none the worse for it.

A Jealous Lover.

"E. R. T." is troubled with a lover who is too jealous. The other day she met a young man friend, and in parting, shook hands with him. Her lover witnessed this, and when she rejoined him, he said: "What do you mean by letting that fellow hold your hand, and look into your eyes like that?" "E. R. T." was most annoyed, and they parted in a tiff. Some days have elapsed, and he has not called to see her. She is very fond of him, but asks me if I do not advise her to break off with so jealous an admirer.

* * * * *

I shouldn't break it off. Let him come and apologise. As you are sure in your own mind that you did not pass the bounds of ordinary social courtesy with the other young man, you are quite right in taking up the attitude you have. If your admirer cannot trust you to shake hands with a man friend, he must indeed be foolish. I hope he will repent of his absurdity.

A Girl Who Must Walk Out.

"I HAVE known a postman for about twelve months," writes "WILD ROSE"; "he is about nineteen or twenty. I like him very much indeed, and am miserable if I don't see him nearly every day. But I have never walked out with him, and don't know whether he likes me or not, but I think he does. One day last week, he asked me to see him after he was done at the office, but he didn't take me for a walk as I expected, but simply stood talking for quite an hour. He did not take me home. I should like to know what his feelings are towards me?"

* * * * *

I should think his feelings are quite what you want them to be. Why on earth a young man should be compelled to take a girl for a walk to show his love, I do not know. It seems to me that true love can be expressed as well standing still as walking about. "WILD ROSE" should try to judge his feelings towards her by what he says, and the way he says it, and not attach so much importance to whether he stood still and said it, or walked about. From your description of the young man, I imagine he is quite as drawn to you as you are to him, but perhaps his duties prevent his devoting too much time to you. Besides, a postman gets tired of walking.

An Uninvited Lover.

"ADA," writes: "Some people have asked me to stay with them in the Spring. They know that I am engaged, and also know my *fiancé*, but they have not even hinted that he should accompany me during the stay, or visit me while I am there. Would you accept the invitation, as my lover is not included?"

* * * * *

I think they have made an oversight in not asking your young man to visit them. They need not necessarily have asked him to stay the whole time you are there, but a short visit, or even an invitation to spend a day, would have been quite usual. Perhaps it has only been a slip, and not intentional. I should not refuse the invitation, but when you are on your visit, hint that you would very much like your sweetheart to visit you.

Cynthia

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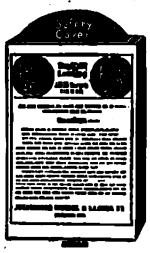

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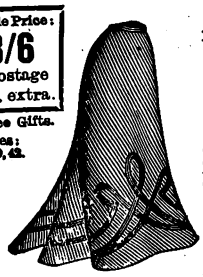

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SHORT STORIES

No. 795.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending March 26th, 1904.

A SOCIETY SECRET.

Relating How a Girl Resisted a Great Temptation, and What Resulted.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

LADY HARROW was dying. The great physician had looked into the bright, restless eyes and his face had grown very grave. He was gone now—gone to tell Lord Harrow of what was impending. His lordship's son was there, too—the only one in all that great house who bore his name. He had always been a spoilt son, yet everyone liked him and excused his faults. For Archie would be heir some day.

A sudden quiet stupor settled upon the sufferer. The eyes closed wearily, and a long-drawn sigh escaped the dry, parched lips. With noiseless feet, the nurses drew near the bed and waited. Among them stood a young girl, a friend of Lady Harrow's, who had devoted herself to the dying woman from the first moment of her illness.

The girl was very beautiful, with large, deep, grey eyes and a mass of fair, wavy hair that made her irresistibly attractive. There were times when the sick woman would let no one remain with her, save this beautiful girl, between whom and herself, despite the great disparity of their years, existed a strong and deep affection.

Once more the eyes opened and wandered from one to another of the group. Finally they rested on the fair face of Gladys Harcourt and a smile stole about the sufferer's mouth. With a gesture of the hand she waved the nurses aside, and beckoned to Gladys to stoop and listen to what she had to say. Gladys understood, and the ripe young lips quivered as she bent her head to listen.

"My dear child, I must tell you something before I die. Don't be frightened. I know I must die. Listen. I don't know how it is, dear, but I have always loved you as though you had been my own daughter. It seems now, as I lie here waiting for what is soon to come, that you are bound to me by some mysterious tie. It is to you, therefore, that I turn in this hour—to you that I make my final appeal. Gladys, my child, I have a sacred trust to leave behind me—a secret I must communicate before I go to another world. I will not burden you with the knowledge of that secret. It is too sad, too terrible, to lay upon so fair a head as thine. But I am afraid—afraid that justice may not be done where justice is due, afraid of the issue in the battle between conscience and expediency. Will you undertake to hold this trust for—for my sake?"

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Gladys bent her head till her warm, fresh lips rested upon those of the sufferer.

"If it will make you happy," she said in a low, musical voice.

"Oh, it will, it will! I cannot trust it to anyone but you!"

The patient's thin hand wandered beneath the pillows. When it reappeared, Gladys saw that it held a little sealed packet.

"Look!" whispered Lady Harrow. "I want you to take this—to keep it as you would your own honour. It means everything—*everything* to me. Can you read what I have written on the cover?"

Gladys took the little packet in her hand and read aloud the inscription thereon:

"*I, Margaret, Lady Harrow, commit this packet to the care of Gladys Harcourt, who is only to open it in the event of Lord Harrow's sudden death, or whenever my son, Archibald, shall inherit the title and estates of my husband. If Archibald becomes Lord Harrow during the lifetime of Gladys Harcourt, I hereby enjoin upon her the solemn duty of reading what is here inclosed and of taking whatsoever steps her conscience may dictate.*"

The young voice ceased.

"Will you promise to fulfil this obligation, my child?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. And may God, in His great mercy, keep all such dark and anxious secrets out of your own life. Kiss me once more, Gladys."

Again the lips of the two women met. A deep sigh came from the sufferer as she dropped her burning head upon the pillows. The flushed cheeks grew suddenly pallid, and Gladys, turning swiftly, beckoned the nurses to approach. But their skill was of no use now. Lady Harrow was dead.

And then, for the first time, Gladys became aware that Archibald Harrow was in the room. When he had entered it she did not know, but he had probably listened to the delivering of that last solemn trust so lately committed to her. He paid no heed to her, however, and stepped quietly up to the bed. Then, going to the door, he summoned his father. Gladys slipped noiselessly from the room and down the broad oak staircase to the deserted drawing-room. Her heart

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was full to overflowing, and she wanted to be alone. For she had loved the stately lady, who now lay in her last long sleep in the room upstairs, with a love as tender and strong as it had been strange and rare. She pressed the little sealed packet to her lips.

"Yes," she murmured, "I will keep the trust committed to me."

* * * * *

It was a year later, and Gladys Harcourt was seated in her daintily-furnished sitting-room, a copy of the *Times* in her hand. Suddenly she gave a start, while a little involuntary exclamation escaped her lips. The paragraph responsible for this agitation was of the briefest description, and ran as follows:—

"*While dining at the Carlton last evening, Lord Harrow was taken suddenly ill. He was conveyed with all speed to his own residence, where medical aid was summoned. Dr. Harvey Tremaine found his lordship to be the victim of a serious epileptic seizure, to which the sufferer succumbed in less than an hour after his return home. Lady Harrow, it will be remembered, died a year ago. His lordship's only son, Archibald, will now succeed to the title and estates of his father.*"

That was all. Yet what did the news involve? Gladys had not forgotten the packet which Lady Harrow had committed to her care. Had the time come for her to participate in that dark secret at which the dying woman had hinted? Going to her writing-case, she took the packet from a little secret compartment and again read its mysterious inscription.

"In the event of Lord Harrow's sudden death!"

Had some unaccountable premonition warned Lady Harrow of what was to befall her husband?

"Or whenever my son, Archibald, shall inherit the title and estates of my husband."

Gladys laid the packet down and began seriously to reflect upon what she should do. One of the conditions had already been fulfilled. The other would no doubt follow in the course of the next few days, and Archibald would be publicly recognised as Lord Harrow. Yes, there could no longer be any reason for her to remain in ignorance of this mysterious secret. To do so would be to violate the trust which Lady Harrow had reposed in her. Once more she took up the packet, and, this time, she broke the seal.

For upwards of two hours Gladys remained in her sitting-room. No one interrupted her, for the door of the room was locked. Her face was very white, her hands were trembling, and the traces of tears were in her deep, grey eyes. For the first time in all her life Gladys Harcourt knew that she stood on the brink of a great crisis. A secret not mysterious now, but fraught with many important and serious possibilities, was in her keeping. And these possibilities depended upon her. Honour, justice, truth—all three were at stake. And it was she who must cast the die. Yet was this the wish of Lady Harrow? Once more she took up the brief little note, written by Lady Harrow to herself, and which had been inclosed with the documents contained in the packet. But it contained no more than was expressed in the last six words of that faded inscription:—

"*Whatsoever steps her conscience may dictate.*"

Her conscience? Then, cost what it might, she must speak out! She must repair the wrong that had been done—must give to the world the secret that was now hers, and hers alone. She rose resolutely to her feet. It was evening, and she remembered a promise to dine at Lady Seymour's. Summoning her maid, she went to her dressing-room, where she attired herself for dinner. Then, wrapping a soft opera-cloak about her white shoulders, she descended the stairs to the carriage. On the steps she was accosted by a messenger, who placed in her hand a letter directed to herself. She opened it under the light in the wide hall, and read the following request:—

"*Selgrove Gardens, S.W.*

"Dear Madam,—*I have a communication to make to you which is of the gravest importance. Can you call here this evening and as early as possible? I will not detain you for more than a few minutes. Perhaps it may influence you somewhat if I hint that my business with you to-night is connected with the recent death of Lord Harrow.—Yours faithfully,*

"Geoffrey Barton."

Geoffrey Barton! Where had she heard that name before? Gladys considered as she refolded the note and returned it to its envelope. Enlightenment was not long in coming. All the world knew that Archibald, now Lord Harrow, was engaged to pretty, piquante Madeline Barton, the belle of the season. The Bartons were fabulously rich, though their lineage and descent were neither so ancient nor yet so unimpeachable as their more aristocratic neighbours could have wished. But when the sun is golden, the sun-spots are not observed, so the Bartons were regarded as very fine people indeed.

Without further reflection, Gladys entered the carriage.

"Drive to Selgrove Gardens," she said to the footman. "I suppose you know Mr. Barton's house?"

The man touched his hat, and, in a few minutes, Gladys was bowling along in the direction of the Bartons'. The carriage drew up before a large house, the door of which flew open as Gladys alighted.

It was evident she had been expected. Without a moment's delay she was conducted to a small study on the first floor, where she found Geoffrey Barton awaiting her. He was a gentlemanly-looking man of fifty or thereabouts, and he looked up as she entered with a curious alertness of expression that made the girl stand still before him. He got up and placed a chair for her. But she declined it with a wave of her hand, and he again sat down.

"Miss Harcourt," he began, "let me first of all thank you for responding so promptly to my appeal. It would be foolish to waste time in useless preliminaries. Let me, therefore, come to the point without delay. Lady Harrow's last act in this world was to intrust to your care some papers which nearly affected the name and fortunes of her family. We—I say *we*, since I am now acting with the full concurrence of the present Lord Harrow—we have good reasons the belief that these documents contained information of a very grave nature—a—a secret, in fact, which ought, or ought not, to remain a secret until the end of time.

"We are ignorant as yet of the precise nature of this secret. The present Lord Harrow overheard his late mother commit it to your keeping, and from her manner upon that occasion I infer that the secret, whatever it is, is one that should be well kept. I say *I* think this. Archibald is inclined to attribute his mother's earnestness to the mere fancies of a disordered brain. But I am a man of the world, Miss Harcourt, and have seen many strange things brought to light that need never have been known. So when Archibald casually mentioned the circumstances to me I made a few inquiries, and these inquiries, though amounting to very little, have led me to the present step. Do you follow me?"

His eyes fixed themselves on the girl's pale face. She could not speak, and merely nodded in reply.

"That is well," resumed Geoffrey Barton coolly. "Well, my first conclusion is this: For the sake of all concerned the secret, whatever it is, should be buried so deep that it can never again be resurrected. And, to this end, the documents now in your possession should be handed over to the present Lord Harrow."

Gladys started back as she heard the words.

"Never!" she cried. "He is the last man who should have them! He would destroy them!"

Geoffrey Barton's eyes were watching her.

"Ah!" he said. "It is as I suspected, then! So you have acquired the secret yourself, Miss Harcourt?"

"Oh, yes, yes! I heard only to-day of the late Lord Harrow's death, and this was one of the conditions of my opening the packet. Oh, I wish Lady Harrow had not left the secret with me!"

"Precisely." Geoffrey Barton's tone was well measured. His lynx-like eyes were still upon her face. "I am now

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strengthened in the opinion I lately expressed. The papers in question should be in the hands of the present Lord Harrow. Pray don't interrupt. Now let me touch, as delicately as possible, on a more private matter. I am given to understand, Miss Harcourt, that you have engaged yourself to a gentleman whose position is not yet assured. I believe you have endured some opposition on account of this circumstance. Personally, I regret I have not had the pleasure of meeting Mr. de Chirer. But from what I have been fortunate enough to glean as to his character and abilities, I may venture the opinion that his unquestionable genius as an artist will bring him the success his talents and perseverance merit. But success is a long ladder. Don't you think, Miss Harcourt, that the way might be paved for him were he the possessor of say, a nice, snug little competency ?"

Gladys' cheeks were burning now. He was tempting her.

"What do you mean ?" she gasped.

Geoffrey Barton laid one hand on her arm.

"Will you sell your secret for fifty thousand pounds ?" he asked in a cool, level voice.

Gladys started back as she heard the words.

"Oh, no, no, no!" she gasped. "I dare not! You know I dare not! Oh, let me go!"

She moved swiftly towards the door as Geoffrey Barton rose.

"Well," he said, "think it over. If you alter your mind come here in two days' time, and you shall have a cheque. It would be a good thing for Mr. de Chirer, you know. Good-bye."

* * * *

It was the afternoon of the second day when Gladys Harcourt alighted from a hansom at the door of Mr. de Chirer's studio in Kensington. She was admitted at once, and in a few minutes was in the presence of the artist himself. In spite of his name, Gordon de Chirer looked every inch an Englishman. Tall, well knit, with frank, open face and honest blue eyes, he made by far the best picture in that well-lit studio.

"Well, this is an honour I little expected!" he exclaimed, as his eye fell on Gladys. "Couldn't have timed it better, either. I've been at it all day, and was just wishing my presence at your father's residence was not regarded as so very undesirable a thing."

He laughed as he wheeled a chair for Gladys up to the glowing fire. But she made him no reply, and, when she was seated, he bent over her and tenderly smoothed the rich, clustering hair upon her fair head.

"What is it, darling ?" he asked. "Is it something I can help in ?"

She lifted her face to his.

"You are quick to understand, dear," she said, as she put her lips up to be kissed. "Yes, it is something in which you may help. I cannot tell you all, Gordon, for it is a secret, and the secret is not mine, but another's. But I can tell you sufficient to make you comprehend my difficulty, and help you to counsel me as to what it is my duty to do."

Gordon nodded, and drew a chair for himself beside her own.

"A year ago," went on Gladys, "a certain lady of title died. She and I were much attached, and before she died she committed to me a great family secret. This secret I was not to know unless her husband were to die suddenly, or until her son should inherit the title and estates of his father. Two days ago the fulfilment of one of these conditions compelled me to acquaint myself with the family secret. It was indeed a very grave and serious one, involving more than I can tell you. The same evening I received a note from a certain gentleman, requesting me to call upon him. I went, and was astonished to find that, though he knew little as to the nature of the secret itself, he was quite aware of its existence, and even of its importance. Finally he urged me to place the documents connected with the secret in the hands of the present head of the family, and offered me a cheque for fifty thousand pounds as an inducement to do this. He gave me two days in which to consider, and that time has now expired. Of course, I am not thinking of the money, Gordon. Nor do I think I ought to part with those papers to any but a respectable firm of solicitors, who would do what they thought right and just in so weighty a matter. But I felt I must come first to you and see if your view of the case coincides with my own."

She stopped. Gordon de Chirer had risen, and was now standing by the window, with his back turned towards her. It seemed quite a long time ere he made any reply. Presently, however, he moved back to the chair he had vacated. There was a far-away light in his blue eyes as he put the question:

"You must tell me one thing, Gladys. What was the name of the lady who died a year ago ? Was it Harrow ?"

Gladys started.

"Yes," she said. "How did you guess it, Gordon ?"

But Gordon passed the question by. Once more he rose from his seat, and this time began to pace the floor restlessly. Gladys watched him, wondering greatly as she did so. But she wisely forbore to question him further, and merely waited for him to speak. Presently he stopped before her.

"Gladys," he said, "did I understand you rightly ? Did you not say that two days had now elapsed ?"

"Yes."

"Will you do as I bid you ? Can you trust me—implicitly ?"

Gladys was on her feet in an instant.

"Trust you!" she exclaimed. "Of course I can trust you!"

"Yes, I know, darling. But can you trust me in this ? Can you trust me so far that you will do whatever I ask you to do, without question or hesitation of any kind ?"

Gladys looked into his face. She had never before seen him quite like this. He was usually so gay and full of wit and merriment. Now he seemed suddenly sobered. There was a gravity, a dignity, in the frank, fearless face that was new to it, and Gladys marvelled as to what this might portend. But there was no hesitancy in the answer she gave him. Putting her two hands trustingly in his, she looked full into his blue eyes.

"I will do as you bid me," she said.

Once more Gordon de Chirer stooped and kissed the girl's red lips. Then he asked:

"Have you the papers on you ?"

"No."

"Then we must drive to your home first. I will wait for you, and we will then go together to the gentleman who made you the offer of fifty thousand pounds for the secret."

A momentary doubt shot through the girl's brain.

"Gordon," she whispered faintly, "you do not want me to—to sell the papers ?"

But Gordon only smiled.

"Come," he said. "I want to see this thing through, once and for all."

In a few minutes they were bowling over the smooth, asphalted streets. Near Gladys' house the hansom drew up, and Gordon waited until she returned with the papers. Then on again till they reached Selgrove Gardens, and the hansom drew up before Geoffrey Barton's house.

Geoffrey Barton was in his library. He seemed a trifle

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disconcerted at the inclusion of Gordon de Chirer into the business in hand. His lifted eyebrows implied a question, which Gladys promptly answered.

"I had better explain," she said, "that, but for Mr. de Chirer, I should not have returned to you at all. I went to him this afternoon for the purpose of seeking his advice on this matter, and, acting upon that advice, I have accompanied him here."

"How much or how little does Mr. de Chirer know of this business, Miss Harcourt?"

Gladys was about to reply when Gordon saved her the necessity.

"Miss Harcourt has informed me," he explained, "that she is in possession of a secret for which you have offered her the sum of fifty thousand pounds. I have also elicited from her the additional information that this secret is connected with the family of the late Lord Harrow. Beyond this she has told me nothing, nor have I sought to compel her confidence in any way."

A shade of relief passed over Geoffrey Barton's face.

"And your object in accompanying Miss Harcourt?" he inquired suavely.

"That will appear presently," responded Gordon. "First of all, I wish to ask you one question. Is the fifty thousand pounds you are prepared to pay for this secret to come out of the estate of the present Lord Harrow?"

"That is, or appears to be, rather immaterial. But, since you ask, I will admit that Lord Harrow has notified me of his willingness to pay that amount out of the estate."

"Thank you. Will you be so good then as to draw up a document explaining the particulars of this transaction and append your signature to the same? I suppose Lord Harrow is wise enough to keep *his* name out of the affair?"

Geoffrey Barton coloured.

"Well, yes," he admitted lamely. "Lord Harrow does not wish to appear in the matter. I am prepared to draw a cheque for the amount on my own bankers, and he will pay me later. But I scarcely see the necessity of putting the transaction down in black and white. You see, it's not a—a regular business proposal, and it would not look altogether—er—businesslike——"

"Or honourable," suggested Gordon. "Nevertheless, I insist upon it. I will draw up a receipt for Miss Harcourt, and shall affix my own name as a witness to the transaction. You will please to make out the cheque. But, in doing so, allow me to request you to leave out the name of the person to whom the money is to be paid."

Geoffrey Barton was becoming more and more embarrassed. He was no more able to divine the drift of these preparations than Gladys herself. He had never met this Gordon de Chirer before, but he felt himself irresistibly compelled to carry out his directions to the very letter. For a few moments nothing more was heard save the scratching of pens as they moved rapidly over the paper. Then the two men looked up. Gordon had just finished a blank receipt, to which he had affixed his name as witness. The name was covered by a sheet of blotting-paper when Geoffrey Barton lifted his head. Up to this time Gladys had offered no protest. But she could no longer restrain her uneasiness.

"Oh, Gordon," she exclaimed, "think what you are doing. It is wrong—worse than wrong—it is wicked!"

But Gordon only smiled.

"Give Mr. Barton the papers," he said.

But Gladys shook her head and drew away from the table.

"Trust me."

The words fell on her ear, and she looked helplessly into the face of her lover. It was a strong face—a noble face—and she obeyed. Geoffrey Barton snatched greedily at the papers and Gordon lifted the blotting-paper from the blank receipt.

"Sign it," he said, as he pushed it towards her.

Gladys took the pen from his hand and prepared to write. All at once a smothered exclamation burst from her lips. Her eyes dilated and fixed themselves on the paper before her. Observing her agitation, the eyes of Geoffrey Barton followed hers and rested on the name that Gordon de Chirer had inscribed thereon. For it was not Gordon de Chirer, but Gordon Harrow! For some time no one spoke. Then Gladys took up the receipt and tore it into fragments.

"I will never sign away your inheritance," she cried. "Oh, why did you force me to give up those papers—the sole remaining proofs of your identity?"

Gordon laid a soothing hand on her shoulder. Then turning to the petrified Geoffrey Barton, he commanded him to fill in his own name on the cheque. When this was done, he wrote a second receipt, handed it across the table, and put the cheque in his pocket.

"Now, Mr. Barton," he said, when he had finished, "I will make you an explanation. Thirty years ago my father, Lord Harrow, married my mother and took her for a long honeymoon trip on the Continent. While there circumstances made it expedient that they should retire for a time to a little sequestered hamlet in the vicinity of Lombardy, where they dropped their identity. In due time I was born into the world, and, not long after, my father and mother returned to Society once more, leaving me in the care of an excellent nurse.

"My father insisted that my birth should be kept secret. There was no stint of money, and I received an education quite in keeping with my real station in life. But I was brought up in complete ignorance with regard to my parentage, and it was not until I was eighteen years of age that my father wrote to me. He told me then of the miserable circumstances attending my birth, together with a great deal more, into which I need not now enter.

"He admitted that I was his actual heir, though the world had no idea of my existence. Finally he left it to me to do as I thought fit. My mother had prayed for my return and recognition, notwithstanding all that such a step would involve. And he left the issue to me. The week that followed was the bitterest I have ever spent. And in the end I ran away."

He paused, and then went on:

"I determined never to return. I had never known a mother's love. Yet I felt for that mother, all unknown as she was to me, and I vowed never to let my own selfish inclinations tempt me into forgetting that she *was* my mother. So I travelled up and down the Continent under my present name, and finally established myself here as an artist. Now you know my story.

"Here is the letter my father sent me. Take it, and, with it, the only remaining proof that I, and not my brother Archibald, am Lord Harrow. Let him keep the title, and all that appertains thereunto, in quietness of mind. I shall not trouble him. His cheque for fifty thousand pounds I shall take. He owes me something for my willingness to sacrifice so much. Yet it is not for him that I do it, but for the fair, sweet name of my dead mother—the mother I never knew."

He rose as he finished speaking. Gladys rose too, and drew near him. There were tears in her deep, grey eyes as they met his. Unmindful of the presence of Geoffrey Barton, Gordon drew her towards him.

"Are you content?" he asked tenderly.

"More than content. I am happy."

Presently she lifted her head.

"Why did you choose the name of de Chirer?" she asked.

"It is only French for Harrow," he replied. "I wonder you did not see through it before."

"Shall you keep it?"

"Yes—if you will share it. Will you?"

"Oh, you know I will!"

Walter J. Mowbray.

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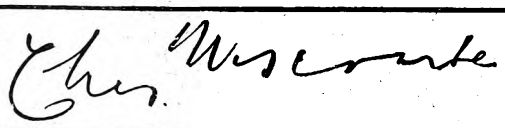
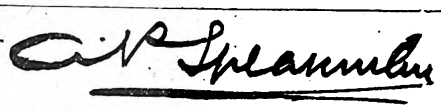
No. 13. 	
No. 14. 	
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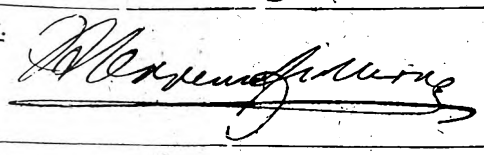
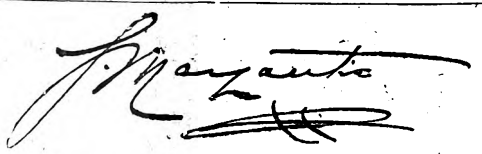
No. 17. 	
No. 18. 	

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The Wage-Robber.

A TALE OF LAKE WINDERMERE.

"Well," said the ironmaster after a long pause, "we will afford you every opportunity of practically demonstrating your idea. You shall have a private room fitted up, with a pulley and shaft from the main engine. In this you will be able to carry out the work, free both from interruption and the prying eyes of curious and, I think, not over-sympathetic engineers."

The ironmaster paused and looked meaningly into the face of Hume Meredith. But the glance he met was grim and determined.

"I am not blind to the antagonism I shall have to endure," was the quiet reply. "It is not easy to convince men such as those with whom I work. They think and live for the hour, and a policy of eternal benefit at the cost of six months' half-pay is one they will fight, and fight hard. Still, I will take the risk." And he smiled his quiet, determined smile and looked straight into the strong face of the great ironmaster.

"Well," said the latter, as he looked once more at the tracings on his desk, "the more I consider the scheme, the more I anticipate the success which you predict. I am not usually so optimistic in new ideas, but I must admit that this one of yours is a revelation. If it can be demonstrated, the trade will be revolutionised, and the patentees will secure the whole of the Government contracts. Indeed, they will hold the monopoly, and Britain will take from Germany all that she has lost, and more." He paused, and then added drily: "But the biggest task of all will be to convince the five hundred men who work in the shops of the value of this invention *to them*. The machine, if it does anything, will minimise labour to one-fifth of the present rate, and even the gospel of ultimate good will have no amelioration for this circumstance. They will put their nose against it from the outset, and we shall have to fight. As you have yourself hinted, they live as they are paid—by the hour."

Hume Meredith was still smiling. He was not the man to be lightly daunted.

"Well," he said, "we are not children to be frightened by bogies or goblins. We are men, and though we differ widely in station—you, an ironmaster, and I, a mere mechanic—the instincts of the man exist equally in both. And—I am determined."

The ironmaster rose.

"Well," he said, "you shall have my assistance and, if necessary, my protection. And, if the scheme succeeds, your reward will be a big one."

For the first time in his life, the great ironmaster offered his hand to an employée. Hume Meredith took it and returned the grasp which he received. For once in his life, the famous ironmaster realised that, under the dark blue tunic of one of his engineers beat a heart as brave as that of a lion. And—far more even than that—the man was a genius.

The men were at work in the great engineering shop of the Windermere ironmaster. The whirr of wheels, the clank of cogs, the lap-lap of link belts, and, far down to the end of the long shop, the deep rumble of the main engine and the groaning of its great fly-wheel. All was bustle and activity. Men with grimy faces and dark blue suits stooped over lathe and boring-machine, guiding the sharp steel tools that ground into the iron so tightly bolted to the moving machines. Drills spun round and round and cut their way through huge plates, while the hot twisted filings dropped on to the floor below. Fitters stood at their vices along the great bench, and the rasp of their files grated on the ear. Every man was at work, but, somehow, they were thinking of other things. Something ominous was in the air, and the ironmaster, entering the workshop, observed it in an instant. But he paid no heed to it, for he understood its cause. A scowl was on every man's face, and muttered threats were beginning to be heard. Across the yard was a small wooden shed, with galvanised iron roof, and, as the men glanced momentarily through the windows of the workshop to where it stood, their faces darkened and their scowls deepened. The ironmaster went out and crossed the yard.

"The brute!" growled Ambrose Drew, as he straightened himself above his boring-machine. "He means to take the bread out of our mouths and the mouths of our wives and children. And the firm encourages him in his infernal invention. He was too proud to mix with us when he worked here, and now——" He ground his teeth and was silent.

Leonard Steele moved stealthily over to his side.

"There are five hundred of us," he whispered hoarsely, "and we're all of one mind. Are we going to submit to it without a protest?"

"What's the use of a protest?" growled Ambrose angrily.

Leonard Steele laughed softly.

"I didn't mean that kind of a protest," he said meaningly. "But it isn't always safe to use ugly words when others will do, though the meaning may be the same." And his eye gleamed with a sinister significance.

Ambrose Drew stooped again over his machine. When he next lifted his head, he looked full into Steele's dark face.

"Spread it among such of the men as we can trust," he whispered. "Tell 'em we'll meet to discuss what is to be done at eleven o'clock to-night in the grove by the lake. He's taken to sleeping in his shed now, for fear his precious invention should be tampered with. I heard him tell the chief to-day that the machine would be finished in three days."

Leonard Steele smiled significantly.

"There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," he said. "I think we shall be able to move the men to our way of thinking. We must stop him. And if he won't stop——" He passed his hand across his mouth and shot a quick glance into his companion's face.

Ambrose Drew nodded and the two men returned to their work. But all that day there were ominous whisperings among the men of the great workshop, and a secret understanding seemed to grow up between them that boded ill for the young inventor in the shed hard by.

It was eight o'clock when Hume Meredith, locking the door of his little workshop behind him, went out of the great gate and down the road to the lake. It was now dark, for the season was autumn, but a soft stillness reigned with the night, which the contrast of the day served but to intensify. It was not often now that Hume Meredith left his workshop, for he well knew what was the prevailing feeling against both

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himself and the invention upon which he was engaged. But there are other things in life than genius and ambition, and, of these, love is not the least.

Lake Windermere looked very calm and peaceful as he stood by its brink and watched the moonlight silvering its waters. He took off his cap and let the cool night air play among his thick crisp hair. There was a soft step behind him and he turned abruptly.

"Ah, Nora," he said, taking her hand in his, "so it's you, dear. It is only three days since we last met, yet it seems an age. I think the continual toil in the workshop and my inability to leave it even at night make the time seem longer than it is. Well, how have you been getting on?"

Nora Langham smiled up into her lover's face.

"Oh, all right," she said. "And you? Is the work nearly done?"

Hume Meredith lifted his head proudly.

"Three days more, at most," he said triumphantly.

"And the end?" she asked eagerly.

"The farther I go," was the glad reply, "the more certain do I become that the invention will be an unqualified success."

There was a short pause, and then Nora said in a low voice:

"Hume, you must be on your guard. I have heard dark hints among the men that almost frighten me. Oh, why can't they see that the invention, while it lessens labour, will ultimately bring the demand up so high that they will not be able to cope with it? They seem so short-sighted, and they will not hearken even though one tells them all that it means. They look askance even at me, for they know we love each other, and hate me because of you."

Hume Meredith looked earnestly into the girl's blue eyes.

"So to love me is to suffer," he said, with a tender light in his.

Nora looked up quickly. Then she put up her face to be kissed.

"Then I hope I may always suffer," she said, as she returned his kiss. "Nay, dear Hume, it is not of myself I think. The only thought their attitude to me awakens is one of apprehension for you and for the success of your work."

Again Hume Meredith kissed the ripe lips. The spot was very lonely, and the trees that overhung the lake screened them from observation.

"My darling," he said tenderly, "I am not ignorant of the opposition I have to face. So far I have met it and overcome it—not by aggressiveness, but by sheer force of will. I have ignored every insult that has been levelled against me. I have shown them that no power on earth is strong enough to move my purpose or deter me from successfully carrying out this work. And this I am going to continue to the end. Obstacles there may be—even danger—but the end will be the same."

Slowly they walked along the margin of the moonlit lake, and, when love had made them happy and hopeful, they separated, and Hume Meredith returned to his little wooden workshop.

* * * * *

It was eleven o'clock. The tall trees of the grove stood up silent and spectral, and the pale light of the moon filtered through the foliage and made lacework-patterns on the green sward beneath. Figures, as silent as the trees, but movable, flitted from cover to cover, as though to avoid notice, and made their way to a little copse on the borders of the lake. The few became a group, and the group swelled to a crowd. Each man's face wore a dark scowl, and pity seemed a thing unknown. For a time, scarcely a whisper was to be heard, and then, in clear but low tones, the voice of Leonard Steele broke the silence, and every man listened to his words.

"Men," he said, "our first duty is towards the helpless women and children for whom we have to provide. There is no man here who would be less than a man more thoroughly in the eyes of us all than by neglecting to do that. Our wives, our mothers, our little ones—all compel us to strive for the continuance of that labour by which we are able to support them. Is it not so?"

There was a subdued murmur among his hearers, and the hands that grasped sticks grasped them more firmly.

"Just so," Steele went on. "I see you all agree with me on that score. Well, a traitor—a black-hearted, favour-seeking traitor—has crept in among us, and is working, day and night, to accomplish that by which four-fifths of you will be rendered penniless, homeless ruined!" His voice rose as he spoke the words. "You will be driven out like sheep—worse than sheep, for they but go to unconscious death, while you will go to conscious misery, conscious hunger, and the women and children whom you love will droop and die and call to you for bread."

Again he paused. There were cries of "Lynch him!" "Lynch him!" from several of the group, and the muttered imprecations increased each instant. Then the voice of Ambrose Drew rose above the rest, and there was silence again.

"Men," he said, "there is only one course left to us. We must force him to desist. Listen! I am no lover of violence if other means will do. Let us send him a note, commanding him to cease this work, and let us earn our bread as before. Give him four-and-twenty hours to decide, and then——" He stopped. The murmurs around him encouraged him to proceed. "Well," he said, in a lower voice, "if he will not heed us, *make him!*"

Once more the murmurs broke out, and fierce discussions took place among the crowd. At last Leonard Steele spoke again:

"Well," he said, "are you agreed?"

"We are!" came from a hundred throats.

"Bravely said, my men. For in this you have shown us you be indeed men—men who will fight for right and justice. Four-and-twenty hours, then. If, then, he does not desist, we will show this—— What shall we call him, lads?"

Ambrose Drew was the first to speak.

"The Wage-Robber!" he said.

There was a fierce cry from the angry crowd. In an instant they took up the word and repeated it in fierce, suppressed whispers.

"The Wage-Robber! The Wage-Robber!"

Without further parley, Ambrose Drew wrote a short note to Hume Meredith, giving him four-and-twenty hours to desist from the completion of his new invention, which he gave to one of the men with orders to slip it beneath a door of the little workshop. And then the crowd dispersed and went each man to his own home.

* * *

Another night had fallen on the broad, calm lake, whose waters bore scarcely a ripple on their unbroken surface. Once more the silver moon rode high in the purple sky, and the trees, as the night before, now swayed gently in the soft breeze. It was midnight and a deep silence lay upon the scene. Suddenly the wind brought the murmur of many voices, and shadowy

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outlines moved among the trees that fringed the shore of the lake. Nearer and nearer they came—a furious, frenzied crowd, and their voices, suppressed as they were, told of the passion that had roused them. They were dragging someone along—someone who fought desperately with his captors, but who was powerless to free himself from their grasp.

"Cowards!" he said. "How well ye merit the name when ye come out, a hundred strong, to fight one man!"

But they paid him no heed and dragged him on to the edge of the lake. There they pinioned him with strong cords, and Ambrose Drew stepped before him.

"Well, Hume Meredith," he said grimly, "we gave you fair and timely warning, and you have not heeded it. I will give you one more chance. Will you swear to relinquish the work upon which you are now engaged?"

The captive looked him full and fearlessly in the face.

"No!" he said resolutely. "A thousand times no! You may do your worst, but you cannot alter my determination."

There was an execration from the crowd.

"We may not be able to alter it," said Leonard Steele significantly, "but we can put an end to it."

"How?" Hume laughed.

Leonard Steele laughed.

"Dead people aren't very determined," he said.

"I'll take my chance," was the reply. "But I won't yield."

There was an angry oath from the crowd.

"Bring up the boat!" said Steele. "We'll damp his ardour a bit and see if that makes any impression. I guess his machine will need an inventor by to-morrow morning!"

A dozen men ran to a boat-house hard by, and drew therefrom a small rowing-boat, which they dragged to the spot where their captive stood.

Ambrose Drew took out a brace and bit, and with it bored a hole in the bottom of the boat. A score of hands hoisted the pinioned man into the boat, where they drew him, feet foremost, beneath the seats, to which they bound him securely. Then, in response to a whispered order from Steele, four men hurried off in the direction of the foundry, and presently returned, bearing two huge bars of pig-iron. Both of these they laid beside the unfortunate man, in order to weigh down the boat. Then, with a suppressed shout and many oaths, they ran the boat down into the water, wading out waist-deep in order to push it far out into the lake.

Slowly but surely it moved out into deeper water, and the men scrambled back to the shore. Then, for the first time, the voice of Hume Meredith called for help, and the men remembered that, in their excitement, they had forgotten to gag him. But they could not reach him now, and they slunk back to their homes.

"Fifteen minutes will do it," murmured Leonard Steele to himself, as he moved away. "No help can reach him in that time. Good-bye, brave Wage-Robber, and a pleasant journey to you!" And he disappeared into the night.

* * * * *

Nora Langham was lying awake in her own room not a mile from the spot where her lover was in danger of his life, bound hand and foot, in a boat that was ready to sink and carry him to a watery grave. She was restless and uneasy. Vague fears came to trouble her and to rob her of her rest.

Presently she heard stealthy footsteps pass her window, then another, and again another. Fearful of she knew not what, she went to the window and peered out.

A man was passing, and he glanced up as he went by. It was Ambrose Drew.

In an instant, she realised that something was afoot which threatened her lover. Hastily dressing, she stole out of the house in the direction he had taken. There were others in the street, all making their way in the same direction, and she followed, being careful, however, to avoid notice.

Soon she entered the grove that led down to the lake. Here she found a number of men already assembled, and she hid herself behind one of the trees where she might stand in shadow and watch what was going forward. There was a sound of disturbance a little way off, and, a few moments later, she saw, to her horror, the form of her lover dragged down to the margin of the lake.

Almost stupefied, she watched the horrible proceedings of the men, and saw Hume Meredith and his leaky craft launched upon the lake. And then the men slunk away, and she only remained. Paralysed almost beyond action, she stood there stupidly, knowing not what to do. And then that voice—his voice—calling for help, smote upon her ear and recalled her to herself.

Two or three minutes she waited, to make sure all the men had left the spot, and then she leapt from her concealment and bounded down to the brink of the lake. Quick as thought, she had resolved upon what to do. Tying her garments about her as well as she could, so as not to impede her movements in the water, she dashed into the lake and swam vigorously out to the boat. She was a good swimmer, but the boat was a long way off. Again that cry for help, and, even as it was uttered, she reached the boat.

"Hume," she said, "it is I—Nora! Have you got your knife?"

"Yes," he replied, "it is in my pocket—the one on your side."

"Thank God!" she said fervently, and, reaching over the boat, she felt for it and drew it out. The water was in the boat now, almost to the man's mouth, and a great fear came into the girl's heart as she felt the boat sinking lower and lower and the water swallowing up her lover.

With a supreme effort, she mastered her hysterical weakness and slashed at the cords that bound him. One by one they snapped, and, when at last one hand was free, Hume took the knife and severed the remaining ropes. He held his breath now, for the water was over his face, and each effort drove him almost to madness. But at last the cords were all severed, and slowly and carefully, for he feared the too sudden foundering of the little craft, he drew himself out from beneath the seats where he had been bound and dropped into the lake beside Nora.

Almost as he did so, the boat, weighted with the bars of pig-iron, disappeared beneath the surface. With a great effort, they avoided the eddy thus caused, and swam silently to shore. And then, her task accomplished, her lover saved,

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Nora Langham sank down on the bank and burst into tears. Hume bent over her and kissed her.

"You have saved my life, darling," he said. "Thank God you were in time!" And, lifting her tenderly up, he led her home.

* * * * * *

Once more Hume Meredith sat in the private office of the great ironmaster. A solicitor was also seated at an adjoining desk.

"Well," said the ironmaster, "we have won, after all. The men are beginning to see the benefit which this invention of yours is to themselves as well as to us. But it was a near thing for you. Had it not been for that plucky little sweetheart of yours, I'm afraid the firm would have lost a prospective partner."

Hume Meredith started. His handsome face flushed. What was he meant to infer? The ironmaster noticed his start of surprise and smiled.

"Yes," he said, "I want a partner to help me in the work. If you will consent to put your head into the business, I shall be satisfied. You have a patent and no capital, and I have capital and a very prosperous business. How much of that prosperity would decline were you to fight me with your patent I am not prepared to admit. But I hope you will not do that. Have the patent rights made out in the name of Outram and Meredith, and I will make over to you an equal share in this business, present and future. What do you say?"

Hume Meredith rose, and this time it was he who offered his hand.

"You are more than generous," he said. The ironmaster shook his head.

"Not a bit of it," he said. "In five years' time you will realise that you are benefiting me, not I you. This is the very biggest thing that has ever happened to the trade. Already the German contracts are being thrown out, and we—we were the gainers."

For nearly an hour they sat thus, the solicitor taking legal instructions meanwhile.

When at last Hume Meredith rose, the ironmaster took a decanter from the sideboard and poured out three glasses of wine.

"To the new firm," he said. "It is an old one—as old as this wine—but to-day is the best and most profitable day in all its history."

Hume Meredith bowed.

"And I," he said, "having experienced the pleasure of working for a clear-sighted ironmaster who has encouraged me in all the labours I have undertaken, am now more highly honoured than in the wildest dreams I have ever anticipated. If the little genius for invention I possess is valued so highly as to place me upon a pinnacle I had never even hoped to reach, I will at least couple it with an integrity and energy towards the still further advancement of the business of which I am now a member, that shall prove a generous deed to be a deed politic."

"Well said!" the ironmaster replied. "Now, I shall expect you to-night at dinner. And my wife desired me particularly to ask you to bring with you the young lady, but for whose bravery, in the face of so many foes, we should all have been losers."

So Hume promised. And, for the first time in her life, Nora Langham sat down to dinner in the ironmaster's great house, and enjoyed a foretaste of that wealth and prosperity that were to follow her all the days of her life.

For the firm of Outram and Meredith has prospered beyond the dreams of avarice, and its partners are the wealthiest ironmasters in the land.

Nora saw a number of hands hoist her lover into the leaky boat, where they bound him securely.

And what of the men who so nearly robbed Hume of his life? They soon understood the huge advantages of the new invention, and became ashamed of their cowardice on that eventful night. Leonard Steele and Ambrose Drew, the ringleaders, publicly apologised, and the most prized of all the wedding-gifts that fell to the lot of Mr. and Mrs. Hume Meredith was the present from the employés to their master and erstwhile companion, whom they learnt to love and trust so well.

J. M. W.

"Don't you dare kiss me!" she cried warningly. "Why, I wasn't thinking of such a thing," he said. "Well, I was," she replied firmly.

Minnie: "Did you sing for Mr. Goodcatch last night, dear?" Winnie: "Yes, love, for nearly an hour." Minnie: "Oh, I'm so glad, darling; I always detested that man."

She was very angry, and he as cool as a cucumber. She: "Sir, I will give you a piece of my mind——" He: "For Heaven's sake, my love, don't think of it; the last time you did that you left yourself only a small fragment. Please don't rashly run yourself into mental bankruptcy."

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DECOYED.

A STRIKING SERIES OF SOCIETY REVELATIONS.

TOLD BY THE DECOY HERSELF.

TWELFTH EPISODE.

A Daring Scheme.

My real father alive! It seemed incredible! Yet there were actually tears of excitement in Dr. Farnie's eyes, and there was no doubting the eagerness in his voice when he gave me the news.

"Let me go to him at once!" I pleaded. "Wherever he is, he must be sorely in need of the love I can give him. I have never been able to feel a daughter's affection for the man who sent word to Bochum for me to join him, for I felt repelled at first sight of him. But my own dear father—why, I know exactly what he must be like! Oh, let me go to him now!"

"I ought not to have told you this yet," was the doctor's troubled response. "You are so excited that you will ruin everything."

On the instant I curbed both excitement and outward impatience. If either one or the other was calculated to work harm, it should be seen that I knew how to avoid doing that, and it was a comparatively calm girl who listened to the directions now given her.

"As you value your own welfare and that of your unfortunate father," he said, "you will avoid betraying any knowledge you have gained from me. At all hazards I must pass another night under this roof, for I have still some work uncompleted which is very important indeed. Certain papers have to be secured, and if I can gain possession of them, your father will in future enjoy the income which is his by right, but of which he has for years been robbed. I have located the papers, and hope to have them in my possession before morning. All will then be ready for our departure. But if you quit the house I shall be deprived of my opportunity, and your father will be ruined."

Dr. Farnie's manner impressed me so much by its naturalness and its anxious tone that I believed every word he said, and readily promised to obey all his injunctions.

"Very well," he said. "I will go downstairs and will tell Mr. D'Alton——"

"Why call him 'D'Alton' when that isn't his name?" I asked, but was met with the grave response:

"It is better so. The time will soon come when his real name will be disclosed. Meanwhile, it is wisest not to encourage any possible slips of the tongue. As I was saying, I will tell Mr. D'Alton that you have been hypnotised into absolute docility, and that you are not merely willing, but anxious to enter the bonds of matrimony as soon as everything can be settled. You play your part properly until to-morrow, and you shall then be freed for ever from all association with this gang—that is, if I succeed in stealing your father's deeds and securities from the man who stole them from him."

"But what about my father—and Miss D'Alton—and Lord Broomville? And poor Alan Melrose? Are they all to be left at the mercy of murderers and thieves?"

I had unconsciously raised my voice at the last words, and Dr. Farnie hastily stepped to the door, unlocked it again, and flung it wide open.

"Miss D'Alton," he said sternly, "you are indiscreet, in spite of my warning! Have I not told you how much depends upon caution? Yet if that spy had been at the key-hole again, she could have heard what you said."

"Forgive me! My anxiety is to blame!" I whispered. "But I will make no more mistakes, believe me."

"Very well; I will trust you. And it may comfort you to know that all the people you have mentioned are being guarded. H'sh! Here comes somebody!"

The door was now nearly closed, but the doctor's sharp ears had detected the sound of a creeping footstep, and, giving me a warning glance, he addressed me in a voice which could be easily heard by a diligent eavesdropper.

"I am glad to hear that you have decided about that," he said. "Shall I tell your father that you like the idea of becoming a princess?"

"Yes—please do," was my obediently-spoken answer. "Tell him that I hope he will let me have a very grand wedding, too. What's the good of marrying a prince if you don't let plenty of people know about it?"

"And you really love the Prince?"

"Oh, yes! I ought to do that, anyway, after he has done me so much honour."

"Certainly. Of course, as Mr. D'Alton's daughter, you have a great position in that section of society that worships money. But there are many exclusive circles in which millions are of much less account than noble blood, and as the Princess Gorouki you will associate with royalty."

"Yes. Won't it be lovely? I wish everything could be arranged at once! I'm dying to make sure that there will be no hindrance."

"My darling child, the Prince is as anxious to expedite matters as you are, so you must go with your aunt to-morrow to buy a trousseau worthy of the occasion."

Both the doctor and I had been aware that the door had been gently pushed open, and that our conversation was being listened to. But we apparently took no notice, and we both feigned pleasurable surprise when my pretended father joined in with the above speech.

"You see," observed the now smiling doctor, "your daughter's indisposition was only temporary."

"And you are quite well again, dear?"

"I should think so," was my gay response. "If you had seen the lunch I ate, you wouldn't think that there was much the matter with me. But, I say, did you ever know such a lucky girl as I am? I can hardly believe it true that the Prince really proposed to me!"

Delight beamed all over the face of the man, who thought that at last all his schemes were turning out to his liking, and he almost overwhelmed me with suggested presents. I might have wondered where the money was to come from that was apparently to be spent so prodigally upon me, if I had not been secretly certain that if I allowed myself to fall into the trap laid for me, I should not be allowed to live to enjoy my promised splendour.

But, knowing all there was at stake, I played my part to perfection, being probably aided by Dr. Farnie, who never took his eyes off my face while the conversation lasted.

"It isn't too late to go out shopping now," I suggested. "Suppose Aunt Flora and I drive to Bond Street and Regent Street to-day?"

But, for some reason, a veto was put upon this plan, and I was enjoined to make myself as pretty as possible before Prince Gorouki arrived. He was, it appeared, ready to sign an already prepared heavy settlement upon me at once, and securities for my dowry of half a million were to be

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handed over to him as soon as the settlement deed had been made absolutely legal and binding.

It seemed rather a strange thing for the settlements to be immediately transferable to me, without waiting for the marriage ceremony to be actually performed. But the Prince was so infatuated that he was ready to agree to anything.

Besides, he had more than their equivalent in value ready to be handed over to him there and then, so he had nothing to lose, even if the wedding did not take place. At least he thought so. But I, for one, knew how fearfully he was mistaken, and when, during the course of the afternoon, he put in an appearance at Park Lane, my heart ached for the man who was showing all the gleefulness of a boy at what he deemed the consummation of his happiness.

I was ashamed, too, of my share in deceiving him. But I saw the absolute necessity of doing so, and I strove hard to avoid unnecessary gush, while at the same time I was careful to obey Dr. Farnie's hints and injunctions implicitly.

We had many callers during the afternoon, but none of them were admitted, though it would only have seemed natural to blazon the news of the engagement to all and sundry, and the Prince himself was in such a state of delight that he was anxious for everybody to know of his supposed good fortune.

I shall never forget that afternoon as long as I live, for I knew, only too well, why the ogres who claimed to be my relations were so determined to let Prince Gorouki speak to nobody outside their own circle until they had finished with him.

He was the head of his house, and could do as he liked both in the way of marriage, and in the disposal of his fortune. So "Mr. D'Alton" knew that the deed of settlement would be duly honoured.

But what about the half million worth of securities? *They were not mentioned in the settlement deed.* Therefore, if the Prince met with an *accident*, and was deprived of the securities, there was nothing to prove any liability towards him in the matter of my dowry!

To this end, therefore, if not to a fatal one, were the schemers arranging the whole business, and when the Prince made a move to go to his hotel, to dress for a dinner engagement of some days' standing, I gazed at him in helpless horror, for I knew not what to do—whether to ruin my father's prospects by disclosing everything, or whether to let Prince Gorouki go out to meet the fate which I was sure was mapped out for him.

"They will never let him reach his hotel alive with those securities on him! They will find some means of killing him and robbing him. Then my so-called father will claim the settlement-money in my name, and there will be nothing to show that there is anything due in return! Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

"My dear little girl, I do believe that you are sorry to part from me!" murmured the Prince, kissing my hand gallantly. "But I shall see you again to-night, for I will cut one or two of my engagements. And after our wedding—next week—I shall never let you out of my sight again!"

Poor man! He had mistaken my anxiety of mind for regret at parting from him for an hour or two! And I knew not how to undeceive him! I seemed as if I neither dared let him go, nor warn him against his enemies!

It was Dr. Farnie who came to my relief, with the meaningly-spoken words: "Miss D'Alton is so happy that she seems loth to lose you for awhile. Your Highness is honoured in being the object of her solicitude, but I should think she may trust you to come back to her *safe and sound.*"

Prince Gorouki looked haughtily at the speaker, as if he thought his intervention both impertinent and uncalled-for.

But I knew his words to be an assurance that a watch would be kept upon His Highness' safety, and that the murderous gang would be allowed to commit no more crimes. So I gave a sigh of relief, and banished all anxiety on my temporary *fiancé's* part.

"You have done splendidly," soon whispered Dr. Farnie, whose face, however, remained grave and mystical, as befitted the part he was playing. "You have done splendidly, and I have been assured that the honorarium will be paid if the wedding takes place."

"Do you think it will?" I asked anxiously, for I had an inward dread lest some form of coercion would be employed on me.

"Certainly not," was the reply. "Ah, Mr. D'Alton, what a proud man you must be to have a daughter lovely enough and good enough to make the grandest match of the season! She has just been asking me if there is any danger of the marriage being postponed or prevented, but I tell her that all her fears are groundless. Everything will be arranged to perfection? Is not that so?"

Mr. D'Alton had joined us, and Dr. Farnie had been clever enough to address him in a way which lulled him into greater security, while at the same time he had said enough to tranquillise me.

* * * * *

It was past midnight, and every nerve in my body throbbed with excitement, for success or failure hinged on what was being done now. Dr. Farnie had employed his eyes and his wits to some purpose while he had been here, and to-night was to see the culmination of all his efforts on behalf of his friends.

He had located the resting-place of the papers he wanted to secure, and had determined to obtain possession of them by using the gift which was to have been exercised balefully upon me. In other words, if caution and strategy were insufficient for his purpose, he meant to try hypnotism. Mr. D'Alton had forgotten that if the gift could be exercised at will on one person, it was likely to be no less potent when directed towards another, and he had never entertained the idea of being victimised himself.

Yet such was Dr. Farnie's intention, and Mrs. Sherwood had unconsciously swallowed a few drops of an opiate which would effectually keep her out of the way for a few hours.

It had been arranged between the doctor and myself that I should keep in readiness for the signal which would tell me whether my co-operation was needed or not.

It came at last in the form of a faint tap at my boudoir door, and I instantly obeyed it.

I was fully dressed, but I wore noiseless bedroom slippers, and had carefully avoided keeping on any article of attire that gave the slightest rustle, for I was as yet quite in the dark as to what I might have to do in the present crisis, except that I must be cautious not to make a sound that would betray my presence.

I carried in my hand a small bag which contained sundry letters and keepsakes which I had brought from Bochum with me, or had received from the few real friends I had made since I came to London.

All the costly jewellery with which my hateful office of decoy had been made attractive had now been left severely alone, for now that so many of my suspicions were at last shaping themselves into frightful realities, I would have nothing which had been given to me by the murderous gang from whose power I hoped to escape this very night.

Going swiftly downstairs I hid the bag where I could easily pick it up on my way out of the house. Then I looked around me, and saw just what I expected—a light shining under the door of the study, which was sacred to the use of the master of the house.

I entered the room without ceremony, and noiselessly ensconced myself behind a tall draught-screen near the window, which already hid a black brief-bag, placed there in readiness by the doctor.

Then I waited for developments.

But how the time seemed to drag! I dared not move for fear of making a noise just when somebody might be near enough to hear me, and my limbs were stiff and cramped when at last I heard the sound for which I was waiting.

Footsteps echoed softly on the thick stair-carpet, and I could

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tell that two persons were descending. At the foot of the stairs they stepped on to the tesselated hall, and it was easy to judge that they were approaching the study.

A moment later the door was thrown wide open.

Then Dr. Farnie and "Mr. D'Alton" came within my range of vision, and, as they walked towards the fireplace, I could see that the former was keeping his eyes firmly fixed upon the face of the latter, whose movements were precisely like those of a helpless automaton.

I knew exactly what had happened. The hypnotist had exerted his gift to some purpose, and had subjugated "Mr. D'Alton" to such an extent that he would probably do whatever he was told to do.

Sit down at this table," commanded the operator, and the "subject" slowly obeyed him.

"Empty your pockets, and describe the uses of the various keys you carry."

Without even the shadow of resistance, the subject began to place a number of articles upon the table, and I could easily see what they were. For his back was turned towards me, and in accordance with previous instructions, I had cautiously crept near enough to be able to note what had transpired.

Dr. Farnie had been doubtful of his power to keep "Mr. D'Alton" long enough in subjection if it became necessary to relax his commanding gaze even for a second, hence the necessity for my presence.

The bunch of keys lay on the table, and "Mr. D'Alton" fingered them one by one as he, in obedience to the doctor's mandate, began to speak slowly.

"This is the key of the bureau in this room, and this smaller one unlocks the sliding well in which I keep all the D'Alton papers. This next key opens the top right hand drawer. In that drawer are the records and proceeds of the New Barbary Land Development Company. This last key opens the safe which is built into the recess, and in which I stored the Graysworthy and O'Connor plunder. Prince Gorouki will help to fill that safe again soon."

My blood ran cold at these words, for they were conclusive proof that this wicked man had really committed the crimes of which I had suspected him. I wondered if he would make any more terrible disclosures. But Dr. Farnie was apparently afraid of exercising his power too long, and he interposed, in a hard, firm, staccato voice: "You will leave those keys on the table and return to your own room."

To my intense relief these orders were complied with. The hypnotised man, caught in his own trap, let the keys drop from his fingers, rose to his feet obediently, and, drawn by the doctor's magnetic gaze, walked quietly out of the room.

Now was the chance that the doctor had planned for me!

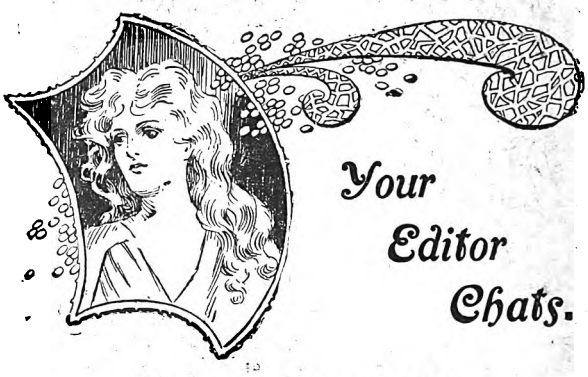
I was alone, within reach of the papers which were to restore to my unfortunate father the competence of which he had been robbed! In two seconds I had seized the bunch of keys, and had opened the sliding well in which the D'Alton papers were kept. Having secured all these, I hurriedly packed them in the brief bag, and, working like lightning, but without making any noise, I also possessed myself of the papers dealing with the New Barbary Development Land Co.

But I could not touch the safe which held that for which men had been murdered, and, putting the keys into the bag which already contained the papers, I left further investigation for other hands to perform.

The bag was now quite heavy. But I carried it into the great marble hall, and put it down beside the door while I reached my own modest property. Happily the switching on and off of the electric light was only the matter of a finger pressure and involved no noise. Neither did the opening of the door, for Dr. Farnie had already seen to that.

So, taking one last look at the Fairy fountain whose beauty had been bought by greed and crime, I gently turned the great door handle, lifted both bags, and, with my heart palpitating with dread of what might still be before me, I stepped out into the black, cheerless night.

(To be concluded.)



Our Great Easter Number.

All of you will be interested to hear that our next issue will be our Splendid Easter Holiday Number. It will, in addition to the usual features, contain the opening chapter of "Phantom Shadows," the admirable new serial story from the pen of Arnold Bennett, who is, as most of you are probably aware, one of the foremost novelists of the day. "Phantom Shadows" is a grand story. Every word of it is well worth reading, for the plot is most original, incident follows incident in rapid succession, and the characters are, as they always should be in good literature, absolutely true to Nature. "Excellent!" will be the verdict of every single reader of "Phantom Shadows," I am sure. A great charm will be lent to the story by the illustrations of Reginald Cleaver. On page 399 will be found a reduced facsimile of the picture which will be printed in colours on the cover of next week's *Short Stories*.

Do Unto Others.

If you have any friends to whom you think of introducing this paper, which has become so universally popular, you could not choose a better time than the present. Here we have a unique competition, the novelty of which no one can fail to appreciate, just begun, and a fine serial story starts next week. The final instalment of "Decoyed" will appear in the same issue, and will shortly be replaced by a series which everyone will read with delight. Just glance around your acquaintances, and note those who are not regular subscribers to *S. S.* Introduce the paper to them, and act the Good Samaritan, for you will please, first, those to whose attention you draw *S. S.*; secondly, yourself, by seeing their satisfaction and receiving their thanks; and, thirdly, myself and my staff, who are striving so hard to earn the hearty congratulations of the thousands of persons who can discriminate between that which is good and clever literature and that which is the reverse.

A Successful Competitor.

I consider that the most just solution to the Ninth Unsolved Love Problem, entitled "The Ordeal of David Hume," was sent in by Mrs. Tom Horne, 11 Greville Road, Kilburn, London, N.W., and I therefore award that lady the prize of one guinea I offered.

If you have not already done so, there is just time for you to make an attempt to win the guinea I offered for a solution to the problem entitled "The Heart of Claire Gilchrist," which appeared last week. All you have to do is to write down in a few words your advice to the girl under the circumstances related. All replies must reach this office not later than Friday, March 25th.

Your Editor.

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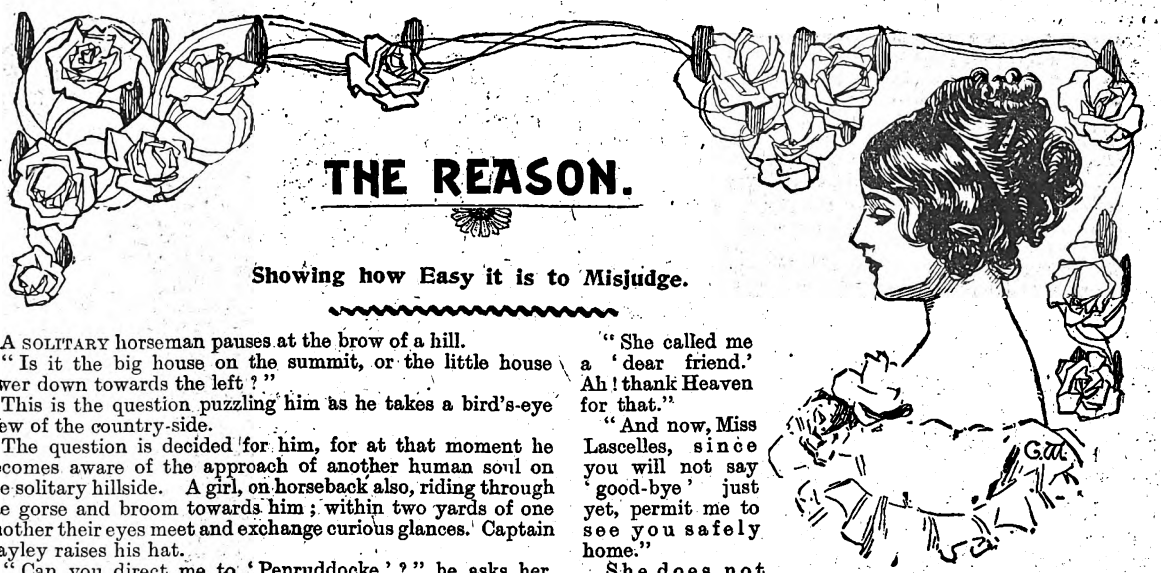

THE REASON.

Showing how Easy it is to Misjudge.

A SOLITARY horseman pauses at the brow of a hill.

"Is it the big house on the summit, or the little house lower down towards the left?"

This is the question puzzling him as he takes a bird's-eye view of the country-side.

The question is decided for him, for at that moment he becomes aware of the approach of another human soul on the solitary hillside. A girl, on horseback also, riding through the gorse and broom towards him; within two yards of one another their eyes meet and exchange curious glances. Captain Bayley raises his hat.

"Can you direct me to 'Penruddocke'?" he asks her, and his question solves the mystery of his presence to her.

"You are——"

"Captain Bayley."

She rides close up to him, extending a frank and friendly hand of greeting.

"I am Miss Lascelles," she informs him.

He takes her proffered hand, looking at her with an air of injured concern.

"Then my business is with you. Somehow I had pictured Miss Lascelles quite a middle-aged lady."

The shadow of a smile flits past the girl's soft eyes, leaving them all the softer for its fleeting presence.

"It is of no consequence," she says, waiving the subject at her own proud pleasure. "I had expected you; your sister wrote and told me that you would come to me as soon as possible—and I saw that the *Serapis* had come into dock last month."

"The end of last month. It is now only the fourteenth," he interposes hastily.

"Exactly," she says, looking past him across the broom while the sunshine slants between them.

"My sister said go to 'Penruddocke,' ask for Miss Lascelles, and into her own hands deliver this."

The girl makes a hasty gesture with her hand as though she would stay his movements. He does not observe it, and from the breast-pocket of his coat, which he had unbuttoned, he brings forth a packet which he holds towards her.

"Here it is! I am a faithful steward."

A change has crept over her face during these last few seconds—an expression of pain and fear had replaced its habitual one of imperious power. She extends her hand, it is trembling. "Thank you," she whispers brokenly, under her breath. He has averted his eyes from her; he cannot bear to witness her distress—shame—which is it?

"I have fulfilled my trust, for the sake of which forgive my previous blunders. I am glad to have met you, even so, good-bye," he says.

She is gazing at the packet he had given her with an absorbing interest. Captain Bayley lingers, loth to leave her alone. Just then he repeats "good-bye." She looks up at last.

"No—not yet—so soon—I have not thanked you; I—I—you have been very good in taking so much trouble for a stranger."

"Not quite a stranger, for you are a friend of my sister's, a 'dear friend,' she told me," smiling kindly at her.

Miss Lascelles' face lights up with a positive glow of tenderness.

"She called me a 'dear friend.' Ah! thank Heaven for that."

"And now, Miss Lascelles, since you will not say 'good-bye' just yet, permit me to see you safely home."

She does not answer in the affirmative, but turns her horse's head in the direction of "Penruddocke." "It was the little house after all," is the captain's reflection.

"Come in, I will give you some tea, and introduce you to Jack," she says, and the face she turns towards him is restored to its usual proud serenity.

The temptation thus set forth is too strong for him to resist; he accepts it.

"Jack" is her brother—a giant stripling, with eyes as blue as a girl's and the shadow of down on his upper lip, which Nature had curled imperiously like his sister's. He is very hearty in his welcome of Captain Bayley. He remembered the captain's sister, Mrs. Bob Beattie; what a jolly woman she was! Fox-hunting season nearly at its finish, lambs are early this year, and so on, and so on. By tacit consent the real object of Bayley's visit is not broached.

"You are staying in the neighbourhood, are you? Then you'll look us up again?" young Lascelles cries heartily when they are parting.

Miss Lascelles walks with them to the open door.

"Yes, come," she says. And then "good-bye."

Captain Bayley trots briskly down the hill.

"And that is Mina's friend, Marion Lascelles; she lives alone at 'Penruddocke' with that boy. Sweet soul! Poor soul!"

* * * * *

"*But I liked you better,*
Marion—Marion—I liked you better, Marion,
Riding through the broom."

Captain Bayley hums the words of the song lightly under his breath. Miss Lascelles looks up into his face with an indefinable expression—a flash—and it is gone.

"Why should you have liked her better then?"

"Because it was our first meeting, and I had her all to myself—just she and I alone among the broom."

"Ah! that was it," carelessly toying with a flower in the posy she is holding in her hand. "And, Marion, do you think she liked you better then, or now in twentieth century evening dress?"

"Shall I ask her?" with the ghost of a smile in his eyes.

"Perhaps you had better not. She, too, may have preferred you on first acquaintance; your vanity might possibly be hurt by such an admission on her part."

"It would not, pretty Marion. Come, there is the next waltz striking up, and it is ours."

They pass through the conservatory on their way to the ball-room in single file; and the women admire the set of

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Miss Lascelles' flowing skirts, the men her white shoulders, and Captain Bayley the top of her head, on which he is looking down, five auburn curls placed zigzag, and a fluffy fringe. They had seen a good deal of one another during the past ten days. First, there was that meeting on the hill, then a formal call which ended in a sociable meal, then a day spent pottering with the foxhounds, another call, and to-night the ball.

"Look at Bayley! That's his third dance running with Marion Lascelles—seems a case, eh?" drawls Carnegy to Mrs. Wylie, who is their mutual hostess.

"I hope not," testily; "Marion Lascelles is a flirt."

"And Bayley as jealous as the grave——"

"It would never do."

If they could have followed the "unsuitable couple" into the conservatory during the supper hour, and seen and heard what took place there! Miss Lascelles can never remember how it came about, only her astonishment that this man, above all others, should express sentiments of love to her.

"*You* love *me?*" she exclaims, and then changing the emphasis to "you *love* me?"

"Yes; why not?" a sudden gloom possessing him as he begins to realise that this may not prove a happy wooing for him.

"Why? Oh, you know very little of me——"

"It is not knowledge, it is instinct which prompts love," Laurence Bayley declares with an impatience that will brook no delay. He will have his answer. "I love you—do you care for me?"

Marion touches him with an imperative gesture.

"If you *know*, you have been unwise in your choice of time; if you do *not* know, there can be nothing between us."

"You are speaking in riddles," he returns coldly. "I know you sufficiently well to believe that you are necessary to my happiness. I do not love lightly, and for me there can be no cure, that is, if you refuse me. But you will not?" breaking off into sharp intreaty.

Her brows are knit in pain, she does not answer him.

"You will—you do. I was a fool to imagine that you might care for me, and yet you have encouraged me, drawn me on in a thousand different ways. Well, it was a dream, and short-lived," and he turns from her.

"Laurence, do not go. I love you, I love you." She has flung her scruples, her prudence, to the winds just in this one moment of passion, and is clinging to him. "You were quite right; I drew you on; I wanted you to care for me; I did not stop to consider. Can you ever forgive me?"

"For loving me?" with the brightest smile he had ever given her.

"No, no, no," wrenching herself from his arms, "I have been mad—wicked—dreaming; we must not—you must not do that. Turn your face away; do not look at me. I am not what I appear to be. *You can never marry me!*"

"Marion!"

"It is true. I swear it. You are a good man, a stern man. I have gauged your character—I know its strength and its weakness. You could not overlook my fault. We must part."

Captain Bayley is stunned. He stands staring helplessly at her.

"We must part," she repeats, and looks for him to say "No."

But he does not.

She leaves him standing there to search for her brother, and induce him to forsake the festivities with her.

There is something glittering on the tesselated floor at Captain Bayley's feet. He stoops to pick it up—it is a fine, gold chain, slipped through a wedding-ring.

He can understand now why she cannot marry him, and the knowledge makes his heart bitter.

* * * * *

Jack watches his sister suspiciously as she opens a note which has been awaiting her. It is addressed in Captain Bayley's hand-writing; there is a regimental crest on the envelope. Marion had come in from her morning ride, pale and listless still, but her face brightened, and her step regained some of its old elasticity as she perceived the note lying on the table. Jack turns his back for a moment, and takes one, two, three puffs at his cigarette; then something which is not merely vulgar curiosity moves him to look towards her again. She has fallen forward in her chair with her face resting upon the table.

"Marion, what is it?" springing to her side. She lifts her face, white as ashes, towards him.

"*It is this!*" she says, and holds up a fine gold chain which is passed through a wedding-ring.

* * * * *

His Majesty's troopship *Euphrates* is lying in Portsmouth harbour. On the morrow she will slip her moorings and set sail for Bombay.

Captain Bayley is staying at the "Queen's Hotel," Southsea; he is thinking of the morrow—with little regret, though, for all places are alike to him. He has dined, and is now smoking a course of cigarettes on the balcony, looking out over the sea which is washing the shores with a gentle splash, monotonous in its sound.

Somebody below is feebly drumming on the piano, singing songs at intervals. Captain Bayley is a patient listener to "Home, Sweet Home," with variations, "Good Old Jeff" song, more "Home, Sweet Home," and variations, "The Wearing of the Green" song, "Rule Britannia," played, that is thumped, with spirit, and then—"Confound it!"

This ejaculation is wrung from him, for that musical soul below had struck up "Marion."

"*I liked you better—*
I—liked—you—better—Marion,
Riding through the broom."

"Confound it!" and, swinging round, he finds a civil waiter at his elbow.

"A gentleman, sir, to see you. He is following me up, sir."

Captain Bayley stalks into his private sitting-room on the balcony, and finds there awaiting him—Jack Lascelles.

It is his first impulse to rush forward with outstretched hand of welcome, but a stern expression on the boyish face of his visitor deters him. He says instead: "Good evening," coldly, too.

"I have no doubt you are surprised to see me," commences the lad; and with his lip curled so, he reminds Laurence forcibly of his sister; "I saw your name down as sailing in the vessel which goes out to-morrow, and I felt that this was my last and only opportunity of seeing you. I went to your club, and they told me that I should find you here to-night, so I came."

"Yes," inquiringly, shutting his ears to that tune, "Marion," which is haunting him. "Can I do anything for you? What is it?"

The boyish blue eyes darken. "You can do nothing for me. I have taken considerable trouble for the purpose of enlightening you regarding a portion of my sister's history. It is right that you should know it. I tell you, striking his clenched fist against the palm of his hand excitedly, it is right and fair and just to her. God knows what you think, how you have misjudged her—you shall do so no longer. I am determined that you shall hear the truth to-night, when it is too late for you to make your peace with her, even if you felt so disposed."

The elder man bows his head; he is prepared to listen.

"Marion married when she was at school at the age of sixteen," he commences abruptly. "Hers was a runaway match, contracted without the knowledge or sanction of our father, who was then alive. The man was a worthless villain, and deserted the girl who had risked so much for his sake a few days after their marriage. Marion returned to her father's protection on one stipulation—that she should assist him in concealing her story from the rest of the world. There seemed no necessity to blazon it abroad, and so she was known still as Miss Lascelles. About a year ago chance led to the discovery of the whereabouts of Marion's husband. He was at Bangalow, and we learnt that there he subse-

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quently met with an accident at polo, which ended fatally. Letters Marion had written him fell into your sister's possession, and so she knew the truth. This was the packet she intrusted you with. If you doubt the authenticity of my story, she can corroborate it. Now I have finished, I will neither excuse nor explain further."

"Stay! stay!" calls Bayley imperiously. Jack turns at the door. "It is too late," he reminds him, "too late for you to attempt to win Marion's forgiveness, or I should not have come to you with the history of her wrongs."

"God help me, that is true," groans Laurence. "And yet I thank you for coming. I acted according to my lights, but *I loved your sister*. Believe this. God bless you!"

And with that blessing ringing in his ears, Jack goes.

On the morrow, H.M.S. *Euphrates* sails. Jack goes home to his sister, but says not a word of the steps he had taken to vindicate her lost reputation in the eyes of the man who should have believed in her more completely — trusted her more fully. For the next few weeks he watches her carefully, noting the returning elasticity to her step, the colour to her cheeks, with brotherly tenderness. She will get over this new sorrow. Poor Marion, she was very young when she first learnt to suffer!

"There are not many brothers in the world like *you*, Jack," she remarks inadvertently one day.

Lascelles breaks off in the midst of a tune he is whistling to return her compliment.

Gradually Miss Lascelles drops out from the old circles in which she had been courted and admired; the pair live more quietly than ever, seemingly content in each other's society. Then a day falls when "Penruddocke" is given up, and the Lascelles quit the country-side.

* * * *

It is Chance which fashions and changes our lives; Chance—Heaven-sent, or otherwise. Captain Bayley is inclined to vote for the former, when a turning in Piccadilly brings him face to face with Jack Lascelles one sultry afternoon in July. The younger man would have passed on with the barest possible recognition, but Bayley stands still in the road before him, and holds out his hand. "You would not pass me, Lascelles, if you did but know how anxiously I have looked for such a meeting. It is three years since we met—an eternity of time! And how has the world been faring with you? They told me you had sold 'Penruddocke'—I have just been staying in those parts."

Lascelles' generous heart relents within him: he cannot resist this hollow-eyed, haggard man, who just resembles the haughty, handsome Bayley of three years back—besides, at times, he is inclined towards the belief that Marion's is a wasted life. She loved Bayley better than he deserved—it is the way with women.

"I am sorry to see you looking so seedy, Bayley—sick leave, I suppose."

"Yes; I was wounded in a skirmish about a year ago and have had a baddish time ever since; however, this climate will soon set me up again. Your sister, Lascelles, how is she? Where is she?"

Jack says quietly: "Come and see."

Marion Lascelles—for by that name she is still known—is alone in the drawing-room of their little house in Mayfair—when Captain Bayley walks in. "Marion," he says, "I have come back—can you ever forgive my cruelty to you in the past?"

What, think you, was her answer?

Jessie Chalmers.

THIS WILL INTEREST YOU.

This is a reduced facsimile of our next week's cover. The picture shows Mr. Theodore Racksole, the American millionaire, and his daughter Nella, in the dining-room at a great London hotel. He orders Jules the waiter (who is involved in a villainous scheme to kidnap a reigning prince) to bring him a steak and a bottle of Bass. Jules refuses to carry out this strange request, and it costs Racksole £400,000 to have his own way. The endless complications that ensue are related with thrilling intensity in "Phantom Shadows," the splendid new serial that starts in next week's SHORT STORIES.

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BY STRENGTH OF WILL.

Relating the Story of a Flirtation and its Results.

There is a pool a little more than a mile from the town of Windham, in one of the loveliest bits of landscape in the country. From its great depth and stagnation, its waters are intensely black, and the clouds by day and the stars by night are reflected in it as in an ebony mirror.

It has an ill-repute in the neighbourhood, and is little frequented, in spite of the beauty in which it is set. The wild flowers on its banks die unplucked, and the frogs that live on its borders croak through the long evenings in undisturbed contentment. On one side a rock, some twenty feet in height and crowned with a clump of short trees, rises perpendicularly out of the water.

Upon this rock, one evening late in August, sat a man and woman, who had evidently chosen the spot for its absolute seclusion.

The man was a fine-looking fellow of thirty, tall and strongly built, with a light beard, curling yellow hair, and large, full-lidded, hazel eyes.

His own opinion of himself was pretty evident in his careless expression of self-satisfaction and confident air. Not bad at heart, an observer of men might have said, but utterly weak and spoilt.

His companion sat watching him intently with an expression of mingled anxiety and impatience. She could have been no more than eighteen, but there was a firmness and energy in her face which gave her an older air than belonged to her years.

She was not beautiful after any type; her features were too pale and irregular. But her bright brown eyes, shadowed by heavy, arching eyebrows, her sensitive mouth, and evident refinement and intelligence, would have been extremely attractive to a man less in love with himself than the person beside her.

Her chief charm, however, was in her figure, slim and luxuriant, full of soft curves, and graceful in a certain leopard-like way which had something very characteristic in it.

She was the first to speak.

"You are going away to-morrow, then," she said, with an undertone of agitation in her voice.

"Yes," responded the other. "Thanks to you, I have spent a charming holiday. Do you know, I shall quite regret it."

"Indeed!" said the girl, with an accent of sarcasm. "Not the least pleasure of your retrospect will doubtless be that you have succeeded in making unhappy an unsophisticated country girl."

"Now, my dear Helen," exclaimed her companion, "why will you take that tone with me? I explained my position fully. I told you that I was going back in the autumn to be married. That should satisfy you. A fellow can't break a promise, you know."

"But he can break every unwritten law of honour," returned the girl fiercely. "He can live a lie; he can delude and desert the innocent for a little amusement. He can prove himself to be utterly heartless and utterly selfish. All this it seems he can do, without lowering himself in his own opinion.

"You say you explained. When did you explain? Not until our intercourse had lasted for three months; not until you had won my love and asked me to be your wife—when you had made an utter fool of me, involved my reputation, and connected our names together throughout the village. Then you explain that you never intended to make me your wife—that it was all a flirtation, and that you were engaged to another woman, whom you intended to marry."

"You are becoming tragic, Helen," said the young man, uneasily. "Why can't you be sensible and make the best of it?"

"You really believe that I shall submit without a murmur?" she asked, in a low, harsh tone. "You are sure that this is the last of it?"

"I can't really see what can be done about it," said the other, with a yawn. "If you were so foolish as to take my talk seriously, and form any expectations upon it, why, you are to blame—not I. You had better be philosophical, shake hands, forget and forgive all, and find some other fellow who will appreciate your incontestable attractions better than I do."

"Now listen to me," cried the girl, springing to her feet. "I tell you, Jarvis Darnley, this is *not* the end of it. The love of a woman like me does not die; it becomes hate—hate as intense as the love you do not deserve. A will like mine does not submit to insult and wrong; it revenges itself. This is to be no folly of a summer to be laughed over and forgotten. There will be a sequel."

"What do you mean to do?" asked Darnley, rising in turn and looking at her in some alarm. "I hope you are not going to be rash."

"I am going to make you repent every hour of this summer!" answered the girl wildly. "You shall bitterly regret every lie you have told me, every treacherous kiss, every false look. Henceforth it shall be the business of my life to do justice between us. Remember my words in the time to come, when your wife caresses you, when your children gather at your knee."

Her voice, which had been pitched in a sharp, high key, suddenly sank into a low, trembling sob.

At this sign of womanly weakness all of Darnley's confidence returned. He broke into a loud laugh.

"Well done!" he cried. "Some day Helen Fielding will be known to the world as a superb tragic actress. Come, now, pay me for my flattering prophecy. Kiss me and forget this rubbish."

He stepped towards her as he spoke with his arms extended; but she shrank back with a visible shudder.

"Do not touch me!" she exclaimed. "Your words are an insult."

But he continued to advance, and she to recede, motioning him off with a gesture of disgust.

In the gathering darkness neither of them saw how near they had approached the edge of the rock. A frail hedge of briars screened the sheer brink of the precipice, and already Helen stood pressed close against it.

Another backward step and her foot slipped. She struggled desperately and silently for a second to recover her balance; then, with a shrill cry, dashed through the bushes, tearing her garments and savagely wounding her face and hands, and plunged into the pool with a heavy, horrible splash.

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For an instant Darnley stood dumb and terror-stricken. A few shreds of the unfortunate girl's clothing floated from the bushes; the thorns were stained with her blood, invisible in the darkness. Below he could hear a faint sobbing, a frenzied splashing, then all was silent.

Darnley was not bad at heart. A sense of awful pity for the poor girl seized upon him. He looked wildly round for the means of rescuing her.

He was a good swimmer, but to have plunged after the drowning girl off the cliff would have been to risk striking some concealed rock, even if the fall from such a height did not stun him.

He ran rapidly down the rock towards a point where the shore of the pool shelved into the water. When he reached the spot the surface of the pool was blank; the girl's figure had disappeared.

An uneasy ripple upon the water, a gentle waving of the reeds growing in the shallows, alone told of the terrible tragedy which had just occurred. Utterly unnerved, Darnley sat down and buried his face in his hands.

Although the poor girl's death had been an accident, he felt like a murderer. She had died with reproaches upon her lips, and he began to wonder if, after all, he had not been responsible for her destruction.

For the first time in his life the little manly feeling of which he was possessed rose and smote him with a sense of shame and remorse.

What had seemed before only the amusement of an idle hour now assumed the proportions of a crime. The drama of folly had ended in death.

Hot tears of sorrow and terror trickled through his fingers; like the weakling that he was, he wept over the consequences of his own selfish heartlessness, more in pity for his own misery than for the wrong he had done.

Presently he rose, and, after searching accessible parts of the shore, shuddering at every floating leaf, fearing to see in it an upturned, accusing face, he turned his steps towards the town.

He reported the circumstances of the disaster to the police, reserving only the events which led up to it.

As he was commonly supposed to be the girl's lover, no suspicion rested upon him.

The pool was dredged, but nothing was found. The dim, watery caverns had swallowed their prey and would not disgorge it.

After the necessary legal forms had been complied with, Darnley left the town in mad haste.

Whether in her wild threats the girl had had a prevision of her sudden death, he could not know, but it was none the less certain that the memory of her haunted him like an accusing spectre for many long months. Already, as she had foretold, he bitterly regretted the folly of that summer, and would have willingly given ten years of his frivolous life if it had never occurred.

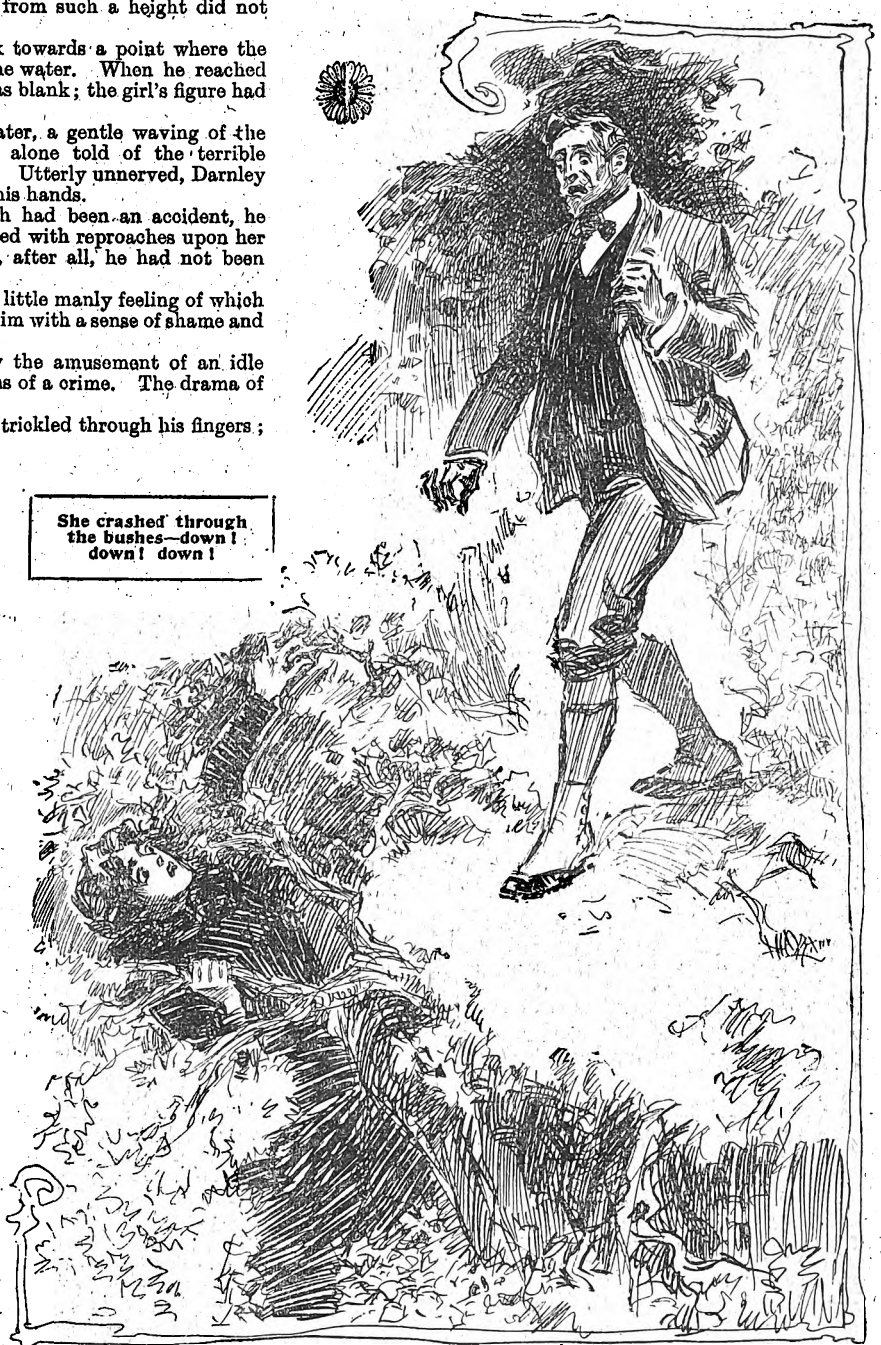
On such men as Darnley even the most painful experiences can make no lasting impression.

In the course of time the events at Windham faded away into an unpleasant shadow.

If there were moments when Helen Fielding, her unfortunate love and miserable death, returned to his mind, he had not much difficulty in banishing them again.

He married a meek little light-haired woman, the exact contrast of Helen, who admired and feared him to his heart's content.

He had never told her the particulars of his connection with Helen Fielding's death, and she had never annoyed



She crashed through the bushes—down! down! down!

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him by referring to that unfortunate event when she found how distasteful it was to him.

To all appearances, then, Helen Fielding's menaces had proved as vain as her love, and Darnley was not likely to pay for his folly and cruelty as heavily as they deserved.

* * * * *

Six years after their marriage, Mrs. Darnley's health, never of the best, became entirely broken. She was confined to her room, a hopeless invalid. She had meantime presented her husband with two children—little girls—upon whom the whole power of his weak nature became concentrated. They constituted his sole pleasure and care, and his love for them was such that he often declared that if any evil should happen to either of them, it would kill him.

Their mother's illness prevented her from taking charge of them, and a friend of Mrs. Darnley's recommended to her a young woman, whose education and refinement made her at once a suitable governess for the children and a companion for the invalid.

Her name was Ellen Meadows, and she had suffered from some accident in her early youth which had terribly marred her features.

When Jarvis Darnley first beheld the new governess, he was conscious of a strange repugnance towards the unfortunate woman. She was still young, but there were traces of grey in her dark hair.

Her face was wretchedly scarred, so dreadfully indeed that its whole appearance must have been changed. Her deep brown eyes alone retained their beauty, and when Darnley met their quiet glance fixed upon him he had a dim and annoying sense of recognition. Yet from the woman's history it was plain that he could never have met her before.

His unaccountable dislike for Miss Meadows was so intense that he suggested her dismissal to his wife. But the invalid woman had taken a strong liking for her new companion, and insisted upon retaining her. Moreover, she had completely gained the affection of the two children; so, in spite of himself, Darnley was compelled to submit to her presence.

She proved herself to be a quiet, efficient person, rarely appearing in the lower parts of the house, and more rarely speaking in Darnley's presence.

But more than once he detected her eyes fixed upon him with a strange look, that, though he could not divine its meaning, sent a cold thrill to his heart.

In spite of his dislike, however, she soon gained a certain influence over him, as she had already done over the rest of the household. It was like a fascination. He found himself inquiring after her on his arrival home. He listened eagerly to the tone of her low voice when she spoke. She had but to suggest a wish, and he eagerly fulfilled it.

Yet it was nothing like affection that he felt for her; his old distrust and dislike clung to him through all. He sometimes wondered if she had not bewitched him. And the worst of it was that when she was near, no matter what might be going on, that terrible night on the cliff, Helen Fielding's menaces and her dreadful death, came back so vividly as to terrify him. He could not account for this, and very soon ceased to try.

As if the angel of misfortune had entered his home along with the governess, a series of disasters began to afflict the household. Mrs. Darnley's illness took an alarming turn, and the physicians declared that nothing more could be done for her.

Miss Meadows nursed her through all as if the invalid had been her sister. Often Darnley would see her through the open door of the sick-room leaning over the invalid until far in the night.

To Darnley the governess' attitude at such times seemed sinister—as if she were rather watching for the approach of death than endeavouring to ward it off.

But what could he do? At best his suspicions were those of a man half-crazed; and, besides, he was powerless to have banished the woman—as powerless as a bird is supposed to be under the eyes of a snake.

Finally, the long-expected death of Mrs. Darnley occurred.

On the day after her burial there was a gentle rap upon the door of the room in which the stricken widower had secluded himself, and Miss Meadows entered, leading his two children by the hand. The governess began the interview by saying:

"I have come to know what change, if any, you propose to make in your household. Is it your wish that I remain in charge of your children, or go?"

The two children clung to her with a cry of dismay. The elder, turning her eyes boldly upon her father, said:

"She shall not go, papa. If she goes, I will go with her."

Darnley looked at his child with a startled glance.

"Do you love Miss Meadows more than you do me?" he said, with a painful effort at pleasantry.

The child seemed puzzled; a strange, wondering expression came into her face.

"I don't know," she replied slowly. "I don't think I love her. I can't tell what it is. Only she must stay. She shall be my new mamma."

Her father rose and began pacing the room with agitated steps. Now, if ever, was the time to assert himself—to free his life from the strange bondage this woman had thrown upon him. He resolved that, cost what it might, she should go. He turned towards her and opened his lips to give her a polite but firm dismissal, and encountered her gaze fastened upon him. Something in the bright, steadfast depths of her eyes seemed to paralyse his will. He stammered, hesitated, and was silent. Then, drawing a long breath, like a man in a dream, he muttered:

"Stay and be a mother to my children.!"

The governess bowed silently and left the room with the children, while Darnley sank down in his chair in a paroxysm of absolute terror. What was the secret of this woman's control over him? He disliked her—feared her, too, for that matter—and yet he was utterly powerless in her presence.

It seemed that the mysterious influence of evil which had fallen upon his house was not yet satisfied. His younger child fell dangerously ill. Again the governess was the indefatigable nurse. Again the wretched father saw her brooding over his child's crib through the silent hours of the night, and again the superstitious terror seized upon him.

In his extremity he made the family physician his confidant. He revealed all his distrust and alarm, and was told in as many words that it was his own mind that was wrong, disordered by his grief and anxiety. The child was suffering from a very common complaint, and the governess was doing all that lay in her power for its welfare.

Nevertheless, Darnley's mysterious forebodings proved only too true. The child died, as its mother had died, in the arms of Miss Meadows.

The governess brought the news to him, standing impassibly near the door, while she spoke in a slow, measured tone. Darnley started up with a cry.

"Oh, what have I done to deserve this?" he said.

"There are those who tell us that each sorrow is the punishment of a crime," said the governess coldly. "Are there no passages in your life to which this suffering is a sequel? Have you worked no misery to others equal to that which you feel now?"

Darnley turned about and glared at her. Something in her words or her voice had seemed like a recognition.

"Who are you, in Heaven's name?" he cried.

"Ellen Meadows, your governess," she answered calmly.

Darnley sat down and covered his eyes with his hand; when he looked up again, he was alone.

He had not yet finished with misfortune. His elder daughter, his favourite, had contracted the disease of which her sister had perished, and rapidly grew dangerously ill.

Once more the governess hung over her like a mother, living at her bedside, nursing her with such skill and care as won the hearty commendation of the physician.

Darnley, in the midst of his grief, was tortured with his former terrors. He walked the house like a maniac, neither sleeping nor eating. He stealthily watched every movement of the governess, but could discover nothing tangibly

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wrong in her actions. He saw that she was indeed what she seemed, a tireless and affectionate nurse.

Nevertheless, there was something terrible in the persistence with which she clung to the bedside. Her black-robed figure, crouching over the child, her eyes fixed with an intense, immovable gaze upon the sleeper's face, reminded him of the old stories of vampires which he had read in his youth. Yet, when he reasoned with himself calmly and collectedly, he could see how wild and irrational his doubts of the governess were.

The end which he had foreseen came at last. One night as he was watching the sickroom, through the half-open door, the governess made a sudden movement, then rose and held the candle over the child.

By its light Darnley could see the woman's face, and its expression terrified him.

A strange, almost agonised smile passed over her lips; a look of mingled sorrow and triumph shone in her eyes. She murmured a few undistinguishable words and set the candle upon the table again. Darnley burst into the room with a frenzied gesture.

"She is dead!" he cried.

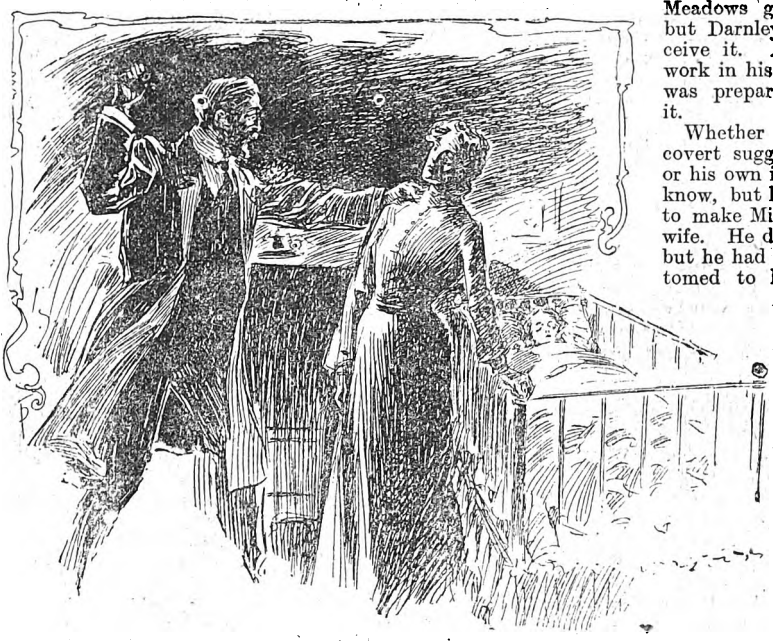
The woman turned quietly and looked at him.

"Yes," she said. "I expected it."

"You hoped it!" shouted Darnley. "Murderess, I saw your face before I entered the room. You have killed my child."

She made no reply, as if she disdained his accusations as the ravings of a maniac.

"Do you hear me, woman?" he cried. "You have murdered her as you did her sister and her mother. How, I do not know. But ever since you have entered this house evil has fallen upon me. Tell me what you have done; confess, or, by Heaven, I will do justice on you with my own hands!"



"Murderess! You have killed my child!"

He had seized her fiercely by the shoulder, and glared into her face with a threatening look. She neither moved, nor resisted, but returned his glance with cold, defying eyes.

"Strike," she said, in a low, deep voice. "You who have seen a woman drown before your eyes need not hesitate to kill another."

Where had he heard that voice before? Where had he seen that look? And, above all, who was it that recalled that terrible night on the rock to him again at the deathbed of his child? He relinquished his hold upon her and staggered back.

"Who are you?" he asked, repeating the question he had asked her before.

"Ellen Meadows," she replied, as she had replied before.

He turned away, and, reaching his own room, he knew not how, fell upon the floor in a deep swoon.

A fortnight passed in the dreary hallucinations of brain fever before he opened his eyes to sunlight and reason again, a strangely altered man.

The first object that met his gaze was the governess, sitting near the bed quietly sewing.

A mental revolution had taken place in him during his illness. He no longer regarded her with abhorrence. He forgot that he had accused, and more than half-suspected, her of having destroyed his wife and children.

All that had merged into a dream, a part, it seemed, of his delirium. He was glad to see her there. He was pleased to think that she had nursed him through his illness. He did not puzzle himself over the change in his feelings. It satisfied him that it should be so.

Her constant devotion at the bedsides of his children and himself had broken the governess' health. She was plainly very ill, too ill to leave his house when he was able to be about again.

It was a part of his strange mental change that he should now devote himself to her. He came to think of little else than her welfare, moving about with a weak, dazed air that was now habitual to him. He obeyed her slightest wish.

As time went by, Miss Meadows grew no better, but Darnley did not perceive it. An idea was at work in his mind, and he was preparing to execute it.

Whether it was some covert suggestion of hers, or his own idea, he did not know, but he had resolved to make Miss Meadows his wife. He did not love her, but he had become accustomed to her; moreover, he said to himself that he ought to make her some sort of reparation for his former injustice to her.

He did not see the strange gleam of triumph in the governess' eyes when he proposed to her. He merely saw that she seemed to be pleased, and that she would make no objection to his wishes.

He insisted that there should be no delay, and she did not remonstrate. With a terrible effort of her will, she conquered her increasing weakness and deceived him with hopes of her speedy recovery.

The wedding took place quietly, and with none but the necessary witnesses; when it was over, she seemed feverishly anxious to be left alone with her husband.

When they were together, she turned suddenly towards him and said:

"Do you know that I shall not outlast the day?"

He stared at her in speechless dismay.

"Oh, no!" he cried. "You are needlessly alarming yourself and me."

"I speak the truth," she said. "I know very well that my end is approaching, and before I die I must reveal my secret." She feebly rose and stood before him. "Do you remember, Jarvis Darnley, a certain night, seven years ago, when you sat with a woman upon a ledge of rocks beside a pool near a little country town? Do you remember that that was the last scene in what to you had been a pleasant Summer comedy, and to her a deep and sorrowful tragedy? You had deluded her

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and broken her heart for a little amusement. She had trusted you, and you had laughed at her faith in you. Do you recall how she met her death?"

"Why speak of that now?" said Darnley anxiously. "It was all over years ago. There was no reparation to be made."

"She told you," continued his wife hoarsely, "that she would exact justice from you to the full—that she would repay you every pang you had ever cost her. Jarvis Darnley, she has kept her word. I am Helen Fielding!"

Darnley made no reply. The weak mind of the poor wretch was absolutely paralysed. He could only stare and groan.

"I was not drowned that night. I fell into the water so near the shore that, by the aid of some bushes, I succeeded in crawling out, numbed, dazed, and cruelly wounded. These scars are the seals of that night's work. Knowing you would search for me, I hid until you were gone.

"I could no longer face my friends after what had happened; besides, for all my purposes, it was better that I should be thought dead. Therefore, I left the place secretly that night. You are the only living being who knows that my bones are not lying at the bottom of that pool. I came to this town and hired a lodging near you, where I could keep you under my eye.

"At the proper time I entered your family. You did not recognise me; I was too cruelly changed. Then my vengeance began. Jarvis Darnley, there is such a power as Will—a power stronger than material weapons, and, supported by such wrongs as mine, it was invincible. I did not destroy your wife and children by material means, but I *willed* that they should die. I concentrated my whole energy into the hope and wish, and I succeeded. I willed that you should be under my influence and that you should marry me. I have accomplished all.

"The wrong you did me seven years ago has been bitterly expiated. For every pain I suffered you have been repaid. The justice you were too heartless to do me then you have done me to-day. I am satisfied."

As she finished, her voice failed and her face whitened out to the colour of marble. With a low sigh, she fell back and died, with a strange, sad smile upon her lips.

When the servants entered the room, they found Jarvis Darnley sitting upon the floor, playing with his fingers and laughing inanely to himself.

The weak remains of his mind had gone. Bitterly had he expiated his folly and sin. But by what occult means the strange woman had justified herself—by what mysterious force or mental power—must be left to the better science of a future day to discover.

Charles L. Hildreth.

The son of the clergyman who performed the marriage ceremony told me this story.

On the evening of a dark and lowering day in late autumn a closed carriage was driven to the door of an inn in a manufacturing town of Derbyshire, from which alighted a woman closely cloaked and veiled. She seemed to know that the landlord was a kind-hearted man, and one to be trusted. She called him aside, and said, without raising her veil but in a voice of rare sweetness, and evidently that of a young person:

"I must trust you, good sir, with more, perhaps, than life. I wish you to serve me without asking a question. I can give you my word, in the outset, that no harm can come to you on my account in any legal way. I must be married. I must be a wife within this hour; and you must find me a husband. I only ask that you will find a man who can legally take a wife; a man, not a rascal; and a man who will take three hundred pounds and give his solemn pledge never to seek me, nor to speak to me after the final word of the marriage ceremony shall have been pronounced. If you can find such a man, and bring him hither, and then bring a willing clergyman, you will do me a great favour."

"But the license, madam."

"I am provided. I have a special licence, wanting only the name of the bridegroom."

It took the host some little time to make up his mind that the lady was in earnest, and that all else was right so far as the law was concerned. When he was satisfied upon these points he nodded and pleasantly smiled. Just the man required was in his employ. He went out into his stables, where he found Mark Conroy at work over a favourite horse. Mark was a splendid specimen of physical and mental manhood. Nearly six feet tall, perfectly proportioned, with features regular and handsome, an eye like a well of light, and a clustering mass of nut-brown curls setting off his shapely head, he was a man such as might win the love and esteem of any woman; and the only reason why he had not married or courted one of the many damsels who sought to attract him was that his love for his beautiful horses engrossed his whole heart.

Mark heard the landlord's story, and went with him into the private apartment where the lady was, determined to have the request from her own lips; and she made it, though, when she had seen him, standing so strong and so proud before her, she faltered considerably. But she got through with it, claiming from him the pledge before-mentioned. While she spoke he tried by every means in his power to gain a glimpse of her face, but in vain. Yet he did not miss her voice. It was very sweet to his ear. He loved music, and he did not think he should ever forget the rich, pure tones of that voice. It was to him an index to her character. Never a coarse woman with such breathing of music.

"My dear lady," he said, with a respectful inclination of the head, "I will accept the money which you offer, because I think I can make a good use of it. Ordinarily I would not listen for a moment, but now three hundred pounds may be the weight in the balance that shall make my whole future; and, added to this, I may serve you. Not for a hundred

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times three hundred pounds would I lend myself to a plot that could work harm to yourself."

"It will save me, sir! Oh, it will save me!'

"Then I am ready."

"And—I have your promise——"

"I have given my word. It has never yet been broken, and I do not think to *your* harm I shall now make my first false step."

Somehow the lady appeared to be more shy than she was at first, and once or twice she moved away from Mark, as though she were afraid of him, and crouched nearer to the landlord.

Near at hand lived an accommodating rector. He came in, fully understanding the work he was to do, and after a few whispered words with the lady, he signified his readiness to proceed. The name of Mark Conroy was filled into the license, after which the work was quickly done.

"Must I sign the register?" the newly-made wife asked uneasily.

The clergyman insisted upon it. The law required it.

Mark signed his name, in a bold, strong, round hand. Then the lady took the pen, and tremblingly wrote a name, saying:

"That is not the name by which I am known, but I have a sacred right to it."

She had written "Cordelia Temple."

She gave to the rector five pounds—to the host five more; and then she counted out six crisp, new fifty pound notes to her husband. Mark took them, and put them into his pocket, and then he drew from his purse a half-sovereign of gold, and laying it upon the post of a big oaken chair, he placed the edge of his pocket-knife upon it, and with a single blow of a piece of wood he cut it into two equal parts, one of which he handed to his wife.

"Lady," he said, "I need not tell you that this, to me, is, and must ever be while I live, a serious matter. Do not tremble. You have my word! But will you not take this bit of gold, and keep it in remembrance of the man whose name you can wear when you will, and who must henceforth be true to you?"

She caught the piece of gold with a spasmodic clutch and turned away, as though to hide an emotion which she did not dare to have witnessed.

One step, and Mark Conroy was by her side. He took her hand, and raised it to his lips.

"I do this reverently," he said, almost in a whisper. "And now, lady," he added, lifting his head proudly, and stepping back, "know that I shall be true to the vows this night taken upon myself. If, in the time to come, Mark Conroy can in any way serve you, you may command him without fear. He will never intrude, and he will never take advantage of any service he may happily render. Adieu! May God and the good angels watch over you, and bless you always."

And with this he turned away, and was gone. The lady could not have spoken if she would.

"I suppose," said the landlord, as the lady was ready to depart, "that you would have this kept a profound secret?"

"No! No!" she cried vehemently. "If men should be upon my track—if they should trace me to this place—tell them that I am married. Tell them exactly what you have seen; but for *his* sake—my—my *husband's*—do not give his name. Will you promise this?"

The good landlord promised, and very shortly afterwards the lady's carriage was whirling rapidly away into the gloom towards Cheshire.

The clock in the tower of the old stone church was striking the hour of nine as the strange woman drove away from the Derbyshire inn. Two hours later—as the same bell-hammer was pealing forth the eleventh hour—another carriage was driven rapidly up, from which alighted two gentlemen—one an elderly man, with a hard, hawk-like face, and the other younger, and evidently a gentleman cad.

Mark Conroy heard the arrival, and came in to see.

The gentlemen were eager and breathless. Had anything been seen of a young lady, appearing as the man described?

Mark contrived to whisper into the host's ear, to direct his questions.

"How old was the lady?" asked the publican.

"Nineteen," answered the old man.

"Was she handsome?"

"She had the name—the shameless vixen—of being the handsomest girl in Staffordshire!"

And then the host told his story—told it as it was, all save that he represented the husband as having gone in pursuit, not to molest the lady, but to protect her into Staffordshire, for he had determined to serve her if he could.

The younger man swore a big oath, and the elder man swore a bigger. Their plans were shattered, and they were crestfallen and chagrined.

Before they went away, the younger man discovered our hero, who had remained respectfully in the background.

"Hallo, Mark, is that yourself?"

And he advanced and extended a hand with perfect freedom of manner.

"Yes, my lord. I am stopping here just now."

"Ah! Say, Mark, did you see this girl we have been talking about?"

"Why, my lord, as for seeing her, I cannot say I did; but I saw the carriage, and saw a woman get into it and whisk away."

"Well, old fellow, there went the most dainty bit of womanhood in the Kingdom. Confound it! I supposed I had her hard and fast. Sir John is her guardian, and had given her to me; but she has given us the slip. Locks, and bolts, and iron bars have been of no use. If she's been honestly married, Sir John's guardianship is at an end. But, say, Mark, I have a magnificent filly, which I wish you to take in hand. She promises tremendous things."

Mark said he would give the filly a try, and shortly afterwards the gentlemen took their leave.

"Who was that?" demanded the host, as they drove away.

"That," replied Mark, "was the Earl of Bentley—Dick Temple."

And they all went their ways in life as seemed to them best.

Mark Conroy from that night became a new man. He borrowed books, and read and studied, and went at French and German. He had said that three hundred pounds might be the making of him, nor did he make a mistake. The owner of a place near Derby—a raiser of thoroughbred stock—was glad to sell him a half-interest, and in a very few years the horses from the stables of Monkton and Conroy stood at the head of the list in England.

The Earl of Bentley let his favourite filly go to pay a betting debt, and Mark bought the animal for twenty guineas. Four years later that filly was known and celebrated under the name of *Lightfoot*, and Mark sold her to the Earl of Derby for ten thousand pounds, and she won the money back for her noble owner in one season.

This was but one circumstance of many. Mark Conroy had one great aim in life, and in that direction he bent every energy.

At the age of two-and-twenty he sold out all interest in his Derby property, and his funds in the hands of his bankers amounted to more than eighty thousand pounds. He had not made one mistake in all his ventures, and Fortune had literally smiled upon him.

And through it all—by day, when business seemed to entirely engross him, and by night, in the still thoughtful watches, one influence was never absent—the music of that sweet voice he had heard in the old Derbyshire inn. Oh! what should come of it? At all events, the thought held him pure and true, and led him to the station of a manhood that any man might covet, for it was pure and true, and elevated, and intellectual, and, above all else, robust in glowing, glorious health.

Eight years had elapsed since the day on which Mark

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Conroy was married, and he had grown from four-and-twenty to two-and-thirty, when he took it into his head to go for a tour on the Continent. He went to Paris first, and thence into Germany. From city to city, seeking a pleasure he did not readily find, until at length he found himself in the quaint, old walled city of Ulm, on the Danube.

He was standing in the curiously-constructed hall of a quaintly-constructed inn, with innumerable nooks and corners and dim recesses, when he was attracted by the sound of a familiar voice. It was the voice of the Earl of Bentley, and he was talking with his valet, a dark-visaged, powerful rascal, evidently engaged because of his physical strength and daring.

"*She will be alone in her chamber an hour after dark,*" said the voice of the Earl. "*I have bribed her maid. My boat is at the old landing. I must not be seen here. Will you carry the lady to that boat?*"

The valet said he would do it. He knew just how to accomplish the task. He would bear the lady to the boat, and she should make no outcry.

"*Once she is in my power,*" went on the Earl, "*all else is simple. We will prove her professed marriage all a sham, and she shall marry me, or*——" The rest of the sentence was lost.

Conroy's heart beat hard and fast. He knew very well who was the lady alluded to. He inquired of the landlord, however, and was informed that the occupant of the suite he had designated was an English lady, who had been with him several weeks—Lady Isabel Cordelia, of Templeton. She was a beautiful woman, but evidently unhappy.

Mark Conroy found the suite of apartments, and did not lose sight of the entrance. About an hour after dark he saw the maid come out, and saw her speak with a man who was hiding in a recess. Shortly after that, this man was joined by another whom he had called by a low whistle, and the two entered the chamber from which the maid had come. A few moments, during which the watcher's heart beat furiously, and then came the sound of a smothered cry.

With a bound Conroy was in the chamber, where he saw a lady struggling in the grasp of two men. With a blow of his fist that might have felled an ox, he sent the valet to the floor; then with a backward sweep he knocked the other against the wall; and then, winding his left-arm around the lady he held her in safety, while with his right he drew a pistol and levelled it.

"Heavens!" exclaimed the valet, when he had picked himself up and looked upon the man who had knocked him down, "it's the horse-trainer, Conroy!"

"And you will find him something more than that if you do not take yourself out of this. Go, tell your master that Mark Conroy knows all, and that if he is in Ulm to-morrow morning he may suffer for it!"

The two men slunk away, and then Conroy led the lady to a seat, and would have let her go, but she clung to him. He was able to speak with comparative calmness, because he had carefully prepared himself for the meeting.

"Lady, I have not forgotten my promise. I have watched over you when you knew it not. You may command me even yet."

She looked up into his face, still clinging to his strong arm, and a variety of emotions were shadowed upon her surpassingly beautiful face.

"You are Mark Conroy?"

"I am."

"Do you know who I am?"

"I do."

"Do you know that you ever saw me before?"

"I cannot say that I know, but my heart tells me that it is so—it tells me that you have the mate to this."

And he drew from his bosom, where it had hung suspended from a silken cord about his neck, a tiny bag of chamois-skin, from which he took a semi-disc of gold.

A moment she stood irresolute, and then, while a rich glow suffused her cheeks, mounting to her temples and brow, and imparting to the lustrous eyes a living light, she drew from her own bosom, where it had been kept in a velvet pouch, the other half of the golden half-sovereign.

Conroy could contain his great heart no longer. Grasping both the lady's hands, and looking earnestly and frankly into her face, he said:

"Lady, from that hour of the other years—that hour in the old Derbyshire inn—I have kept the faith then pledged. Your voice betrayed to me a pure and worthy woman, and I have held the sweet remembrance in love and true devotion. I dare not, knowing who and what you are, ask you to share my lot; but, oh!—if you——"

She put out her hand and stopped him,

"Mark Conroy, from that same hour I have not lost sight of you. I know how you have lived—how you have thrived and prospered——"

"But," he cried, interrupting her, "you do not know that the one thought of yourself has been the blessed spirit of my uprising."

"But—*I have hoped it*," she said.

"You—have—hoped?"

"Oh! My husband! If you claim me for your wife, and love me always, I shall be happy!"

And so, after years of waiting, Mark Conroy found his reward; and he was not prouder nor more happy than was the Lady Isabel Cordelia, heiress of the vast estates of the Earl of Templeton. A distant cousin inherited the title, but the wealth was hers.

Lord Bentley, when he learnt the truth, not only gave up his striving and his persecution, but he descended to beg that the story of his fruitless endeavours might not be told in England.

But in England Mark Conroy and his wife lived no more. They found a pleasanter home on the Rhine, where were countrymen enough to make it home-like, and where they were estimated in Society for the grand qualities of head and heart that endeared them to all with whom they came in social contact.

Robert Macdonald.

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Pink and Grey.

The Tale of a Rectified Misunderstanding.

It was strange, but my cousin Fonda and I looked like twins. We resembled each other a great deal more than we did our own sisters. To be sure, there was nothing striking about either of us, though Fonda was very pretty. We were of medium height, oval faces, dark hair and eyes, and regular features. She had far more bloom and sparkle than I—as well she might have—for she was a rich man's petted daughter, while I was a poor seamstress who earned my living by the day. Fonda went everywhere, had everything. It seemed to me that I had nothing but my work. There was always plenty of that for me.

There was one thing Fonda wasn't allowed to have—that was a lover. Uncle Algernon wouldn't have one of his girls married before they were twenty-five, he said—he had seen enough of the folly of early marriages. So when Wendell Larne commenced paying attention to me, I found that I did have something which my envied cousin Fonda hadn't.

He was the best fellow in the world, was Wende, and made my life much brighter and happier. Not that he could take me to the opera and such places—Wende hadn't much money—but he could always be ready for an evening walk in the park with me, and I felt quite proud when I went to church on Sunday, my arm in his.

That Spring, Aunt Fannie—Cousin Fonda's mother—died, and they sent for me to come to Thornhill and make up mourning for the girls.

Thornhill was Uncle Algernon's country-house, about four miles out of the city. It was a lovely place, and they kept a carriage, in which the girls drove into town nearly every day.

They sent for me, and when I arrived I was shocked to see what a change grief had made in Fonda. She had wept her cheeks as white as a sheet. The other girls didn't realise their loss so much, being younger, only twelve and fourteen years old.

"Oh, Cousin Annie, it's dreadful to have your mother die—your own dear mother!" she said to me.

"I know it, Fonda, and you'll miss her more and more as the years go on!" I said.

I had.

And now that she was an orphan, too, my cousin seemed to take to me as she never had done before. Not that she had ever been unkind or slighted me when our paths came together—she was always cordial and kind—but she seemed to find my quiet ways more congenial than when she had been gay.

She looked very pretty in her mourning dresses.

"See," she said, one day, leading the way into her dressing-room, "here is my last new dress. Poor mamma had just ordered it for me. I am sure I never can bear to wear anything so gay now!"

"I don't think it is gay, Fonda. I think it is lovely!" I said.

It was pink and grey—two delicate tints of the same quality of silk combined. "And here are the hat, gloves, and parasol—the hat of the same material as the dress, the gloves beautifully matched—aren't they?—the parasol the same shade of grey lined with pink. I wore the dress once—only once!"

Fonda stood lost in reverie.

"I wish I hadn't gone that time. I wouldn't if I'd known my mother wasn't going to live!" she broke out, and then turned away to a window.

"Where, Fonda? What do you mean?"

"Oh, never mind, Annie. Do you know, I can't bear the sight of this dress now? I am going to give it to you, if you will accept it."

"To me?"

"Yes; hat, gloves, parasol—everything. Take them, Annie. The dress will fit you as well as if it was made for you."

"Oh, no, dear Fonda, I couldn't think of taking this exquisite silk! By-and-bye you will want to wear it yourself."

"No, I never shall. I give it to you, Annie. It is yours."

"I can't take it, Fonda."

But she motioned the dress towards me, and went out of the room.

I was quite nervous, and my hands trembled as I took up the exquisite, fragrant gloves. It seemed as if I ought not to take such an expensive present as that beautiful costume from anyone. I opened and shut the parasol, and then opened it again as I caught my reflection in the dressing-glass, and saw that it was very becoming.

Just as I put the things down and went to my sewing, a maid brought me a note.

"Just come, and the boy said he would wait for an answer, Miss Belton."

It was from Wende:

"My Own Dear Annie,—*My father, mother, and sister are here from the country to spend a few days. I have told them about my little lady, and they are very anxious to see you. I will call for you to-morrow (Sunday), at ten o'clock, to dine with us.*

"Wende."

A moment's tumultuous emotion filled me. That little note had so much signification for me—for Wende and I were not, exactly speaking, engaged. It was tacitly understood that we liked each other, that some time, perhaps, we might be married; but now that he wanted to introduce me to his family it was equivalent to announcing our betrothal. So my heart stood still for a moment, then bounded quickly, sending the blood into my pale face.

I wrote in reply, "I will be ready," and dispatched the boy.

When I came back to my work I paused again by the pink and grey dress to look thoughtfully at it. How lovely it would be to wear to-morrow! I had no new Spring things, and my winter ones were shabby—very shabby, it seemed to me, now, thinking of Wende's father and mother, and his sister, who was called the beauty of her native village. I lifted the dainty hat, with its rosebuds and pink feather. I was really pretty in it, and I did so want to wear it.

The next morning Fonda was ill—confined to her room with a sick headache, and could on no account be disturbed. So I did not speak to her about the pink and grey silk confection, for I had concluded to wear it. In the vigils of the night I decided that my brown velveteen would not do. I had a horror for looking like a shop-girl arrayed in rusty finery.

Wende would think me his "little lady" indeed. I thought, when I was dressed, I looked as beautiful as my Cousin Fonda ever did.

But I was disagreeably conscious of "borrowed plumes," and when I saw Wende's trap rolling up the avenue I shrouded my head in a large drab veil, and wrapped myself up in a long shawl.

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But when we were half a mile from the house I said the wind was not so cold, after all, and put my veil in my pocket, and let the shawl slip from my shoulders.

"Why, how pretty you look, Anne; haven't you a new dress?" asked Wende.

"Yes, a present from my cousin Fonda. She has gone into mourning."

"It's very pretty. And I suppose she can afford to make you a present if she likes?"

"Oh, yes."

I saw that he was very much gratified with my appearance.

Well, Wende's father and mother were very nice people, and his sister a most lovely girl, and I had a delightful day; but at length night came, and I got into the trap to return.

"Is anything the matter with me, Wende?—anything wrong in my appearance, I mean?" I asked, as I was settling in the carriage.

"No; why?"

"That gentleman over there is staring at me so."

He was a tall, very handsome-looking young man—looking at me very hard indeed; and not with an impertinent gaze of admiration, but with a rather surprised and not very pleasant look.

"Haven't you ever seen him before?" asked Wende.

"No."

"It must be the new dress," said Wende, with a smile, as he turned the horse's head.

As the wheel ground the kerbstone, I saw the gentleman jump into a cab.

As we drove to Thornhill I told Wende I had had a very happy time, and he assured me that his family were delighted with me; and we, then and there, agreed to be married in the autumn.

When the carriage stopped at the side-door of Thornhill it was dusk, yet I distinctly saw the cab with the strange gentleman whirl by me, and I was quite alarmed; but Wende said it was only a coincidence. His way probably lay in our direction.

Well, a day or two passed. When Fonda recovered I did not mention that I had worn the dress; but I thought I would take it now.

And now I discovered that my cousin Fonda looked worse every day; then I learnt that it was something different from her mother's death which was preying upon her.

"I'll tell you Annie, for I know I can trust you," said she. "Last Christmas, one of my friends introduced me to her cousin, Mr. Forsyth Croxwood. He understood that papa and mamma would not receive young gentlemen, and so we have met at Mrs. Appleton's house all the winter and Spring. I like him ever so much, though, since mamma died, I have felt condemned for deceiving her and going to walk with him about a month ago, in that very pink and grey silk I showed you. But there is nothing wrong about it. I think I ought to be allowed to see Mr. Croxwood. Still I have not dared. He wrote me a note just after mamma died, and asked me to let him call; but I had to refuse. But last Monday I saw him going to Ethel's, and I slipped on my hat and went over. But, Annie, he wouldn't speak to me; he was downright rude! Ethel didn't know what to make of it any more than I. And, oh, I have nearly cried myself to death! It seems as if my heart would burst!"

"Do you love him so very much, Fonda?"

"I love him dearly! It is my first, and it will be my last, love!"

Now, I had lately grown very much attached to Fonda, and I secretly thought it a shame that she couldn't have a lover, so, having learnt all about Mr. Croxwood, and finished the mourning-dresses at Thornhill, I went home to the city, and, on that very first evening, called on Mr. Croxwood. It was a rainy evening, and I wore my old velveteen, though Fonda had pressed the pink-and-grey silk upon me, and I had it packed safely away among my possessions.

I called at the Albion Hotel where Mr. Croxwood was staying, and was shown into his private room.

Here I introduced myself, and had no difficulty in asserting my identity, as he assured me that I looked very much like Fonda.

"I *have been* deeply attached to your beautiful cousin, Miss Belton," he said, when I mentioned her name; "but I have lost faith in her. I have much desired to visit her at her home, but she has always refused me. Judge, then, of my indignation when I saw her driving, last Sunday a week ago, with a young gentleman who was freely admitted to Thornhill in the evening. She is duping me, and I will not be a plaything for any woman."

"Sunday—driving—oh!—oh!" I stammered. At length my wits returned. "Mr. Croxwood," said I, "you would like to be friends again with my cousin Fonda, would you not?"

"If it were possible; but I do not believe it is. I can never forgive deception."

"If you will come to my house to-morrow evening I will promise you information which will relieve you of this misunderstanding."

"Misunderstanding?" He shook his head.

But he promised to come.

I made my simple rooms fresh with country roses which Wende's sister had promised me, and which I had been looking for, and sent a note to Fonda to come in the evening, as I had news of Mr. Croxwood which would cheer her, I said. Of course she came.

I had been dressed an hour in the pink and grey silk, and Wende was there when the Thornhill carriage stopped at the door, and Fonda came up.

Of course she could expect no explanation before Wende, though she looked expectant, and seemed uneasy, but at last the bell rang, and Mr. Croxwood was shown in.

He stopped at the entrance, and looked from Fonda to me. Evidently he did not know which was which.

"Do not be deceived again by appearances, Mr. Croxwood," said I. "This is Miss Annie Belton; opposite is my cousin Fonda."

He advanced, looking at Fonda, pale, in her black dress, and I saw his keen eyes soften with tears.

"And this young gentleman, Mr. Wendell Larne, is the one with whom I drove a week ago last Sunday," I added, and Wende rose and bowed—with a smile.

That set the matter all right. He found a seat instantly by Fonda, and, though she was very much bewildered, she looked very happy. Wende and I managed to leave them alone a little while, soon, and then I managed to see Fonda a moment alone, and explain how I had worn the pink and grey dress.

I don't know whether his wife's death softened Uncle Algernon's heart, or Mr. Croxwood won his way somehow, but my Cousin Fonda was married that summer, and I was as happily married in the autumn.

Esther Serle Kenneth.

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The Don't Worry Club.

And the Mission it Fulfilled.

"For Heaven's sake, Myra, stop worrying! What good does it do? Take things easy!"

"And if I did, John, I'd like to know what would become of you! Somebody has to do the worrying, and as *you* won't, *I* must. You would have been bankrupt long ago if it hadn't been for me. We can't both spend money like water! Here you come home with a new suit of clothes and overcoat when you could have worn your others another winter as well as not. I need a new dress *dreadfully* and now I can't have it, because you spend all the money on your precious self!"

"I declare, I never saw such a woman in my life! If there isn't any *real* thing to worry about, you have the faculty of hatching up one. Who said you couldn't have your frock? Go and get it, don't worry about the money; I'll attend to that. You don't see me fretting and stewing over every little thing!"

"No, because I have always done it for you. I save and save, watching the pennies while you spend the pounds."

Tears were imminent, so Mr. Miller said soothingly: "Well, there, there, ducky, don't do it any more, it doesn't pay," giving her the affectionate kiss and the pat which usually ended their little squabbles.

The next day Mrs. Miller received a message from her husband that he would not be home that night to dinner as he was invited to dine with some friends at the club.

Approaching his home about midnight, he was surprised to see the house lighted from garret to cellar instead of a dim light in the hall as on many (alas! too many) previous occasions. He wondered what was going on, and inserted his latch-key rather impatiently. Entering the sitting-room he found it deserted, but hearing gay voices in the dining-room, proceeded to investigate.

There he found his wife entertaining company.

"Why, what's all this?" said John, beaming cordially upon the merry company, but with a sinking heart at thought of the amount of gas burning all over the house.

"This is the first meeting of the 'Don't Worry' Club," gaily explained his wife. "I invited the ladies to dinner and we organised the club this evening. The gentlemen came later to accompany them home.

When the last guest had departed Mrs. Miller kissed her husband affectionately, saying:

"I'm so glad you thought of it, John; it's going to be lovely! I feel better already, and in future will take things easy; let them come as they will. If the house tumbles about our heads, I'm never going to worry any more. After receiving your message to-day, knowing that I should be alone to-night, I thought it a good time to organise, so went and invited them all to dinner. We had a lovely little dinner; everything passed off beautifully."

John was busy thinking and did not reply.

"Oh, I ordered my new dress to-day!" she rattled on. "It's going to be beautiful! I went to Perry's. Might as well have it right while I'm about it, if it does cost more. They let me have it for ten guineas. Of course I needed a hat to go with it and selected a perfect love. It's just too sweet! Oh, I feel so much better and free from care, and *so* glad we ormed the club!"

Mr. Miller did not sleep much that night, for figures were dancing a lively jig in his head, and he kept wishing he had not bought his new clothes. The next night when he came home to dinner his wife was absent, having left word that if she did not return he was to call for her about ten o'clock at Mrs. Brown's, as she might possibly dine there.

Mr. Miller ate his dinner alone, but everything had lost flavour, and his appetite was not up to the mark. When he had gone through the form of eating he smoked a cigar and read his paper; then becoming restless and lonely, lay down on the couch and slept, waking just in time to go Mrs. Miller at the appointed hour. "I've had a lovely time!" said she, on their way home. "I'm never going to stay alone again in the evenings after this. When you stay at the club, I'm going out too."

"But I was at home this evening."

"I know it, but I thought you could stand it *once*, when I have been alone many, many times."

"Well, hereafter, Myra, when you go out to dinner do not order a seven-pound joint for me to eat alone. It would be better to have a small steak and not have so much left over."

"*I* didn't order it. I told Sarah to get something nice for you if I didn't return, and I knew she'd do it."

"But, my dear, think of the expense!"

"Oh, I'm not worrying about that! Time enough when it comes. Don't forget that I am president of the 'Don't Worry Club,' John."

And John thought about it a great deal.

On Saturday morning the "president" said: "Well, I suppose you won't be home to dinner as it's your regular club night, and I'll go over to Mrs. Fraser's."

"Yes, I will be home. Dinners at the club cost money, and our bills will be so heavy this month with your new dress and hat, and so much company, and——"

"Your new suit and overcoat," put in his wife. "Yes, I see, but there is no use thinking of such things beforehand. Undoubtedly something will turn up to help you out."

"What, I'd like to know, but my salary?"

"But you may get a rise, or your uncle John might send you a cheque, or——"

"Did he ever send one?"

"No, but he *might*—you have to look on the bright side. I tell you, John, you should join a 'Don't Worry' Club, then you'd feel as happy and light-hearted as I do!"

"One member in the family is enough. I'll be home to dinner to-night. Good-bye."

"Very well, then, I'll not go to Mrs. Fraser's, for I'd rather spend the evening with you," kissing him affectionately.

That evening while he smoked she sat on the arm of his chair and smoothed the wrinkles on his forehead, which she knew were caused by the change in the state of affairs. Being tender-hearted, she really felt sorry for him.

"I tell you, dearie, let us form a club all by ourselves and call it the 'We'll-worry-all-we-want-to' Club. You do your share and I'll do mine, and we'll carry the worries together. It's too much for one, both must help. I carried the burden so long that my strength gave out, and I determined to shift the load to your shoulders for awhile. Let's have our enjoyments together, too, it isn't half so expensive."

"You are right, little woman, I'll do my part in the future."

"My dress is only to cost three guineas, John; I stretched the price a bit to frighten you, and my new hat is an old one done up. The other night when I thought it was time for you to be coming home, I sent Katie upstairs to turn on the gas and it had only been burning a short time. Now, you see, I'm not such a bad little wife, after all, am I?"

John caught her in his arms, exclaiming:

"You're a perfect treasure!" **Herbert Malcolm.**

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And They Struck.

Papa (from the next room): "Ethel, aren't you going to light the gas in there?" Ethel: "Yes, papa; we were just speaking of—er—striking a match."

An Industrious Youth.

"Claudia, is the young man industrious to whom you are engaged?" "Industrious? Why, papa, he said he intended to propose to me a month ago, but was too busy."

Rivals in Love.

Dolly: "Jack said that he had a business engagement to-night." Dasherly: "Yes, he mentioned something to me about asking old Millyuns for his daughter's hand."

A Gentle Hint.

"Can you tie a real lover's knot, my dear?" inquired Bertie. "No," replied Masie, hiding her blushes with her fan; "but our new clergyman can do it very nicely."

No Responsibility.

"Why is it," they asked, "that you let your husband have his own way in everything?" "Because," she replied, "I like to have someone to blame when things go wrong."

She Paid Him Back.

Horrified Parent: "And you dare to tell me that you kissed that young Hankinson last evening!" Weeping Daughter: "Yes; but the—mean thing k-kissed me first!"

Demonstration.

"Clara," said her mother severely, "did I see Mr. Spoodle holding your hand last night?" "Yes; but he was showing me how he saw some people walking along the other night."

He Knows Now—Worse Luck!

He: "Tell me, confidentially, how much did that hat cost you?" She: "George, there is but one way in which you can obtain the right to inspect my millinery bills." He popped.

Good Advice.

He: "Ah, if I were rich and lovely as you are I know what I would do." She: "Marry a count, I suppose." He: "No, not at all." She: "What then?" He: "If I were you I'd marry me."

Disillusioned!

"Do you reside in this city?" asked a masked man of a masked lady at a masked ball the other evening. He felt awful when she said to him in a low voice: "Don't be so silly, John; I know you by the mole on your thumb." It was his wife.

Why Was He so Particular?

"Frank," she said, softly, "I have concluded to do without a new hat and send for mother with the money. It won't take much to pay her expenses here." "My dear," he cried, excitedly, "the idea of your wearing that old hat another day is too horrible for me to endure, and I'll never enter this house again till you get a new one."

Made Good Progress.

Miss Passe: "Mamma tells me that I did not begin talking until I was nearly four years old." Miss Young: "How remarkable! But you have caught up since then, haven't you?"

Spiteful Creature.

Rosie: "I wonder is it true that one's likely to catch something from being kissed." Maud: "Of course not. You've been kissed enough, but you haven't caught anything yet, have you?"

Distinctly Inadvisable.

Minnie: "Don't you wish we women were strong enough to defend ourselves like men?" Muriel: "No. We should lose the satisfaction of telling those hateful men just what we should like to do to them."

How Silly of Her.

Lily (earnestly): "I want to ask you a question, Bob." Bob (also earnestly): "What is it, dearest?" Lily (still earnestly): "If you had never met me, would you have loved me just the same?"

Why He Grumbled.

"I married for money," said the gloomy man. "Wasn't there a woman attached to it?" asked the cynic. "Of course there was," with increased gloom; "so much attached to it that she has never parted with a penny!"

Would She?

"Ernest," said Estelle, with a shy smile, "your glove is split. You ought to have someone to keep you in repair, and sew buttons on your coats." "You wouldn't like to—to—to be a sister to me, would you, Estelle?" said Ernest.

The Hardships of Flat Life.

"He's a pretty collie," said Miss Kennelworth, "but it's a funny thing that he wags his tail up and down, instead of sideways." "The poor thing," said Mrs. Parke, "has always lived with us in our flat, and that's the only way he *could* wag it."

Audacity Won.

"So you would not take me to be twenty?" said a young lady to her partner, whilst they were looking over some music together one evening. "What would you take me for, then?" "For better, for worse," replied he, and he was accepted.

Practising Time.

Ponsonby (somewhat boastfully): "I may say, Miss Blitlerwick, that I am quite an adept at athletics. I can row, ride—either horse or bike—swim, spar, jump, and run." Miss Blitlerwick (sweetly): "Here comes papa. Do let me see you jump and run."

Denied the Accusation.

He: "This is a nice state of things, and we have been married only four months. I'm almost crazy at seeing you flirting with all these fellows. You recollect what you promised at the altar?" She: "Indeed I don't, dear. I was so nervous that I don't remember the least thing."

How He Proposed.

He: "I suppose it isn't too much to say that you and I have always led the fashion in our set, Miss Mabel?" She: "So people appear to think." "And it wouldn't do for me to be the last to adopt a new idea, would it?" "No, indeed!" "Well, have you noticed that everybody seems to be getting married lately?"

Gallantly Said!

Jones is nothing if not gallant. Mrs. Brown is exactly the same age as her husband, but she will not admit it. "My husband is forty," she said to some friends the other day; "you wouldn't believe it, but there's actually ten years' difference in our ages." "Impossible, dear madam!" hastily interposed Jones, anxious to say something agreeable; "I'm sure you look every day as young as he does."

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Dupes of Destiny.

By BLANCHE EARDLEY.

Writer of "The Bond Between."

FIFTIETH CHAPTER.

A Meeting on Danger Point.

When Marcella and her timid, half-dazed companion had clung together in a frightened silence during the journey to London, there had, all unconscious of their close proximity to each other, passed by in another train the man to whom Marcella was going, for whom her poor, loving heart was crying. Had Philip Nullius but guessed that when the telegram calling him to his constant little sweetheart's assistance was delivered at his London address—where he was making unceasing efforts to trace that unknown baby brother who had shared with him the love of the dead mother—that instead of being in the least danger, Marcella was fleeing to a haven of refuge, he would not have obeyed so blindly the imperious wording of the telegram that ran: "*Come to Marcella. Danger Point.*"

Without a moment's hesitation he had left his rooms and his train had barely steamed out of Paddington Station, than it was passed by the one bringing Marcella and her childish charge to London. It had been a long, anxious time for Philip, that fruitless search for those of his own blood, yearning to clasp the hand of one who had perhaps buffeted with the world's blows even as himself, and who may also have longed to gaze into the face of a kinsman; for, however humble of origin, blood was still thicker than water. Then there was that other dreadful knowledge he had obtained in so strange a way, and which he could not use, yet neither was he able to forget, and mingling with all his anxiety and personal uneasiness, there was ever the haunting thought of Marcella being exposed to all sorts of horrible dangers at the Court. He had, on receipt of the hasty summons from London, decided that, birth or no birth, he would not leave Crawley unless he took with him the woman he loved.

As he leant back in the train his thoughts wandered from his own private troubles to those of Lady Violet. He remembered having always been attracted to her by her intense love for Marcella, and yet he knew that between the aristocrat and the mysterious man with the black beard was a link of some sort. He could not think it one of crime; for his dear love's sake he would harbour no unkind thought of the beautiful aunt she loved, but a too keen instinct had warned him that Lady Violet knew more than she had dared to say.

Arriving at Crawley, he left the train and proceeded on foot towards the village. As he was passing through the barrier the porter recognised him and touched his cap civilly.

"Good day, sir. It's a long time since you came to Crawley, sir."

Philip smiled. He was very popular with the parishioners of the straggling village, and it had been a matter of regret that Fate should have stepped in between him and his work. Aloud he said pleasantly:

"Yes, Grig—my holiday has been a long one, protracted on account of business rather than pleasure." Then he added abruptly:

"I am going to see Miss Rust at the Court; I suppose things are much the same there? Quiet and—and happy?" He could hardly explain why he had asked the last question. It had been torn from him.

"'Appy, you said, sir?" And the weather-beaten face of the old man underwent a curious change—a shadow seemed to rest on it. "Well, I shouldn't like to say as things ain't well up at the Court, but of late there's been strange talk in the village as 'ow a cloud is restin' over it. Women steal about, sir, veiled very closely. And there's been strange men about as well, sir—comin' and goin', too, as though they was spies." He shook his old head wisely. "Aye, there's a cloud for certain hangin' over the Court."

Philip started. The garrulous old man's tongue had aroused his anxiety concerning Marcella. She had, then, he thought, wired for him to meet her on Danger Point, because she dared not ask him to the Court! He murmured a few kindly remarks to the old porter, and moved away. He was eager to be at the side of the girl he loved more intensely than ever, because he had always had to suppress the passion within him.

He hastened his steps involuntarily. It was growing dusk, and he remembered of old the grim character of the lonely rock known locally as Danger Point, and his heart feared for the brave girl who might be waiting so patiently for him, exposed to the numberless dangers that lurked for those who tempted Fate on the bleak surface of Danger Point.

As he hurried from the station and cut across the wooded undergrowth that divided the village into so straggling a community, he stopped suddenly. Coming towards him were two men, so deep in conversation that they did not even notice him. After one swift glance into one of the two faces, he uttered an exclamation and slipped swiftly into the shadow of a tree. Of all people, he would not have met Sir Cyprian Rust just then.

As they approached where he was standing, Sir Cyprian said coldly:

"So you threaten me, do you, Mr. Dick? Don't you think that rather an awkward attitude to take? What can your threats do to me?"

His companion laughed. And Philip noticed that he was a tall, flashy-looking man, with a careless, devil-may-care face and vivid blue eyes.

"Do to you? Why, queer your pitch for a very long time, my dear Sir Cyprian," was the laughing retort. "I wonder are you aware that the net is drawing very close, that probably unless some unforeseen accident happens, Scotland Yard will score a grand success in the capture of a very much 'wanted' aristocrat whose life has so long been a dual one?"

"Confound you!" was the quick reply that came softly from the baronet's lips. "You are playing your own game, I see! I suppose you have a price unless you are already bought?"

"I am not bought yet—but I don't mind telling you that I mean to make a good deal over this," was the cool reply.

"Suppose you have no chance of betraying me?" Sir Cyprian retorted slowly

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The other shrugged his shoulders. "It has taken me a long time to find you. Since that night when I saw you at the house of Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox, much has happened to prevent my looking you up," he laughed suddenly, and Philip wondered vaguely what made him think he had seen the man before. There was an odd resemblance—a tone in the voice—a note in the laugh that sent his thoughts trooping back to the tender story of his love—yet the thought was incredible, a phantasy of his own imagination; his mind was so full of Marcella that he heard her voice even in the tones of another belonging to one whom he guessed instinctively to be a social pariah.

In the meantime, Sir Cyprian drew the man's arm within his own with an assumption of friendliness, though Philip, watching keenly, saw his sapphire-like eyes glint savagely. "Come with me to the Court and you will have your price—I am not foolish enough to jeopardise my liberty in wrangling over terms."

The other laughed triumphantly. "So you have decided not to make an enemy of me, eh? It's just as well. I intend to be fooled by no one! As it is, I only managed to get back into England by a ruse!—my death is popularly supposed to be a thing of the past. But I will go with you to the Court, and we'll discuss terms there, my fine baronet. Jove!" he chuckled grimly, "wouldn't a few people love to see us now—the great chief and an old member!"

Sir Cyprian's mouth twisted in an ugly smile. He seemed to have aged considerably since Philip had last seen him—only his eyes retained their look of youth.

"Yes," he said, with a curious catch in his low voice, "we will come to terms at the Court. We will—settle up then, and you will not find me wanting in generosity either. We will throw in our lots together, Dick! You will not regret coming to the Court."

Then the two men passed on—the rogue and the greater rogue—and as they vanished from his sight, Philip shivered. Something weird and inexplicable seemed to have enveloped the two men. In the far distance the sun had just sunk in a streak of red fire, and it seemed to the watching man that they were vanishing into a sea of blood, that drew them on as with a lurid menace. So Sir Cyprian and his comrade passed from his sight.

The next moment Philip pulled himself together, and broke into a sharp run that quickly brought him out into the country, and in the direction of Danger Point. A brisk walk of twenty minutes brought him to the place where he knew Marcella would be waiting for him. The wind had risen, and the sound of the waves fell upon his ear with a mournful echo. The red had died out of the sky, and only a dull grey was there instead

As he looked round eagerly, his eyes sweeping the bleak headland in search of a well beloved face and figure that had waited for him, he did not notice a silent shape creep from behind a rock and steal towards him.

"Marcella," he called, "I am here, darling. Where are you?"

The sea moaned dismally, but Marcella did not answer, and as he was about to cry out again, a loud, sneering laugh sounded close behind him.

"I am afraid you will be disappointed, Mr. Nullius. I am here as Marcella's substitute, and am glad to meet you—again!"

Philip turned and saw the face of Edward Day.

"You!" he exclaimed sharply. "What does this mean?"

FIFTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

The Shadow that Passed.

The other laughed brutally.

"That instead of Marcella, you are to have a pleasant experience with me, Mr. Nullius! I have long waited for this day; now it has come at last!"

Philip faced him squarely. He realised that he had treachery to meet, and that the fate of Marcella depended upon the way in which he met it.

"What do you mean?"

The other drew nearer. "That you have walked into a nice little trap, Mr. Nullius," he said slowly, "and you will find it difficult to get out of it—that is, if you ever do get out of it!" he added significantly.

Philip looked at him with a sudden appreciation of the villainy that had lured him to such a lonely, isolated spot. Fool that he had been to have imagined that Marcella would have appointed such a place for a meeting! His heart contracted at the thought of what Marcella must be enduring, while he was unable to protect her. Something of what he was thinking flickered in his face, for Edward Day said mockingly:

"Don't fear for Marcella; she is quite well and, I think, happy."

"You have seen her, then, lately?" Philip said quickly.

The other laughed. The curate's question proved that he had had no opportunity of seeing the girl who had escaped his and Sir Cyprian's clutches. "Oh, yes—I have seen her; quite recently. She is resigned to the prospect of becoming my wife," was the sneering reply.

Philip's face flushed angrily. "I understand—that telegram was sent by you. You got me here by a lie—for what purpose?"

"For the purpose of getting back a little of what I owe you, Mr. Nullius!" was the fierce retort. "The chalking up has been a long time on my slate, but I intend to wipe it clean of the debt now—you understand? If you want to fight—I'll give you a chance—but only one of us shall leave the 'Point' alive!" and he laughed, a low, cunning note that sent the blood ebbing from Philip's face. He could no longer fail to grasp the awfulness of his position. He, a clergyman of the Church of England, was compelled to fight for his life on a bleak, desolate rock, with a man whose hatred for him had reached the height of madness. He made one final effort to argue with the man whose gleaming eyes were lit with the fever of lust, and whose pale face was like unto that of a devil.

"Why should you hate me so, Day? Good God, man, you can't wish to murder me in cold blood!"

"Why do I hate you? Why do I wish you dead more than any other man on earth? Well, I'll tell you. It is because you have scored where I have failed, because without an effort you won the love of the one woman whom I wanted, and—and—you stand in my way as no other man does; money, position and power wait for me behind your back, you—you——"

He stopped abruptly. Philip Nullius was staring at him in amazement, not unmixed with fear.

"Come," the curate said, after a pause, "I don't understand what you mean; but I only realise that I am forced to defend myself from a madman!"

He flung his hat and coat on the hard ground, and faced his enemy. "I am ready," he said briefly, with set lips and steady eyes, and to himself he murmured: "Oh, God! help me, for Marcella's sake!"

The next moment Edward Day had flung himself upon the man whom he had hated so long and secretly, and whom, since he had learnt the secret from Sir Cyprian, he both feared and loathed most bitterly. For were Philip Nullius but dead, he would then be certain of the position that Sir Cyprian had told him he would reveal when he should return—alone, from Danger Point!

"Ah!" he gasped hoarsely. "At last, Philip Nullius; the sun has set for you, and to-morrow it will rise for me!"

Then his strong, wiry arms clasped like a vice round the more athletic figure of the man who was of the same blood as that which ran in his veins, and it was the lust of Cain that suddenly seized Edward Day in its clutches.

Both men fell, the curate for the moment had a brief advantage over his infuriated assailant, then, with a cunning look in his blue eyes, Edward Day sprang at his throat with his strong, hands, and attempted to drag him towards the edge of the cliff. Throwing all his strength into one

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desperate effort, Philip struck a well-directed blow with his doubled-up fist at the fair, boyish brow so close to his, and with a muffled cry Edward Day released his hold, and fell back, his head striking heavily against a piece of loose stone that had once been a portion of a rock.

Philip leant over him anxiously. Little as he understood the motive for the assault upon him, and attaching no significance to the half-maddened words that had dropped from Day's lips, he was still glad that he could feel the heart-beats of the unconscious man, who had intended to kill him.

As he rose from his knees he kicked something bright that was lying on the ground, and had evidently fallen from the other man's pocket when in the heat of their struggle. Though it was almost dusk, he saw that it was a locket, and something in the shape of it aroused his interest. He had another such locket in his possession at that moment. As his fingers touched the spring, he uttered an exclamation, for on one side was the face of a beautiful woman, and on the other, where there was no likeness, he saw by the aid of a match which he struck, the two words in a clear girlish hand—"From 'Cabel'!"

His hand shook, and his brain reeled under the sudden shock of knowledge that came upon him.

"Cabel!" That was the mysterious signature of those letters that had been stolen from him some time ago. Surely, the similarity between the two lockets must be a link in that hidden chain he had so long been trying to piece together. The word "Cabel" was an uncommon one; the writing was like that on the letters! It was more than coincidence—it went deeper than supposition! The man from whose coat the locket had fallen knew something—he——

"Ah!" he groaned in bitterness of spirit as the truth burst upon him. The brother who had lain as a baby with himself in that unknown mother's arms, and for whom he had prayed, and hoped to find, was one and the same as the treacherous backbiter who had lured him on to Danger Point with the object of killing him, of shedding the blood of the man who was his brother!

For a few moments he stood motionless, then rousing himself he picked up the coat he had flung on the ground, and covered the body of the unconscious man who lay at his feet. Then he turned, and with a white, set face made his way down to the beach.

"I must find someone to take him away! I will risk everything and go to the Court!" he muttered. "*Perhaps* I shall see Marcella." Just then a shadow darted up from under his feet and disappeared before he noticed more than that it was that of a man. He turned and looked back anxiously, but the shadow had vanished into thin air.

"He will be safe up there," he murmured again, "and I shall not be long—my brother!"

FIFTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

On the Scent.

"Will you come with us, sir? The picture will be there, as no efforts have been made to move it. They are a dangerous gang and we are taking special precautions to see that none of them are likely to escape. Most of them are 'wanted' by the police, and have been difficult to trace, owing to the cleverness of their leader; but now we have practically drawn a cordon round them, and by to-night shall have the whole lot under lock and key."

Mr. Johnson frowned. Had the offer come at any other time he would have hailed it with delight, but it interfered with him just as he was on the point of going to the succour of his son—the son he dared not claim, but whom he meant to see standing in his proper place. He had some time ago read a copy of the late Sir Basil Wingate's will at Somerset House, and saw that his son was not excluded from his inheritance, as at first he had thought was the case. But now that he had decided to go and save Philip from the treachery the anonymous telegram had said was threatening him on Danger Point, he was confronted by the detective from Scotland

A Husband's Good Advice.

It is commonly said, when one complains of indigestion, that "nobody should eat anything which disagrees with him"; but there is little sense in that remark. It is like saying that no man should be allowed to go into the water until he has become an expert swimmer. What one person can digest with ease will often cause in another all the miseries of dyspepsia; and it is not easy to learn who are the lucky and who the unlucky ones except by experiment. Besides, sufferers from indigestion are to be found among the most temperate, self-denying people, who exercise the utmost care in their choice of diet. "At one time I suffered very much from indigestion," says Mrs. Golder, of the Lodge, Barden Park, Barden Road, Tonbridge. "I had almost constant pain at the stomach, and in my back between the shoulders. I was always distressed by wind, while the headaches I endured were simply dreadful. A feeling of depression was constantly upon me, which no effort of my will could overcome. These troubles, and a complete want of appetite, quickly reduced me to a condition of extreme weakness. Then it was that I first proved the great value of Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. I was advised to try that medicine by my husband, who some years before had been cured of dyspepsia by it. The first few doses gave me relief at once, and after a little patience and regularity in its use I was restored to perfect health. At another time I was attacked by pleurisy, when I found that indigestion is not the only complaint that Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup is good for. Using it for the second time, I was entirely relieved of this new trouble; and that, too, after a doctor, who had attended me for a long time, had quite failed to do me any good."

In every land and in all climates people may be found with experience similar to that of Mrs. Golder. Composed of roots, and herbs, with no mineral admixture whatever. Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup is a purely vegetable tonic. It creates fresh, pure blood, and assists food to nourish, thus enabling nature to do its own work in its own way. For thirty-five years it has been the favourite remedy in the sixteen principal countries of the world, and it maintains its proud position amid a host of rivals because of its proved merit. Nothing else is "just as good," nor anything like so good; and the world recognises that fact.

A Way They Had in Egypt

Until comparatively recent times, in Egypt when a man refused to work, or failed to work as fast as his overseer thought proper, they lashed him with whips until he either mended his pace or died. If he died they laid him aside and put another labourer in his place. And so the game went on. It was a simple and effective plan, but the spread of intelligence has made it unpopular. There are times, the liver being sluggish, when even the most industrious of us cannot work. Then it is one should resort to Mother Seigel's Syrup. That feeling of oppression at the chest, and pain between the shoulders after eating; that drowsiness and headache; all proclaim you are unable to digest your food. And until you alter that by taking Seigel's Syrup, it is as useless to expect relief as to try to grow figs on gooseberry bushes. "Mother Seigel's Syrup has done me more good than all the doctors I ever consulted," says Mrs. Lancaster, of 3 Mill Road, Leighton Buzzard. "I suffered for years from chronic indigestion, and gradually became low and depressed. My appetite completely left me, and I suffered much from spasms caused by wind accumulating round my heart. I also suffered severely from constipation, but a few bottles of Mother Seigel's Syrup completely restored me to perfect health."

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Yard, bound for Leyton, where the police had reason to believe the missing picture was concealed in Water Grange.

"You are quite certain my recognition of the picture will be sufficient?" he asked hastily. "I—I have a most urgent message calling me to Crawley."

The man looked at him for a moment. "Ah! Crawley. That's where Sir Cyprian Rust lives, is it not, sir? Yes, I think your identification of the picture is all we shall require now. You see, the picture is the peg upon which we are hanging a great deal afterwards; once the ring-leader of that gang is collared, hundreds of other charges will come up. My junior has been quietly on the job some days now, and unless I am very much mistaken, or something wonderful happens in the meantime, the 'Spade' will relinquish his disguise for a more public character."

Hastily dispatching a telegram to Lady Violet, informing her of his change of plans for the moment only, and assuring her and Marcella of his devotion, Caleb J. Johnson—the man whose own secret was weighing heavily upon him—made a silent journey in the society of the bluff, cheerful-looking man from Scotland Yard. The news of the financier's fall from the places of the great in City circles had not yet become public property. He had done nothing that put him within the jurisdiction of the law. The companies in which he had always taken the lead had been properly wound up; he had taken good care when the crash came to meet it honourably, and his own money had gone to make good the losses. The hand that had struck at him in the dark was, he knew, that of his ex-secretary, Edward Day, the clever rogue whose forgeries he had been afraid to denounce, and who rose in the financial firmament as he, the older veteran, had gone down.

As they were driving towards Water Grange, he spoke suddenly to the detective. "Why are we going to this place? I thought it was owned by a respectable member of society?" He did not add that he had entertained a very different opinion himself.

The detective laughed. "Every house is respectable, sir, until it is proved otherwise."

Arriving at the house, it looked desolate, and the whole place had an appearance of being uninhabited.

The two men rang and knocked loudly, but no one hurried to obey the peremptory summons of the law.

An old gardener, who had been weeding a piece of waste ground, approached, and said swiftly:

"There has been no sign of anyone about since I came down yesterday. I've watched, and so has Jakes, and it's my belief that they have cleared. Some accomplice got wind of it and tipped them the cue, that's evident."

"Ah!" and a frown ruffled the senior's brow. "At any rate, Huckle, we'll just enter and satisfy ourselves that the place is empty. This gentleman is Mr. Johnson."

An entrance was forced into the desolate house, and in spite of his anxiety concerning the son he loved, the ex-financier experienced a thrill of curiosity as he followed the two men into the hall.

"What's that?" one of them whispered sharply, as they stood at the top of a flight of stairs, after having made an investigation of the top part of the house. "I heard a cry that came from somewhere down those stairs; we have not been into all the rooms yet."

A few moments sufficed for the doors of the basement rooms to be opened by the three men, now keenly alive to the knowledge that there was someone imprisoned. The last door was forced open, and truly enough the cry that had filtered up through the darkness came from the figure on a mattress.

"Why, it's a woman!" burst from them simultaneously.

They bent over the form, and one of the men struck a match and lit a tiny gas jet. At the sight of the face of the almost fainting woman Mr. Johnson uttered a cry of amazement. It was, in spite of the ravages of want, suffering and despair, the face of a woman he had seen somewhere, but he could not locate the time or place.

A little brandy from a flask brought a slight flush to the white face, and the blue eyes opened hazily.

"Who are you, and where are the others?" the detective said sharply.

"The others!" she laughed weakly. "They left me here, with enough bread and water to keep me alive for a few days. They locked me in and for three days I have been alone! Have they gone, then?"

"Yes. I have a warrant for the arrest of a man concerned in the robbery of a valuable picture," was the terse reply. "Can you give me any information concerning the men who lived here, and why you are deserted by them?"

A curious light flickered in her eyes. "They were a set of rogues and vagabonds. I am sorry to say I am the daughter of the man they call the 'Vicar.' I came here in order to save another woman whom they thought they had decoyed"—here Mr. Johnson started and began to follow the thread of the words intently. "When they found that I had outwitted them they were furious, and in revenge left me here; but I have paid them back—cheated them of their prey!"

"What's your name?" the representative of the law said curtly.

"Lottie Haste—no!" she laughed bitterly. "I will tell you my married name. I am Mrs. Edward Day, the wife of the fiend who deserted me, and only failed to murder me because he did his work so clumsily!"

The financier started forward. He remembered the occasion when he had seen that fair, scornful face before. But then it had worn an expression of tenderness and joy. It was when he had passed in a hansom, and had seen her gazing at Edward Day, who was coming out of a house in Guilford Street. And she was the wife of the young ruffian who had dared to make love to Marcella Rust—no—Marcella Frayne-Lennox, as he now knew her name to be.

"Where did this man Day—your husband—go to?" the detective said quickly.

She laughed weakly. "A wife is not supposed to give evidence against her husband, is she? But I can tell you this"—she raised herself and said hurriedly, "he has gone to do harm to one who has never wronged him—on Danger Point, Crawley! I bribed a boy to send a telegram to some one in London, but God knows whether it has done any good! Go! go!" she pleaded wildly. "What you seek I feel sure you will find at Crawley—only make haste; while you wait here perhaps murder is being done. I did my best—I tried to stop it!" then, with a sigh, she fell breathless on to the mattress.

Mr. Johnson moved towards the door. Her words had aroused his fever of anxiety. "Perhaps murder was being done—or had been done!"

"Wait, sir, please!" the detective said quickly. "This woman may be of use to us in identification. We must take her with us; would you mind telling the driver of the carriage to come round to the door while we carry her up?"

When the financier had departed the detective bent over the girl eagerly. "Tell me who the other man was—and who was with him?"

Raising her head, she murmured a few words in his ear. He drew back sharply. "Are you sure?"

"Yes," was the faint reply. "I know positively."

He smiled grimly; then, aided by his junior, carried the girl up the stairs, out to the closed trap where Mr. Johnson sat, deep in thought.

"We are going to Crawley, sir; do you still wish to go there also?"

"I do," was the quiet reply.

"Then we shall travel together, if you have no objection, sir."

"I shall be glad of company," Mr. Johnson answered grimly.

And the throbbing of the engine as the train bore them westwards beat out the refrain in the ex-financier's brain of "Philip! Philip! How shall I find you? Alive or murdered?"

(The conclusion of this serial will appear next week.)

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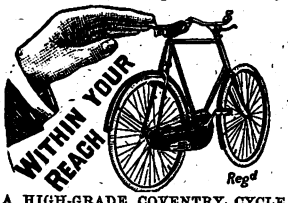

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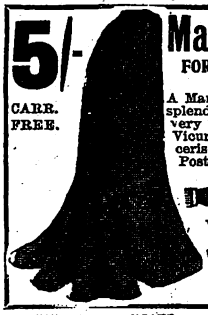

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

Should a Man Propose to a Friend?

"SHOULD a man marry a girl who is a mere friend?" This perplexes "ALGY." "I have known a girl for some years," he writes, "and we have seen a great deal of each other. We have been great chums, and like each other, but I have never uttered a word of love to her. At the same time, I believe she has much deeper feelings towards me than I have towards her. In this case, ought I to propose? Could a marriage between chums be a happy one?"

* * * * *

There is always something wrong, "ALGY," about a "chum" marriage. Friendship is not quite a strong enough ground on which to marry, as many and many have found before now. One may like a person ever so much, yet be utterly unmoved in the direction of love. To propose would be a risky experiment. Before doing anything of the kind, I advise you to get to know each other more intimately. If she loves you, as you suspect, perhaps in time you might reciprocate. But don't propose on the ground of mere friendship.

❦❦❦

A Forced Engagement.

"I HAVE been walking out for several Sunday evenings with a girl, whose company I like very much," writes "A. W. N.," "and the way she greets me leads me to think she looks forward to the walk with as much pleasure as I do. But she is engaged to a man out in South Africa. This was brought about by her parents, and the girl wants to be released. Our ages are eighteen and nineteen."

* * * * *

You will have a difficult task. Evidently the girl's parents wish her to marry the gentleman in South Africa, and parents like that are often more powerful than kind. Before you attempt to persuade the girl to break off her engagement, or move in the matter, you must reach a deeper stage in her affections than merely "liking her company." When you and she have reached the point of devotion—if you ever do—and both feel that life without the other would be a misery, then take steps to dissuade the parents from insisting on the other marriage. But at present, not being exactly in love with each other, you have not a very stong case. Besides, if the girl really does not wish to marry the other man, surely she herself has the power to break off the engagement?

❦❦❦

'Twixt Mother and Sweetheart.

"ERIC" writes: "I am twenty years old, and have had a sweetheart for the last four years." (This is beginning young, 'ERIC.") "I have also a parent (mother) and little sister dependent on me. Although I care very much for my sweetheart, I am not at present able to marry. My salary is very small, and I have no particular prospects. Would it be best to break off the engagement, as there is nothing very encouraging for her to look forward to?"

This is a very sensible letter. I am glad that "ERIC," unlike many of my correspondents, has a nice, generous feeling towards his mother and sister, who, after all, have prior claim on his work to any a sweetheart can have. So long as "ERIC" has to support his mother, he should certainly postpone marriage, at any rate until his prospects improve. I do not see he need break off the engagement. Cannot he and his sweetheart come to a sensible understanding? Would she be willing to wait three years? If so, he must make a great effort to improve his position. After all, a young man of his age should never let himself think he has no prospects in life. An intelligent, persevering youth should surely be able to improve his position in that time. If not, then I fear he is not the sort of man to take a wife.

❦❦❦

A Test of Love.

"GERTRUDE" is engaged to a young man, and both truly love each other. She has been engaged a month, and had only known him five months previously. "GERTRUDE" has now learnt that, before making her acquaintance, the young man had compromised himself with another girl, who now threatens him with legal proceedings. Under the circumstances, what is "GERTRUDE'S" duty? Should she break off the engagement? "He is dearer to me than my own life," she says, "and, in any case, ought I to forgive him?"

* * * * *

I do not see that you have anything to forgive. His offence was not against you, as you admit that you did not know him at the time he was paying attentions to the other girl. As you confess your deep love for him, obviously you should prove it by standing up for him should the legal difficulty arise. Most women forgive a lover for any wrong, provided it is not against themselves. Don't call yourself "broken-hearted." You are not the only woman who has had to stand a test of her love for a man.

❦❦❦

Jealous of Fiance's Patients.

"ROSA" is engaged to a doctor. He has many lady patients, but always refuses to say anything about them when questioned by "ROSA." Does this mean that he may have other love affairs? Would it be wise for "ROSA" to continue her engagement?

* * * * *

"ROSA" is too suspicious. Surely she must know that a doctor's professional etiquette prevents him from saying anything at all about his patients, even to his sweetheart or wife, especially his lady patients? Let "ROSA" get this silly idea out of her head, and understand that a doctor bears an entirely different relation towards the opposite sex, and that he has lady patients does not in the least mean that he he will be unfaithful to his betrothed. If all doctors' sweethearts and wives were as suspicious as "ROSA," theirs would be a troublesome existence, and it is worrying enough already.

❦❦❦

A Girl who Gives Presents.

"FORLORN" is very worried because he is acquainted with a girl who is very much attached to him, but for whom he does not care at all. The girl is always giving him presents, and evidently thinks that it is "FORLORN'S" intention to marry her. As this is just what he does not intend to do, he asks my advice as to what course he had better pursue.

* * * * *

I advise "FORLORN" to tell the lady frankly that he does not love her, unpleasant as this task undoubtedly will be. Also acquaint the girl's parents of this fact, and they will probably cease to encourage her in running after him.

Cynthia

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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FROM

A Lecture on Cocoa

BY

DR. ANDREW WILSON, F.R.S.E., &c.

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Headache

SOMETIMES when things don't go right in certain parts of your body you feel the effect in your head. When you've got headache, it doesn't necessarily mean your head is wrong. Headache is very often only a symptom of disorder elsewhere. Look somewhere else for the mischief, and correct the cause not the symptom.

Is the headache in the forehead, and does it cease if you press it? If so, that's neuralgic headache. Is it in the forehead, or on one side of the head only? If so, it's what doctors call "megrim"; and arises from want of tone in the system. Is it general and accompanied by sickness, foul breath, constipation, &c.? If so, it's a bilious headache, and arises from excessive secretion of the bile. All these headaches are traceable, you see, either to stomach weakness, which lets the system get run down (resulting in neuralgia or megrim), or to liver disorder, which deranges bile secretion and causes bilious headaches. Bile Beans act directly on liver and stomach. That's how they cure headache. They cure headache, which is only a symptom, by correcting the disorders which cause it.

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Bile Beans FOR Biliousness

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SHORT STORIES

The above picture shows Mr. Theodore Racksole and his daughter Nella in the dining-room of a great London hotel. He orders Jules, the waiter—who is secretly engaged in a villainous scheme to kidnap a reigning prince—to bring him a steak and a bottle of Bass. This is against the rules of the hotel, so Jules refuses. It costs Racksole £400,000 to have his own way. The endless complications that ensue are graphically related in "PHANTOM SHADOWS," the new serial that starts within.

[No. 796. Week Ending April 2nd, 1904.

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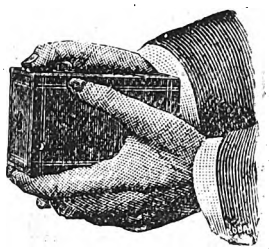

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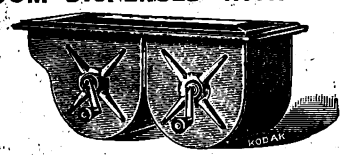

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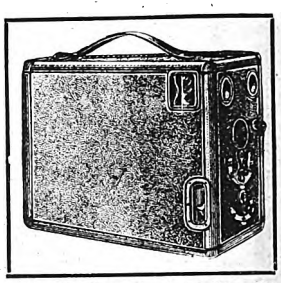

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SHORT STORIES

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A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

FIRST CHAPTER.

The Millionaire and the Waiter.

"Yes, sir?"

Jules, the celebrated head waiter of the Grand Babylon, was bending formally towards the alert, middle-aged man who had just entered the smoking-room and dropped into a basket-chair in the corner by the conservatory. It was 7.45 on a particularly sultry June night, and dinner was about to be served at the Grand Babylon. Men of all sizes, ages, and nationalities, but every one alike arrayed in faultless evening dress, were dotted about the large, dim apartment. A faint odour of flowers came from the conservatory, and the tinkle of a fountain. The waiters, commanded by Jules, moved softly across the thick Oriental rugs, balancing their trays with the dexterity of jugglers, and receiving and executing orders with that air of profound importance of which only really first-class waiters have the secret. The atmosphere was an atmosphere of serenity and repose, characteristic of the Grand Babylon. It seemed impossible that anything could occur to mar the peaceful, aristocratic monotony of existence in that perfectly-managed establishment. Yet on that night was to happen the mightiest upheaval that the Grand Babylon had ever known.

"Yes, sir?" repeated Jules, and this time there was a shade of august disapproval in his voice; it was not usual for him to have to address a customer twice.

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"Oh!" said the alert, middle-aged man, looking up at length. Beautifully ignorant of the identity of the great Jules, he allowed his grey eyes to twinkle as he caught sight of the expression on the waiter's face. "Bring me an Angel Kiss."

"Pardon, sir?"

"Bring me an Angel Kiss, and be good enough to lose no time."

"If it's an American drink, I fear we don't keep it, sir." The voice of Jules fell icily distinct, and several men glanced round uneasily, as if to deprecate the slightest disturbance of their calm. The appearance of the person to whom Jules was speaking, however, reassured them somewhat, for he had all the look of that expert, the travelled Englishman, who can differentiate between one hotel and another by instinct, and who knows at once where he may make a fuss with propriety, and where it is advisable to behave exactly as at the club. The Grand Babylon was a hotel in whose smoking-room one behaved as though one was at one's club.

"I didn't suppose you did keep it, but you can mix it, I guess, even in this hotel."

"This isn't an American hotel, sir." The calculated insolence of the words was cleverly masked beneath an accent of humble submission.

The alert, middle-aged man sat up straight, and gazed placidly at Jules, who was pulling his famous red side-whiskers.

"Get a liqueur glass," he said, half curtly and half with good-humoured tolerance, "pour into it equal quantities of maraschino cream and crême de menthe. Don't stir it; don't shake it. Bring it to me. And, I say, tell the bar-tender——"

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"Bar-tender, sir?"

"Tell the bar-tender to make a note of the recipe, as I shall probably want an Angel Kiss every evening before dinner so long as this weather lasts."

"I will send the drink to you, sir," said Jules distantly. That was his parting shot, by which he indicated that he was not as other waiters are, and that any person who treated him with disrespect did so at his own peril.

A few minutes later, while the alert, middle-aged man was tasting the Angel Kiss, Jules sat in conclave with Miss Spencer, who had charge of the bureau of the Grand Babylon. This bureau was a fairly large chamber, with two sliding glass partitions which overlooked the hall and the smoking-room.

Only quite a small portion of the clerical work of the great hotel was performed there. The place served chiefly as the lair of Miss Spencer, who was as well known and as important as Jules himself. Most modern hotels have a male clerk to superintend the bureau. But the Grand Babylon went its own way. Miss Spencer had been bureau clerk almost since the Grand Babylon had first raised its massive chimneys to Heaven, and she remained in her place despite the vagaries of other hotels. Always admirably dressed in plain black silk, with a small diamond brooch, immaculate wristbands, and frizzled yellow hair, she looked now just as she had looked an indefinite number of years ago. Her age—none knew it, save herself, and perhaps one other.

The gracious and alluring contours of her figure were irreproachable; and in the evenings she was a useful ornament of which any hotel might be innocently proud. Her knowledge of Bradshaw, of steamship services, and the programmes of theatres and music-halls was unrivalled; yet she never travelled, she never went to a theatre or a music-hall. She seemed to spend the whole of her life in that official lair of hers, imparting information to guests, telephoning to the various departments, or engaged in intimate conversations with her special friends on the staff, as at present.

"Who's Number 107?" Jules asked this black-robed lady.

Miss Spencer examined her ledgers.

"Mr. Theodore Racksole, New York."

"I thought he must be a New Yorker," said Jules, after a brief, significant pause, "but he talks as good English as you or me. Says he wants an 'Angel Kiss'—maraschino and cream, if you please—every night. I'll see he doesn't stop here too long."

Miss Spencer smiled grimly in response. The notion of referring to Theodore Racksole as "a New Yorker" appealed to her sense of humour, a sense in which she was not entirely deficient. She knew, of course, and she knew that Jules knew, that this Theodore Racksole must be the unique and only Theodore Racksole, the third richest man in the United States, and therefore probably in the world. Nevertheless, she ranged herself at once on the side of Jules. Just as there was only one Racksole, so there was only one Jules, and Miss Spencer instinctively shared the latter's indignation at the spectacle of any person whatsoever, millionaire or Emperor, presuming to demand an "Angel Kiss," that unrespectable concoction of maraschino and cream, within the precincts of the Grand Babylon.

Next to the proprietor, there were three gods at the Grand Babylon—Jules, the head waiter, Miss Spencer, and, most powerful of all, Rocco, the renowned chef, who earned two thousand a year, and had a chalet on the Lake of Lucerne. All the great hotels in Northumberland Avenue and on the Thames Embankment had tried to get Rocco away from the Grand Babylon, but without success. Rocco was well aware that even he could rise no higher than the *maître d'hôtel* of the Grand Babylon, which, though it never advertised itself, and didn't belong to a limited company, stood an easy first among the hotels of Europe—first in expensiveness, first in exclusiveness, first in that mysterious quality known as "style."

Situated on the Embankment, the Grand Babylon, despite its noble proportions, was somewhat dwarfed by several colossal neighbours. It had but 350 rooms, whereas there are two hotels within a quarter of a mile with 600 and 400 rooms respectively. On the other hand, the Grand Babylon was the only hotel in London with a genuine separate entrance for Royal visitors constantly in use. The Grand Babylon counted that day wasted on which it did not entertain, at the lowest, a German prince or the Maharajah of some Indian State. When Félix Babylon—after whom, and not with any reference to London's nickname, the hotel was christened—when Félix Babylon founded the hotel in 1869 he had set himself to cater for Royalty, and that was the secret of his triumphant eminence. The son of a rich Swiss hotel proprietor and financier, he had contrived to establish a connection with the officials of several European Courts, and he had not spared money in that respect. Sundry kings and not a few princesses called him Félix, and spoke familiarly of the hotel as "Félix's."

The Grand Babylon was managed accordingly.

The "note" of its policy was discretion, always discretion, and quietude, simplicity, remoteness. The place was like a palace incognito. There was no gold sign over the roof, not even an explanatory word at the entrance. You walked down a small side street off the Strand, you saw a plain brown building in front of you, with two mahogany swing doors, and an official behind each; the doors opened noiselessly; you entered; you were in Félix's. If you meant to be a guest, you, or your courier, gave your card to Miss Spencer. Upon no consideration did you ask for the tariff. It was not good form to mention prices at the Grand Babylon; the prices were enormous, but you never mentioned them. At the conclusion of your stay a bill was presented, brief and void of dry details, and you paid it without a word. You met with a stately civility, that was all. No one had originally asked you to come; no one expressed the hope that you would come again. The Grand Babylon was far above such manœuvres; it defied competition by ignoring it; and consequently was nearly always full during the season.

If there was one thing more than another that annoyed the Grand Babylon—put its back up, so to speak—it was to be compared with, or to be mistaken for, an American hotel. The Grand Babylon was resolutely opposed to American methods of eating, drinking, and lodging—but especially American methods of drinking. The resentment of Jules, on being requested to supply Mr. Theodore Racksole with an Angel Kiss will, therefore, be appreciated.

"Anybody with Mr. Theodore Racksole?" asked Jules, continuing his conversation with Miss Spencer. He put a scornful stress on every syllable of the guest's name.

"Miss Racksole—she's in No. 111."

Jules paused and stroked his left whisker as it lay on his gleaming white collar.

"She's where?" he queried, with a peculiar emphasis.

"No. 111. I couldn't help it. There was no other room with a bath-room and dressing-room on that floor." Miss Spencer's voice had an appealing tone of excuse.

"Why didn't you tell Mr. Theodore Racksole and Miss Racksole that we were unable to accommodate them?"

"Because Babs was within hearing."

Only three people in the wide world ever dreamt of applying to Mr. Félix Babylon the playful but mean abbreviation—Babs; those three were Jules, Miss Spencer, and Rocco. Jules had invented it. No one but he would have had either the wit or the audacity to do so.

"You'd better see that Miss Racksole changes her room to-night," Jules said after another pause. "Leave it to me, I'll fix it. *Au revoir!* It's three minutes to eight. I shall take charge of the dining-room myself to-night." And Jules departed, rubbing his fine white hands slowly and meditatively. It was a trick of his to rub his hands with a strange, roundabout motion, and the action denoted that some unusual excitement was in the air.

At eight o'clock precisely dinner was served in the immense *salle à manger*, that chaste yet splendid apartment of white and gold. At a small table near one of the windows a young lady sat alone. Her frock said Paris, but her face unmistakably said New York. It was a self-possessed and bewitching

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face, the face of a woman thoroughly accustomed to doing exactly what she liked, when she liked, how she liked; the face of a woman who had taught hundreds of gilded young men the true art of fetching and carrying, and who, by twenty years or so of parental spoiling, had come to regard herself as the feminine equivalent of the Tsar of all the Russias. Such women are only made in America, and they only come to their full bloom in Europe, which they imagine to be a continent created by Providence for their diversion.

The young lady by the window glanced disapprovingly at the menu card. Then she looked round the dining-room, and, while admiring the diners, decided that the room itself was rather small and plain. Then she gazed through the open window, and told herself that though the Thames by twilight was passable enough, it was by no means level with the Hudson, on whose shores her father had a hundred thousand dollar country cottage. Then she returned to the menu, and with a pursing of lovely lips said that there appeared to be nothing to eat.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Nella." It was Mr. Racksole, the intrepid millionaire who had dared to order an Angel Kiss in the smoke-room of the Grand Babylon. Nella—her proper name was Helen—smiled at her parent cautiously, reserving to herself the right to scold if she should feel so inclined.

"You always are late, father," she said.

"Only on a holiday," he added. "What is there to eat?"

"Nothing."

"Then let's have it. I'm hungry. I'm never so hungry as when I'm being seriously idle."

"*Consommé Britannia*," she began to read out from the menu, "*Saumon d'Ecosse, Sauce Génoise, Aspics de Homard.* Oh, Heavens! Who wants these horrid messes on a night like this?"

"But, Nella, this is the best cooking in Europe," he protested.

"Say, father," she said, with seeming irrelevance, "had you forgotten it's my birthday to-morrow?"

"Have I ever forgotten your birthday, Oh most costly daughter?"

"On the whole you've been a most satisfactory dad," she answered sweetly, "and to reward you I'll be content this year with the cheapest birthday treat you ever gave me. Only I'll have it to-night."

"Well," he said, with the long-suffering patience, the readiness for any surprise, of a parent whom Nella had thoroughly trained, "what is it?"

"It's this. Let's have filleted steak and a bottle of Bass for dinner to-night. It will be simply exquisite. I shall love it."

"But, my dear Nella," he exclaimed, "steak and beer at Félix's! It's impossible! Moreover, young women still under twenty-three cannot be permitted to drink Bass."

"I said steak and Bass, and as for being twenty-three, I shall be going in twenty-four to-morrow."

Miss Racksole set her small, white teeth.

There was a gentle cough. Jules stood over them. It must have been out of a pure spirit of adventure that he had selected this table for his own services. Usually Jules did not personally wait at dinner. He merely hovered observant, like a captain on the bridge during the mate's watch. Regular frequenters of the hotel felt themselves honoured when Jules attached himself to their tables.

Theodore Racksole hesitated one second, and then issued the order with a fine air of carelessness:

"Filleted steak for two, and a bottle of Bass." It was the bravest act of Theodore Racksole's life, and yet at more than one previous crisis a high courage had not been lacking to him.

"It's not in the menu, sir," said Jules the imperturbable.

"Never mind. Get it. We want it."

"Very good, sir."

Jules walked to the service-door, and, merely affecting to look behind, came immediately back again.

"Mr. Rocco's compliments, sir, and he regrets to be unable to serve steak and Bass to-night, sir."

"Mr. Rocco?" questioned Racksole lightly.

"Mr. Rocco," repeated Jules with firmness.

"And who is Mr. Rocco?"

"Mr. Rocco is our chef, sir." Jules had the expression of a man who is asked to explain who Shakespeare was.

The two men looked at each other. It seemed incredible that Theodore Racksole, the ineffable Racksole, who owned a thousand miles of railway, several towns, and sixty votes in Congress, should be defied by a waiter, or even by a whole hotel. Yet so it was. When Europe's effete back is against

"Rocco," said Felix Babylon, "let me introduce Mr. Theodore Racksole, the millionaire, of New York."

the wall not a regiment of millionaires can turn its flank. Jules had the calm expression of a strong man sure of victory. His face said: "You beat me once, but not this time, my New York friend!"

As for Nella, knowing her father, she foresaw interesting events, and waited confidently for the steak. She did not feel hungry, and she could afford to wait.

"Excuse me a moment, Nella," said Theodore Racksole quietly, "I shall be back in about two seconds," and he strode out of the *salle à manger*. No one in the room recognised the millionaire, for he was unknown to London, this being his first visit to Europe for over twenty years. Had anyone done so, and caught the expression on his face, that man might have

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trembled for an explosion which should have blown the entire Grand Babylon into the Thames. Jules retired strategically to a corner. He had fired; it was the antagonist's turn. A long and varied experience had taught Jules that a guest who embarks on the subjugation of a waiter is almost always lost; the waiter has so many advantages in such a contest.

SECOND CHAPTER.

How Mr. Racksole Obtained his Dinner.

Nevertheless, there are men with a confirmed habit of getting their own way, even as guests in an exclusive hotel: and Theodore Racksole had long since fallen into that useful practice—except where his only daughter Helen, motherless but high-spirited girl, chose to think that his way crossed hers, in which case Theodore capitulated and fell back. But when Theodore and his daughter happened to be going one and the same road, which was pretty often, then Heaven alone might help any obstacle that was so ill-advised as to stand in their path. Jules, great and observant man though he was, had not noticed the terrible projecting chins of both father and daughter, otherwise it is possible he would have reconsidered the question of the steak and Bass.

Theodore Racksole went direct to the entrance-hall of the hotel, and entered Miss Spencer's sanctum.

"I want to see Mr. Babylon," he said, "without the delay of an instant."

Miss Spencer leisurely raised her flaxen head.

"I am afraid——" she began the usual formula. It was part of her daily duty to discourage guests who desired to see Mr. Babylon.

"No, no," said Racksole quickly, "I don't want any 'I'm afraids.' This is business. If you had been the ordinary hotel clerk I should have slipped a couple of sovereigns into your hand, and the thing would have been done. As you are not—as you are obviously above bribes—I merely say to you, I must see Mr. Babylon at once on an affair of the utmost urgency. My name is Racksole—Theodore Racksole."

"Of New York?" questioned a voice at the door, with a slight foreign accent.

The millionaire turned sharply, and saw a rather short, French-looking man, with a bald head, a grey beard, a long and perfectly-built frock-coat, eye-glasses attached to a minute silver chain, and blue eyes that seemed to have the transparent innocence of a maid's.

"There is only one," said Theodore Racksole succinctly.

"You wish to see me?" the new-comer suggested.

"You are Mr. Félix Babylon?"

The man bowed.

"At this moment I wish to see you more than anyone else in the world," said Racksole. "I am consumed and burnt up with a desire to see you, Mr. Babylon. I only want a few minutes' quiet chat. I fancy I can settle my business in that time."

With a gesture Mr. Babylon invited the millionaire down a side corridor, at the end of which was Mr. Babylon's private room, a miracle of Louis XV. furniture and tapestry; like most unmarried men with large incomes, Mr. Babylon had "tastes" of a highly expensive sort.

The landlord and his guest sat down opposite each other. Theodore Racksole had met with the usual millionaire's luck in this adventure, for Mr. Babylon made a practice of not allowing himself to be interviewed by his guests, however distinguished, however wealthy, however pertinacious. If he had not chanced to enter Miss Spencer's office at that precise moment, and if he had not been impressed in a somewhat peculiar way by the physiognomy of the millionaire, not all Mr. Racksole's American energy and ingenuity would have availed for a confabulation with the owner of the Grand Babylon Hotel that night. Theodore Racksole, however, was ignorant that a mere accident had served him. He took all the credit to himself.

"I read in the New York papers some months ago," Theodore started, without even a clearing of the throat, "that this hotel of yours, Mr. Babylon, was to be sold to a limited company, but it appears that the sale was not carried out."

"It was not," answered Mr. Babylon frankly, "and the reason was that the middle-men between the proposed company and myself wished to make a large secret profit, and I declined to be a party to such a profit. They were firm; I was firm; and so the affair came to nothing."

"The agreed price was satisfactory?"

"Quite."

"May I ask what the price was?"

"Are you a buyer, Mr. Racksole?"

"Are you a seller, Mr. Babylon?"

"I am," said Babylon, "on terms. The price was four hundred thousand pounds including the leasehold and goodwill. But I sell only on the condition that the buyer does not transfer the property to a limited company at a higher figure."

"I will put one question to you, Mr. Babylon," said the millionaire. "What have your profits averaged during the last four years?"

"Thirty-four thousand pounds per annum."

"I buy," said Theodore Racksole, smiling contentedly; "and we will, if you please, exchange contract-letters on the spot."

"You come quickly to a resolution, Mr. Racksole. But perhaps you have been considering this question for a long time?"

"On the contrary," Racksole looked at his watch—"I have been considering it for just six minutes."

Félix Babylon bowed, as one thoroughly accustomed to every eccentricity of wealth.

"The beauty of being well-known," Racksole continued, "is that you needn't trouble about preliminary explanations. You, Mr. Babylon, probably know all about me. I know a good deal about you. We can take each other for granted without reference. Really, it is as simple to buy a hotel or a railroad as it is to buy a watch, provided one is equal to the transaction."

"Precisely," agreed Mr. Babylon smiling. "Shall we draw up the little informal contract? There are details to be thought of. But it occurs to me that you cannot have dined yet, and might prefer to deal with minor questions after dinner."

"I have not dined," said the millionaire, with emphasis, "and in that connection will you do me a favour? Will you send for Mr. Rocco?"

"You wish to see him, naturally."

"I do," said the millionaire, and added, "about my dinner."

"Rocco is a great man," murmured Mr. Babylon, as he touched the bell, ignoring the last words. "My compliments to Mr. Rocco," he said to the page who answered his summons, "and if it is quite convenient I should be glad to see him here for a moment."

"What do you give Rocco?" Racksole inquired.

"Two thousand a year and the treatment of an Ambassador."

"I shall give him the treatment of an Ambassador and three thousand."

"You will be wise," said Félix Babylon.

At that moment Rocco came into the room, very softly—a man of forty, thin, with long, thin hands, and an inordinately long, brown, silky moustache.

"Rocco," said Félix Babylon, "let me introduce Mr. Theodore Racksole, of New York."

"Sharmed," said Rocco, bowing. "Ze—ze, vat you call it, millionaire?"

"Exactly," Racksole put in, and continued quickly: "Mr. Rocco, I wish to acquaint you before any other person with the fact that I have purchased the Grand Babylon Hotel. If you think well to afford me the privilege of retaining your services I shall be happy to offer you a remuneration of three thousand a year."

"Tree, you said?"

"Three."

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"Sharmed."

"And now, Mr. Rocco, will you oblige me very much by ordering a plain beefsteak and a bottle of Bass to be served by Jules—I particularly desire Jules—at table No. 17 in the dining-room, in ten minutes from now? And will you do me the honour of lunching with me to-morrow?"

Mr. Rocco gasped, bowed, muttered something in French, and departed.

Five minutes later the buyer and seller of the Grand Babylon Hotel had each signed a curt document, scribbled out on the hotel note-paper. Félix Babylon asked no questions, and it was this heroic absence of curiosity, of surprise on his part, that more than anything else impressed Theodore Racksole. How many hotel proprietors in the world, Racksole asked himself, would have let that beefsteak and Bass go by without a word of comment?

"From what date do you wish the purchase to take effect?" asked Babylon.

"Oh," said Racksole lightly, "it doesn't matter. Shall we say from to-night?"

"As you will. I have long wished to retire. And now that the moment has come—and so dramatically—I am ready. I shall return to Switzerland. One cannot spend much money there, but it is my native land. I shall be the richest man in Switzerland." He smiled with sad amusement.

"I suppose you *are* fairly well off?" said Racksole, in that easy, familiar style of his, as though the idea had just occurred to him.

"Besides what I shall receive from you, I have half a million invested."

The above picture illustrates a thrilling episode which is related in a future instalment of "Phantom Shadows."

"Then you will be nearly a millionaire?"

Félix Babylon nodded.

"I congratulate you, my dear sir," said Racksole, in the tone of a judge addressing a newly-admitted barrister. "Nine hundred thousand pounds or so expressed in francs will sound very nice—in Switzerland."

"Of course to you, Mr. Racksole, such a sum would be poverty. Now if one might guess at your own wealth?" Félix Babylon was imitating the other's freedom.

"I do not know, to five millions or so, what I am worth," said Racksole, with sincerity, his tone indicating that he would have been glad to give the information if it were in his power.

"You have had anxieties, Mr. Racksole?"

"Still have them. I am now holiday-making in London with my daughter in order to get rid of them for a time."

"Is the purchase of hotels your notion of relaxation, then?"

Racksole shrugged his shoulders. "It is a change from railroads," he laughed.

"Ah, my friend, you little know what you have bought."

"Oh! yes I do," returned Racksole; "I have bought just the first hotel in the world."

"That is true, that is true," Babylon admitted, gazing meditatively at the antique Persian carpet. "There is nothing anywhere like my hotel. But you will regret the purchase, Mr. Racksole. It is no business of mine, of course, but I cannot help repeating that you will regret the purchase."

"I never regret."

"Then you will begin very soon—perhaps to-night."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because the Grand Babylon is the Grand Babylon. You think because you control a railroad, or an ironworks, or a line of steamers, therefore you can control anything. But no—not the Grand Babylon. There is something about the Grand Babylon——" He threw up his hands.

"Servants rob you, of course."

"Of course. I suppose I lose a hundred pounds a week in that way. But it is not that I mean. It is the guests. The guests are too—too distinguished. The great Ambassadors, the great financiers, the great nobles, all the men that move the world, put up under my roof. London is the centre of everything, and my hotel—your hotel—is the centre of London. Once I had a King and a Dowager Empress staying here at the same time. Imagine that!"

"A great honour, Mr. Babylon. But wherein lies the difficulty?"

"Mr. Racksole," was the grim reply, "what has become of your shrewdness—that shrewdness which has made your fortune so immense that even you cannot calculate it? Do you not perceive that the roof which habitually shelters all the force, all the authority of the world, must necessarily also shelter nameless and numberless plotters, schemers, evil-doers, and workers of mischief? The thing is as clear as day—and as dark as night. Mr. Racksole, I never know by whom I am surrounded. I never know what is going forward. Only sometimes I get hints, glimpses of strange acts and strange secrets. You mentioned my servants. They are almost all good servants, skilled, competent. But what are they besides? For anything I know my fourth sub-chef may be an agent of some European Government. For anything I know my invaluable Miss Spencer may be in the pay of a court dressmaker or a Frankfort banker. Even Rocco may be someone else in addition to Rocco."

"That makes it all the more interesting," remarked Theodore Racksole.

* * * * *

"What a long time you have been, father," said Nella, when he returned to table No. 17 in the *salle à manger*.

"Only twenty minutes, my dove."

"But you said two seconds. There is a difference."

"Well, you see, I had to wait for the steak to cook."

"Did you have much trouble in getting my birthday treat?"

"No trouble. But it didn't come quite as cheap as you said."

"What do you mean, father?"

"Only that I've bought the entire hotel. But don't split."

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"Father, you were always a delicious parent. Shall you give me the hotel for a birthday present?"

"No. I shall run it—as an amusement. By the way, who is that chair for?" He noticed that a third cover had been laid at the table.

"That is for a friend of mine who came in about five minutes ago. Of course I told him he must share our steak. He'll be here in a moment."

"May I respectfully inquire his name?"

"Dimmock—Christian name Reginald; profession, English companion to Prince Aribert of Posen. I met him when I was in St. Petersburg with cousin Hetty last autumn. Oh, here he is! Mr. Dimmock, this is my dear father. He has succeeded with the steak."

Theodore Racksole found himself confronted by a very young man, with deep black eyes, and a fresh, boyish expression. They began to talk.

Jules approached with the steak. Racksole tried to catch the waiter's eye, but could not. The dinner proceeded.

"Oh, father!" cried Nella, "what a lot of mustard you have taken!"

"Have I?" he said, and then he happened to glance into a mirror on his left hand between two windows. He saw the reflection of Jules, who stood behind his chair, and he saw Jules give a slow, significant, ominous wink to Mr. Dimmock—Christian name Reginald.

He examined his mustard in silence. He thought that perhaps he had helped himself rather plenteously to mustard.

THIRD CHAPTER.
At Three A.M.

Mr. Reginald Dimmock proved himself, despite his extreme youth, to be a man of the world and of experiences, and a practised talker. Conversation between him and Nella Racksole never seemed to flag. They chattered about St. Petersburg, and the ice on the Neva, and the tenor at the opera who had been exiled to Siberia, and the quality of Russian tea, and the sweetness of Russian champagne, and various other aspects of Muscovite existence. Russia exhausted, Nella lightly outlined her own doings since she had met the young man in the Tsar's capital, and this recital brought the topic round to London, where it stayed till the final piece of steak was eaten. Theodore Racksole noticed that Mr. Dimmock gave very meagre information about his own movements, either past or future. He regarded the youth as a typical hanger-on of Courts, and wondered how he had obtained his post of companion to Prince Aribert of Posen, and who Prince Aribert of Posen might be. The millionaire thought he had once heard of Posen, but he wasn't sure; he rather fancied it was one of those small, nondescript German States of which five-sixths of the subjects are Palace officials, and the rest charcoal-burners or innkeepers. Until the meal was nearly over, Racksole said little—perhaps his thoughts were too busy with Jules' wink to Mr. Dimmock; but when ices had been followed by coffee, he decided that it might be as well, in the interests of the hotel, to discover something about his daughter's friend. He never for an instant questioned her right to possess her own friends; he had always left her in the most amazing liberty, relying on her inherited good sense to keep her out of mischief; but, quite apart from the wink, he was struck by Nella's attitude towards Mr. Dimmock, an attitude in which an amiable scorn was blended with an evident desire to propitiate and please.

"Nella tells me, Mr. Dimmock, that you hold a confidential position with Prince Aribert of Posen," said Racksole. "You will pardon an American's ignorance, but is Prince Aribert a reigning Prince—what, I believe, you call in Europe, a Prince Regnant?"

"His Highness is not a reigning Prince, nor ever likely to be," answered Dimmock. "The Grand Ducal Throne of Posen is occupied by his Highness' nephew, the Grand Duke Eugen."

"Nephew?" cried Nella with astonishment.

"Why not, dear lady?"

"But Prince Aribert is surely very young?"

"The Prince, by one of those vagaries of chance which occur sometimes in the history of families, is precisely the same age as the Grand Duke. The late Grand Duke's father was twice married. Hence this youthfulness on the part of an uncle."

"How delicious to be the uncle of someone as old as yourself! But I suppose it is no fun for Prince Aribert. I suppose he has to be frightfully respectful and obedient, and all that, to his nephew?"

"The Grand Duke and my serene master are like brothers. At present, of course, Prince Aribert is nominally heir to the throne, but as no doubt you are aware, the Grand Duke will shortly marry a near relative of the Emperor's, and should there be a family——" Mr. Dimmock stopped and shrugged his straight shoulders. "The Grand Duke," he went on, without finishing the last sentence, "would much prefer Prince Aribert to be his successor. He really doesn't want to marry. Between ourselves, strictly between ourselves, he regards marriage as rather a bore. But, of course, being a German Grand Duke, he is bound to marry. He owes it to his country, to Posen."

"How large is Posen?" asked Racksole bluntly.

"Father," Nella interposed laughing, "you shouldn't ask such inconvenient questions. You ought to have guessed that it isn't etiquette to inquire about the size of a German dukedom."

"I am sure," said Dimmock, with a polite smile, "that the Grand Duke is as much amused as anyone at the size of his territory. I forget the exact acreage, but I remember that once Prince Aribert and myself walked across it and back again in a single day."

"Then the Grand Duke cannot travel very far within his own dominions? You may say that the sun does set on his empire?"

"It does," said Dimmock.

"Unless the weather is cloudy," Nella put in. "Is the Grand Duke content always to stay at home?"

"On the contrary, he is a great traveller, much more so than Prince Aribert. I may tell you what no one knows at present, outside this hotel, that his Royal Highness the Grand Duke, with a small suite, will be here to-morrow"

"In London?" asked Nella.

"Yes."

"In this hotel?"

"Yes."

"Oh, how lovely!"

"That is why your humble servant is here to-night—a sort of advance guard."

"But I understood," Racksole said, "that you were—er—attached to Prince Aribert, the uncle."

"I am. Prince Aribert will also be here. The Grand Duke and the Prince have business about important investments connected with the Grand Duke's marriage settlement. . . In the highest quarters, you understand."

"For so discreet a person," thought Racksole, "you are fairly communicative." Then he said aloud: "Shall we go out on the terrace?"

As they crossed the dining-room Jules stopped Mr. Dimmock and handed him a letter. "Just come, sir, by messenger," said Jules.

Nella dropped behind for a second with her father.

"Leave me alone with this boy a little—there's a dear parent," she whispered in his ear.

"I am a mere cipher, an obedient nobody," Racksole replied, pinching her arm surreptitiously. "Treat me as such. Use me as you like. I will go and look after my hotel." And soon afterwards he disappeared.

Nella and Mr. Dimmock sat together on the terrace sipping iced drinks. They made a handsome couple, bowered amid plants which blossomed at the command of a Chelsea wholesale florist. People who passed by remarked privately that from the look of things there was the beginning of a romance in that conversation. Perhaps there was, but a more intimate acquaintance with the character of Nella Racksole would have

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been necessary in order to predict what precise form that romance would take.

Jules himself served the liquids, and at ten o'clock he brought another note. Intreating a thousand pardons, Reginald Dimmock, after he had glanced at the note, excused himself on the plea of urgent business for his Serene master, uncle of the Grand Duke of Posen. He asked if he might fetch Mr. Racksole, or escort Miss Racksole to her father. But Miss Racksole said gaily that she felt no need of an escort, and should go to bed. She added that her father and herself always endeavoured to be independent of each other.

Just then Theodore Racksole had found his way once more into Mr. Babylon's private room. Before arriving there, however, he had discovered that in some mysterious manner the news of the change of proprietorship had worked its way down to the lowest strata of the hotel's cosmos. The corridors hummed with it, and even underservants were to be seen discussing the thing, just as though it mattered to them.

"Have a cigar, Mr. Racksole," said the urbane Mr. Babylon, "and a mouthful of the oldest cognac in all Europe."

In a few minutes these two were talking eagerly and rapidly. Félix Babylon was astonished at Racksole's capacity for absorbing the details of hotel management. And as for Racksole he soon realised that Félix Babylon must be a prince of hotel managers. It had never occurred to Racksole before that to manage a hotel, even a large hotel, could be a specially interesting affair, or that it could make any excessive demands upon the brains of the manager; but he came to see that he had under-rated the possibilities of a hotel. The business of the Grand Babylon was enormous. It took Racksole, with all his genius for organisation, exactly half an hour to master the details of the hotel laundry-work. And the laundry-work was but one branch of activity amid scores, and not a very large one at that. The machinery of checking supplies, and of establishing a mean ratio between the raw stuff received in the kitchen and the number of meals served in the *salle à manger* and the private rooms, was very complicated and delicate. When Racksole had grasped it, he at once suggested some improvements, and this led to a long theoretical discussion, and the discussion led to digressions, and then Félix Babylon, in a moment of absent-mindedness, yawned.

Racksole looked at the gilt clock on the high mantelpiece.

"Great Scott!" he said. "It's three o'clock. Mr. Babylon, accept my apologies for having kept you up to such an absurd hour."

"I have not spent so pleasant an evening for many years. You have let me ride my hobby to my heart's content. It is I who should apologise."

Racksole rose.

"I should like to ask you one question," said Babylon. "Have you ever had anything to do with hotels before?"

"Never," said Racksole.

"Then you have missed your vocation. You could have been the greatest of all hotel-managers. You would have been greater than me. and I am unequalled, though I keep only one hotel, and some men have half a dozen. Mr. Racksole, why have you never run a hotel?"

"Heaven knows," he laughed, "but you flatter me, Mr. Babylon."

"I? Flatter? You do not know me. I flatter no one, except, perhaps, now and then an exceptionally distinguished guest. In which case I give suitable instructions as to the bill."

"Speaking of distinguished guests, I am told that a couple of German princes are coming here to-morrow."

"That is so."

"Does one do anything? Does one receive them formally—stand bowing in the entrance-hall, or anything of that sort?"

This picture is a reduced facsimile of next week's cover, which will be printed in colours. It illustrates an exciting struggle between Racksole and Jules, which takes place as the immediate outcome of the events which are recorded in the closing paragraphs of this instalment. Next week's "Phantom Shadows" will be splendid.

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"Not necessarily. Not unless one wishes. The modern hotel proprietor is not like an inn-keeper of the Middle Ages, and even princes do not expect to see him unless something should happen to go wrong. As a matter of fact, though the Grand Duke of Posen and Prince Aribert have both honoured me by staying here before, I have never even set eyes on them. You will find all arrangements have been made."

They talked a little longer, and then Racksole said good-night.

"Let me see you to your room. The lifts will be closed and the place will be deserted. As for myself, I sleep here," and Mr. Babylon pointed to an inner door.

"No, thanks," said Racksole, "let me explore my own hotel unaccompanied. I believe I can discover my room."

When he got fairly into the passages, Racksole was not so sure that he could discover his own room. The number was 107, but he had forgotten whether it was on the first or second floor. Travelling in a lift, one is unconscious of floors. He passed several lift-doorways, but he could see no glint of a staircase; in all self-respecting hotels staircases have gone out of fashion, and though hotel architects still continue, for old time's sake, to build staircases, they are tucked away in remote corners where their presence is not likely to offend the eye of a spoilt and cosmopolitan public.

The hotel seemed vast, uncanny, deserted. An electric light glowed here and there at long intervals. On the thick carpets, Racksole's thinly-shod feet made no sound, and he wandered at ease to and fro, rather amused, rather struck by the peculiar sense of night and mystery which had suddenly come over him. He fancied he could hear a thousand snores peacefully descending from the upper realms. At length he found a staircase, a very dark and narrow one, and presently he was on the first floor. He soon discovered that the numbers of the rooms on this floor did not get beyond seventy. He encountered another staircase and ascended to the second floor. By the decoration of the walls he recognised this floor as his proper home, and as he strolled through the long corridor he whistled a low, meditative whistle of satisfaction. He thought he heard a step in the transverse corridor, and instinctively he obliterated himself in a recess which held a service-cabinet and a chair. He did hear a step. Peeping cautiously out, he perceived, what he had not perceived previously, that a piece of white ribbon had been tied round the handle of the door of one of the bedrooms. Then a man came round the corner of the transverse corridor, and Racksole drew back. It was Jules—Jules with his hands in his pockets and a slouch hat over his eyes, but in other respects attired as usual.

Racksole, at that instant, remembered with a special vividness what Félix Babylon had said to him at their first interview. He wished he had brought his revolver. He didn't know why he should feel the desirability of a revolver in a London hotel of the most unimpeachable fair fame, but he did feel the desirability of such an instrument of attack and defence. He privately decided that if Jules went past his recess he would take him by the throat and in that attitude put a few plain questions to this highly dubious waiter. But Jules had stopped. The millionaire made another cautious observation. Jules, with infinite gentleness, was turning the handle of the door to which the white ribbon was attached. The door slowly yielded and Jules disappeared within the room. After a brief interval, the night-prowling Jules reappeared, closed the door as softly as he had opened it, removed the ribbon, returned upon his steps, and vanished down the transverse corridor.

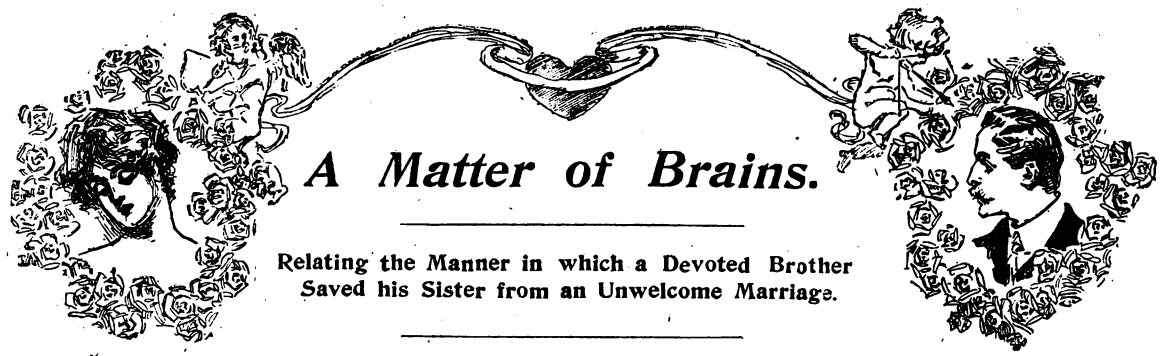
"This is quaint," said Racksole; "quaint to a degree!"

It occurred to him to look at the number of the room, and he stole towards it.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he murmured wonderingly.

The number was 111, his daughter's room! He tried to open it, but the door was locked. Rushing to his own room, No. 107, he seized one of a pair of revolvers (the kind that are made for millionaires) and followed after Jules down the transverse corridor. At the end of this corridor was a window; the window was open, and Jules was innocently gazing out of the window. Ten silent strides, and Theodore Racksole was upon him.

(Another long instalment of this splendid serial next week.)



A Matter of Brains.

Relating the Manner in which a Devoted Brother Saved his Sister from an Unwelcome Marriage.

Dolly glanced unconsciously at the hat-rack as he drew on his left glove. There was something different in its appearance, he thought, but he was for a time quite unable to determine what it was. The fact of the matter was, Dolly was not gifted with a superabundance of intellect. He realised the fact for himself. Perhaps it was because he was so frank in acknowledging his deficiency that his friends seldom referred to it. He was a charming companion—when one wished to rest one's tired brain, and he was the kind of fellow you could always borrow money from on the slightest pretext. Therefore he was tolerated, and managed to find an occasional companion at the club. Therefore he was called "Dolly" by everyone, from the steward of the club up, although he detested the name and much preferred the more dignified, even heroic, appellation, "Adolphus," with which he had been christened.

By the time Dolly had reached the forefinger of his left hand in the careful adjustment of his painfully new-looking gloves, his mentality had been worked up to the pitch of reason. He observed that there was a strange cane in the hat rack, precisely like the cane Jack Hazzard carried. This meant that Hazzard had been in the house recently, at least during the afternoon, and, departing, had left his cane. Dolly was a trifle troubled by this. Not on account of the cane—Hazzard could get that at any time—but why should his old schoolfellow, Jack Hazzard, the very man, although a poor young lawyer, Dolly cared for and admired more than any other man in the world, call at the house and not ask for him? They had been in the same class at college. Jack had graduated with honours—Dolly had graduated, in spite of private tutors and Jack's generous coaching, by the back door. But they had been in the same class and they were

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bosom friends, and Dolly could not understand the matter at all.

Dolly heard a faint sob. He looked up in a frightened manner and listened intently. The sob was repeated, and it was not difficult to tell that it came from the library, and it was less difficult to determine that it was uttered by his sister Laura.

Dolly loved but one woman in the world. The phrase seems trite, inasmuch as it has been repeated by every man to every woman he has made love to. But it was literally true in Dolly's case, as any of the girls who would have contented themselves with his fortunes present and prospective, despite his lack of brains, would have acknowledged. Dolly had no thought for any woman in the world but his sister Laura. Her he worshipped as a superior being to himself.

Dolly walked slowly to the library. There was a horrible fear in his mind that his friend had offended his sister. He could not offer a reasonable explanation for such a state of affairs, so he determined to find out what it was about—and Dolly seldom determined to do anything. He threw open the door of the library and paused. A handsome girl was sitting at a little rosewood desk with her head resting upon her arms. The fugitive end of a lace handkerchief, and an occasional tremor of the slight figure made it very evident to Dolly that he had not been mistaken in supposing that his sister was crying. He walked very gently over to her, and put his ungloved hand on her fluffy golden head. It seemed almost like taking a liberty, for he had never been the romping kind of boy who delights in teasing the other boys of his acquaintance by taking delightful liberties with a pretty sister. He was a little bit afraid, indeed, but he stroked the pretty head once or twice and felt unusually manly.

"By Jove—Lol," he drawled, first adjusting his eyeglass (Dolly could not talk unless his eyeglass was either properly in position or dangling from his hand), "by Jove, I—I——," but Dolly could not think of anything to say. Finally an inspiration came to him.

"I'm awfully sorry, Lol," he drawled again. To his great surprise, far from having the desired effect, this speech precipitated a fresh burst of tears, and the head shook convulsively. Dolly was nonplussed. The only way he knew to please a girl who was offended at anything was to apologise, but Dolly had nothing to apologise for, and could not guess anything. He boldly determined to do something desperate. He knelt down on the floor at her side and put his arm round her. Then he put his mouth close to her shell-like ear, blushing furiously the while, and whispered, still with a drawl:

"Tell a fellah what's the mattah, Lol. We've always been old chums, haven't we, Lol? Tell a fellah—p'waps I can help you, don't you know."

The head shook furiously in the negative. Dolly was discouraged, but he continued:

"I know I am not very smart, and all that—but I'll do all I can—indeed I will, don't you know. Tell me what's the mattah, Lol." In reply to this there was a burst of words, sobs, and little short-drawn breathing from which Dolly managed, by the aid of much and unusual concentration of mind, to gather the fact that his sister considered herself the most miserable girl in the whole world, and that she wished she were dead, and all that sort of thing.

"But you haven't told me why?" continued Dolly.

Laura suddenly sat bolt upright, with an angry look in her eyes, and said, excitedly:

"I don't love him—I don't love him a bit—I detest him, and papa says I must marry him."

Dolly got up and walked slowly back and forth the length of the room. He was a good deal surprised. He liked Jack—he always had. He knew very little about the indications of such things, but it had always seemed to him that Jack was a little sweet on Laura. Perhaps it was because he wished such to be the case that he had thought it. Then, too, Laura had always seemed to be fond of Jack. To be sure, she had never said anything that would indicate anything in particular, but it had always been Dolly's cherished wish that his chum Jack and his sister Laura should some day marry—and when they had settled, Dolly had a secret hope that they would let him come and live with them, the two beings he thought most of in the world, and thought of almost continually. Of course, he would never marry; but they would all have plenty of money, and they would be very happy together. It was too bad. The only dream of Dolly's life had been broken, and he, in turn, felt that he was quite the most miserable man in the world. Of course, he would never wish again that they should marry. If his sister actually detested Jack, he would do all in his power with his father to alter the latter's decision. He would appeal to Jack's own manliness. He was sure he could break if off.

He went over to his sister, who was still sitting, with clenched hands and tearful eyes, where he had left her. He stooped over and kissed her white forehead.

"By Jove! you know," he said, "don't worry, Lol—don't worry, old chum—sister. I'll fix it, don't you know. Jack's always been a good friend of mine, and once he said he'd do anything I evah asked him—it was after I did him a favah, you know. I'm rawther ashamed to speak of it, but I will now—and I'll make him give you up—and I'll make him pwomise nevah to come heah again at all. By Jove, I will!—and I'll take his cane back to him myself. He'll nevah come heah again. He used to be my chum, you know, but Jack Hazzard shall nevah come heah again to bother my deah old chum, my sister."

"But it isn't Jack Hazzard!" It was a very timid voice now. He looked at her quickly. She was blushing, and his heart gave a sudden jump.

"Who is it—who is it?" he said so quickly for him that he noticed it himself.

"The Count de Froissart," answered his sister, almost in a whisper.

'By Jove!" said Dolly, and then he was silent for a few minutes. When he looked at her again she was sitting as he had seen her at first, with her arms on the desk and her head resting on them. But she was not crying. Girls are liable to do anything to hide a blush.

"I don't like him," said Dolly. The head made no answer.

"Do you like him?" he asked. The head shook furiously in the negative.

"Of cawse you don't," said Dolly; "you told me you detested him—but I've just found out something, old sister, and I want you to tell me the truth about it. Dear old Jack Hazzard, poor Jack Hazzard, who hasn't anything but his heart, don't you know, my chum Jack Hazzard—he loves you, sister, and—you—love—him?" The head bent just slightly in the affirmative.

"Thank Heaven!" said Dolly.

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Dolly spent the afternoon at his club as usual. But he was a very much preoccupied Dolly. Instead of spending the afternoon with the crowd of smart and jolly fellows who tolerated his modest silence for financial reasons, he remained quite alone in a corner of the room. The smart fellows made it a point to go up to him one by one and ask him if it were really true that he was "thinking." But Dolly disarmed them by the gravity of his manner and the look almost of decision that had come to his face. There was one, however, who did not make any allusion to Dolly's thoughtfulness. It was the Count de Froissart, a French nobleman who stayed, so it was whispered, but a short time in one place as a rule, and who intended to marry an heiress. He was not a bogus count. His bankruptcy was too public a matter to leave any doubt about the genuineness of his title. And it was no reflection against him that he wished to marry money. In the matrimonial market the Count was no bankrupt. Are not titles worth more than money?

The Count was more than agreeable to Dolly, and many were the whispered "I told you so's," among the other clubmen as they dined together that evening.

"They say it's all arranged," said Jack Dashing, with a sigh, for Laura Nostrand was not only an heiress but a beautiful girl.

"We're not in it," said Tom Barry gruffly.

"I take it that these French noblemen are cleverer at making love to the fathers and sons than they are to the daughters," said Kerman, who was a journalist who considered himself witty.

"They arrive at their destination just the same," said Dusen.

Eight o'clock arrived, and Dolly and the Count were sitting before their last bottle of wine.

"I think," said the Count, "that I'll stroll up to your house and make a short call on your very beautiful, your exceptionally interesting sister—besides, I have still a few points to discuss with your father. He is a man I was born to admire."

"Of cawse," said Dolly languidly.

"Possibly I may have the pleasure of seeing you later at the club. I have the greatest desire to make your more intimate acquaintance."

"P'waps," drawled Dolly.

"Then I shall return," said the Count, rising to depart.

"By-the-way," continued Dolly, "if you do happen to be back here by nine o'clock, p'waps you wouldn't mind giving me a lesson, don't you know, deah boy, in baccarat—don't know anything about baccarat, you know, and want to learn. Be awfully stupid for you, don't you know, but——"

"Not at all, not at all. I will return promptly at nine o'clock, I pledge you my word of honour. *Au revoir.*" And the Count departed.

"He will not call on the dear old girl-chum to-night," said Dolly to himself. "Eight to nine is hardly time enough, and that man, I'm suah, would prefer to gamble with a man who didn't know how, to calling on his *fiancée*—at least I hope he would—and if he doesn't call to-night he never will again."

At nine o'clock that evening the Count and Dolly repaired to a private room in the club.

At three o'clock the next morning they emerged from it. The Count looked as fresh as a white-winged yacht when she plunges into her native element. His white teeth glistened and his eyes sparkled with the pleasure of abundant success. As for Dolly he was a sorry sight. His right eye blinked sleepily behind his monocle, and his left seemed closed altogether. His hair was untidy and his collar and necktie were sadly in need of adjusting. There was an unusual flush on his face, too, and his mouth was twitching.

At the door of the club they parted.

"I condole with you, Monsieur," said the Count; "you play a magnificent game of baccarat. You are far my superior at play, I assure you. It was all a matter of luck—all a matter of unfortunate luck."

"No," drawled Dolly, as he turned up the street, "it was a matter of bwains, don't you know—a matter of bwains."

It was quite four o'clock in the morning when Dolly walked feebly into his home. It was the first time in all his life he had been out so late or even late at all, unless his presence somewhere else accounted for his absence. He was not surprised, therefore, to find a light in the library, and to hear the rustle of papers that told that his father was waiting for him. He walked unsteadily into the room, walked up face to face with his father, and sank half-exhausted into a chair.

"Where have you been?" asked the latter sternly.

"Club," said Dolly laconically.

"Doing what, if you please?" continued his father, with an indication of rising anger.

"Gambling," said Dolly, still laconically.

"Fool!" said his father.

"I have heard you call me that befoah, father," drawled Dolly.

For a time the older man was silent. Then he spoke again.

"How much have you lost, Adolphus?" he asked.

"Every penny," said Dolly.

"Every penny?" gasped the old man.

"Every farthing," corrected Dolly.

"But, my son, you had in the bank something like twenty thousand pounds?"

"Gave cheques for all of it," said Dolly.

"But you can stop the cheques——"

"Gave my word of honour that I wouldn't," drawled Dolly again.

"With whom were you playing?" asked his father quickly.

"A professional gambler and a cheat," answered Dolly.

Again the older man was silent for a time. Finally he said:

"Adolphus, when I gave you that money I told you that the income from it was sufficent to support you in as much style as I considered good for your well-being, especially as you had, at no expense, a home and the use of my stable. I did not and do not propose to be treated by my son as most rich men have been treated by theirs. The twenty thousand pounds is a bagatelle. Your action is something far different. When I gave it to you, you will remember that I warned you that if you spent part of it you would have to get along on the income from what remained. If you spent all of it, you would have to go to work and earn your own living. You accepted the conditions. Now, sir, you shall——"

"I will go to work, father, and earn my own living." He walked towards the door and halted a moment irresolutely.

"Father," he said, "I want you to bweak off the match between the Count de Froissart and my dear sister. She loves an honest man and an honest man loves her—besides, the Count de Froissart is the man who won my money—p'waps it won't be necessary to bweak off the match. By Jove, you know, I don't think it will. He did not call on either you or her to-night in order to gamble with me—and he can catch a boat for France to-morrow."

The two men stood looking at each other for a moment or two. And then as though each knew what the other was thinking, and as though each knew what the other meant, they walked silently towards each other and gripped each other by the hand.

* * * * *

Dolly took his usual place at the table of his coterie the next day, and listened to their jokes, most of which were directed at him, and tried hard to understand them. He was delighted with everything all the afternoon, but his delight reached a climax when a generously strong hand was placed on his shoulder. Dolly looked up and ejaculated: "Jack!"

"Dolly," said the latter, "come over here a minute. I have something to tell you." They walked to the further end of the room.

"Dolly," said Jack again, "I'm going to marry your sister. I'm the happiest man in the world."

"No, you are not, don't you know, old chap," answered Dolly; "I am."

Thomas Winthrop Hall.

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HOW TO START THIS GREAT CONTEST TO-DAY.—The three numbers of *Short Stories* containing the first coupons may be obtained through any newsagent for threepence, or will be sent post free for 4½d. by the Publisher, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

£25 IN CASH PRIZES!

1st Prize, £10. 2nd Prize, £5. 3rd Prize, £2.

And Eight Cash Prizes of £1 each.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below you will find five signatures. Each of these signatures is the ordinary signature of the person to whom it belongs. The writing is not assumed for the occasion; it is just the way in which each of the persons signs his name to letters or to cheques. The first three sets of signatures have already appeared, and the numbers containing them can be had from any newsvendor, or from this office for 1½d. each post free.

What you have to do is to print in the space opposite each signature the name (initials, Christian name and surname) which you think it to be. No one but the Editor possesses the correct names of all the signatures shown. If you are in doubt as to the correct rendering of any signature or signatures ask some of your friends. When you have filled up the coupon to the best of your ability, cut it out and keep it by you, with the other coupons, until you see an announcement in SHORT STORIES telling you to send them in, together with the coupons which will appear in SHORT STORIES.

CONDITIONS.

(1) The name must be clearly printed in ink opposite each signature.
(2) Only one name is allowed in each space.
(3) No alterations are allowed in the words.
(4) When you have filled up your coupon, cut it out and keep it by you, together with the coupons which have appeared and will appear in SHORT STORIES.
(5) Each competitor may send only one set of coupons, but all the members of one household may compete. Each set will be accepted independently.
(6) In all cases the Editor's decision is final, and competitors may only enter on this condition.

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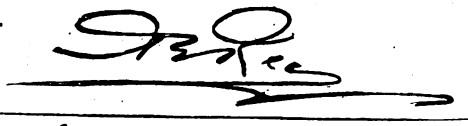
No. 19. 	
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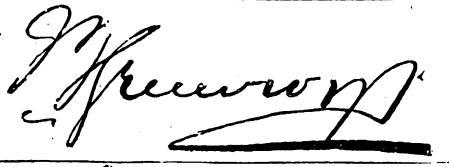
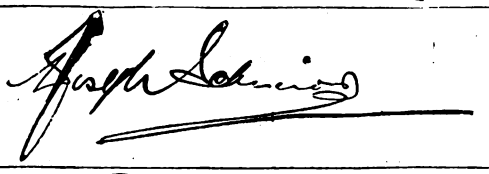
No. 21. 	
No. 22. 	
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THIS SERIES CONCLUDES BELOW.

DECOYED!

A Striking Series of Society Revelations. Told by the Decoy herself.

LAST EPISODE.

A Decoy no Longer.

I HAD escaped with my life. But I trembled with fear of what might still await me, for I no sooner closed the door behind me, than I realised how helpless I still was.

Suppose the coast was not quite so clear as I had hoped, and I failed to reach the street before being perhaps seized and choked from behind, so that I could not even make an outcry? Or suppose that there had been some misunderstanding about the arrangements of my friends, and that I had merely escaped from one trap to fall into another?

No wonder that my heart palpitated with fear, and that, hampered by having to carry a bag in each hand, my progress towards the gate seemed to be inordinately slow!

"Turn to the right, walk about twenty yards, and you will find a hansom waiting for you."

The doctor had instructed me to this effect. But when I saw the hansom I paused, panic-stricken, for I remembered that other hansom in which Mr. O'Connell had been driven to his doom, and I was possessed by a sudden fear that, after all, Dr. Farnie was merely taking the easiest way of disposing of me.

As I slowly walked a little nearer to the vehicle, the figure of a man emerged from a gateway which had previously sheltered him from observation, and my fears vanished on the instant, for I recognised him as no other than Lord Broomville.

Now I was safe indeed, and an exclamation of thankfulness escaped me as I was joyfully clasped in the arms of the man who already held my heart in his keeping.

"Forgive me, dearest," he whispered, after pressing a warm kiss on my lips. "Forgive me! I am so overjoyed to know that you are safe, that I couldn't resist claiming a lover's privilege."

"And you!" I whispered back, as he quickly relieved me of my impedimenta. "You are safe too? You have escaped from those terrible bogus policemen? Oh! I am so thankful!"

"You are thankful to know that *I* am safe?"

"How can I be otherwise? I have suffered torments on your account!"

Lord Broomville seemed to think that this speech required another kiss by way of appreciative answer, for how could I help showing him that his safety was even dearer to me than my own?

"This, darling, means that you will marry me by-and-bye, doesn't it?"

For all answer to this question I put my hand tremulously into my lover's disengaged one, and he was well content with this mute acceptance.

"God willing, Vivienne, you shall never regret converting me into the happiest of men," he murmured rapturously. "But we have much to do, and must make good our departure at once."

With ready obedience I stepped into the waiting hansom, and I cared not then whither I was driven, for was I not being guarded by the man who was dearer than all else in the world to me?

Nevertheless, I did not let the precious brief-bag out of my sight, for it represented the whole future of the real father whom I was longing to meet, and I did not intend to fail in any part of my duty towards him.

It seemed only a few minutes ere the cab stopped at the Palace Hotel. A couple of rooms and a maid were already engaged in readiness for me, and after assuring himself that I was in safe hands, Lord Broomville bade me a brief farewell.

"I have an appointment, even at this unearthly time," he said, "and it is important that I should keep it, so I must tear myself away from you for a few hours."

"You'll be very careful?" I said anxiously. "Don't let those men who acted as policemen get you into their clutches again. You might not escape so easily another time."

A happy laugh emphasised my lover's reply.

"Don't let them worry you again, dear. I assure you, they are absolutely harmless, so far as we are concerned, for it was because they were already in my pay that they sought an opportunity of convincing 'Mr. D'Alton' that they were ready to do anything for money. I could have laughed aloud when they 'arrested' me, if I had not been anxious about you. But I had to keep up the deception awhile longer, until restitution had been made to your father, so I was apparently driven off, to be disposed of at the 'City Office' by Kaspar and Co. But I am still safe and sound, and so are you, my dearest."

Another moment, and my affianced husband had started on his return journey, and I sought a few hours' rest, happy in the firm belief that all was going well with myself and my friends.

* * * * *

At nine o'clock I was dressed again, ready for any further developments that might take place, and I was not at all surprised when Lord Broomville presented himself, for he had promised to drive with me to see my father, directly after breakfast.

"You look as bright as if you had slept all night," he smiled, "and as if you had never had a worry in your life."

"You forget," was my happy answer, "how much I have to compensate me for past worries. But let us make haste. I am dying to know my father."

"And he will be happy when he is able to remember all about you. At present his mind is still clouded, so far as past events are concerned. But I am well fortified with a supply of the antidote you mentioned, and we will soon put everything right."

"Suppose the tulip-juice does not act as we hope it will?"

"If you made no mistake in reading what the book said of it, I feel confident of its efficacy."

"And I am sure I have made no mistake, so we will hope for the best."

Each yard that we drove served to increase my excitement now, for marvellous things were to take place within the hour, and I could hardly restrain my impatience when we actually drove up to a house near Lancaster Gate.

"Does my father live here?" I asked breathlessly, receiving for reply: "He is here now. He has lived in Fulham for many years, earning his living as a clerk. But an old friend of his recognised him lately, and made it his business to work for his re-instatement. Now that he is likely to recover his memory, you will learn much that still puzzles the friend—Mr. Halliday."

Five minutes later I stood in the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Halliday, who both welcomed me with tears of pleasure in

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their eyes. There was also a Dr. Midhurst there, and a tal man, of aristocratic bearing, who looked at me with a pathetic lack of recognition, but of whose actual personality I had not the slightest doubt.

This was indeed my father, and it was heart-breaking to think that even the sight of his only child had no power to re-awaken the memory which had laid dormant for so many cruel years.

"Never mind," was my cheerful reflection. "He will know me directly."

While I was trying to rouse my father's recognition Lord Broomville and Mr. Halliday had been swift of action.

"D'Alton, do you mind drinking this?" asked Mr. Halliday. "We are hoping it will do you good."

"My name is Vincent—Henry Vincent, as I have already explained to you," was the puzzled reply. "But I shall be very thankful if this medicine will benefit me in the way you suggested. Thank you."

With the word "Thank you," my father took the tiny glass held out to him, and drained it on the instant, whilst I, terribly anxious, watched for the slightest sign of dawning recognition.

This, however, was deferred for the present, for, with a wild, inarticulate cry, my father clapped his hands to his head, and swayed about as if he were in agony. Then he dropped like a log, and lay prone on the floor, the picture of death itself, and I shrieked in terror at the sight.

"Take her away, please," was Dr. Midhurst's hurried direction. "We must raise him to a couch, and loosen his collar."

"He is dead! We have killed him!" I sobbed.

"He is not dead yet," was the stern response. "Please make as little trouble as you can."

The doctor was very blunt of speech. But his words had their desired effect, and though it was half-an-hour before I heard any further news, I sat, mute and motionless, until Lord Broomville came and kissed me compassionately.

"Take heart, dearest," he said. "Your father is now lying in a sound, restful sleep, and Dr. Midhurst is confident that when he wakes he will know himself to be Beverley D'Alton."

"Pray Heaven he may be right!" I murmured, and when, an hour later, Mrs. Halliday sought me again, there was a glad light on her face which told me that all was indeed well.

* * * * *

"Your father shows signs of waking, and the doctor thinks that it would be wise for yours to be the first face he sees."

Such was the message brought to me, and, trembling with carefully-suppressed excitement, I followed my kind hostess to the couch on which my father was stirring uneasily, as if dreams were disturbing his still dormant senses.

It was an indescribably solemn moment. The sleeping man. The suspense-racked girl. The watchful doctor. The devoted friends!

All but one were almost breathless with anticipation of what the next five minutes might bring forth. And he—ah! how could I resist an exclamation of joy when he opened his eyes and gazed into my face with astounded rapture!

"Helena!" he cried, springing to his feet with the agility of a boy. "Helena my darling wife! Is it possible that I have been mistaken, and that God has spared you to me after all?"

"Father!" I sobbed, rushing to embrace him. "Father! Oh! how thankful I am that you have recovered."

"Recovered? Why, I have never been ill! And yet—surely I must have been very ill, for I dreamt that you had left me for ever! And now I see you—alive and well! But how different you are! And your dress is odd too!"

My father's face, just now transfigured with joy, grew very troubled. He had at first been misled by my evident resemblance to his girl-wife. But various discrepancies were forcing themselves upon his notice, and he looked helplessly around him, in search of enlightenment.

I fervently thanked God for the great blessing He had vouchsafed me, but my heart still ached for my poor father, and I felt it impossible to tell him that so many years of his life had been stolen from him.

"I don't know this place," he continued slowly. "Helena, what's wrong with me? My eyes must surely be playing me false! Everything is so strange. Tell Bridgeman I want him. He gave me some medicine for my cold, but I can't understand what I am doing here."

Mr. Halliday, who had purposely kept out of sight, now came forward and faced his old friend.

"Beverley," he said, "time has made a big stride since your treacherous valet robbed you of your memory, and turned you adrift to earn your living as best you could——"

"Earn my living! Nonsense! That is a problem I have never had to face in my life!"

Evidently a marvellous thing had happened. The antidote had restored the patient's memory to the moment in which he must have taken the fiendish dose of blighting poison. But it had left his mind a blank concerning subsequent events.

"I am strangely puzzled," he faltered. "My wife is unlike herself. And you—friend Halliday—you look many years older than when I last saw you."

"I *am* fifteen years older," was the pitying reply. "And so are you, old friend. Those years have been a tragedy. But, please God, your barque is now sailing in smooth waters, and for the rest of your days it will be anchored in the Haven of Happiness."

The words, spoken so solemnly, carried conviction with them.

"Fifteen years!" was the horrified rejoinder. "Do you mean to tell me that my brain has slept for fifteen years?"

For all answer, Mr. Halliday, whose lips were twitching with sympathetic emotion, pointed to a pierglass which surmounted a console table in the room, and we all anxiously watched my unfortunate father as he hastily strode up to it, and looked at the reflection which faced him.

"It is even so!" came from between the white lips. "I am no longer young! I am a modern Rip van Winkle."

"But *he* came back to find himself unwanted and forgotten, while for *you* there wait the regard of old friends, and the love of a devoted daughter!"

"A daughter? Ah, now I understand! This is not my Helena! It is Vivienne, my little Vivienne, grown into her mother's likeness!"

"Father!"

"My darling! My dear one!"

Tears flowed from my father's eyes, and my own were blinded with emotion, as I was folded in his loving embrace. But my heart beat high with gratitude to God, for, with His help, I had been able to foil our enemies, and had won a parent whom I could love and honour.

* * * * *

There was a long story of fraud and wickedness to unravel. But Beverley D'Alton could tell us nothing that happened to him after he had been subjected to the malignant experiment which put it beyond his power to betray his enemies. We could only conjecture that they must have insured his return to England from Cologne, where he had been staying for a few days after taking me to Bochum to school. Then his valet appropriated his money and papers, and passed himself off as Beverley D'Alton.

My father's discovery by Mr. Halliday was nothing less than providential. The latter was senior partner of a big banking firm, and when, some months ago, a man calling himself Henry Vincent was engaged as assistant cashier, he was amazed at his marvellous resemblance to his old-time friend, Beverley D'Alton, who had apparently resolved not to live in England again, but of whose great good luck all the financial world was talking.

"Henry Vincent" had not the slightest recollection of anything that had happened to him prior to fifteen years ago. But the actual truth did not occur to Mr. Halliday until he was at a reception at which the supposed Beverley D'Alton and I were present. He had known my mother well before her marriage, and saw my resemblance to her, although he had never seen her since she was taken abroad in search of health.

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He was, however, puzzling his brains to understand what was meant by the fact that the much-lauded millionaire bore no resemblance to the Beverley D'Alton whom he had known in years gone by, when he was accosted by Viscount Broomville.

"How do you do, Mr. Halliday?" he said. "You seem to be eyeing the D'Altons very curiously. Father and daughter are not much alike, eh?"

"And that is really supposed to be Beverley D'Alton?"

"It *is* the very individual."

"I have my doubts about that. I knew D'Alton when he was a young man, but that person bears no resemblance to him."

"Hush! Let nobody else hear you say that yet," was Lord Broomville's eager injunction. "What you have said supports my belief that imposture and rascality are in the air."

Of course, Mr. Halliday wanted to know a great deal all at once. But Lord Broomville was cautious, and made an appointment for the next morning, when remarkable disclosures were made on both sides.

It was resolved to work carefully and expeditiously, and Lord Broomville promptly disappeared from his usual haunts, to pursue certain investigations, while Mr. Halliday satisfied himself, by judicious questioning, that "Henry Vincent," who remembered nothing prior to fifteen years ago, must indeed be the real Beverley D'Alton.

Thus, when I was almost distracted by doubts and fears, willing workers were doing their best to solve the mysteries which surrounded me, and bring the gang of criminals to justice.

The incident in the seed shop gave them their first clue about the strange mental condition of "Henry Vincent," and their plans embraced the idea of experimenting upon him while I was there also.

Miss D'Alton was their next object of solicitude, and the ultimate recognition between herself and her nephew was a very affecting one, but joyful in the extreme.

One other victim of Mrs. Sherwood's poisonous concoction was Alan Melrose. But he and his sisters were shadowed on their northward journey by detectives in the pay of Lord Broomville, and the mock specialist, who proved to be no other than the murderous Kaspar Krause, was cleverly caught in his own trap, with the result that his intended victims returned to London in great excitement. Alan was soon as completely restored as my father and Miss D'Alton, and he was able to explain all about the missing £80,000 worth of securities, all of which were eventually returned to him.

The Greathams had not been victimised at all. Claude Greatham received a secret visit from his old friend, Lord Broomville, and was henceforth an indefatigable worker in the cause of justice. Indeed, it was he who introduced Dr. Farnie, whose remarkable powers had been of such signal service to us.

Speaking of Dr. Farnie brings me back to where I left him, after making my escape from the house in Park Lane. His task was a delicate one. He had to try to keep the impostor, who was indeed and in truth no other than my father's former valet, Tallis Bridgeman, in thorough mental subjection until there was no doubt that I had got safely out of the house with the precious papers which had been so useful in helping the ex-valet and his wife to pursue their career of imposture.

In this he was quite successful, but his power failed to last until a posse of detectives arrived on the scene, and his devotion to our cause nearly proved fatal to him, for he was locked in his own room, resisting a determined attempt to murder him, when timely relief arrived, and caused the arch criminal to direct against himself the poisoned dagger which had been intended for the doctor who had befooled him so cleverly.

We none of us wanted a scandal, so the affair was hushed up as much as possible. The public certainly learnt that a faithless valet, his career of treachery being discovered, had evaded justice by committing suicide. But many details were kept quiet, and my father took Aunt Helena and myself abroad for a while, the Park Lane house being closed as a matter of course.

Prince Gorouki had both his diamond ring and his marriage settlement returned to him, and though he no doubt thinks me a very fickle young person, he is ignorant of the peril he ran when he became a suitor for my hand.

Mrs. Sherwood, or, to give her her right name, Mrs. Bridgeman, escaped with her sister-in-law, Annchen Krause, but both women lost their lives in a shipwreck, and many people were thankful to know that no further mischief could emanate from them.

Susan is my maid still, and is greatly excited over my forthcoming marriage with Viscount Broomville. So is Aunt Helena. And so is my former governess, Fräulein Wernher, who has come all the way from Bochum to be present.

As for our many friends, their troubles have ended as happily as mine have, and they all do their best to help me to forget the terrible time when I was brought to England to be a "decoy."

THE END.

Our New Serial—"Phantom Shadows."

Do you like the opening chapters of Arnold Bennett's story, which appear in this number? Do you like the splendid illustrations from Reginald Cleaver's pencil? I am sure you must do. And I am equally as sure that you will like the instalments of "Phantom Shadows" that are to follow. They tell how Theodore Racksole and his daughter Nella fight a grim fight, the issue of which is always in the balance, with Jules, the rascally waiter, and his accomplices. The progress of the schemes and counter-schemes are related in a manner that holds the reader's attention throughout. Not a dull line will be found in the whole story. On page 423 there appears a reduced facsimile of next week's cover. Look out for it on the bookstalls and in the newsagents' racks and windows.

The Signature Competition.

I HOPE you are all entering for our unique competition. The fourth set of signatures appears on page 427. If you have not already started to solve them, remember that you can still get the back numbers containing the first three sets. I should advise you to lose no time in procuring these, else you may find you are too late. Get your friends to enter for the competition as well. There is much amusement to be derived from it, and everybody has an equal opportunity of carrying off a prize.

The Tenth Unsolved Love Problem.

I SHALL announce as soon as I possibly can the name of the winner of the guinea offered in connection with the problem entitled "The Heart of Claire Gilchrist." Another, the final one of this series, which has been so ppular, will appear shortly.

Your Editor.

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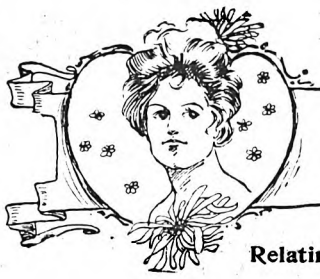

Tit for Tat.

Relating how the Reply to a Question was Postponed, and how it was Answered in the End.

"Why won't I marry you? Oh, well, for several reasons; but I will be charitable and give but one—I do not love you."

She spoke in the most careless tone possible — as though a proposal of marriage was just the most everyday occurrence in the world, and he who makes it even more commonplace and so stupid.

He looked the picture of a disappointed lover—why was not he bored with her as she was undoubtedly with him? He sat uncomfortably on an uncomfortable chair, and toyed nervously with the spoon in the cup of tea that she had humanely given him.

She put up her hand to hide a yawn.

"More sugar?" she asked with indifferent sweetness. "You look as if you wanted something."

"So I do—I want you!" he blurted out desperately.

This was so ridiculous that she laughed aloud.

"But you can't have me," she said, her mood waxing more and more flippant as her patience waned, "while you can have sugar. I advise you to take the sweet that is within your reach, and not cry for the moon. Don't you know the fate of the man in the fable who cried for the moon?" she asked innocently. "The moon laughed at him," and she rose and laughed wickedly at this fiction.

He rose, too. She did not expect he would have sense enough to accept her motion to adjourn. He gulped down his tea and placed the cup upon a table near, and pulled himself together a new man—the dose had done him good.

"Will you allow me to finish the fable?" he asked politely. "The moon has two faces, you know; and when the man had levelled a telescope at her and seen all her imperfections, and blessed his stars that he had cried in vain, why, she—but you can guess what the moon did."

And he picked up his hat and, bowing profoundly, left the room.

* * * * *

By an odd coincidence it was at another tea that they met again after many days.

She saw him approaching her through the crowd above which he towered, and their last meeting was brought vividly to mind, and with it a bright blush to her cheek, for though on that occasion she completely routed him, that parting shot of his wounded her vanity, if nothing else; and to-night as she looked upon his handsome face, not seen for so long, she felt a sharp pain in her heart that made her fear that it, too, was wounded. Her one thought was to escape him, and as the crush was too great for her to get out of his way, she turned her back upon him unceremoniously.

Evidently he had no reason to avoid her, for notwithstanding this impolite action on her part the next moment he was addressing her, and she turned to him with a guilty blush.

"How do you do?" he said with nonchalance, just as if they were but slight acquaintances, with no bitter social memories in the past to bind them together with the link of suffering. She wished he felt as keenly as she did. "Were you not cruel enough to me at our last meeting," he continued pleasantly, "that you must needs cut me at this? Perhaps you think I am going to make a fool of myself as I did then!" and the way he laughed brought the tears into her eyes.

"Ah!" she sighed, so low that he had to bend his head to hear her, "it was somebody else who was the fool then—not you!"

"Who?" he asked, with a ring of triumph in his voice.

"I!"

She whispered the little monosyllable in so shamefaced a way that he had to bend still lower to catch it.

The tide of humanity had set towards the rooms where the refreshments were served, and left them standing alone. Perhaps she fondly fancied he would take her in his arms at this confession, but she was sadly disappointed. Instead he drew himself up to his full height, with a smile on his lips that struck terror to her soul, and said coolly:

"Gallantry forbids that I should agree with you, yet I dare not contradict you, so we will let it stand an open question. Perhaps I shall answer it when I return from America—I sail to-morrow. I hope you will wish me success—I have been so unsuccessful in my matrimonial ventures on this side of the water, I am going to try my luck over there."

Was not her humiliation vengeance enough for him, that he should torment her in this way? He had only to look at her face to see that he *was* tormenting her. For one moment the room swam round her, but the next, by a supreme effort, she conquered her faintness and looked at him unflinchingly.

"I wish you all the success you deserve," she said calmly.

For a moment each looked the other steadily in the face, as if each were trying to measure the other's power of resistance, and then, without another word, they turned away.

They were quits.

* * * * *

They met again at another social function.

"How do you do?" she said. "Where is your wife?"

"My wife? She is in the future. I am sorry to say I am so unfortunate as to be a bachelor still. My quest for a wife was as unsuccessful in America as here, with this difference—here the girl I wanted wouldn't have me, there I wouldn't have the girl whether she wanted me or not. Somehow, foreigners and I don't hit it off very well together."

"That is something of my experience with Count Offenstein," she observed, smiling a little.

"Ah! the Count—I heard something about that. You are engaged to him, are you not?" he asked carelessly.

"I was—until I discovered that he thought I was an heiress, and he discovered his mistake."

"So we are both free—it looks as if we were reserved for each other," he remarked dispassionately. "Perhaps this meeting is a special dispensation of Providence, and we shall call down eternal wrath upon our defenceless heads if we do not accept it as such."

"But I do not see how we can help ourselves," she laughed.

"There is one way—we might be married," he suggested.

"But in that case the remedy would be worse than the disease, don't you think?" she asked.

"Perhaps. But being a doctor, you know, you cannot expect me not to wish you to accept my remedy," he answered.

"True—a doctor is always thinking of his fee!" she exclaimed. "Well—perhaps—I will accept your—remedy if you promise not to make your fee too exorbitant—remember, I am not a heiress."

"Oh! you can pay me in kisses!"

* * * * *

"How about that question you were going to answer when you returned from abroad?" she asked mischievously, after the fee had been paid.

"Well, have I not kept my word? I answered it when I proposed we should get married. I would not want a fool for a wife, would I?"

Mabel E. Baugh.

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An April Fool.

Showing How a Jealous Girl Unwittingly Helped Her Rival.

The Chester family kept, with suitable festivities, Christmas, New Year's Day, All-Fools' Day, Hallowe'en, and so on, straight through the year.

They were fools once a year, if not oftener, as Will said; and to tell the truth, the first of April was the "maddest, merriest day" of the whole year through for them.

Viewed from this standpoint, therefore, it did not seem quite so impertinently cruel to play a trick upon Eva Atwood.

True, she was a stranger among them, almost, having lived in the Chester family but a few months, and knew nothing or little of their customs; and the only motherless daughter of a wealthy, indulgent gentleman, residing in a great city, would not be apt to know much of these hilarious country pastimes. But as her cousin Belle said contemptuously, she might know, and there was no earthly reason why she should be exempted from a joke unless because she was rich. And Belle curled her lips in scorn.

Belle was discussing her plan with her sister Annie and Cora Webster, her friend.

"The best of it is, Allison Foster's initials are A. F., which stand for April Fool, and then two other young men of our set have the same ones, Albert Follonsby and Arthur French," said Belle, with animation.

"But Eva does not know either of these," said Annie.

"So much the better, goosie; but if she learns of the joke she will have no one to blame but her own stupidity."

"Can you write like Allison Foster?" asked Cora.

"Near enough to deceive her. I have lots of notes of his that I can study."

"No doubt of that," laughed Cora.

"Well, don't chatter, and I will see what I can do."

Belle sat down to her writing-desk and soon produced the following note, which she read to them:

"My Dear Little Eva,—*You will, no doubt, be surprised to receive this note, we have known each other so short a time; but since the first evening we met I have loved you.*

And you, my darling, do you return this love, the first and only love of my devoted heart? Never answer this if you do not respond to my love, for I could not bear it; but make me happy by wearing a geranium leaf in your hair the next time I come to the house. By this token I shall know that you love me, even as I love you.—Yours devotedly,

"A. F."

April 1.

"Oh! Won't it be funny to see her going about with a geranium leaf stuck in her hair, and he will not know anything about it at all, and only we three in the secret?" said Cora thoughtlessly.

"I think it would be cruel," said Annie indignantly. "I never realised before how mean it would be; and she a stranger among us, and the dearest little soul that ever breathed."

"So you will give the game away?" said Belle angrily.

"No, I won't; but I wash my hands of the whole affair," and Annie walked off, but returned to say significantly:

"Have you thought, Belle, if Eva doesn't wear the geranium leaf, that it is a virtual refusal; and if you consent to wear it (you know what I mean), you accept what she refuses?"

But to this Belle deigned no reply, only to Cora she said, after her sister left the room:

"Pshaw! I know she loves him."

"What shall you do with the letter?"

"Send it by post. Will you drop it in the pillar-box as you go by?"

"Yes, but remember you must let me know when the fun begins. I should be sorry to miss it."

"All right." And the girls separated; Cora to return home by way of the post-office, where she dropped the letter, Belle to join the family downstairs.

A lovely, sweet-faced young girl sat on the sofa, cutting paper dolls for little Isabel. Annie was reading, as was her wont. Mrs. Chester was sewing. Just then in sauntered Will, who was home from college for a few days.

"Well, cousin mine," said he, sitting down beside Eva, "are you looking forward to the first of April?"

"Why, what comes then?" asked she.

"Surprises," said he solemnly; "for instance, if you wished to present me with your cheque for ten thousand pounds, to-morrow would be just the day to do it. I should be surprised at that."

"So should I," said she demurely, with dimples lurking in her cheeks.

"The children are up to all kinds of games the first of April, dear," said Mrs. Chester, smiling. "Don't let them torment you."

By Will's explanation she imagined it to be a day of surprises after the style of Christmas, only with more secrecy, and she thought it a good time to make each of her cousins and her aunt a suitable present.

Her father was very wealthy, and, at her request, only a week before had sent her some gifts which she waited but a suitable opportunity to bestow.

Mr. Atwood had sent his daughter to reside in Wilmot with her aunt, because she was delicate, and he hoped the country air would be of benefit to her. Only on this consideration would he have separated from his only child even for a week. He hoped and expected that his sister's home would be very pleasant, and Mrs. Chester was indeed very kind, as were all the family except Belle, a proud, handsome girl of just Eva's age.

But Belle, from the day of her cousin's arrival, had been secretly envious of Eva, of her wealth, jewels, silks, and laces; of her gentle, ladylike manners, her beauty, everything; for when envy enters the soul it is insatiable, and feeds upon any material it can seize for this purpose. Eva was rich, it is true, but she valued riches only as they enabled her to make others happy; she had jewels, silks, and laces, but she seldom wore them, and dressed far more simply than Belle; her manners ought not to have offended, since they sprang from unselfishness; and her loveliness was of the delicate, unassuming order that was far less effective than the regal beauty of her cousin Belle.

But the latter fancied there was a growing friendship between Eva and Allison Foster, and this fact completed her dislike.

We all understand how objects rise in the estimation when others begin to prize them. It was so with Belle. Allison Foster was undoubtedly good, handsome, and talented, a young physician sure to make his mark, and Belle had encouraged his attentions previous to her cousin's arrival, although she had not fully made up her mind that she would marry him if he should offer himself, for a still more eligible

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match might intervene. But when she saw her cousin's evident appreciation of his worth and manliness—her cousin, who had seen so many rich and cultured people—she grew jealous of every word or look that passed between them, and she burnt to humiliate her rival.

If love is blind, jealousy is doubly so. Eva was not her rival in any sense, for Allison had only a kindly feeling in his heart for the fair young stranger, the glamour of Belle's beauty still being round him. Indeed, although nothing was said to her about the matter, Eva felt sure of his love for Belle; and, though she wondered in her heart that he had not chosen Annie, instead, she never thought of herself in connection with the matter. She did admire him, and liked to have him talk with her, and she thought Belle must be very happy indeed.

The first of April arrived, and the family, suspicious of each other, sat down to the breakfast table.

The eggs were passed round, but no one touched them except Eva and little Isabel. Their temerity was rewarded by finding them all right. (Mrs. Chester had handed them round.)

Encouraged by this, Will and his sisters each took one, but found only the shells cleverly filled with salt.

The coffee was fragrant and excellent, as usual; the cream neither salted nor sour, and the lumps of sugar white and glistening. But no amount of stirring would dissolve them. Extracting his with his spoon, Will rapped it on the table.

"Marble, girls, sure's you're alive," he cried. "Good for you, mother. 'You see, dear," mimicking his mother's tone, turning to his cousin, "'the children are up to all kinds of games,' and mother is as much a child as any of us."

Mrs. Chester laughed and they all enjoyed their jokes immensely. Just then the letters were brought in. There were only two, one for Will and one for Eva. Will looked dismayed at the contents of his, but brightened up almost immediately.

"Own up now; which of you wrote this letter?"

Each one solemnly asserted that they had neither written it nor caused it to be written.

"What is it, dear?" asked his mother anxiously.

"Nothing, only one of our larks must have got out. The head-master want my presence immediately at the college to answer certain charges, and so on. I thought it was an April fraud."

"Oh, Will!" exclaimed his mother.

"Serves him right," said Belle. "College boys are no better than cubs."

"Thank you, sissy," said Will, making her a low bow.

"Hallo, what is this?"—gathering up his text-books and finding a ten pound note in his Greek. "I suppose father sent it, mother?"

"Ask me to-morrow," answered his mother, trying to be merry, but worried at her son's difficulty in college.

"Did you put it there, Eva?"

"Ask me to-morrow," she answered, exactly as his mother had done.

Belle thrust her hand into her pocket and drew forth a lovely bracelet—yes, two of them—and she gave a cry of pleasure. "Oh, who could have put them there?"

"Allison Foster," suggested Will; but he did not believe it.

"Pshaw! you know better," said Belle; but she was pleased with the suggestion.

"Well, then, I should say Eva Atwood. One of those two I'll be bound."

"Don't be so ridiculous," said Belle.

"Then you have found me out. Spare my blushes, my dear sister. I earned the money in my spare time. I burnt the midnight oil that you might shine in the assemblies which your beauty is so well fitted to adorn. Don't thank me, your pleasure is enough," said Will, waving his hand dramatically.

"I won't, never fear," said Belle shortly. "You couldn't keep money in your pocket long enough to buy them. Father must have sent them when he did your ten pound note."

But when Annie found on her table a book she had much desired, she went straight to Eva and hugged her enthusiastically, "I know it's you, and I thank you a thousand times." Mrs. Chester received a silver tea-pot, and Isabel a splendid doll.

Although it is true they all thought of Eva as the possible donor, all but Annie thought it was likely to have been Mr. Chester, who was a commercial traveller, and often sent home valuable presents. But who could have distributed them so cunningly?

Eva came in at last, but she wore no geranium leaf in her hair.

The next day solved the mystery. Meanwhile Will packed up his books and started off.

"Never mind," said he affectionately, patting his mother's face. "Maybe I'll get off with only a reprimand."

But next morning his grinning face was seen at the breakfast table and the family discovered the whole thing to have been a hoax. He had written the letter himself and fooled them most cleverly.

This was the most successful farce ever acted in the Chester family on All Fools' Day.

"But it was cruel, Will," said his mother, frowning and smiling.

"I know it. I almost relented a dozen times," said he.

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But Eva, quiet little Eva, had read and digested her letter long ere this. It never occurred to her that it was a hoax, for she could not conceive of anyone unkind enough to do such a thing. Still she was not deceived. She did not believe Allison Foster loved her, although he told her so in this letter.

"No, he does not love me, although he thinks he does; if he did——" and a blush covered her face and a tender look stole into her sweet eyes. "No, he does not. I feel something lacking in the letter. I will not wear the geranium leaf, but I will tell him why. I will write to him—that will be best."

So when Mr. Foster called, a shy little figure met him in the hall and put a letter into his hand, and then ran upstairs before anyone saw her.

Completely mystified, his hand closed over the note, and then he entered the sitting-room. Cora, Annie, Will, and Belle were all there, and at once they plunged into a merry chat; but, although Allison joined in it, his thoughts were with Eva and he wished she would enter.

She came in at last, and she wore no geranium leaf in her hair, as the girls saw at a glance. Annie looked significantly at Belle, and Cora rather enjoyed her friend's discomfiture also. Allison saw nothing of this, for he was shaking hands with Eva, holding her hand a little longer than was strictly necessary, it seemed to Belle, while he looked into her face with a new feeling in his own. Eva smiled and dropped her eyes shyly.

Later, when Allison was at home, he tore open the letter and read:

"Dear Mr. Foster,—*I was, as you fancied I should be, much surprised at receiving your letter, particularly as you have never before given me any reason to think you loved me. I think you are mistaken now. I have heard that people sometimes deceive themselves by thinking they feel more kindly than they do, and it seems as if you must be thus mistaken in the measure of your regard for me. I am quite sure, dear Mr. Foster, that, if you really loved me, my heart would tell me so. I did not wear the geranium leaf for this reason. Sincerely your friend,*

"Eva Atwood."

The sweet girl's secret was plainly told in this letter; also her unerring insight, which would not let her be deceived.

Allison was keen and shrewd. He saw at a glance that some trick had been played on the unsuspecting girl; but whom to mistrust, unless Will Chester, he did not know.

The next day he happened to meet Eva returning from the village alone. A tide of crimson swept over his own face as well as hers.

"Miss Atwood, will you let me see the letter I wrote you?" he asked.

"Certainly," she replied with a surprised look.

Belle had said she wrote nearly enough like Mr. Foster to deceive Eva, but she could not deceive the young man himself. Furthermore, having received several notes from Belle, he knew her writing immediately.

"Is there anything wrong about it?" asked Eva, timidly, seeing his stern look.

"No, except that it was unsuccessful," he replied, determined that she should never know how she had been deceived. He raised his hat and passed on, comparing in his mind the beautiful, guileless face of Eva with the proud look of Belle. His love for the latter was swept to the winds by his knowledge that she had perpetrated this cruel hoax upon her cousin.

"I wonder if I was mistaken," thought Eva, as she walked on. "He looked almost as if he cared."

"She loves me, I feel sure, by her letter," said he to himself, and a glad warmth stole into his heart at the thought.

After this, Mr. Foster's visits plainly were to Eva, and in a few months he asked her to marry him, and this time she did not refuse.

Belle bitterly regretted her folly when she learnt of the engagement, for somehow she felt that her conduct had helped it forward. "I was the April Fool, not Eva," she said; but she bore the disappointment in haughty silence, and Annie and Cora forebore to mention her April joke, and to this day Eva knows nothing about it.

Mary Hatch.

THE NEW - - - - - GOVERNESS.

Telling How Mr. Fred Morrisor Found His Wife.

"Where is Miss Gray?" asked Fred Morrison, as his sister crossed the lawn.

"Miss Gray has her duties to attend to," answered Helena. "She is putting Gerty to bed. Oh, dear, I wish I had never seen her!" Helena added, with an anxious expression.

She was still young, though she had been four years a widow; thirty years of age, in fact, and two years older than Fred, who had arrived from Canada three weeks ago.

He was tall and broad-shouldered, his face being tanned almost as dark as his fair hair and moustache.

"I hope she won't trouble you much longer," he said, as he paced the lawn by Helena's side.

"You are not going to do anything foolish?" she cried, resting a hand on his arm.

"Certainly not."

"You know what I mean, Fred. You are not going to ask Miss Gray to marry you?"

"At the first opportunity," he said, with an air of determination.

"A woman you had not seen until three weeks ago; of whom we know absolutely nothing?"

"You know she lived with Lady Tresserton for two years, anyhow," he retorted.

"Ah," said Helena, "I ought to have gone to see Lady Tresserton. I wish I had not been content with a written reference. Miss Gray certainly led me to believe she knew something about children——"

"Gerty seems immensely fond of her," Fred suggested.

"My friend, Mrs. Vereker, who happens to know a cousin of Lord Tresserton," Helena continued, "declares that Lady Tresserton has no children."

"Well, have you asked Miss Gray to explain?"

"She said she was Lady Tresserton's companion. Lord and Lady Tresserton live very unhappily. Mrs. Vereker told me that. I feel sure there's something in the background——"

"There is Miss Gray!" Fred exclaimed, as he turned at the end of the lawn.

She stepped out into the garden, looking far more like the mistress of the house than Mrs. Marston. Miss Gray was the taller by half a head, her figure was graceful and beautifully modelled, her hair of a dark reddish-brown colour, her face small and rather pale. She had a look of distinction, which caused Helena to hesitate before each order.

"Oh, what a treat to get out of the nursery," she cried

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Helena stared, and then walked away.

"What induced you to enter it?" asked Fred, coming to her side.

"Beggars can't be—— You know the proverb."

"You might easily have found a more congenial occupation," he suggested.

"I desire nothing different," she said. "I am quite contented; I like your sister, and I am growing quite fond of little Gerty."

"And Gerty's uncle?" he asked, bending over her.

"You were not—you were not in the bill," she retorted.

"Still," he said, "facts have to be faced. I want you to be my wife, Winnie."

She stopped abruptly.

"Don't call me that," she said.

"I want you to give me the right to call you Winnie always. I want you to share my life. Tell me you love me," he urged. "Your eyes have betrayed you already."

"There would be something else to tell you first," she murmured.

"Then tell me, and have done with it."

"Not now," she answered.

"Then let me take you on trust," he persisted. "You admit that you love me?"

"I did not intend to admit it," she said, with a vivid smile.

"Now you have said it," he cried. "Nothing shall keep you from me now. Tell me, at least, that nothing need," he pleaded.

"I—I don't know," she answered. "Some men might think it an obstacle. I cannot tell whether you are one of them." And, turning away quickly, she re-entered the house.

The next day she seemed to avoid him, devoting herself more than usual to Gerty. Fred found no opportunity to speak to her alone.

"Mrs. Vereker called this afternoon, Miss Gray," said Mrs. Marston, in the drawing-room after dinner. "Did you know that Lady Tresserton had left her husband? It must have been very soon after you left Armestead Square. Lord Tresserton is employing detectives to find her."

"I don't imagine they are very likely to succeed," answered Miss Gray. And, rising abruptly, she bade Helena and Fred good night.

* * * * *

The following afternoon Gerty was playing with her dolls on the lawn beneath the walnut-tree, and Miss Gray was sewing as she leant back in a garden-chair.

"Am I disturbing you?" asked Fred, coming to her side.

"It is pleasant out here," she said. "Won't you sit down?"

"When will you enter upon this unnecessary explanation?"

"It is by no means unnecessary——"

"I am impatient to tell Helena you have promised to be my wife," said Fred.

"I haven't promised to be your wife," she expostulated.

"You know," he muttered, "you rather test one's patience."

"Perhaps you shall have your reward at last," she answered, "if you really wish for it."

As she spoke, a servant came from a side door.

"Please, Miss, Mrs. Marston wants you in the drawing-room," she said.

Rising, Miss Gray accompanied the girl indoors.

Gerty began to engross Fred's attention, until about ten minutes later Helena entered the garden.

"I can't understand it," she said. "I sent Harriet for Miss Gray. On her way to the house the girl told her a man was waiting to see her. Miss Gray asked what he was like and, instead of going to him in the drawing-room, she ran upstairs, put on her hat, and left the house. I want you to come with me to tell him."

Not a little mystified, Fred accompanied Helena to the drawing-room, where he saw a tall, dissipated-looking man of forty.

"I am sorry to say Miss Gray has gone——" Helena began; but the visitor interrupted her.

"Did she know I was here?"

"The servant," said Fred, "told her a gentleman was waiting, and described you to Miss Gray."

"She is my wife—Lady Tresserton!"

"Good Heavens!" muttered Fred.

"My wife left my house," Lord Tresserton explained indignantly, "a month ago. I employed a detective, and he found the cabman who drove her to the railway station. He succeeded in tracing her here."

"Lady Tresserton has had time to catch the train?" he asked.

"Easily," Helena answered.

"And the next?"

"There is no other for an hour."

Muttering an imprecation, Lord Tresserton left the room.

"I should not like to be his wife," cried Helena. "Poor old Fred!" she murmured. "How blind you were!"

That evening Fred went to the railway station and spoke to the station-master. He learnt that Lady Tresserton, as he now thought of her, had caught the London train, but had first made hurried inquiries concerning the place to take ship for New York. Also, she had asked whether she could book through to Liverpool. Lord Tresserton had been told all this, and there could be little doubt that both had travelled to the Mersey.

* * * * *

Miss Gray's name was not mentioned during the next few days.

As they passed a great change came over Fred. His face looked haggard and worn, his manner was taciturn and irritable.

About a week later Helena went to London for the day, and Fred was smoking when the library door opened.

"Miss Gray to see you, sir; she is in the drawing-room."

A few hurried strides took him across the hall. She was standing in the middle of the room, and Fred stopped as if he had seen a ghost.

"I assumed you were on your way to America," he blurted out.

"It is true I took my passage," she said. "You see I have come back to you instead."

"But your—your husband——"

"I have not got one yet," she said, with a smile; "perhaps I never shall have one."

"Lord Tresserton——"

"My brother-in-law. He married my sister Winifred. I lived with her for two years—she refused to stay with her husband unless I did so. We had very little money; so that we could not leave Armestead Square until I found a home. We sent the servants out one day and called a cab," she explained. "The trunk containing my clothes has Winnie's—Lady Tresserton's—initials on it. My box held her things. I entered the cab; my sister walked away. At the station I sent my box, containing her clothes, to a cottage a mile from here. With the other I travelled to the house. I stuck a label over the initials—you see they had done their work."

"Thrown Tresserton off the scent?" Fred queried.

"I imagined," she continued, "Lord Tresserton would succeed in tracing the cabman, whom I thought would describe the box. In the event of his pursuing me here, I thought I might be able to lead him further astray. I asked absurd questions at the station to lead him to think I intended sailing to New York. I travelled to Liverpool the same night, and took a passage by the *Sioux*, a slow boat on the point of starting. I guessed Lord Tresserton would follow on by the next, and in fact I was on the quay when he went aboard the following day. I have taken my sister away, "and on his return I don't fancy he will discover her. Besides, she will take steps to protect herself legally now," she continued. "I am going back to Winnie. I don't think your sister will want me any more."

"But I want you, Winnie!" cried Fred.

"My name is Maud," she quietly corrected.

Stanley Hammond.

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TRUE FRIEND OR FALSE?

An Entrancing Story, Telling How the Fates Were Kind.

"Of course, as sub-manager, your salary will begin at £300," said the senior partner, "and that is a pleasant item. On the other hand, you might not care to go to Australia?"

"I shall be very pleased to go there," said the younger man, almost bitterly, "and the sooner I go the better I shall like it."

"A week from to-day?"

"To-morrow, if you wish, sir."

The above conversation had taken place two years ago, and now Humphrey Wallis was home again in England, having been transferred back to headquarters at his own request.

The time he had spent in Australia had not had the desired effect, for he was slow to change. He went out loving Enid Glynn with all his heart, although hopelessly, and now—after two years of absence——

He shrugged his shoulders. If only he could forget as other people seemed to do so easily.

As he was walking across London towards Euston Station, he saw in front of him an old Manchester friend, who was also a cousin of Miss Glynn.

Probably the latter consideration was uppermost in Humphrey's mind as he stepped forward and saluted his friend with a hearty slap on the shoulder.

Egerton Lee turned swiftly, and stared, white-faced and trembling, at his former friend.

"Hope I didn't startle you!" said the latter apologetically. But his remark was wasted, for the other man fled as though for his life. Humphrey stared after him in absolute amazement, without attempting to follow him.

Then a whimsical explanation of his old friend's terror occurred to him, which he accepted at once.

"Poor beggar, looked at me as though I had been a ghost come back to life," he thought; "perhaps that's what he thinks, for I haven't written to a soul in this country since I left it."

He arrived in Manchester some four hours later. One of the first people he met on coming out of the station was a former acquaintance, to whom he extended his hand with a certain amount of difference. But this time there was no terror, only a hearty greeting and a crowd of questions.

"And Lee—Egerton Lee?" said Humphrey presently. The other man's face became serious at once.

"Ah, yes," he answered; "you heard about it, then?"

"Heard about what?"

"He died, you know, a few months ago."

Humphrey stared in amazement, unable to speak for the moment.

"A very sad case," continued his acquaintance. "You know that cousin of his who was so delicate?"

"Miss Glynn!"

"No, no. Walter Lee—quite a young fellow; been ill off and on for years. Well, he became worse, and Egerton, who was always rather quixotic, gave up his situation and took him away to Blackpool. His first idea had been to send the lad alone, but he wouldn't go that way, so they went together. Egerton had had a little legacy, thirty shillings a week or so, and he drew slightly on his principal each week, so as to make up enough to keep them comfortably."

"But it was Walter who was ill."

"Exactly; yet it was Egerton who died, and they had been in Blackpool three months. That was what surprised everybody. They've no relations here except Miss Glynn, and even she was not notified of the funeral. Merely a short note when all was over, to tell her of the death, and that she was entitled to this money—about £2,000."

"And where did Walter go?" said Humphrey. "Did you never hear how Egerton died?"

"Not a word. Nobody even knows where Walter is. Perhaps he was jealous because the money went to Miss Glynn instead of to himself. But I must be off now. Good-bye, old man!"

And away he went, leaving Humphrey more puzzled than before.

"I can't leave the matter at this stage," thought the latter. "There's some mystery, and it must be cleared up. I'm quite certain it was Egerton I met in London; and, anyhow, nobody could confuse him with Walter.

"And Enid has received a legacy, and is further out of my reach than ever!"

* * * * *

Meanwhile, Enid Glynn was not obtaining much pleasure from her money, although it had certainly made a considerable difference to her. For one thing, it had removed the necessity to work for her living, and, as she had never been particularly strong, the change was very welcome on this account alone, and should have made her life happy.

But happiness is entirely relative, and is much more concerned with such matters as the heart and the mind than mere possession of money. And when the heart is grieving, all the legacies in the world cannot cure it.

So Enid found, and her grief was for Egerton Lee. Some little comfort she took from the knowledge that he had loved her, even though he had never said so. But she reproached herself for not having encouraged him to speak when he had obviously wished to do so. And now it was too late. He had died without knowing that she loved him, in a strange house, with only one, who was himself an invalid, to attend to him.

How sudden it had been! Everybody knew that Walter Lee was delicate, and that the end of his life was only a matter of a very few years, or possibly months. But that he should take a turn for the better and be able to leave his bed and even resume business whilst Egerton, the very pattern of

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health, should be stricken down with the same dreadful complaint and carried to his grave in a few weeks, this was extraordinary.

She had known nothing of this until about a week after Egerton's death. Then, and then only, she received a short note from Walter, saying that his cousin was dead and that she succeeded to the £2,000 in accordance with the terms of their grandfather's will.

He gave her the address of the lawyers who would arrange the matter, and said that, as for himself, having to some extent recovered his health, he was going to the south of England, where he intended to obtain work and settle down.

Out of love comes jealousy, and there were times when Enid, thinking over the circumstances, felt vague suspicions against Walter Lee. The love that hungered in her heart whispered that there had been foul play; that Walter had had some interest in getting rid of his cousin.

The suspicion was strengthened by the fact that Egerton's watch and rings had disappeared, and that his own savings, apart from the £2,000, had been withdrawn from the bank only a few days before his death. And there were other circumstances. Why should Walter disappear so mysteriously?

She was thinking these things over for the thousandth time when there came a sudden ringing at the front-door bell. The sound jangled hideously upon her over-wrought nerves, making thought impossible, and she threw herself upon the sofa, holding her hands over her ears. The landlady entered the room.

"There's a gentleman downstairs would like to see you, Miss Glynn."

"To see me?"

"Yes; Mr. Wallis."

A faint flush crept over Enid's face. She had heard how hardly Humphrey had taken his rejection, and of his voyage to Australia. The present visit proved, at any rate, that he had not forgotten her. But if he had come—she shook her head at the idea that occurred to her, and made her way to the drawing-room.

The usual greetings were exchanged with a certain amount of awkwardness on both sides, and then Humphrey plunged immediately into his subject.

"If you will allow me to refer to a painful subject," he began.

She bowed resignedly, and made up her mind to give him a very definite *no* this time. It was not that she disliked Humphrey; far from it, but there was only room for one in her heart.

"I want to speak about poor Egerton Lee," he said.

"About Egerton Lee?" This was not at all what she had expected to hear, but it was very welcome, nevertheless.

"Yes; I have just heard of his death; it was very sudden."

"It was worse than sudden," she cried piteously. "It was suspicious!"

It was Humphrey's turn to stare now.

"He was my cousin," she explained hurriedly; "and excepting Walter, the only relative I had in the world. I never liked Walter. Where has he gone to? And where is Egerton's watch, and his rings and his money—his own money? Egerton was strong and well when he called here before he went to Blackpool, and yet we hear a few weeks later that he is dead. And the other one disappears and daren't show himself!"

"I suppose it was all straightforward," he answered slowly. "And, besides, I understood you received your grandfather's legacy, so that goes to disprove any suspicions of foul play. But Egerton and I were old friends, and if you don't mind giving me the address at Blackpool, Enid, I thought of going there for a day or two to get to know how the poor fellow died."

"I don't know the address. Walter simply headed his letter 'Blackpool,' and that was all. If I'd known, I might have gone myself."

"It doesn't matter much. They are bound to have registered the death, and I can get to know all I want from that."

"And you will let me know?"

"Yes, I will call here and tell you."

"If you could satisfy me that he was not harmed, and that everything was right and straightforward, I could become more reconciled. But these doubts and suspicions are wearing my life away."

"And if, when I return, I can assure you of that?"

"If you could——"

"I came here to-day with another purpose in addition to wanting to know something about Egerton. It's two years since we parted, Enid, and I've been hoping sometimes against hope that you might have changed your mind about what I asked you. If you only knew how much it means to me! And you admitted then that you liked me as well as any of the others."

"I did, and I like you still," she said.

"Then say 'Yes' to me, Enid, and come away from these dreary lodgings to a home of our own. Just think how happy we should be together!"

She sprang to her feet with a new light flashing from her eyes, walked quickly across the room, and then turned suddenly to him as though she had at last made up her mind.

"I like you very well, indeed, Humphrey, but all my heart and soul seem bound up now in the fate of my poor cousin."

"In his fate? But you don't think he is alive?" he cried.

"I know he's dead—I've no doubt about that! The lawyers must have seen the death certificate before they transferred that money to me. But I want to know how he died, and if there was any foul play."

"And if I find out all about that, if I find the house at which he dies, and get to know the whole of the circumstances so as to satisfy you one way or the other?"

"Ah, if you could only set my mind at rest about that!"

"Would you say 'Yes' to my question, Enid?"

"I would say—whatever you wished!"

But as he advanced towards her she broke away and fled from the room. And as he walked out of the house, Humphrey resolved upon a dishonourable action for the first time in his life. He would go to Blackpool and make inquiry there, but to what extent he would communicate the result to Enid, that was another matter.

* * * * *

His suspicions as to the fate of Egerton Lee were confirmed with startling promptness the next day. He travelled to Blackpool by an early morning train and found his way at once to the Registry Office, where he obtained a copy of the certificate of Egerton's death.

His next call was upon the doctor who had signed the certificate, from whom he begged as an old friend of the dead man, some particulars as to the illness of the latter. The doctor was interested as soon as he mentioned the name.

"I will tell you what I can with pleasure," he said cordially, "and the case you mention has a particular interest for me, as I nearly made a most extraordinary mistake in writing out the certificate. Just imagine, my dear sir; here were two cousins. Walter Lee, poor

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fellow, was doomed long before he came to Blackpool. I knew he wouldn't live."

"Walter Lee! You knew he couldn't live!" cried Humphrey.

"Yes—no, my dear sir, a thousand pardons; I should have said Egerton, not Walter. Walter was the healthy one — a particularly healthy young fellow, in fact. Well, I attended Mr. Egerton for a good many weeks, and all that time I addressed him and thought of him as Mr. Walter. And naturally when the poor fellow died, I filled in the certificate with the name of Walter. The other young man turned quite pale when he read it, and begged of me to alter it immediately; said it might be unlucky, and I don't know what else! He explained that there had been a misunderstanding as to their names."

"And you altered it?"

"My dear sir, I would rather have written a thousand certificates than have hurt his feelings in the way I did. It was only superstition, but superstition is very human. Oh, yes, I altered it as quickly as I possibly could."

Humphrey thanked him and then hastened away. He had made up his mind already to make his way straight to London and endeavour to trace Egerton there. The apparent difficulties of his task did not daunt him, for he knew there were very few firms in the whole of England engaged in the business to which Egerton had been trained.

Humphrey left Blackpool that evening, and walked out of Euston Station early next morning. A hurried breakfast, five minutes with the directory, and he set out with three addresses, at one of which he was almost certain to find the man he sought.

He had decided to see Egerton in order to learn his reason for disappearing. Having learnt that, he could shape his course accordingly, for he should know what tale to tell to Enid and how far it would be safe to deceive her. Upon one thing he was quite determined, and that was to marry Enid Glynn, whether by truth or falsehood. His love had become a passion, and was already blunting his sense of honour.

When he called upon the second of the three firms he was told that Walter, not Egerton Lee, had been engaged with them, but had resigned rather suddenly a few days previously. However, they gave his private address to Humphrey, and thither he made his way.

The landlady had a Mr. Walter Lee staying at her house. He was leaving London, and was upstairs at that moment packing his trunk. If the gentleman would give her his name.

But Humphrey slipped a half crown into her shrivelled old palm, and begged her to tell him where the room was, which she did at once.

He opened the door with considerable nervousness. A man who was stooping over a trunk stood up suddenly, and stared at Humphrey as though he saw a ghost.

"You! You've followed me!"

"Yes, I have," said Humphrey doggedly. "You didn't suppose I'd let an old friend go under in this fashion, especially not if I could help him?"

"And who knows you are here?"

"Nobody. Not a soul, Egerton."

The other man breathed a sigh of relief. "What do you want to know?" he said next moment.

"I want to know why you died," answered Humphrey smiling nervously. "Come along, old chap, you surely can trust me not to give the show away, whatever your game may be."

"Yes, I trust you," said Egerton slowly. "And besides, the tale concerns you to some extent. I had the good fortune, Humphrey, to have a little money left to me, and the evil fortune to fall in love with a girl who didn't care twopence about me. In fact, I'm almost certain you are the favourite suitor now, whatever you may have been before, and therefore I don't hesitate to mention her name to you."

"Miss Glynn?"

"Yes, Enid Glynn. Well, I had often felt what a shame it was that I should have the use of that £2,000 whilst she—poor, delicate little woman—had to work so hard for her living. Whilst I was nursing my cousin Walter, I suddenly saw a way out of the difficulty. It was risky, especially with the Doctor, but everything turned out well. And now I've turned to work again, and feel better for it, and she has the money, and will put it to good use, whether she marries or not.'

"So you gave up all your hopes——"

"I had none to give up. She never cared for me."

"But you cared?"

"Yes, I cared for her, and so I did what I could to make her happy."

Humphrey stood silent. He knew now why Enid had refused him, and he knew why the legacy had brought little or no happiness to her life. With him lay the power, by half a dozen words, to bring these two together and lead them to their life's happiness. But those half dozen words he would never speak. Friend, honour, everything might go, but he could not speak the words that would separate him from Enid Glynn.

He left Egerton soon after. The faithful self-sacrifice of the latter made Humphrey despise himself. He shook hands with the friend whom he meant to betray, and ran from the room as though he were a thief. Even at the door he turned, half resolved to explain everything. But Egerton came forward, and pushed him bodily from the room.

"You go to your happiness, to Enid," he said wistfully; "for myself, I'm a superfluity, so the best thing I can do is to efface myself again."

Humphrey hurried down the stairs without another word. Out of the house, away, anywhere. And all the time he fought blindly, savagely, against every instinct and prompting of his better self.

That night he spent in a hotel in Tottenham Court Road, but he did not sleep. All through the weary hours he sat, thinking silently in the darkness, combating every argument that his sense of honour, dying hard, suggested. And in the morning, when he came downstairs, his heart was as hard as a rock towards Egerton, even though his mad passion for Enid blazed more fiercely than ever.

An hour later he took his seat in the Manchester express, due to leave Euston at ten o'clock. By this time the strain of the previous night was beginning to tell upon him, and he fell into an uneasy sleep. Other people got into the carriage, one in particular, who was closely muffled up, and who smiled, though rather sadly, as he took his seat beside Humphrey.

Meanwhile the latter was passing through a nightmare of remorse. He turned uneasily, groaned, clenched his fists and loosened them as suddenly, and then at last a fierce ejaculation broke from his lips, and he opened his eyes and stared in wild terror at the calm, serious face of Egerton Lee.

A sudden impulse came over Humphrey to tell the whole tale then and there. But simultaneously he thought of the look that Enid had given to him two days before—a look that was all kindness and might so easily be changed into love.

"Are you coming to Manchester after all?" he said coldly, "coming to claim your legacy back again?"

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"No, not quite that," said Egerton, "but I'm going to ask a favour from you."

"What is it?"

"I intend to leave England altogether and strike out afresh in the Colonies, but before going I thought if I could see Enid once, just for a moment——"

"It's quite impossible," said Humphrey harshly. "She thinks you are dead."

"No, you don't understand my plan. I didn't mean to speak to her or even to let her see me or know of my presence."

"What then?"

"I thought of driving straight to a hotel, and staying there until after it was dark. Then, with my face well covered, I might come to the street where she lives; and I thought perhaps you, who have so much influence with her, would call and persuade her to come out for a walk."

"And if I do?" said Humphrey doggedly.

"I shall see her as she passes."

"You swear not to make yourself known to her in any way."

"I swear."

"Then I agree. I'll call at the house where she is staying about seven o'clock this evening."

"And you think she will come out?"

"Yes, I think so. I'll send a wire to say I've discovered something in regard to a matter she asked me to inquire about, and that I'll call to take her out about seven."

Egerton seized his friend's hand and shook it eagerly. "You're a real friend," he said, "in all the lonely days to come I shall think of you the next after Enid."

"Don't; you hurt my hand," said Humphrey roughly, and drew it away.

* * * * * * *

The landlady showed Humphrey straight into the drawing-room where Enid was waiting for him. She advanced eagerly, holding out her hand in welcome.

"How cold you are!" she cried, "and your face is pale! What is the matter?"

"It's nothing. I've been worried a great deal."

"I'm sorry," she said gravely. "I suppose it is for somebody else, as usual, Humphrey. I remember in the old days how generous you were, and how you looked after all your friends."

"I always tried to be faithful to my friends," he said, speaking slowly and almost hoarsely. "Do you mind coming out for a stroll while I tell you what I have discovered?"

"About Egerton?" she cried, "but tell me one thing before we go any further," and she came closer and looked up at him appealingly. "There has been no foul play. You have not found out anything of that sort?"

"No, nothing of that sort," he said, and then, with sudden fierceness, "And when I have told you, you promised——"

"I will marry you," she said simply. "I promised, and I will keep my word. We both loved Egerton, did we not, Humphrey?"

"Why do you keep mentioning his name?" he cried. "Let the dead be quiet in their graves; it is ungenerous to keep reminding me."

She looked at him in astonishment, but seeing how ill he looked—his face was ghastly pale—she forebore to speak, but ran out of the room and put on her hat and jacket. When she opened the door again Humphrey was standing where she had left him, staring stonily before him. He followed her from the room without a word and out of the house. And as they walked beneath the light of the lamp a man, who was standing at the opposite side of the street, leant forward and stared at the slender figure of the girl as a lost soul might stare at the barred gates of Heaven.

Meanwhile Enid and Humphrey walked along in utter silence for several minutes, until at last she spoke.

"You are not well," she said softly.

"No, I am not. And then with a sudden burst of passion that swept all the barriers of his restraint, "I don't deserve to be well," he said bitterly. "I am a thief and a liar and a false friend; but, before Heaven, it shall finish now. But before I tell you, Enid, promise to look kindly upon me. If I had betrayed my friend and stolen his happiness it would have been for love of you. Because I could not bear to give you up, even though I knew you loved him and not me."

Some faint glimmering of the truth must have reached her, for she stood still in the dark and deserted street, and seized his arm, trembling piteously, and begged to know what he had to tell.

"You loved Egerton?" he said.

"I did; I do now," she answered, with a sudden light springing in her eyes and making her face beautiful in the moonlight. "I have never deceived you about that, Humphrey."

"And if he were still alive?"

"If he were? Is he alive?" she whispered. "Is that what you have discovered?"

He nodded his head silently. "He is in the street we have just left," he said a moment later.

"And you? You have sacrificed yourself for your friend and for me and you ask for forgiveness!" she cried, her eyes shining.

"I ask for forgiveness," he repeated.

"Then I grant it to you," she said earnestly, and made him stoop and kissed him. "I don't know how it has all come about, but I know that we owe our life's happiness to you, and to you alone."

And thus they parted, and went their different ways in life Humphrey walked slowly on through the darkness, and Enid turned to meet Egerton, who was trying to avoid her. But when she called he came slowly and hesitatingly towards her, not knowing what happiness the Fates had reserved for him.

Wal Frank.

"Is that young man gone, Matilda?" cried her father from the top of the stairs. "Oh, awfully!" returned Matilda.

He: "What's a fellow to do when a girl breaks his heart?" She: "Get a new one." He: "A new what?" She: "A new girl."

"Jack told me last night that he had given me his heart." "Well, it's damaged goods. He told me last week that I had broken it."

He: "I understand that you are to be congratulated?" She: "No; the engagement is broken off." He: "That is what I heard."

"Confound the printers!" "What's the matter?" "Why, I wrote a sonnet to my fiancée's 'Wee Foot,' and they've printed it 'Web Foot.'"

"Did your wife listen to your excuses for coming home so late last night?" "Oh, yes; she listened to me, and then——" "Then what?" "I listened to her—for four hours."

"The summer will soon be here again, Mr. Hardfact—summer, with its murmuring streams, blossoming flowers, and sweet birds on the wing!" "One moment, Miss Gushly! There is no bird on the wing. The wing is on the bird!"

Maud: "What do you do when a man persists in asking for a dance and you don't care to dance with him?" Marie: "Tell him my card is full." Maud: "But supposing it isn't, and he still persists?" Marie: "Then I insist that it is, and let him see that it isn't."

"I think I'm making some headway," said the persistent lover, who is not in favour with her father. "But I thought the old gentleman kicked you out whenever he found you at the house?" "He does; but I have noticed that he is not kicking nearly so hard of late. I feel sure that he is gradually relenting."

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A Superstitious Wife.

Relating How She Was Cured.

Before Maud and I were married, her penchant for horse-shoes and four-leaved clovers did not impress me as an indication of anything more serious than the harmless romanticism of innocent maidenhood. I did not then realise what it is to have superstition in the family. Even later, when she implored me to wear my left sock wrong side out for luck, I regarded it only as the sign of affectionate solicitude for my welfare, which would evaporate after the honeymoon. I noticed that she was very particular about these things.

She thought that it was flying in the face of Providence to leave a room by a different door from that by which she had entered. This was a very uncomfortable superstition in our flat, because the rooms were strung along in a line, so that it was practically impossible to pass from our drawing-room to the dining-room without going through a couple of bedrooms. Maud was in a fearful dilemma about this at first. I suggested that she should let herself out of the front window by a rope, walk round the house, and climb into the back window on the fire-escape. She seemed to be pained by the levity of this advice, and I left her in tears. When I returned she was radiant with hope.

"If you go out of the second door backwards it reverses the charm and gives you good luck," she said, and she stuck to it even after she had fallen over a door-mat and driven a hairpin into the back of her head in her efforts to propitiate the Fates. I couldn't see much luck in that, but she called my attention to the fact that if she had gone out in the usual way she might have driven the hairpin into her nose, which would have been much worse.

At first she was the only victim of her vagaries, but later they began to get in their work on me. She sat up late one night to put a genuine, hand-painted, four-leaved clover about two feet in diameter on the back of my coat, and she was so nervous about it that she painted it on the outside instead of on the lining. It took a quart of benzine to bring back peace to our household.

One day I came home and found her seated behind her sewing-table, which was covered with cards. As soon as she saw me she sprang to her feet with her countenance full of hysteria. She pointed her finger at me with a gesture of desair.

"Howard, you have been followed by a dark woman. Who is she? Don't attempt to deceive me!"

"My dear, I can conceal nothing from you," I replied. "She is the woman who attends to our laundry. She met me at the door with a demand for six pounds, and I told her to call again in the summer."

I never saw anybody so relieved as Maud was.

"I knew the cards couldn't be wrong," she said. "I've just got a book that tells all about them. Now I'm going to tell your fortune."

She made me cut the pack and then she began to deal out the cards.

"A black knave; that's you," she said.

"Thanks, awfully," said I.

"That only means a young man who is of dark complexion," she explained. "There's a light queen following him. That's I, of course. Isn't it nice? The ace of spades is the next one! Oh, Howard, that means that I'm going to die," and she began to cry.

"Turn over the next one and let's see about the inquest," I said, trying to pass the thing off with a joke.

"The ten of hearts," she sobbed. "That means a laugh and a merry time. Oh, Howard, to think that you should go off and enjoy yourself after I'm dead! You horrid, horrid thing!"

"But, my dear, I should cry my eyes out. There must be a misdeal here somewhere; it can't be otherwise."

"No," she moaned, "and the very next card is the nine of clubs, which means that whatever you're told is sure to come true. I am as good as dead, and you will be happy."

"Light of my existence——"

"Don't speak to me. Would you deceive a woman who has only a few days to live?"

In desperation I turned the next card. It was the two of diamonds. Maud was looking over the top of her handkerchief. I saw her face brighten.

"That's the best money card in the pack," she said. "We're going to be rich before I die."

"Then cheer up, my dear. You must make up your mind to stay by me until I'm rich."

After this there were no more tears for a while. I did not transgress the rules of Fate again that evening except by picking up a pin the wrong end first. Maud was much frightened at the prospect of bad luck, but I explained that I had picked up the pin off the bedroom carpet with the bottom of my bare foot, and that under the circumstances it is nearly impossible to get at anything but the business end of a pin.

Day by day Maud grew worse, until finally I decided to have some doctors come to see whether some of her numerous superstitions had not cast a shadow over her once brilliant intellect. Of course, I didn't let her know about it. I said that some friends would call, and she must entertain them. The experts arrived about three o'clock one afternoon. I did not get there till 4.30. When I came in a curious scene met my gaze. Maud was standing behind her table telling fortunes, and the old medical fossils were so interested that they had forgotten what they came for, and did not even notice my entrance. I caught a confused sound of voices. "Did you say I was going to be pursued by a blonde?" "Gracious me! Brunette? Thank Heaven! That bars my wife out."

When they saw me there was confusion, and the doctors hurriedly took their leave. Maud burst out laughing.

"The old sillies!" she said. "I made them believe that all the girls in town were running after them. They swallowed it all. I never realised before how absurd cards were."

"And you'll give up telling fortunes?" I gasped.

"Yes; I don't believe in cards any more. These men have cured me."

"Good!" I murmured under my breath, "they've broken their professional records."

"And you won't be superstitious any more?" I said aloud.

"Never again," she promised. "I'll begin to-day. Goodness, no; I can't begin to-day. It's Friday. And to-morrow is the 13th of the month. Oh, dear, I'll have to wait. But the first good lucky day, when the sun doesn't rise in a cloud, and I get out of bed with my right foot first, I will renounce superstition for ever—if I haven't a bad-luck dream during the night."

Charles Watson.

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Outwitted.

The Tale of a Lawyer's Narrow Escape.

"Are you a lawyer, sir?"

I started violently at the words, for I had been sitting for some time at my desk, plunged in a fit of the deepest thought, and had not heard anyone enter the office.

It was a warm summer's evening, and I had left the windows and doors open, for the sake of the refreshing draught. Rising from my seat, and turning up the gas-jet on the table, I turned and surveyed my interlocutor, who proved to be none other than a well-dressed, rather good-looking man of forty or thereabouts, of medium height, and possessed of a pair of small, piercing eyes, which returned my gaze unflinchingly.

"I am Mr. Avery, the junior partner of the firm, as you might have seen, had you taken the trouble to read the sign upon the door," I replied shortly; for I was in no wise pleased with his interruption upon my reveries.

"True," he answered courteously; "but the door was open, and the hall unlighted. I require your services for a short time," he resumed, seating himself, "provided you are disengaged for to-night."

"*Professionally* I am at your disposal for the evening," I answered.

"Ah, your remark reminds me of what I ought to do," he said laughingly, taking out his pocket-book and laying four five-pound notes on the table. But I waved my hand impatiently, informing him that no payment was necessary until after consultation, and requested him to proceed to business.

"The business to which I referred," he continued, replacing the money, and fixing his keen, black eyes upon my face, "will require your services until late in the night, if not until to-morrow morning. My niece, who resides some miles away, is dangerously ill, and, her recovery being extremely doubtful, she desires to make her will. For this purpose, I have applied to you, promising you, should you accede to my request, any fee you may demand."

I communed with myself for a few moments, eyed the man suspiciously, and then asked the distance to the young lady's residence, and the mode of conveyance thither.

"About ten miles," he responded, handing me his card, on which I read, "Martin Jackson, Castletown, Surrey." "As a train does not leave for some hours yet, I have provided a carriage and driver, which is awaiting us in the street. May I consider your services as engaged?"

I responded that he might, and a few moments sufficed to find us ensconced in a closed carriage.

The more populous portion of the town was soon passed, my companion, meantime, enlightening me with an account of his niece's illness, and previous history. I was a young man, and my nervousness and suspicions of the man beside me may be excused, when his evident anxiety in employing myself, an inexperienced lawyer, are considered. His story, too, did not sound consistent in all respects, for he spoke of his niece, Miss Blanche Pickering, as being, at times, subject to short fits of insanity. I, therefore, was prepared to find something mysterious on my arrival at our destination—which occurred shortly—in a thick grove of oak trees.

When the carriage stopped, it was in front of a large, dark-looking stone building, standing a short distance back from the road, and surrounded by tall trees. A feeble light flickered in a single window at the side of the house, and a few dim rays shone through the lower-storey window.

One thing struck me as rather curious as I walked up the gravel walk to the mansion, and tended to arouse my suspicions still more. The man Jackson dismissed the carriage, after paying the driver, with a few low, whispered words, the import of which I was unable to ascertain, and the carriage turned round sharply. I said nothing, however, but, shifting my revolver into a more convenient position in my inner pocket, entered the house with my companion, who unlocked the door with a latch-key, and was ushered into the drawing-room, which was poorly lighted by a hanging-lamp.

Having seen me seated at a table, on which were spread refreshments, Jackson left me, for a short time, and, returning shortly with a large, well-built man, whom he introduced as Mr. Cooper, took a seat beside me, his companion following his example, and, pouring out some wine, requested me to join them, which I courteously refused, on the plea of being a teetotaler. After a few moments of conversation I was again left alone, and, lighting a cigar, waited patiently my summons to actual business.

The door was opened a short time after, and by request of Cooper, I followed him up the staircase to the gloomy hall above, then into a room, where was seated my first applicant by the side of a bed, apparently in conversation with someone reclining there.

The room was a luxurious one, and appeared more so for the great contrast it presented to what other portions of the house I had seen. The rich carving, the heavy tapestry, and general appearance of the surroundings, bespoke the wealth of the possessor, whoever that person might be. Seating myself at a small table drawn up near the bed, with Jackson seated in his former position, and Cooper withdrawn to the other end of the apartment, reclining on a lounge and apparently indifferent to all that was to transpire, I awaited further developments, taking one look at the face of the occupant of the bed.

It was no wonder that I gazed long and earnestly at the countenance of the woman who reclined there. A more perfect face I had never seen—pale and with an expression of care and pain, it might have been, yet there was no trace of illness or disease, and as my eye wandered from those beautiful features, the sad yet sweetly smiling eyes, down to the plump white hand which rested in the large brown one of Jackson's, I felt that there was some mystery in the case, and that he had been untruthful in his revelations. Suddenly the man rose, dropping the lady's hand, drew up a chair opposite to my own, and with an impatient, uneasy exclamation, brought my investigation to an end.

"You will draw out the ordinary formula of a testament," he said, giving the young girl a close, scrutinising look, in which I could detect a warning expression, "writing as I dictate (Miss Pickering having acquainted me with her

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destined disposal of her property), and allowing her to acquiesce when it is finished. I suppose her affirmation will be all that is necessary ? "

I was somewhat surprised at the strangeness of the request, but replied :

" Certainly, if I am confident that she is *compos mentis*, and she is too ill to dictate herself."

Here a slight exclamation broke from the lips of the occupant of the bed, as if about to frame a word or sentence, but she was checked by Jackson, who, with a threatening scowl, evidently not meant for my observation, said :

" Do not exert yourself, my dear niece ; I will do all that is necessary," and then, as I drew the writing material before me, he quickly leant over towards her, and hissed in her ear : " Remember—be careful ! " with such emphasis as to cause her to sink, pale and trembling, back among the pillows of the bed.

A half-hour elapsed, and the will had been completed. All Blanche Pickering's property, personal and real, was to be divided between the man Jackson and his son Henry, with the exception of a few small legacies. Then I read it, and after propounding the few necessary interrogatories to the legator, which were answered in a low, trembling affirmative, I requested her to sign it.

Drawing my chair up to her side, with the paper and pen in my hand, I waited for her to obey my request—intimating to Jackson that it would be as well to have Cooper as a witness.

The latter individual had evidently fallen asleep, for a call to him not bringing him to the bedside, Jackson rose and walked to where his companion lay.

At this moment, and with the rapidity of light, the girl's hand caught my own, and leaning my head downwards, so that I could listen to what she might desire to say, I heard her whisper, in passionate, beseeching words :

" I am forced to this ! They intend to kill me ! For Heaven's sake, help me ! "

Then she sank back, and before Jackson had been able to observe us, we had both resumed our former relative positions.

At last the will had been signed, witnessed, and sealed, and, hat in hand, I stood at the table, awaiting my client's further pleasure, as unconsciously as if I had not the idea in my mind of returning before morning, and that, too, with the police.

Mr. Jackson handed me some bank-notes, shook hands with me warmly, and then requested Cooper to show me to the door. As I left the room, I cast an encouraging glance at Miss Pickering, which did not escape the notice of the lynx-eyed guardian, for he looked me sharply in the face as if to detect some sign of recognition there.

Then I followed my servitor down the stairs, listened to his untruthful regrets that the carriage must have returned to the house, as agreed upon, and then gone to the town, declined his offer to remain for the night, and having been directed on my road, stood once more in the open air.

My first thought was to make all haste to the town, and, on the slight evidence of foul play I had, to obtain justice for the young girl.

The idea was immediately discarded, for, as I was about to start out, a wild scream of terror assailed my ears.

In a moment I was again up the steps, and turning the knob of the door in an ineffectual attempt to gain admittance.

I was about to attempt to force an entrance through the window, when the door was flung suddenly open, and the man Cooper stood before me.

He saw me at once, and, with an oath, struck at me with his clenched fist. Evading the blow, I whipped out my revolver, and striking him with the butt end, knocked him senseless to the ground.

I was again about to turn and enter, when the form of Jackson dashed down the staircase, through the open door, and I felt myself in his grasp.

I saw at once that he was unarmed, and, raising my pistol, fired ; but the shot was turned aside, and the weapon knocked from my hand to the ground.

Then ensued a fearful struggle between us, in which we both were precipitated down the steps upon the gravel walk below—I uppermost.

It was, perhaps, for two minutes that I held him by the throat, dealing him blows with my disengaged hand—he having the other in his strong grasp—when, with a dexterous twist of his powerful arm, he turned me aside, and I lay prostrate upon the ground, with the vice-like grip of his strong fingers grasping me by the throat, until my eyes were starting from their sockets and every muscle became inactive.

Seizing a large stone, which lay near him, he raised it in his left hand, and was about to strike me on the head, when a sharp, loud report rang on the air. The form of the ruffian fell back—his fingers relaxed their grasp.

A form in white passed before my uncertain vision ; and then, for the space of five minutes, I was utterly unconscious.

When, at length, my mind awoke from its stupor, a form—that of Miss Pickering—was bending over me, chafing my temples, and attempting to perform what Nature had done—restore me to sensibility.

From her I learnt that she had risen from her bed, at the exit of the two ruffians from her room, and, observing my dangerous situation, had fired at Jackson, just as he was about to strike me with the stone, with my revolver, which she had picked up.

I also learnt that her scream was caused by the resolution of the murderous twain to start after and murder me—fearing that she had communicated something to me which might upset their well-laid plans.

Having securely bound the still unconscious Cooper, and treating Jackson in the same way, we waited for the dawn. Miss Pickering, meanwhile, informed me of her imprisonment, by Jackson, for over a year, and his resolve to force her to make her will, and then make away with her. Her parents having died, and left her sole heiress to great wealth, her appointed guardian, Jackson, a half-brother of her mother's, was playing for a no diminutive stake.

The next morning a farmer's cart conveyed Cooper and Jackson to the town, where they were handed to the police.

Not long afterwards Miss Blanche Pickering became Mrs. Avery.

The will and revolver are still in our possession—the sole mementoes of that exciting night, when I almost lost my life, and gained a bride.

D. Harrison.

A Wonderful Journey.

Count Vay de Vaya may justly claim to be the most widely-travelled man in the world. He has visited, literally, every country on earth, and speaks no fewer than seven languages. He recently accomplished the remarkable feat of penetrating, on a mission connected with charitable and religious institutions, through the wilds of Siberia, from the Near East of Russia to the mysterious and romantic Far East, to which the eyes of the whole world are now turned. At Peterhof, near St. Petersburg, Count Vay de Vaya was accorded an audience by the Tsar, and during his subsequent journeyings he received a similar honour at the hands of the Emperors of China, Korea, and Japan. To have been received by these great monarchs, certainly four of the most unapproachable of the world's sovereigns, is a wonderful record: and the Count's diary of what he saw and heard in their little-known palaces, of what they told him, and of what they asked him, is of deep and unique interest at this moment. Count Vay de Vaya's diary is published just as he wrote it at the time in *Pearson's Magazine*, his audiences with the Tsar and the Emperor and Dowager Empress of China appearing in the April number, on sale April 1. The audiences with the Emperors of Korea and Japan will appear in the May number.

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An Unkind Suggestion.

Cholly: "I was thrown out of a carriage the other day, and would have been killed if I hadn't alighted on something soft." She: "Really? Did you fall head first?"

A Different View.

Her Mother: "I think that Mabel has a slight leaning towards this young Mr. Smith." Her Father: "Slight? Great Scott! You ought to have seen them last night!"

No Encouragement Required.

Her Father: "What! You say you're engaged to Fred? I thought I told you not to give him any encouragement?" His Daughter: "I don't. He doesn't need any."

Cause and Effect.

Alice: "What a gallant person Mr. Dunkley is. He never addresses me without beginning 'Fair Miss.'" Dorothy: "Oh, that's force of habit. He used to be a 'bus conductor."

He Had Just Been Accepted.

Algy: "So you've been taking Miss Haughtie out boating on the river. Rather stylish girl, but too reserved for me." Reggie: "Yes, I expect she is; I've just reserved her for life."

Thankful for Small Mercies.

Ethel: "And so you told him what you thought of him, did you? And what did he say?" Kittie: "The horrid thing! He said he was pleased to know that I thought of him at all."

The Only Choice She Had.

Mother: "Why did you accept Charlie from among all the young men who have paid you attention?" Daughter: "Because he was the only one that had the good taste to propose."

Her Version.

He (bitterly): "You have no heart." She: "What nonsense!" He: "It's the truth. You flirt outrageously with every man you meet." She: "Then I must have a large heart to take in so many."

The Retort Courteous.

His Wife: "I wish I had lots of money." He: "If one could get what one wished for, I think that I should wish for common-sense, not money." Wife: "Naturally, everybody wishes for what they haven't got."

A Bitter Emphasis.

Vexed Wife: "There's no calamity that can befall a woman that I have not suffered!" Amiable Husband: "Wrong, my dear; now, you have never been a widow." Vexed Wife: "I said calamity, sir!"

Absent-Minded.

Elsie: "Yes, dear, my husband is a doctor, and a lovely fellow, but awfully absent-minded." Ada: "Indeed?" Elsie: "Only fancy! During the marriage ceremony, when he gave me the ring, he felt my pulse and told me to put out my tongue."

Extremely Wonderful.

Editor (gazing on his *fiancée's* picture): "That girl is a poem." Poet (curiously): "And still you do not reject her?"

A Surprising Fact.

"Did you call on Miss Jonas?" "Yes. She was awfully disagreeable, too; didn't cheer up, really, until I started to leave."

Should Try Again.

He (desperately): "Then I am to give up all hope, am I?" She (consolingly): "Not of necessity. There are lots of girls about still, you know."

She Was Bored.

She: "Don't you play, Mr. Staylate?" He: "No; but I am thinking of taking lessons. I have a good ear for time, don't you know." She: "Indeed! Was it eleven or twelve o'clock that just now struck?"

The Last Straw.

He (bitterly): "If I were rich you'd marry me readily enough!" She: "Don't, Gussie, don't! Such devotion breaks my heart!" He: "What do you mean?" She: "Often have you praised my beauty, but never before my common-sense!"

A Shrewd Wife.

Mrs. Greene: "I hope you trust your husband implicitly?" Mrs. Brown: "Oh, yes, indeed! But I wouldn't have him know it for the world. If he were aware how absolutely I trust him he might be tempted to take advantage of it, you know."

Spoken in Haste.

Daughter: "Should I give Mr. Cash an immediate answer to his proposal, mamma? He has only known me four months, you know!" Mother (anxiously): "Goodness gracious, yes, child! When he's known you longer he might want to back out of it!"

Breaking it Gently.

Fred: "I've news for you, cousin Mabel! Daisy Green is engaged to be married!" Mabel: "Heavens, Fred! That red-nosed little spitfire! Whoever could want to marry her? Surely the poor fellow isn't here to-night?" Fred: "Yes, he's here, dear—*I'm he!*"

Matrimonial Bliss.

"Marriage," acridly said the Grizzled Bachelor, with a grin as pessimistic and mirthless as that of a laughing hyena, "is always a disappointment—to the fellows who don't get the girl, and to the girls who don't get the fellow; also to the girl who does get him, and to the fellow who gets her."

That Awful Child Again.

Willie: "Where did the hen bite you, Mr. Jones? I don't see any of the marks." Mr. Jones: "Why, Willie, I haven't been bitten by any hen." Willie: "Mamma, didn't you tell papa Mr. Jones was dreadfully henpecked? Why, mamma, how funny you look! Your face is all red."

Sour Grapes.

Robson: "Where are you going to?" Remsen: "Up to ask my pretty cousin to marry me." Robson: "Well, good luck to you." Remsen: "Thanks, old chap." Robson (an hour later): "Well, did your pretty cousin say yes?" Remsen: "No; the plain-looking hussy refused me."

Her Objection.

Miss Askew: "So your marriage is put off?" Miss Crummy: "Yes, papa is not at all satisfied with his position; mamma doesn't like his family connections, auntie thinks he is too careless in his dress, and I think——" Miss Askew: "Yes, what do you think?" Miss Crummy: "I think I ought to wait till he asks me."

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Concludes in This Number.

DUPES OF DESTINY.

By BLANCHE EARDLEY.

FIFTY-THIRD CHAPTER.
The Lifting of the Shadows.

"WHERE is he?"

"They carried 'im into the lodge keeper's at the Court, sir. They got a doctor at once, but 'e's still unconscious, they say."

The ex-millionaire wiped his brow with a trembling hand. Then he was again too late! He had arrived with the two detectives and the weak, delicate wife of Edward Day, and they had stopped in the village to make some inquiries, while he had gone as quickly as he could to find news of Philip. It was too far to go to Danger Point and look for him. Had he fallen into the trap laid for him, what was to have happened would have taken place the day before. Oh! fool that he had been not to have gone immediately on receipt of the telegram that poor girl had contrived to send by someone. Now he had arrived to learn that the night before a man dying of wounds was brought down from Danger Point, and when he had asked the name, he had been told that it was the "young gentleman who was once often seen about at the Court," and his heart told him that it was Philip—Philip, the son of his youth, who was bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, who lay dying.

At the door of the lodge he hesitated. "I—I—want—to see him!" he muttered to the kindly-faced woman who met him.

He walked into the tiny room and took off his hat. The room was empty, but in the inner one he heard voices.

A shadow stood on the threshold. He looked at it with dim eyes. It came towards him; then, as the full light fell upon it, he staggered and would have fallen had not the shadow flung out a strong hand and supported him.

"Why, Mr. Johnson! What wonderful stroke of Fate brings you here! There's nothing wrong, I hope, with Marcella?" and Philip Nullius gazed anxiously into the white drawn face of the man who seemed to have suddenly aged.

"No—no!" and Caleb J. Johnson drew a long, quivering breath. "All is well. She is safe with—with Lady Violet. But you, Philip," he went on, using the young man's name unconsciously, "you are safe and unhurt! How is it? They told me you were dying, and I hurried here."

"It was good of you, sir," Philip answered gravely. "I am not in the least hurt—though I was in danger once. It is not I who am dying, but—Edward Day!"

"Ah! tell me?" the ex-financier cried harshly. "Did he make an attempt upon your life, then? And did you instead nearly kill him, Philip?" and he laughed cruelly.

"He did make an effort to fight me, sir," Philip said gravely, "but he fell and struck his head. I left him to go and find someone to help me, and when I returned I found him stabbed, with a dagger left in his side."

"Dying! and soon he will be dead! So have his sins found him out—the young liar, thief, would-be-murderer and forger that he was!" Mr. Johnson's voice shook with the hate that seized him.

"Hush!" Philip said sharply. "Don't revile the dying, sir; besides—there is another reason"—his voice trembled—"I cannot stand by and hear him abused now."

"Why, not? He bore you no love."

"No," was the sad reply, "but I have just discovered that he is my twin-brother."

"What!" the ex-millionaire shouted, "your—twin—brother? Oh, Heaven!—if this be true—if this be true—then I am indeed paid back by Destiny!"

Philip looked at him wonderingly, and, as he looked, the perspiration broke out in beads upon his brow. The wild words and distraught manner of the one-time financier pointed to a strange conclusion, and it was one that almost bewildered him in its weird possibilities. Who was this man with the quivering face and haggard eyes, that he should ask such strange questions?

"What do you mean, sir?" he said sharply. "Do you know the secret that has baffled me for so long—the secret of my birth?"

Mr. Johnson raised his face from his hands where he had hidden it.

"Yes, lad—I know it! I am not Caleb J. Johnson, but Caleb Jerningham—your father, and also father of the unfortunate boy lying in that room. It is a long story, lad; don't blame me now—my punishment is great! I have only known of this a short time."

There was a silence, then a hand was laid on the older man's shoulder. "Come, let us go into him—before he dies."

And by the death-bed of the weak, erring son of that once loved girl-bride, Caleb Jerningham drained the dregs of the cup of bitterness. He had fought with his own son, and that son had brought him down in name and position, robbed and betrayed his father. It had been a battle of blood against blood, brain against cunning, and cunning had prevailed—to what purpose?

"That is the dagger we found in him," Philip whispered

He looked at it, and his mind leapt the space of years. He saw a couple of hearty miners on a gold claim in Australia; one presented his friend with a quaint dagger of Eastern pattern as a memento of troublous times. And that friend's name had been Rayne! He shivered. Rayne had worshipped Helen in those days, and now—now he had done her son to death!

Almost as though the dying man read his thoughts, Edward Day murmured faintly:

"Confound you, Rayne! You have won the last trick! I did all the others fairly well; but you—have scored, Rayne!" His eyes flickered and caught the tender glance of Philip bending over him, and for an instant he paused. "I'm sorry!" he whispered. "It is the only thing for which I have regret. Forgive!"

Philip turned to the ex-financier. "Will you tell him—now?"

He shook his head. "It would only embitter the end for him. I must bear it alone. He did me grievous wrong. I forgive him now."

Then, over the dead body of the sinful man, the two men gazed at each other. Father and son; and between them lay another of their blood—a man who had wronged them both.

Philip reached out his hand; his eyes gleamed through a mist. "Father!"

"Son!"

And across the dead the hands of the living met in a clasp of fellowship and understanding.

At the door of the cottage they came face to face with the two women most dear to them. They were Lady Violet and Marcella, who flew with a cry into her lover's arms.

"We could not stay behind," Lady Violet said. "My darling and I were anxious; but tell us what has happened? Why are you and Mr. Nullius both together, and looking so grave?"

"Come in here," the financier said, drawing her back into the room. "We all have much to explain, and now is the best time for shadows to be lifted. Come, Philip, my son—come, Marcella."

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FIFTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.
In the King's Name!

"So you have betrayed me, have you? Thus is your promise to be bought, is it? You think to have scored off me—to have given me away! But you have reckoned without your host, my dear Major Dick!" and Sir Cyprian laughed quietly, yet with a thrill of triumph in his voice that made the man with him wince uneasily. His eyes followed those of the baronet, and saw through the window an unpretentious-looking trap come slowly up the drive. There was nothing out of the way about it, but his lips parted in a slow smile of satisfaction as he turned to the man whom he had betrayed.

"You see, Rust, they think you will take some catching. You are no ordinary criminal; but you must cave in now—oh, Great Chief!" he laughed recklessly.

The lines round the baronet's mouth grew deeper, and his eyes sparkled as he said softly:

"And you have sold me for a price, my dear Major. Turned King's evidence, eh? Well, it's a pity; but I don't think you will live to enjoy the proceeds of your treachery!"

"What do you mean?" burst from the other man hastily.

Sir Cyprian slipped his hand in his pocket. "That the law of all traitors to a cause is that they must die. It is a penalty they must pay."

The other rose and stumbled to the door. He had not considered that his own safety was in danger. It had escaped him for the nonce that the man he had betrayed would die hard, and not without an attempt to wipe out the score.

"Don't trouble!" laughed the sneering voice; "the key is in my pocket—that way of escape is closed, there is only one thing left to you now."

The craven coward, sodden with drink and dazed with terror, fell on his knees before the door. "For pity's sake, Rust, let me go! I—I can't die!"

"No? That's a pity, because it is the only thing left to such a worm as yourself!" Then his rage flashed forth. "You won't have the pleasure of seeing me in the hands of the police. The 'Spade' will play the trump card yet."

Then with a swift movement he drew his hand from his pocket. There was a report—a flash of smoke, and then—silence. The man who had been kneeling near the door fell over limply, and from his temple oozed a small stream of red.

"Open! In the King's name!" cried a loud, commanding voice outside the door, and there was a sound of tramping feet.

Sir Cyprian replaced the weapon in his pocket and smiled; then touching a panel in the wall, he disappeared, just as the door was broken open, and a crowd of men tumbled into the room. As they saw the bundle on the floor they recoiled.

"Suicide! Too late!"

"No!" cried another voice—that of Caleb Jerningham—"not suicide—murder!" They turned the body over, and as the ex-financier's eyes fell on the upturned face, he exclaimed in amazement.

"This is Flash Dick—the informer," the detective said. "I see he's got his deserts!"

And Caleb Jerningham realised, with a throb of gratitude, that the woman he had wronged by marrying was indeed free to be his wife again; for the man with the dead, unsightly face was the erstwhile dashing cavalry officer, Major Richard Frayne-Lennox—once the husband of Lady Violet, and the father of innocent Marcella!

"Thank God he is dead!" he murmured, as he turned away. "Marcella shall never know."

Sir Cyprian Rust sat in a chair in the room at the end of the secret wing. It was the room where he had for years kept his mad wife a prisoner, while defrauding the insurance people of twenty thousand pounds. He sat with his face to the light, a mocking smile still resting on the cynical mouth, at having cheated the law, even at the eleventh hour. In the midst of the beautiful curios and jewels for which he had so successfully devoted his evil genius in obtaining, they found him, true to the end to his fatal love of sin and crime, surrounded by the objects of his unprincipled passion. His left hand hung over the side of the chair, and from it a pool of blood ebbed slowly. With his usual love of neatness and precision the baronet had severed the main artery, and so facing the famous picture that was stolen from the one-time millionaire, he died, his fingers clutching the "Sign of the Spade," the "Society" over which he had so long reigned as an unworthy monarch. At a higher tribunal he was answering for his sins, while the law, clamouring for admittance, cried: "In the name of the King!"

* * * * *

A beautiful summer day; on the lawn at the Court a garden-party was in full swing.

"It seems like the days of your grandfather back again, Sir Philip," said an old Army veteran to the tall, manly young Squire; "and your wife, too, reminds me of her aunt. How the old chap would have rejoiced to see his grandson back in the old place—dear, dear! All's well that ends well!"

Sir Philip Jerningham agreed, and his eyes met those of the gracious young chatelaine of the Court, in a glance of love and understanding.

All was well indeed with them, and the present compensated for the horrors of the past year, when they had fought against such fearful odds. The news of Sir Cyprian's suicide had been followed by the amazing news that a will, made on the death-bed of the late Sir Basil Wingate, leaving everything unconditionally to the children of his daughter, had she any, was found in a secret drawer in Sir Cyprian's study; then came another thunderbolt from Mr. Caleb J. Johnson, who, taking his own name of Jerningham, revealed himself as the husband of the late Sir Basil's daughter and father of Philip Nullius—the new baronet.

The past was hushed and forgotten in the events that quickly followed.

"Dearest love," Sir Philip whispered to his wife, "how lovely you look, my darling, and how I love to see you happy, little wife."

Her fingers caught his for an instant.

"I am almost too happy, beloved; but there is another couple running us very close. See!" she laughed softly, "my dear mother and your father, Philip. And Aunt Laura, Sir Cyprian's wife, how happy she is now that she has regained her reason and is living so comfortably with us. It's like a fairy tale for us all to be so united after the fearful misunderstandings of the past!"

He smiled. "Yes, it is a wonderful fairy tale, beloved, and we must never let it come to an end. Dear little Lottie seems happier, too. Your mater has already a match-making idea fermenting in her brain, I notice. See how she artfully contrives to leave her with young Halebury!"

Marcella laughed softly. "Yes—dear, loyal, little Lottie will change her name by-and-bye, that is evident. She will forget soon, I hope." Then, turning to her husband, she murmured: "Oh, Philip, how grateful I am to God for having guided us through so much trouble, and brought us into such a beautiful haven of happiness—such 'dupes of destiny,' as we all were."

"Yes, darling!" he answered. "And now 'children in Fairyland'!"

THE END.

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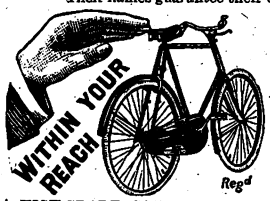

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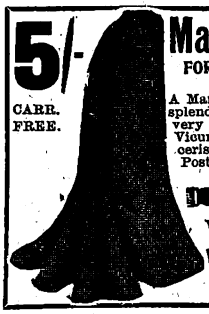

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Mammon versus Love.

"IRIS" writes: "My family is very poor, but quite recently a rich aunt took a fancy to me, and desired me to live with her. She is a widow with no children, and my parents were naturally delighted with the opportunity, and, of course, I was equally pleased. But there is one circumstance which mars my joy. At home, I kept company with a young man who is a clerk, hard-working and desirable in every way except in worldly means. My family had no objection to him at the time, but since I am with my aunt all is changed. She and they absolutely forbid my having anything to do with him, merely because of his social position. I love him very dearly, and he tells me that he hopes to be considerably advanced in position and able to marry me shortly. My aunt is very determined, and would cast me off if I disobeyed her, and that would mean many disadvantages for myself and my family."

* * * * *

You must decide whether the young man on the one hand, or your own wealth and prosperity and the welfare of your family on the other, is dearer to you. Some girls would give up everything for love, others would think twice before surrendering worldly wealth. Your own nature must decide. There is only one compromise. Don't pledge yourself to the young man, but just wait until he has attained the prosperous condition he speaks of. Persuade your aunt, if possible very tactfully, that he is quite a desirable young man and effect an introduction. She may take a fancy to him, too, and then everything would be right. But between now and then I should advise you to appear to be obeying your aunt.

Tittle-Tattle.

"A. S. R." is in an awkward position. She is engaged to a man some years older than herself, of whom she is most fond. However, since her engagement is announced she has been hearing all sorts of whispering about the man. There are rumours that he was concerned in some scandal a good many years ago, of which "A. S. R." knew nothing when accepting his proposal. Should she take any steps in the matter, as her friends are talking a great deal, and one of them advised "A. S. R." to break off the match?

* * * * *

If at the time of his proposal you knew nothing to the detriment of your *fiancé*, then the scandal with which he is said to have been connected cannot have been a very serious one. If you really love him, you will be fully prepared to withstand the talk of tattlers. Even if their stories are true, quite possibly the incident has long been forgotten, and is not one which is really much against the man. I imagine the rumours are simply exaggerations, set about to make mischief by people who are either malicious or jealous. You should show your character by absolutely ignoring them. No doubt your *fiancé* will explain everything in good time, and you should wait until then.

The Way to Meet Girls.

"WHAT is a man to do who has no opportunity for getting to know girls?" asks "WORRIED," who finds himself in that position. "I have found it so difficult," he adds, "that I almost despair of ever getting to know them?"

* * * * *

I cannot quite understand a man who is in this position. The ways of getting to know girls are numerous. If a man has sisters, for instance, he should be able to meet their girl friends. If he has no sisters, then he must have male friends, who have sisters, whom he should be able to meet. Failing either of these, a young man can often meet the right sort of girl in connection with his place of worship. He could join a tennis-club, or a dramatic society, or a musical club. Dances, and At Homes are the certain result of his belonging to such bodies. The man who, like "WORRIED," finds himself out of touch with the fair sex, has, I think only himself to blame. By a very little effort he should be able to meet a sufficient number of the opposite sex from which to select a possible sweetheart.

A Rival Stepmother.

A tale of a serious love affair comes from "DELICE." "I am twenty and about to become engaged. But my domestic relations are very strained, owing to the fact that my young stepmother—aged twenty-nine, the widow of my deceased father—wishes to marry the man I love. She is still pretty, young, and smart, and makes her love for him very evident. He is flattered by it, and puts down whatever I may say about her to jealousy. He does not exactly encourage her, but finds it difficult to repulse her. She uses every possible means to influence my lover in her favour and against me. She is malicious and ill-natured, and always refers to her own perfections and to my faults. I just hate her, and am sorely afraid she will do me mischief with my lover."

* * * * *

Why, "DELICE," need you meet him at the same house as that in which your stepmother lives? Could you not so arrange it that he did not visit you there? Evidently, she is more experienced than yourself, and far cleverer in making herself attractive to a man, or she would never have caused the havoc she has. You should candidly ask the young man which of the two he loves. If he confesses that it is yourself, then implore him not to see your stepmother any more, and arrange your meetings elsewhere. It would be quite hopeless to expect a settlement so long as this pitched battle continues.

A Bumptious Sweetheart.

"MY sweetheart," writes "A. M.", "has got into a way lately of bragging about himself, trying to make himself look bigger and more important than he really is. I am very fond of him, and he of me, but it makes it unpleasant when we are with friends, and makes him look very small. What could I do to break him of this habit? He is just reaching his twentieth birthday."

* * * * *

I should not be alarmed. The approach of one's twentieth birthday has often the effect of swelled head on young men, who are just beginning to realise that they are growing important. In a very short time your sweetheart will discover that his importance is of a very limited order, especially if you continue to treat him just as before, and always squash him whenever he indulges in this bragging habit. Don't on any account treat it seriously. The complaint from which he suffers rarely lasts long at that age. If it should seize him five or more years later, it would be much worse.

Cynthia.

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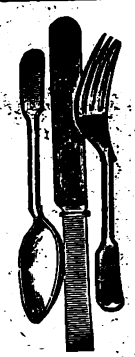

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SHORT STORIES

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THIS SPLENDID NEW SERIAL HAS JUST BEGUN.

A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

Synopsis of First Chapters.

Mr. Theodore Racksole, American multi-millionaire, accompanied by his daughter Nella, arrives at the GrandBabylon Hotel. At dinner he orders Jules, the dignified head-waiter, to bring him a steak and a bottle of Bass.

Jules is annoyed at this strange order, and refuses to carry out the millionaire's instructions.

Calmly, without a word of expostulation, Racksole seeks out Félix Babylon, the proprietor of the hotel, and in less than twenty minutes contracts have been signed between the two parties, by which it is transferred to Racksole for the sum of £400,000.

The millionaire then orders the *chef*, Rocco, to cook him a steak, and to see that it is served, with a bottle of Bass, by Jules at their table in the dining-room.

When Racksole returns to his daughter, he finds that with her is a Mr. Reginald Dimmock, English companion to Prince Aribert of Posen. As Jules is serving the steak, Racksole sees him give a significant, ominous wink to this Dimmock. In the course of conversation, the latter says that his master is on the point of coming to the hotel.

Racksole stays talking very late that night to Mr. Babylon, and as he is making his way to his room in the small hours of the morning, he sees Jules emerging from Room 111—Nella Racksole's! What can it mean? Ten silent strides, and the millionaire, revolver in hand, is upon him.

THIRD CHAPTER.

The Struggle Between the Millionaire and Jules.

"One word, my friend," the millionaire began, carelessly waving the revolver in the air. Jules was indubitably startled, but by an admirable exercise of self-control he recovered possession of his faculties in a second.

"Sir?" said Jules.

"I just want to be informed what the dickens you were doing in No. 111 a moment ago?"

"I had been requested to go there," was the calm response.

"You are a liar, and not a very clever one. That is my daughter's room. Now—out with it, before I decide whether to shoot you, or throw you into the street."

Racksole seized him by the throat.

"Excuse me, sir, No. 111 is occupied by a gentleman."

"I advise you that it is a serious error of judgment to contradict me, my friend. Don't do it again. We will go to the room together, and you shall prove that the occupant is a gentleman, and not my daughter."

"Impossible, sir," said Jules.

"Scarcely that," said Racksole, and he took Jules by the sleeve. The millionaire knew for a certainty that Nella occupied No. 111, for he had examined the room with her, and himself seen that the trunks and her maid and herself had arrived there in safety. "Now open the door," whispered Racksole when they reached No. 111.

"I must knock."

"That is just what you mustn't do. Open it."

Confronted by the revolver, Jules readily obeyed, yet with a deprecatory gesture, as though he would not be responsible for this outrage against the decorum of hotel life. Racksole entered. The room was brilliantly lighted.

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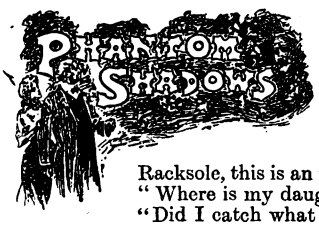

'A visitor, who insists on seeing you, sir," said Jules, and fled.

Mr. Reginald Dimmock, still in evening dress, and smoking a cigarette, rose hurriedly from a table.

"Hello, my dear Mr. Racksole, this is an unexpected—ah—pleasure."

"Where is my daughter? This is her room."

"Did I catch what you said, Mr. Racksole?"

"I ventured to remark that this is Miss Racksole's room."

"My good sir," answered Dimmock, "you must be mad to dream of such a thing. Only my respect for your daughter prevents me from expelling you forcibly, for such an extraordinary suggestion."

A small spot half-way down the bridge of the millionaire's nose turned suddenly white.

"With your permission," he said, in a low, calm voice, "I will examine the dressing-room and the bath-room."

"Just listen to me," Dimmock urged, in a milder tone.

"I'll listen to you afterwards, my young friend," said Racksole, and he proceeded to search the bath-room and the dressing-room without any result whatever. "Lest my attitude might be open to misconstruction, Mr. Dimmock, I may as well tell you that I have the most perfect confidence in my daughter, who is as well able to take care of herself as any woman I ever met, but since you entered it there have been one or two rather mysterious occurrences in this hotel. That is all." Feeling a draught of air on his shoulder, Racksole turned to the window. "For instance," he added, "I perceive that this window is broken, badly broken, and from the outside. Now, how could that have occurred?"

"If you will kindly hear reason, Mr. Racksole," said Dimmock in his best diplomatic manner, "I will endeavour to explain things to you. I regarded your first question to me when you entered my room as being offensively put, but I now see that you had some justification." He smiled politely.

"I was passing along this corridor about eleven o'clock, when I found Miss Racksole in a difficulty with the hotel servants. Miss Racksole was retiring to rest in this room when a large stone, which must have been thrown from the Embankment, broke the window, as you see. Apart from the discomfort of the broken window, she did not care to remain in the room. She argued that where one stone had come another might follow. She therefore insisted on her room being changed. The servants said that there was no other room available with a dressing-room and bath-room attached, and your daughter made a point of these matters. I at once offered to exchange apartments with her. She did me the honour to accept my offer. Our respective belongings were moved—and that is all. Miss Racksole is at this moment, I trust, asleep in No. 124."

Theodore Racksole looked at the young man for a few seconds in silence.

There was a faint knock at the door.

"Come in," said Racksole loudly.

Someone pushed open the door, but remained standing on the mat. It was Nella's maid, in a dressing-gown.

"Miss Racksole's compliments, and a thousand excuses, but a book of hers was left on the mantelshelf in this room. She cannot sleep, and wishes to read."

"Mr. Dimmock, I tender my apologies—my formal apologies," said Racksole, when the girl had gone away with the book. "Good-night."

"Pray don't mention it," said Dimmock suavely—and bowed him out.

FOURTH CHAPTER.
Entrance of the Prince.

Nevertheless, sundry small things weighed on Racksole's mind. First there was Jules' wink. Then there was the ribbon on the door-handle and Jules' visit to No. 111, and the broken window—broken from the outside. Racksole did not forget that the time was three a.m. He slept but little that night, but he was glad that he had bought the Grand Babylon Hotel.

It was an acquisition which seemed to promise fun and diversion.

The next morning he came across Mr. Babylon early.

"I have emptied my private room of all personal papers," said Babylon, "and it is now at your disposal. I purpose if agreeable to yourself, to stay on in the hotel as a guest for the present. We have much to settle with regard to the completion of the purchase, and also there are things which you might want to ask me. Also, to tell the truth I am not anxious to leave the old place with too much suddenness. It will be a wrench to me."

"I shall be delighted if you will stay," said the millionaire, "but it must be as my guest, not as the guest of the hotel."

"You are very kind."

"As for wishing to consult you, no doubt I shall have need to do so, but I must say that the show seems to run itself."

"Ah!" said Babylon thoughtfully. "I have heard of hotels that run themselves. If they do, you may be sure that they obey the laws of gravity and run downwards. You will have your hands full. For example, have you yet heard about Miss Spencer?"

"No," said Racksole. "What of her?"

"She has mysteriously vanished during the night, and nobody appears to be able to throw any light on the affair. Her room is empty, her boxes gone. You will want someone to take her place, and that someone will not be very easy to get."

"H'm!" Racksole said, after a pause. "Hers is not the only post that falls vacant to-day."

A little later, the millionaire installed himself in the late owner's private room and rang the bell.

"I want Jules," he said to the page.

While waiting for Jules, Racksole considered the question of Miss Spencer's disappearance.

"Good morning, Jules," was his cheerful greeting, when the imperturbable waiter arrived.

"Good morning, sir."

"Take a chair."

"Thank you, sir."

"We have met before this morning, Jules."

"Yes, sir, at three a.m."

"Rather strange about Miss Spencer's departure, is it not?" suggested Racksole.

"It is remarkable, sir."

"You are aware, of course, that Mr. Babylon has transferred all his interests in this hotel to me?"

"I have been informed to that effect, sir."

"I suppose you know everything that goes on in the hotel, Jules?"

"As the head waiter, sir, it is my business to keep a general eye on things."

"You speak very good English for a foreigner, Jules."

"For a foreigner, sir! I am an Englishman, a Hertfordshire man, born and bred. Perhaps my name has misled you, sir. I am only called Jules because the head waiter of any really high-class hotel must have either a French or an Italian name."

"I see," said Racksole. "I think you must be rather a clever person, Jules."

"That is not for me to say, sir."

"How long has the hotel enjoyed the advantage of your services?"

"A little over twenty years."

"That is a long time to be in one place. Don't you think it's time you got out of the rut. You are still young, and might make a reputation for yourself in another and wider sphere." Racksole looked at the man steadily, and his glance was as steadily returned.

"You aren't satisfied with me, sir?"

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"To be frank, Jules, I think—I think you—er—wink too much. And I think that it is regrettable when a head waiter falls into a habit of taking white ribbons from the handles of bedroom doors at three in the morning."

Jules started slightly.

"I see how it is, sir. You wish me to go, and one pretext, if I may use the term, is as good as another. Very well, I can't say that I'm surprised. It sometimes happens that there is incompatibility of temper between a hotel proprietor and his head waiter, and then unless one of them goes, the hotel is likely to suffer. I will go, Mr. Racksole. In fact, I had already thought of giving notice."

The millionaire smiled appreciatively.

"What wages do you require in lieu of notice? It is my intention that you leave the hotel within an hour."

"I require no wages in lieu of notice, sir. I would scorn to accept anything. And I will leave the hotel in fifteen minutes."

"Good day, then. You have my good wishes and my admiration, so long as you keep out of my hotel."

"Good day, sir. And thank you."

Racksole got up.

"By the way, Jules, it will be useless for you to apply to any other first-rate European hotel for a post, because I shall take measures which will insure the rejection of any such application."

"Without discussing the question whether or not there aren't at least half a dozen hotels in London alone that would jump for joy at the chance of getting me," answered Jules, "I may tell you, sir, that I shall retire from my profession."

"Really! You will turn your brains to a different channel."

"No, sir. I shall take rooms in Albemarle Street or Jermyn Street, and just be content to be a man-about-town. I have saved some twenty thousand pounds—a mere trifle, but sufficient for my needs, and I shall now proceed to enjoy it. Pardon me for troubling you with my personal affairs. And good day, again."

That afternoon Racksole went with Félix Babylon first to a firm of solicitors in the City, and then to a stockbroker, in order to carry out the practical details of the purchase of the hotel.

"I mean to settle in England," said Racksole, as they were coming back. "It is the only country——" And he stopped.

"The only country?"

"The only country where you can invest money and spend money with a feeling of security. In the United States there is nothing worth spending money on, nothing to buy. In France or Italy, there is no real security."

"But surely you are a true American?" questioned Babylon.

"I am a true American," said Racksole, "but my father, who began by being a bedmaker at an Oxford college, and ultimately made ten million dollars out of iron in Pittsburg—my father took the wise precaution of having me educated in England. I had my three years at Oxford, like any son of the upper middle class! It did me good. It has been worth more to me than many successful speculations. It taught me that the English language is different from, and better than, the American language, and that there is something—I haven't yet found out exactly what—in English life that Americans will never get. Why," he added, "in the United States we still bribe our judges and our newspapers. And we talk of the nineteenth century as though it was the beginning of the world. Yes, I shall transfer my securities to London. I shall build a house in Park Lane, and I shall buy some immemorial country seat with a history as long as the A. T. and S. railroad, and I shall calmly and gradually settle down. D'you know—I am rather a good-natured man for a millionaire, and of a social disposition, and yet I haven't six real friends in the whole of New York City. Think of that!"

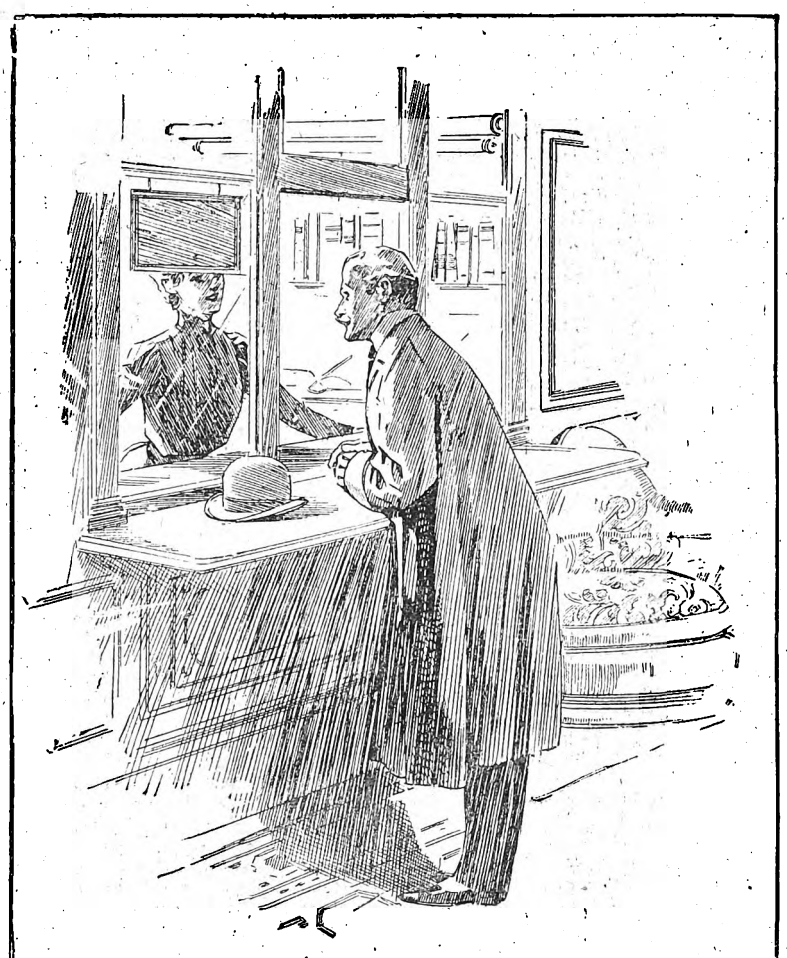
"And I," said Babylon, "have no friends except the friends of my boyhood in Lausanne. I have spent thirty years in England, and gained nothing but a perfect knowledge of the English language and as much gold coin as would fill a rather large box."

These two plutocrats breathed a simultaneous sigh.

"Talking of gold coin," said Racksole, "how much money should you think Jules has contrived to amass while he has been with you?"

"Oh!" Babylon smiled. "I should not like to guess. He has had unique opportunities—unique opportunities."

"Should you



Nella saw a young man of about thirty years at the window. It was his Serene Highness Prince Aribert of Posen.

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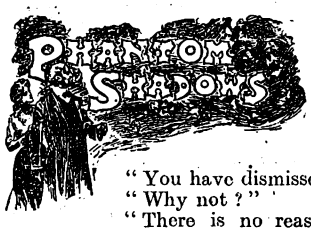

consider twenty thousand an extraordinary sum under the circumstances?"

"Not at all. Has he been confiding in you?"

"Somewhat. I have dismissed him."

"You have dismissed him?"

"Why not?"

"There is no reason why not. But I have felt inclined to dismiss him for the past ten years, and never found courage to do it."

"It was a perfectly simple proceeding, I assure you. Before I had done with him, I rather liked the fellow."

"Miss Spencer and Jules—both gone in one day!" mused Félix Babylon.

"And no one to take their places," said Racksole. "And yet the hotel continues its way!"

And when Racksole reached the Grand Babylon he found that Miss Spencer's chair in the bureau was occupied by a stately and imperious girl, dressed becomingly in black.

"Heavens! Nella!" he cried, going to the bureau. "What are you doing here?"

"I am taking Miss Spencer's place. I want to help you with your hotel, dad. I fancy I shall make an excellent hotel clerk. I have arranged with a Miss Selina Smith, one of the typewriters in the office, to put me up to all the tips and tricks, and I shall do very well,"

"But, look here, Helen Racksole. We shall have the whole of London talking about this thing—the greatest of all American heiresses a hotel clerk! And I came here for quiet and rest!"

"I suppose it was for the sake of quiet and rest that you bought the hotel, papa?"

"You would insist on the steak," he retorted. "Get out of this, on the instant."

"Here I am, here I stay," said Nella, and deliberately laughed at her parent.

Just then the face of a fair-haired man of about thirty years appeared at the bureau window. He was very well-dressed, very aristocratic in his pose, and he seemed rather angry.

He looked fixedly at Nella, and started back.

"Ach!" he exclaimed. "You!"

"Yes, your Highness, it is indeed I. Father, this is his Serene Highness Prince Aribert of Posen—one of our most esteemed customers."

"You know my name, Fräulein?" the newcomer murmured in German.

"Certainly, Prince," Nella replied sweetly. "You were plain Count Steenbock last Spring in Paris—doubtless travelling incognito——"

"Silence," he intreated, with a wave of the hand, and his forehead went as white as paper.

FIFTH CHAPTER.

What Occurred to Reginald Dimmock.

In another moment they were all three talking quite easily, and with at any rate an appearance of being natural. Prince Aribert became suave, even deferential to Nella, and more friendly towards Nella's father than their respective positions demanded. The latter amused himself by studying this sprig of royalty, the first with whom he had ever come into contact. He decided that the young fellow was personable enough, "had no frills on him," and would make an exceptionally good commercial traveller for a first-class firm. Such was Theodore Racksole's preliminary estimate of the man who might one day be the reigning Grand Duke of Posen.

It occurred to Nella, and she smiled at the idea, that the bureau of the hotel was scarcely the correct place in which to receive this august young man. There he stood, with his head half-way through the bureau window, negligently leaning against the woodwork, just as though he were a stockbroker or the manager of a New York burlesque company.

"Is your Highness travelling quite alone?" she asked.

"By a series of accidents I am," he said: "My equerry was to have met me at Charing Cross, but he failed to do so—I cannot imagine why."

"Mr. Dimmock?" questioned Racksole.

"Yes, Dimmock. I do not remember that he ever missed an appointment before. You know him? He has been here?"

"He dined with us last night," said Racksole—"on Nella's invitation," he added maliciously; "but to-day we have seen nothing of him. I know, however, that he has engaged the State apartments, and also a suite adjoining the State apartments—No. 55. That is so, isn't it, Nella?"

"Yes, papa," she said, having first demurely examined a ledger. "Your Highness would doubtless like to be conducted to your room—apartments I mean." Then Nella laughed deliberately at the Prince, and said, "I don't know who is the proper person to conduct you, and that's a fact. The truth is that papa and I are rather raw yet in the hotel line. You see, we only bought the place last night."

"You have bought the hotel!" exclaimed the Prince.

"That's so," said Racksole.

"And Félix Babylon has gone?"

"He is going, if he has not already gone,"

"Ah! I see," said the Prince; "this is one of your American 'strokes.' You have bought to sell again, is that not it? You are on your holidays, but you cannot resist making a few thousands by way of relaxation. I have heard of such things."

"We shan't sell again, Prince, until we are tired of our bargain. Sometimes we tire very quickly, and sometimes we don't. It depends—eh? what?" Racksole broke off suddenly to attend to a servant in livery who had quietly entered the bureau and was making urgent, mysterious signs to him.

"If you please, sir," the man by frantic gestures implored Mr. Theodore Racksole to come out.

"Pray don't let me detain you, Mr. Racksole," said the Prince, and therefore the proprietor of the Grand Babylon departed after the servant, with a queer, curt little bow to Prince Aribert.

"Mayn't I come inside?" said the Prince to Nella immediately the millionaire had gone.

"Impossible, Prince," Nella laughed. "The rule against visitors entering this bureau is frightfully strict."

"How do you know the rule is so strict if you only came into possession last night?"

"I know because I made the rule myself this morning, your Highness."

"But seriously, Miss Racksole, I want to talk to you."

"Do you want to talk to me as Prince Aribert or as the friend—the acquaintance—whom I knew in Paris last year?"

"As the friend, dear lady, if I may use the term."

"And you are sure that you would not like first to be conducted to your apartments?"

"Not yet. I will wait till Dimmock comes; he cannot fail to be here soon."

"Then we will have tea served in father's private room—the proprietor's private room, you know."

"Good!" he said.

Nella talked through a telephone, and rang several bells, and behaved generally in a manner calculated to prove to Princes and to whomever it might concern that she was a young woman of business instincts and training, and then she stepped down from her chair of office, emerged from the bureau, and, preceded by two menials, led Prince Aribert to the Louis XV. chamber in which her father and Félix Babylon had had their long confabulation on the previous evening.

"What do you want to talk to me about?" she asked her companion, as she poured out for him a second cup of tea. The Prince looked at her for a moment as he took the proffered cup, and being a young man of sane, healthy instincts, he could think of nothing for the moment except her loveliness.

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Nella was indeed beautiful that afternoon. The beauty of even the most beautiful woman ebbs and flows from hour to hour. Nella's this afternoon was at the flood. Vivacious, alert, imperious and yet ineffably sweet, she seemed to radiate the very joy and exuberance of life.

"I have forgotten," he said.

"You have forgotten! That is surely very wrong of you? You gave me to understand that it was something terribly important. But, of course, I knew it couldn't be, because no man, and especially no Prince, ever discussed anything really important with a woman."

"Recollect, Miss Racksole, that this afternoon, here, I am not the Prince."

"You are Count Steenbock, is that it?"

He started. "For you only," he said, unconsciously lowering his voice. "Miss Racksole, I particularly wish that no one here should know that I was in Paris last Spring."

"An affair of State?" she smiled.

"An affair of State," he replied soberly. "Even Dimmock doesn't know. It was strange that we should be fellow guests at that quiet, out-of-the-way hotel—strange but delightful. I shall never forget that rainy afternoon that we spent together in the museum of the Trocadéro. Let us talk about that."

"About the rain, or the museum?"

"I shall never forget that afternoon," he repeated, ignoring the lightness of her question.

"Nor I," she murmured, corresponding with his mood.

"You, too, enjoyed it?" he said eagerly.

"The sculptures were magnificent," she replied, hastily glancing at the ceiling.

"Ah! So they were! Tell me, Miss Racksole, how did you discover my identity?"

"I must not say," she answered. "That is my secret. Do not seek to penetrate it. Who knows what horrors you might discover if you probed too far?" She laughed, but she laughed alone. The Prince remained pensive—as it were, brooding.

"I never hoped to see you again," he said.

"Why not?"

"One never sees again those whom one wishes to see."

"As for me, I was perfectly convinced that we should meet again."

"Why?"

"Because I always get what I want."

"Then you wanted to see me again?"

"Certainly. You interested me extremely. I have never met another man who could talk so well about sculpture as the Count Steenbock."

"Do you really always get what you want, Miss Racksole?"

"Of course."

"That is because your father is so rich, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, it isn't!" she said. "It's simply because I always do get what I want. It's got nothing to do with father at all."

"But Mr. Racksole is extremely wealthy?"

"Wealthy isn't the word, Count. There is no word. It's positively awful the amount of dollars poor papa makes. And the worst of it is he can't help it. He told me once that when a man made ten millions no power on earth could stop those ten millions from growing into twenty. And so it continues. I spend what I can, but I can't come near coping with it; and, of course, papa is no use whatever at spending."

"And you have no mother?"

"Who told you I had no mother?" she asked quickly.

"I—er—inquired about you," he said, with equal candour and humility.

"In spite of the fact that you never hoped to see me again?"

"Yes, in spite of that."

"How funny!" she said, and lapsed into a meditative silence.

"Yours must be a wonderful existence," said the Prince. "I envy you."

"You envy me—what? My father's wealth?"

"No," he said; "your freedom and your responsibilities."

"I have no responsibilities," she remarked.

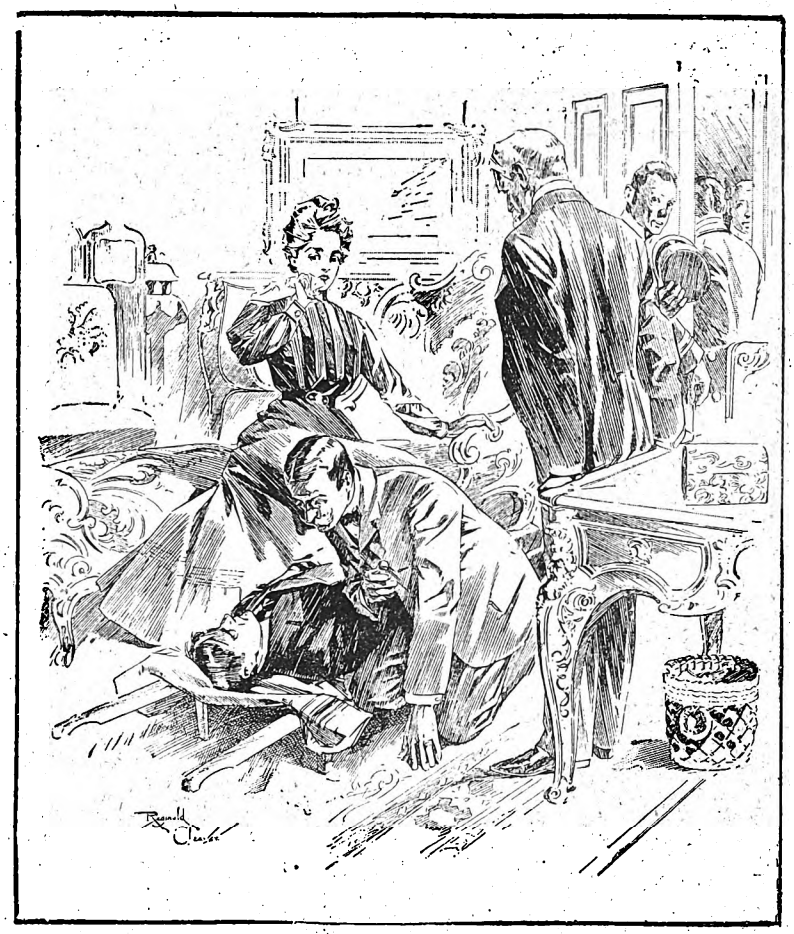
"Pardon me," he said; "you have, and the time is coming when you will feel them."

"I'm only a girl," she murmured with sudden simplicity. "As for you, Count, surely you have sufficient responsibilities of your own?"

"I?" he said sadly. "I have no responsibilities. I am a nobody—a Serene Highness who has to pretend to be very important, always taking immense care never to do anything that a Serene Highness ought not to do. Bah!"

"But if your nephew, Prince Eugen, were to die, would you not come to the throne, and would you not then have these responsibilities which you so much desire?"

"Eugen die?" said Prince Aribert, in a curious tone



"Dimmock—dead!"

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"Impossible. He is the perfection of health. In three months he will be married. No, I shall never be anything but a Serene Highness, the most despicable of God's creatures."

"But what about the State secret which you mentioned? Is not that a responsibility?"

"Ah!" he said. "That is over. That belongs to the past. It was an accident in my dull career. I shall never be Count Steenbock again."

"Who knows?" she said. "By the way, is not Prince Eugen coming here to-day? Mr. Dimmock told us so."

"See!" answered the Prince, standing up and bending over her. "I am going to confide in you. I don't know why, but I am."

"Don't betray State secrets," she warned him, smiling into his face.

But just then the door of the room was unceremoniously opened.

"Go right in," said a voice sharply. It was Theodore Racksole's.

Two men entered, bearing a prone form on a stretcher, and Racksole followed them. Nella sprang up. Racksole stared to see his daughter.

"I didn't know you were in here, Nell. Here," to the two men, "out again."

"Why!" exclaimed Nella, gazing fearfully at the form on the stretcher, "it's Mr. Dimmock!"

"It is," her father acquiesced. "He's dead," he added laconically. "I'd have broken it to you more gently had I known. Your pardon, Prince." There was a pause.

"Dimmock dead!" Prince Aribert whispered under his breath, and he knelt down by the side of the stretcher. "What does this mean?"

"The poor fellow was just walking across the quadrangle towards the portico when he fell down. A commissionaire who saw him says he was walking very quickly. At first I thought it was sunstroke, but it couldn't have been, though the weather certainly is rather warm. It must be heart disease. But anyhow, he's dead. We did what we could. I've sent for a doctor, and for the police. I suppose there'll have to be an inquest."

The millionaire pays an early morning visit to the kitchen.

Theodore Racksole stopped, and in an awkward solemn silence they all gazed at the dead youth. His features were slightly drawn and his eyes closed; that was all. He might have been asleep.

"My poor Dimmock!" exclaimed the Prince, his voice broken. "And I was angry because the lad did not meet me at Charing Cross!"

"Are you sure he is dead, father?" Nella said.

"You'd better go away, Nella," was Racksole's only reply; but the girl stood still, and began to sob quietly. On the previous night she had secretly made fun of Reginald Dimmock. She had deliberately set herself to get information from him on a topic in which she happened to be specially interested and she had got it, laughing the while at his youthful crudities—his vanity, his transparent cunning, his absurd airs. She had not liked him; she had even distrusted him, and decided that he was not "nice." But now, as he lay on the stretcher, these things were forgotten. She went so far as to reproach herself for them. Such is the strange commanding power of death.

"Oblige me by taking the poor fellow to my apartments," said the Prince, with a gesture to the attendants. "Surely it is time the doctor came." Racksole felt suddenly at that moment he was nothing but a mere hotel proprietor with an awkward affair on his hands. For a fraction of a second he wished he had never bought the Grand Babylon.

A quarter of an hour later Prince Aribert, Theodore Racksole, and a doctor, and an inspector of police were in the Prince's reception-room. They had just come from an antechamber, in which lay the mortal remains of Reginald Dimmock.

"Well?" said Racksole, glancing at the doctor.

The doctor was a big, boyish-looking man, with keen, quizzical eyes.

"It is not heart disease," said the doctor.

"Not heart disease?"

"No."

"Then what is it?" asked the Prince.

"I may be able to answer that question after the post-mortem," said the doctor. "I certainly can't answer it now The symptoms are unusual to a degree."

The inspector of police began to write in a note-book.

SIXTH CHAPTER.

In the Gold Room.

At the Grand Babylon a great ball was given that night in the Gold Room, a huge saloon attached to the hotel, though scarcely part of it, and certainly less exclusive than the hotel itself. Theodore Racksole knew nothing of the affair, except that it was an entertainment offered by a Mr. and Mrs. Sampson Levi to their friends. Who Mr. and Mrs. Sampson Levi were he did not know, nor could anyone tell him anything about them except that Mr. Sampson Levi was a prominent member of that part of the Stock Exchange familiarly called the Kaffir Circus, and that his wife was a stout lady with an aquiline nose and many diamonds, and that they were very rich and very hospitable. Theodore Racksole did not want a ball in his hotel that evening, but the arrangements for it had gone too far, so the ball went forward.

The Gold Room of the Grand Babylon was built for a ball-room. A balcony, supported by arches faced with gilt and lapis-lazuli ran round it, and from this vantage men and maidens and chaperons who could not or would not dance might survey the scene. Everyone knew this, and most people took advantage of it. What everyone did not know—what no one knew—was that higher up than the balcony there was a little barred window in the end wall from which the hotel authorities might keep a watchful eye, not only on

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the dancers, but also on the occupants of the balcony itself.

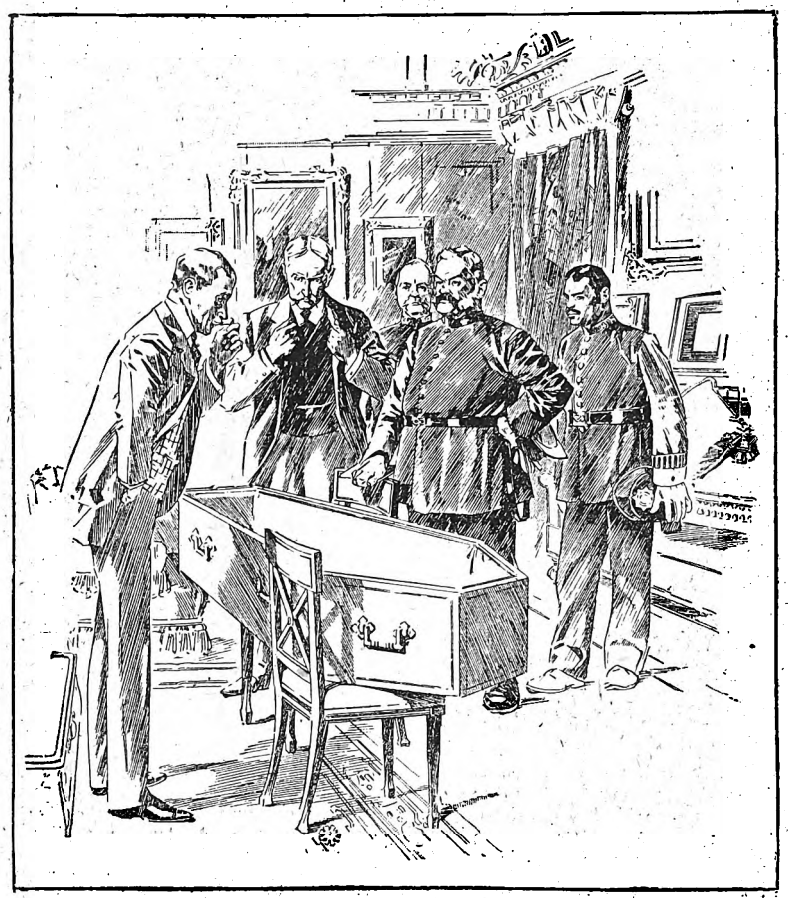
It may seem incredible to the uninitiated that the guests at any social gathering held in so gorgeous and renowned an apartment as the Gold Room of the Grand Babylon should need the observation of a watchful eye. Yet so it was. Strange matters and unexpected faces had been descried from that little window, and more than one European detective had kept vigil there with the most eminently satisfactory results.

At eleven o'clock Theodore Racksole, afflicted by vexation of spirits, found himself gazing idly through the little barred window. Nella was with him. Together they had been wandering about the corridors of the hotel, still strange to them both, and it was quite by accident that they had lighted upon the small room which had a surreptitious view of Mr. and Mrs. Sampson Levi's ball. Except for the light of the chandelier of the ballroom the little cubicle was in darkness. Nella was looking through the window; her father stood behind.

"I wonder which is Mrs. Sampson Levi," Nella said, "and whether she matches her name. Wouldn't you love to have a name like that, father—something that people could take hold of—instead of Racksole?"

The sound of violins and a confused murmur of voices rose gently up to them.

"Umph!" said Theodore. "Confound those evening papers!" he added, inconsequently but with sincerity.



The coffin was empty. Dimmock's body had disappeared!

"Father, you're very horrid to-night. What have the evening papers been doing?"

"Well, my young lady, they've got me in for one, and you for another; and they're manufacturing mysteries like fun. It's young Dimmock's death that has started 'em. It'll be all over New York to-morrow morning, too. The worst of it is that Babylon has gone off to Switzerland."

"Why?"

"Don't know. Sudden fancy, I guess, for his native heath."

"What difference does it make to you?"

"None. Only I feel sort of lonesome. I feel I want some one to lean up against in running this hotel."

"Father, if you have that feeling you must be getting ill."

"Yes," he sighed, "I admit it's unusual with me. But perhaps you haven't grasped the fact, Nella, that we're in the middle of a rather queer business"

"You mean about poor Mr. Dimmock?"

"Partly Dimmock and partly other things. First of all, that Miss Spencer, or whatever her wretched name is, mysteriously disappears. Then there was the stone thrown into your bedroom. Then I caught that rascal Jules conspiring with Dimmock at three o'clock in the morning. Then your precious Prince Aribert arrives without any suite—which I believe is a most peculiar and wicked thing for a Prince to do—and moreover I find my daughter on very intimate terms with the said Prince. Then young Dimmock goes and dies, and there is to be an inquest; then Prince Eugen and his suite, who were expected here for dinner, fail to turn up at all——"

"Prince Eugen has not come?"

"He has not; and Uncle Aribert is in a terrible stew about him, and telegraphing all over Europe. Altogether, things are working up pretty lively."

"Do you really think, dad, there was anything between Jules and poor Mr. Dimmock?"

"Think! I know! I tell you I saw that scamp give Dimmock a wink last night at dinner that might have meant—well!"

"So you caught that wink, did you, dad?"

"Why? Did you?"

"Of course, dad. I was going to tell you about it."

The millionaire grunted.

"Look here, father," Nella whispered suddenly, and pointed to the balcony immediately below them. "Who's that?" She indicated a man with a bald patch on the back of his head, who was propping himself up against the railing of the balcony and gazing steadily into the ball-room.

"Well, who is it?"

"Isn't it Jules?"

"Gemini! By the beard of the prophet, it is!"

"Perhaps Mr. Jules is a guest of Mrs. Sampson Levi."

"Guest or no guest, he goes out of this hotel, even if I have to throw him out myself."

Theodore Racksole disappeared without another word, and Nella followed him. But when the millionaire arrived on the balcony floor he could see nothing of Jules, neither there nor in the ball-room itself. Saying no word aloud, but quietly whispering wicked expletives, he searched everywhere in vain, and then, at last, by tortuous stairways and corridors returned to his original post of observation that he might survey the place anew from that vantage ground. To his surprise he found a man in the dark little room, watching the

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scene of the ball as intently as he himself had been doing a few minutes before. Hearing footsteps, the man turned with a start.

It was Jules.

The two exchanged glances in the half light for a second.

"Good evening, Mr. Racksole," said Jules calmly. "I must apologise for being here."

"Force of habit, I suppose," said Theodore Racksole drily.

"Just so, sir."

"I fancied I had forbidden you to re-enter this hotel?"

"I thought your order applied only to my professional capacity. I am here to-night as the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Sampson Levi."

"In your new *rôle* of man-about-town, eh?"

"Exactly."

"But I don't allow men-about-town up here, my friend."

"For being up here I have already apologised."

"Then, having apologised, you had better depart; that is my disinterested advice to you."

"Good-night, sir."

"And, I say, Mr. Jules, if Mr. and Mrs. Sampson Levi, or any other Hebrews or Christians, should invite you again to my hotel you will oblige me by declining the invitation. You'll find that will be the safest course for you. I hope you fully understand me. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

Before midnight struck Theodore Racksole had ascertained that the invitation list of Mr. and Mrs. Sampson Levi, though a somewhat lengthy one, contained no reference to any such person as Jules.

He sat up very late. To be precise, he sat up all night. He was a man who, by dint of training, could comfortably dispense with sleep when he felt so inclined, or when circumstances made such a course advisable. He walked to and fro in his room, and cogitated as few people besides Theodore Racksole could cogitate. At 6 a.m. he took a stroll round the business part of his premises, and watched the supplies come in from Covent Garden, from Smithfield, from Billingsgate, and from other strange places. He found the proceedings of the kitchen department quite interesting, and made mental notes of things that he would have altered, of men whose wages he would increase and men whose wages he would reduce. At 7 a.m. he happened to be standing near the luggage lift, and witnessed the descent of vast quantities of luggage, and its disappearance into a Carter Paterson van.

"Whose luggage is that?" he inquired peremptorily.

The luggage clerk, with an aggrieved expression, explained to him that it was the luggage of nobody in particular, that it belonged to various guests, and was bound for various destinations; that it was, in fact, "expressed" luggage dispatched in advance, and that a similar quantity of it left the hotel every morning about that hour.

Theodore Racksole walked away, and breakfasted upon one cup of tea and half a slice of toast.

The above is a reduced facsimile of the picture which will be printed in colours on the cover of next week's Short Stories. *It illustrates how Nella sees something very suspicious in the demeanour of the old lady at the table, and, watching her, notices her take a pellet of paper from the tart she is eating. Nella immediately decides on her course of action.*

At ten o'clock he was informed that the inspector of police desired to see him. The inspector had come, he said, to superintend the removal of the body of Reginald Dimmock to the mortuary adjoining the place of inquest, and a suitable vehicle waited at the back entrance of the hotel.

The inspector had also brought subpœnas for himself and Prince Aribert of Posen and the commissionaire to attend the inquest.

"I thought Mr. Dimmock's remains were removed last night," said Racksole wearily.

"No, sir. The fact is the van was engaged on another job."

The inspector went away to perform his duties.

In a few minutes a message came from him requesting Mr. Racksole to be good enough to come to him on the first floor. Racksole went. In the ante-room, where the body of Reginald Dimmock had originally been placed, were the inspector and Prince Aribert, and two policemen.

"Well?" said Racksole, after he and the Prince had exchanged bows. Then he saw a coffin laid across two chairs. "I see a coffin has been obtained," he remarked. "But it's empty."

"Just so," said the inspector. "The body of the deceased has disappeared. And his Serene Highness Prince Aribert informs me that though he has occupied a room immediately opposite, on the other side of the corridor, he can throw no light on the affair."

"Indeed, I cannot!" said the Prince, deeply distressed.

"Well, this licks creation," murmured Racksole.

(Another long instalment next week.)

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WHITE LILACS.

Telling the Influence They Had on a Man's Life.

"WHO is he?"

Mrs. Allingham held the snowy card lightly in her jewelled hand. The bit of dainty pasteboard read: "Keith Montrose."

Her daughter Genevieve turned from the mirror where she was arranging her magnificent hair.

"Why, it's one of Alec's friends! It must be Colonel Montrose, whom he met at Baden."

Mrs. Allingham swept back her satin cap-strings.

"I've no doubt it is. Dear me, where's my handkerchief? He must bring news from Alec—oh, I hope nothing has happened!"

Vieve looped up a curl.

"If he's nice, mamma, send up for me."

Mrs. Allingham bustled away.

It is just possible that when Colonel Keith Montrose saw this fat, over-dressed, bustling woman, he wondered whence the handsome student, Alec Allingham, derived his grace and refinement. But when Vieve—in response to her mother's summons—appeared, he might have wondered still more at the family beauty. Vieve turned her lustrous orbs full upon the handsomest man she had ever seen, and immediately began planning how to capture him.

The Colonel was just home—had seen young Allingham six weeks before. He had promised to make reports of his prosperity to his mother.

"You will stay and dine with us, Colonel?" purred Mrs. Allingham.

Vieve lifted her white lids alluringly.

"I shall be very happy to," said the Colonel.

Neither at Baden nor at Paris had he seen such hair and eyes.

Dinner was late. The Colonel and Vieve walked out on the long verandah in the Spring sunshine. The Colonel could not keep his eyes from the coils of raven hair against the ivory neck, and the curve of her ripe lips as she stood beside him smiling.

"You are Alec's only sister, Miss Allingham?"

"Oh, no—there is Henry."

There was no explanation of this ambiguous reply, for a ringing voice broke out, singing:

"*Thy blue bonnet, when thou came hither,*
Could scarce keep out the wind and weather,
But now it has turned to a hat and feather—
Thy bonnet has blown, whither, oh, whither?"

The ringing young voice carolled on.

Vieve rose, mortified and angry.

"Shall we go in, Colonel? The sun is rather warm."

The Colonel rose instantly, but made a feint of examining a flower at the door while he listened again.

"*Thy sword at thy back was a great black blade,*
With a basket-hilt of iron made,
And now a long rapier doth hang at thy side,
And huffingly doth this bonny Scot ride!"

The last line was given with an indescribable emphasis. In spite of himself the Colonel laughed. Vieve's cheeks were crimson.

"She is only a child, Colonel, and in spite of all mamma can do, she is very noisy."

"Your sister?"

"Yes; it is Henriette."

The next moment they went down to dinner. Mr. Allingham was in town. The guest sat down with the ladies.

At first there was only Miss Allingham and her mother, but half through the first course the door swung open, and a tall girl, with black hair falling over her shoulders, wearing a crimson dress, and bearing a branch of white lilacs in her hand, nonchalantly entered the room. Vieve glanced apprehensively at her mother.

"Henriette," warningly, "are you quite ready for dinner?"

No answer. The branch went rustling upon a table. A little velvet hat, with a white plume of the fragrant blossoms went after it.

"I don't want any dinner."

"Why, my dear?"

"Shay is dead!"—with a tumultuous sob. A door slammed and the girl with the unconquerable spirit was gone.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Mrs. Allingham, as though words would not express her feelings.

"I wish all her dogs were dead!" said Vieve, charitably.

"If it were not dogs, it would be something worse. No one can tell what I suffer with that child."

"The black sheep!" thought the colonel, full of pity for the quivering lips he had caught sight of. The girl was, perhaps, fifteen years old. She had splendid eyes, like Vieve, but the expression of her face was totally different.

It was a face that haunted Colonel Montrose. The forehead under the jetty tresses had a splendid breadth. The eyes were full of passion, yet the pale cheek had a strangely chastened look for a child.

But Henry did not appear again, much to her sister's relief, and before sunset the Colonel took his departure. He went down the garden-path, Vieve's tones honey-sweet in his mind; but just beyond the garden, at the edge of the avenue, the breath of fresh lilacs bathed his face, and the sound of passionate sobbing smote his ear.

After listening a moment he turned aside from the path, and below the garden wall, beneath a thicket of lilacs in bloom, he caught sight of a crimson dress. He gazed until he made out, in the gloom, a little brown hand, a prostrate figure, and a head of hair. For a moment he was at a loss what to do. Then he went forward slowly, his step falling softly in the grass. The sobs were growing only heavier. He discovered a little mound, and saw how it was—the child was weeping over Shay's grave.

"My child," he said gently, "is it right to grieve so for a dog?"

The girl looked up.

"He was only a dog, but he was all I had to love me," she said.

The Colonel sat down upon a stone.

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"Will you tell me about him?"

"Do you really care?" said the girl.

She looked at him wistfully.

"Yes," he said, gravely.

"He knew so much!" said poor Henry. "Once, when I was alone in the woods, I fell into the lake, and he plunged in and pulled me out; and when I came to my senses, I was lying on the bank, and he was lapping my face. I walked home in my wet clothes, two miles, and was ill for a month with fever. I did not dare tell mamma how it happened, for fear she would scold me; but all the time Shay lay on a mat by the bed, and would not leave me, though they whipped him to drive him out. He was a St. Bernard—so handsome! He was so good—so good! And he *always* loved me!" And Henry's locks went down upon the fresh mound in another paroxysm of grief.

"If I might send you another," ventured the Colonel. "The St. Bernards are always brave and affectionate. He would soon get attached to you."

"No, no!" cried Henry. "You are very good. But I don't want another dog; they always die. Rose, Shay's mother, died, and—and everything that loves me dies!" and the child shook with her sobs.

Words had no effect. She would not be comforted, and at last Colonel Montrose rose and went on his way, wondering, and yet touched to the heart. And for years he never inhaled the odour of white lilacs without recalling the girl whom he had so vainly tried to console under their shadow—the odd, wild girl, who sang rollicking songs, and roamed in the woods, and *would* not be conventional.

* * * * *

The splendid seaside Pavilion was crowded with guests. Aristocracy had, at last, found a suitable place in which it could worship Nature—everything at the Pavilion was smoothed and cultivated and gilded to perfection. And here millionaires lolled in the sea-breezes, and swung down to the front in their carriages, and found the beach delightful.

It was quite late in the summer when a party of cavalry officers rode out from the town and arrived at the Pavilion on the day previous to a grand ball. The horses curvetted and pulled hard at their silver bits, and the riders doffed their military caps right and left to the smiling ladies upon the beach.

"General Montrose is the handsomest man in the service!" they averred.

The General and his suite met with a universal welcome. Cavalry officers are treasures in a ball-room. Already there was a great fluttering among the ladies.

"The General has blue eyes, and I know he prefers brunettes. I shall wear my pink *crêpe*," said Hallie Lee.

"What you wear will hardly matter," said her mother discontentedly. "You forget Miss Allingham."

Miss Hallie pulled her curls and pouted.

But the General was not a dancing man. When the waltzers tripped their lightest, and the music rang its sweetest he stood quietly talking with a knot of gentlemen.

"Have you seen our belle, General?" asked one of them.

"I have seen many beautiful ladies, Bromley, but I have not been told who bears off the palm."

"Then you have not seen Miss Allingham. I never saw such a woman off canvas."

"Is she present?"

"Yes, at the further end of the room—wearing a dress of white silk. We cannot see her face here. Shall we go that way?"

But half way across the hall General Montrose started and turned aside. He had met Henry Allingham's eyes.

He hardly knew why he avoided her—why he was conscious of a great confusion and pain. But, Heavens, how beautiful she was—far more so than Vieve had ever been. Vieve, who had married a poverty-stricken German baron, and had gone to Dresden.

It was not till late in the evening that he found himself in the vicinity of the brilliant belle. He had found Alec Allingham. It was the brother who presented him—and the beautiful Henry uttered a few silvery words, and then seemed to forget his existence.

"Spoilt," he muttered, bitterly, and turned coldly away.

It was not until then that he knew how he had held his memory of this girl as an assurance of the hearts of women.

"Now that she can make fools of men, she will not cry for a dog," he said cynically. "Well, I will never marry. I am too world-wise and heart-weary to value mere beauty in women. My life is more than half gone. Let the rest go quickly."

* * * * *

It was early morning—he was pacing the sands. One of the hotel boats, marked *Pavilion*, was floating at its moorings. He entered it, and rowed away.

The bay was smooth as glass. Far away in the shining water he saw a black object; for want of a better goal, he pulled towards it.

It was a low line of rocks covered with shells and seaweed. He moored his boat and sprang upon them, gathering a handful of the rosy shells, and tearing a strange sea-moss from a cleft. The sky was shining with the faint gold of the rising sun; the sea-birds screamed around him.

Suddenly he saw the boat, the only one in sight, drifting far out of his reach. It had not been securely moored, and had quickly yielded to the press of the water. The tide was coming in, and the boat was drifting to land.

"An absurd situation," he muttered.

He thought that was all, at first. Then he perceived that the rocks were below high-water mark, and the feeling of annoyance changed to one of horror. For he could not swim.

He measured his distance from the shore. It was so great that he could not make out the figures which he knew must, at that hour, be moving about the beach, and it was utterly unlikely that they would discover his situation.

He was to drown, then. He smiled, with pale lips.

The water had risen to his knees, when he heard a call:

"Courage!"

Then he heard the dip of oars; next, saw their flash, as a boat, bearing a cargo of lilacs, and rowed by a slight girlish figure, glided up to him. He stepped in, and sank down with a white cheek, saved from death.

For several moments he did not know his preserver. Half an hour's waiting for death had unnerved and weakened the man. But suddenly he felt to whom belonged the great eager eyes, so dark, so lustrous, fixed upon him.

"You are ill," said Miss Allingham. "Be patient; I shall row as fast as I can. The storm is growing very fast."

She pulled deftly. The boat shot ahead. There was a lilac bloom, white and fragrant, in her little velvet hat, a splendid glow upon her cheeks.

"I had been two miles up the shore to an old garden, for my favourite flower, when I met a boat of the Pavilion. I feared something was wrong, and so I kept on the alert until I discovered you. How fast the storm is coming!"

"Yes; it will overtake us. You should have saved yourself, and left me to my fate."

The boat was tossing like a cockle-shell, yet she showed no fear, only lifted her eyes to his face, at those hard words—so bitter, unnatural, ungrateful—with a pathetic reproach. Those eyes set his heart on fire; his lips and cheeks grew red with passion.

At that moment an oar broke. Henry uttered a cry.

"Let it go!" he cried hoarsely. "We will die together."

"No," she answered. "I mean to live. Can you scull?"

"Forgive me!" he exclaimed. "I am a brute."

He took the remaining oar from her hand. She smiled gloriously in his face.

"Beauty," he said, "why did you risk yourself to save me? What was I to you?"

"You were more than life to me," she answered. "It was for your love that I gave up my hoyden ways, and strove to grow wise and womanly. I think that you like me a little. Now—now," with a little arch smile, "will you scull to land?"

And while the white lilacs were yet in bloom, they were married.

Florence Martin.

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What you have to do is to print in the space opposite each signature the name (initials, Christian name and surname) which you think it to be. No one but the Editor possesses the correct names of all the signatures shown. If you are in doubt as to the correct rendering of any signature or signatures ask some of your friends. When you have filled up the coupon to the best of your ability, cut it out and keep it by you, with the other coupons, until you see an announcement in SHORT STORIES telling you to send them in, together with the coupons which will appear in SHORT STORIES.

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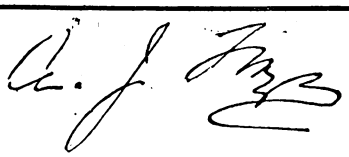
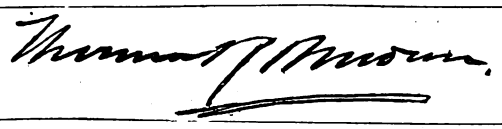
No. 24. 	
No. 25 	
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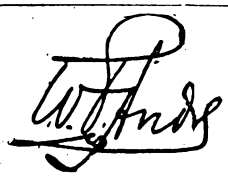
No. 27. 	
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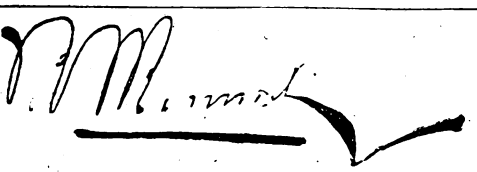
No. 29. 	

NAME.....

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My Ward's Conquest.

Telling How a Young and Beautiful Girl Captured a Whole Family.

WHILE sitting in my library one morning in July, I received a letter from the executors of the will of one Harold Marsden, informing me of the fact that the aforesaid Harold Marsden was dead, leaving a daughter and a large fortune, and—could my eyes deceive me?—I was appointed guardian of the daughter of the deceased.

Now to me, a man of forty years, who had travelled all my life, and seen enough of the fair sex to totally disgust me, this was anything but pleasant news. I had never seen this daughter of my college friend Harold; but I had heard rumours of a great beauty and flirt, and to have the young lady thrown at my head in this manner was anything but agreeable.

As I sat frowning and wondering how to get out of this difficulty, my good sister Mehitable, who kept house for me at my pretty country home, Grey Gables, entered.

"Why, Willis, you look troubled! What is the matter?"

And as I had always done from childhood, I straightway poured my troubles into the sympathetic ears of Mehitable.

"Why, that is news; but we must make the best of it."

"Well, what am I to do?"

"Do? Why, you are to write the poor child, and invite her here at once. Where is she?"

"The letter says she is at school."

"Of course, she is waiting to hear from you; and as I now have my flowers to attend to, I will leave you, and when I return I do not want to see that frown. This ward may prove a blessing instead of a calamity."

And so the letter was duly written and posted to Miss Muriel Marsden—the name was not bad, and I found myself repeating it, and wondering what sort of a girl this new ward of mine was.

At last I received a letter in a delicate, girlish hand, thanking me for my invitation, and stating that the writer would be with us on Thursday at 5 p.m., and this was Tuesday.

A letter from my scapegrace brother Jack, stated that he would be home from college Wednesday morning. I laid both letters down with a sigh. No more peace for me now, with a grown ward and my mischievous brother Jack in the house. Thursday arrived only too soon for me, and with it a telegram calling me to Narfield, a small town eight miles away.

"I will be back by the three o'clock train, in time to meet Miss Marsden, when she comes," I said to Mehitable; "and if I should not happen to get there, send Jack."

I could not finish my business as soon as I expected, and so had to go by the very train I expected my ward. As I took my seat facing two young ladies, I heard a bell-like voice exclaim:

"Oh, won't I lead him a life of it!"

And the older lady said to her companion:

"Well, you are capable of it."

Something in the smooth, clear voice reminded me of the letter I received on Tuesday, and I listened intently to try to catch more of the conversation.

"How old is he?" presently asked the old lady.

"Oh, about forty—a regular old fogey, and hates women."

"Well, you have the power to make him change his mind on that subject, if anyone has."

The other shrugged her shoulders in a manner unmistakably Frenchy, and laughed.

"Oh, I'll lead him a dance! I hear he has a younger brother."

"Muriel, you are a dreadful flirt."

"Now, Grace, do not scold; but here is Lakeville. Now to beard the lion in his den; the——"

I waited to hear no more, but hurrying from the station, rushed through the woods by a path that led to Grey Gables. Muriel! I knew it! And so this small, giddy creature was my ward, was to make my house her home hereafter, and had already designs on Jack.

Now, I liked a stately, dignified woman; but these giddy laughing butterflies—bah! I hated them. My conscience began to prick me for not honourably making myself known. But, pshaw! Jack was there, no doubt, and I could not endure a ride all the way to Grey Gables with that designing little creature.

As I neared the drawing-room windows, I heard a merry peal of laughter in a voice already hateful to me, and instead of going in to welcome her, I stole up to my rooms to dress for dinner. While dressing, I occasionally heard that ringing laugh. So she was one of these nuisances who laugh incessantly—how was I to bear it?

At last the dinner-bell rang, and as I looked in the glass I thought what a well-preserved man I was—no one would take me to be a day over thirty. So I mustered up courage, and walked down to the drawing-room.

The family had assembled; Mehitable, in her quiet, black gown, sat by the window knitting; Jack was leaning over a red easy-chair, in his usual graceful manner; and in the chair sat the small being I had already begun to hate. She was looking at Jack, and laughing at some remark he had just made.

As she heard the door she glanced up, and, seeing me, came quickly across the floor with a graceful, gliding movement, that reminded me of a snake, saying:

"I know this is my new guardian, so shall not wait for an introduction"—at the same time offering me her cool, little hand.

As I said some stiff words of welcome, I gazed at the most beautiful creature I had ever seen.

The dimpled, peach-bloom face, rosebud mouth, perfect teeth, and, above all, a pair of wonderfully-beautiful, brown

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eyes, as soft and pleading as a fawn's, all this framed in the fluffy golden hair, made a most beautiful picture.

She had changed her grey travelling dress for one of some soft, white clinging material, and a bunch of crimson roses gleamed bright and warm on her breast. But as I looked at the figure standing before me, the pleading look in the brown eyes only seemed to say "treachery," and my stiff, conventional greeting was hardly one in which to welcome a stranger.

In an instant the little figure was drawn proudly erect, and the eyes that a moment before were so soft and beautifully brown, flashed steely grey into mine; and deliberately turning her back to me, she walked to the window, and commenced talking to Mehitable.

At the dinner-table she was as bright and gay as ever, addressing all her remarks to Jack and Mehitable, never once looking at me. As we rose from the table, Mehitable said:

"Willis, perhaps Muriel would like to walk through the garden—we have some beautiful roses, dear."

I could see at once that Mehitable was completely captivated by the girl, and I waited anxiously for her answer.

"Oh, I would not trouble Mr. Craig. Jack will show me the roses, will you not?"

And so she called him Jack already. I groaned inwardly as I watched the two saunter down the garden path. Mehitable turned to me with her sweet smile, saying:

"Is she not lovely?"

"I have not noticed anything particularly lovely about her," was my cool answer.

"Now, Willis!"—and Mehitable's hand was laid approvingly on my arm. "After seeing her, will you persist in this insane dislike? She is a sweet, lovable child—a little wayward, perhaps, but you only know that from what you have heard."

"I detest flirts."

"You do not know she is a flirt."

"Well, enough said, Mehitable; the fact that she was thrust on me in this manner is very disagreeable," and, turning wearily, I left the room.

And so it went on, day after day, and week after week; it seemed as if the girl had bewitched them all; she called Mehitable "Auntie," and caressed her in that clinging manner I called "snaky." She and Jack were inseparable, and as for her behaviour to me, she showed her dislike in every word and look. She had not only captivated Mehitable and Jack, but everyone in the little village in which we lived seemed to worship her; I alone detested her. I could see only her utter heartlessness and fickleness.

At last a new actor appeared on the scene, in one Gerald Hastings, who, it appeared, had been an old lover of Muriel's. But the girl played with him, as she did with all others—one day all smiles and as gracious as a queen, the next cold, chilling, and indifferent. I at once took a great liking to Gerald Hastings, and invited him to Grey Gables. He accepted my invitation; and I plainly saw his passionate love for Muriel.

"What a capital thing it would be," thought I, "if I could marry her off to Hastings; he loves her devotedly." My conscience sometimes pricked me, as I wondered if I was doing exactly right by the daughter of my old friend, but I would ease it by saying: "Pshaw! what made him bring her up in that manner?"

One day Gerald came to my library, asking the hand of my ward in marriage. He said she had refused him twice, but he could not give her up. I promised to do all I could for him, and went to bed, resolving to speak to Muriel about it.

The next morning, at the breakfast table, Jack said: "Have you heard the news?" Of course we were all anxious to hear it, and he continued:

"Old Mrs. Raynor's son was run over last night and nearly killed. He is not dead yet, but cannot last long; and I heard they had hardly a mouthful to eat."

We were all expressing sympathy and regret, when Muriel said, with that shrug of the shoulders I hated so:

"Oh, do not talk about such horrid things; they cannot hear you expressing your sympathy, and they would not appreciate it if they did; that kind of people never does."

I looked at her in amazement. What kind of a woman was she to talk so heartlessly of her fellow creatures? The talk drifted in other channels, and as we rose from the table, I said:

"May I see you in the library in the course of an hour, Miss Marsden?"

She looked at me in surprise, and then said indifferently:

"If you wish it."

I went to the library, and sat thinking what a beautiful woman she was, but how heartless and cruel. How I wished I could marry her off. My thoughts were interrupted by the frou-frou of skirts, a tap at the door, and she stood before me, looking as haughtily at me as a queen might look on her lowliest subject.

"You wish to see me?"

"Yes; be seated."

"I prefer to stand."

"Very well—Mr. Hastings last night asked your hand in marriage."

At the mention of his name a look of disdain came on her face, as she said:

"And so he has appealed to you, has he? What did you tell him?"

"Miss Marsden, as your guardian, I am bound to look after your welfare, to a certain extent. You can never find a better man than Gerald Hastings, or one more passionately in love with you; besides that, he is wealthy, handsome, has pleasing manners, and I wish you to marry him."

"You wish me to marry him! I would not marry him, for that reason alone, even if I loved him—but I detest him, therefore shall not marry him."

She gathered her skirts in one little jewelled hand and prepared to leave the room.

"Stop! I wish you to remain here and think this matter over carefully."

"Sorry to displease you, but I have an engagement; and besides, I never think; it is too tiresome." Bowing gaily, she tripped down the hall, whistling: "Good-bye, my lover, good-bye!"

I smothered an oath. So that was the way I was to be treated, in my own house, by a chit of a girl. I should never stand it. Walking to the window, I saw her on the lawn, engaged in a skirmish with Jack, over a book. At last, she threw it at him, and turning, ran into the house. Such antics were disgusting to me, and I determined to find Mehitable, and have a talk with her about it.

I entered the dining-room, and at first thought it was empty, but a second glance revealed a little figure, curled up in an easy-chair, before the fire, which we always kept lighted in the autumn, reading. It was Muriel. Jack came in after me, and, approaching Muriel, said:

"I say, Muriel, I am awfully sorry, but I have got to go to Harsgreen to-morrow, and we cannot have our ride."

"I am sorry, too, Jack; as, in that case, I shall have to ride alone."

"What horse will you take?"

"Black Beauty."

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"But, Muriel, I hate to have you take her when you go alone; she is dangerous."

"Oh, I can manage her. I shall not ride any other."

"Then you cannot go," said I.

"Indeed, and why not."

"Because Black Beauty is no fit horse for you, and I do not want you to take her."

"Well, I intend to go, and I shall ride Black Beauty, so what are you going to do about it? Come, Jack, I am going for a walk," and, taking her hat, she left the room, followed by Jack, while I proceeded to the stables, and ordered John on no account to saddle Black Beauty the following day, and then went to the house to do some writing.

As the dinner bell rang, Jack came in alone, saying Muriel had grown tired of him, and sent him back, while she finished her walk alone. I straightway dismissed her from my mind, as an unpleasant subject. My writing finished, about six o'clock I started to the post-office. As I neared the cottage of Mrs. Raynor, I thought of the poor woman and her son, and reproaching myself for not helping them, resolved to stop and see them on my way home. Suddenly the door was opened, and I heard a voice I knew only too well:

"Oh, that is all right, Mrs. Raynor, I am glad to help you. I will see that he has a more comfortable bed, and to-morrow will come again."

Could I believe my eyes? There stood Muriel, in all her bright beauty, and beside her Mrs. Raynor, thanking her, in a broken voice, for what she had done. They did not see me on account of the dusk, but as I walked on, my mind was in a very disturbed state. Was this the woman I had called heartless? Bah! It was only a new freak of hers, this trying to play "Lady Bountiful." I was detained at the post-office, therefore it was too late to stop at Mrs. Raynor's on my way back. As I neared my own door, I met Gerald Hastings, coming down the steps, with bag in hand.

"Good-bye, Mr. Craig," he said, offering his hand; "I have seen Muriel again, and it is all up with me."

"Why, Gerald, are you going?"

"Yes, but I thank you for what you have done for me. I cannot talk now, but will write you. Good-bye!"

Morning dawned, bright and clear, and as Muriel was not down to breakfast, I did not see my ward, but as I was sitting in the library, I heard the clatter of hoofs down the drive, and Muriel, radiantly beautiful, in her dark habit, mounted on Black Beauty, dashed past the window, and was out of sight before I could recover from my amazement. I called John, and wrathfully demanded what that meant.

"I could not help it, Mr. Willis," said the old man. "Miss Muriel ordered me to saddle the horse, and when I told her what you said, she went to work and saddled him herself, and I could not help it, sir, she would not stop."

"That will do."

No more writing for me now. I went out on the verandah and sat down. So my commands were to be regarded as lightly as air, and she was to go on hearing no master, but following the inclination of her own sweet will. My musings were interrupted by the appearance of little Susie Fielding, the daughter of an old shoemaker, who barely did enough work to keep the wolf from the door.

"Mr. Craig," she said, shyly, "is Miss Marsden in?"

"No, she is not. Anything I can do for you, Susie?"

"No, sir; she told me to come to-day and get my books."

"What books?"

"Oh, don't you know? She promised to get me some books and a dress, so I can go to school."

"When did she tell you this?"

"The last time she came to sing to father."

"Does she sing to your father?"

"Oh, yes, since his eyes got so bad he cannot read, Miss Marsden sings for him every day! Oh, sir, she is a perfect angel! We all love her—don't you?"

I evaded the embarrassing question, and asked:

"What else has this angel of yours been doing?"

"Oh, sir, she does everything! She bought a nice map for the school-house, and a chair for lame Willie Sanson, and she paid Mrs. Hammond's doctor's bill, and lots of other things, and everybody loves her. If I come to-night, do you suppose she will have my books?"

"I daresay."

"All right, I will come."

Surprise upon surprise, where would it end? And so this mischievous little flirt, whom I had termed heartless and cruel, and whom I had hated with all my heart, was really a good fairy, going round and helping the poor of the place in which I had lived all my life without even once realising their desolate condition. But why was she so wilful and haughty, always treating me with such supreme contempt? And then the thought arose, if I had been a little more gracious that first night, perhaps all would have been different. But her wild trick of the morning, I could not readily forgive that. What was that coming slowly up the hill? Farmer Brown in his waggon, with Black Beauty tied behind. Two steps took me to the gate, and, as he drew nearer, I saw Muriel lying on a feather bed in the bottom of the waggon. My heart gave a great leap, she looked so white and still. Was she dead? Just then, Farmer Brown, seeing me, called out:

"Mr. Craig! The little one got thrown, and wife said I had better bring her home, as you are nigher a doctor than we are."

"Where is she hurt?"

"Sprained her foot, I think. Now, if you'll help me, we'll get her in."

We carried her in and laid her on the sofa, while I summoned Mehitable to stay with her, and started for a doctor. Dr. Agnew came, and after cutting off the dainty French boot and examining her foot, he pronounced it a severe sprain, one that was liable to keep her in her room for weeks. And so wilful Muriel was punished, and I had no hand in it.

Two weeks had passed and I had not yet seen her, but Jack and Mehitable brought me favourable news of the invalid, and I never saw one of the villagers, but what her praises were rung in my ears, until I began to feel heartily ashamed of myself for acting as I had.

One morning I had gone to her door, but Mehitable brought me word that Muriel did not want to see me. After that I had not troubled her, until one day the doctor said Jack might carry her downstairs. Mehitable said she was wild with delight at the prospect of once again leaving her room. But, as luck would have it, Jack was called away on business, and, with great misgivings, I walked up to Muriel's room and knocked at the door. As she said "Come in," I entered. When she saw me, that look of dislike, I knew so well, crossed her face and she said:

"Oh, is it you?" and went on with the book she was reading. I walked to the sofa.

"Muriel, why did you not tell me?"

"Tell you what?"

"Tell me of the part you were playing as good fairy to our villagers."

"Why should I tell you anything? You took no interest in me or any of my doings."

"Muriel, forgive me! I confess I did wrong, but, little ward, I will explain it some time. Let bygones be bygones; shake hands and say we are friends."

Her little hand was laid in mine, and her brown eyes, full of unshed tears, looked gratefully at me, as she said:

"If you wish it."

"That will do," said I. "Now we are firm friends."

She laughed the wicked little laugh of old.

"You are strangely forgetting the duty of a friend; you have not even asked how I am feeling this bright morning."

"I know you are feeling well enough to go downstairs, and, as Jack is not here, I come to take his place, if you will trust yourself to me."

She looked at me from under her half-closed lids, saying slyly:

"Cruel guardians sometimes get rid of naughty wards by throwing them from their castle window when all attempts to marry them off have proved unsuccessful."

"Now, Muriel, I thought we were to forget the past."

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"So we are, and to show you how completely I forget it, I will let you carry me down."

As I lifted the slender figure and gazed at her pale face, resting so confidently on my shoulder, an indefinable something stole over me, and I could not explain my feelings, so I carefully descended to the sitting-room, where we surprised Mehitable, who sat by the window, sewing. Muriel laughed as she saw Mehitable look at us in wonderment.

"Do not look as though you thought the heavens were about to fall about your ears, aunty. This stupid old guardian of mine has come to his senses; we have buried the hatchet."

After that Muriel and I were the best of friends. Every day I carried her to the sofa in the sitting-room, and every day I sat by her side, and read or listened while she talked of her dear papa. And, as time wore on, I grew more ill at ease, as I thought that Jack loved her, and she only looked on me as an elder brother. At last I could bear it no longer, and, one morning, as Jack and I were alone, I said:

"Jack, do you love Muriel?"

"Well, yes; who could be in the house with her and not love her?"

A great lump rose in my throat, and I thought what an old fool I was to fall so desperately in love with my ward.

"Does she know this?"

"Know what?"

"Of your love for her?"

He turned and looked at me, and then said:

"Oh, that is what you mean, is it? Well, see here, this is the girl I love in that way," and he drew from his pocket the photograph of a dark, gipsy-faced girl. How light my heart felt as I looked at that photograph, and how I blessed that little dark-haired beauty for stealing Jack's heart before he saw Muriel.

"But does she not love you?"

"She? No, she knows all about Bessie. Now, you old goose," Jack said, assuming a paternal manner, "don't you suppose I know how matters are going? Go ahead and win, my son, and I will give you my blessing."

So that settled it. All day I felt as though treading on air. But I could not make up my mind to see Muriel until next day. As I entered the sitting-room, bearing a big bunch of red roses, which I laid on the sofa by her, she said:

"Why have you not been to see me before? Just think, Jack had to carry me downstairs this morning, you truant."

"Well, I will try to make myself very entertaining. Now I have come to tell you a story."

"To tell me a story? All right, I am all attention."

I sat down by her and commenced:

"Once on a time, as the story-books have it, there was a cross old bachelor, who had travelled a great deal, and seen enough of women to thoroughly disgust him. One day, when he received a letter announcing the death of an old friend, he felt very sorry; but when he read further, and found that this friend had appointed him guardian to his daughter, his anger knew no bounds, and, like the unreasonable man he was, he made up his mind to dislike the poor little daughter, and make it as unpleasant for her as possible. The evening of her arrival he travelled in the same train and overheard a conversation between her and another lady that only increased his dislike.

"As time wore on, he felt harder than ever towards her, and, while sitting on the verandah one day, wondering how to punish her, he learnt from a little girl how kind she had been to the poor, doing all sorts of good deeds, and he saw she had only used that heartless tone and manner as a cloak to cover her good deeds. And as he was thinking of her, she was brought home, and he found his ward had been injured. Well, they grew firmer friends from day to day, but he wished to be something more than a friend to her, so deeply did he love her. He went to her and told her all about it. Can you tell me how she felt?"

I waited a moment for an answer, and then the little hand was slipped in mine, and the happiest moment of my life was when Muriel's brown eyes looked in mine, and her dear voice murmured: "I love you."

Duncan Rivers.

Your Attention, Please.

I HAVE a few words of good advice for you, and will claim your attention for a few moments. This is what I want to say to you especially — don't delay in starting to read "Phantom Shadows," the excellent new serial story that has just begun in this paper. You can commence it this week, for the summary will give you the gist of the first instalment. After you have read to the end of chapter six, which concludes this week's instalment, I am certain that you will look forward to the time when the next *S. S.* will be published, so that you will be able to continue with the story. Really, Mr. Arnold Bennett's best work is contained in "Phantom Shadows," which is going to prove one of the most successful of *S.S.* serials. Just drop me a line on a post-card criticising it, will you, for I should be very glad to hear what my readers themselves think of it?

Do You Want £10?

WHEN you have read "Phantom Shadows," turn to page 459, and learn all about the competition, full details of which are given. Cannot you decipher the signatures? Perhaps not at first glance, but you may be able to after a careful study. At any rate it will be worth your while to do your best to solve them. The four back numbers of this paper containing the previous sets can still be obtained, so if you wish to enter the competition, you will find no difficulty on that score, for any newsagent will only be too glad to procure them for you, if he has not got them in stock, and they will be sent post free from this office on receipt of sixpence in stamps. The concluding set of signatures will appear next week.

A Chance for Small Advertisers.

THERE is an announcement on page 468 that will doubtless interest many readers. If you have something on your hands that you wish to dispose of, or have any small wants of any sort, you now have a unique opportunity of gratifying your wishes. Full particulars are given in the announcement referred to above.

Next Week's Number.

OUR next number will contain, besides the usual features, another splendid long instalment of "Phantom Shadows," and the Eleventh Unsolved Love Problem, entitled "Brian Cresswell's Choice." A prize of one guinea will be offered in connection with this latter.

I shall also announce next week the winner of the guinea offered in connection with the problem, "The Heart of Claire Gilchrist."

Your Editor.

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- An - Imaginary Wedding.

Telling What Happened in Consequence of a Girl's Foolish Fancy.

MISS FAINE looked dreamily out on the housetops of the crowded city and bit the corner of a heavy white envelope in her hand. It contained an invitation to the wedding of an old schoolfriend—the last of her class to marry, save herself—and she was thinking of the letter she had received from the merry little bride to be, a letter so full of happiness and anticipation. She thought, too, of Marian, her particular chum, who had married last Spring, and of how happy she was. Miss Faine had never been in love; she had never had a sweetheart, and so she thought less of the sentiment of love than of the satisfaction of not being an old maid or the fun of telling one's friends about one's wedding and of the delight of preparing a trousseau.

With characteristic impulsiveness and firmness and a bright smile of merriment, she decided to experience all the pleasure of anticipating and preparing for a wedding. She would get the prettiest trousseau imaginable and tell her friends—this much she would enjoy even if the groom was wanting. To that individual she gave but a passing thought; she should think of a name for him and when she talked of him at all it would be as of someone far away but possessed of all the manly traits she could think of. She resolved to begin the frolic by writing to Marian a confidential letter, telling her all about it and asking forgiveness for laughing at her foolish happiness the Spring before; then half the fun would be in telling Dr. Barnes, the cold man of the world who wanted her to marry him; the dressmaker, a gossipy little woman, would have to know, and the affair might be vaguely but cunningly hinted at in the boarding-house.

Miss Faine was a good-looking, graceful young woman of twenty-two. She dressed well, talked well, and, though considered indifferent and formal, was accorded considerable attention by reason of her being Society editress of the *Daily Telephone*.

She was exceedingly clever and tactful in business, but, though men liked and admired her, she was too smart to be flattered and too busy to devote to the men she met enough time to show her real character; so few had loved her. She had always been busy, successful, and ambitious, and cared little for men in general.

She had seldom thought of marriage until this morning, when she received the wedding invitation; then the monotony and emptiness of her life impressed her.

That night Miss Faine braided her long hair thoughtfully and lay down on her little white bed, not to sleep, but to think—as happy as a little child. She planned what she should say to Marian; then she could see herself downstairs in the drawing-room next evening when Dr. Barnes called—she should lean on the mantel with a deliciously indifferent air and tell him that she had promised to marry another—oh, the delight of that! Then she grew weary of thinking of the long list of friends to whom she should tell the secret as a profound one, and she fell asleep with thoughts of linen and lace and love floating through a mind usually filled with sterner things. In her dreams she heard the good-natured landlady gossiping to the new arrivals: "Now don't say I told you, but they say Miss Faine is engaged."

She left the house early next morning and stopped at the dressmaker's. Her face was quite pink when she said:

"Mrs. Martin, I want to see you about some sewing. I shall need rather more than I have needed. You know—about—that is, in February."

"Oh, Miss Edith, now are you goin' to be married? Well, now you can't think how glad I am. A sweet, pretty girl like you, without no mother, why, it's the very thing."

And she spent an hour planning and talking with Mrs. Martin.

By the time she reached her desk she had become so enchanted with the idea of her own wedding that she could think of nothing else. The society column that day would be short, for she must write to Marian.

"My dearest Marian," she began, "I am going to tell you a very important secret which must be carefully guarded. I am going to be married in February to Mr.——"

Here she lifted her pen and looked thoughtfully over the head of the editor-in-chief. Of course she must determine "his" name, occupation, and so on, though she had not given those things a thought. She took a scrap of paper and wrote "Mr. Ernest Field," but that did not please her, and she tried one after another until she decided on "Mr. Richard Blake." Then she continued:

"——Richard Blake, and he is, I think, all a man should be. He is kind, sympathetic and tenderhearted, besides being firm and manly."

She read this over and, without observing its inconsistency, liked it. Then added:

"He is literary in his tastes and appreciates the ability I may have in this direction."

Miss Faine was delighted with Mr. Richard Blake, and as she wrote the last sentence she thought of reckless, aristocratic Tom Arnold, to whom, it had been said, she was engaged, and of how he had scorned the idea of her taking a position on the *Daily Telephone*. She was conscious of liking her imaginary bridegroom infinitely more, and resumed:

"Without being strikingly handsome, he is good-looking, with strong, clear features and an expression of firmness about the mouth. I dare say, dear Marian, that all this seems very unlike my practical, unsentimental self, but I confess a complete change has come over me. We are planning to keep house, and all my aspirations, ambitions, hopes, and longings centre round the thought of that little home. And just think how I used to detest the idea of ever having to keep house!"

Then she wrote page after page concerning the pretty things she expected to have and asking Marian's advice.

When she posted that letter she thought she had never remembered feeling so happy. She pictured Marian with her pretty face full of smiling surprise, wondered if she would tell Fred, and then counted the hours until her answer should come.

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Walking home, she tried to recall the qualities she had attributed to Mr. Richard Blake, and she smiled as she said to herself: "I shall be sure to forget what he is like. I should have kept a copy of that description."

That evening she put on a daintily frilled and flowered dress and went downstairs to see Dr. Barnes. Afterwards she laughed outright at her own cleverness in acting the part so prettily, and she enjoyed it all so thoroughly that once or twice, after she had gone to her room, she wished she might share the joke with someone; but she had no intimate friends and she was one who lived so much alone that she seldom betrayed her innermost thoughts and feelings, even to her best friends.

Dr. Barnes had folded his arms and said quietly, looking her straight in the eyes:

"May I ask whom you are to marry?"

"Mr. Richard Blake," she had answered, naturally enough and with an appropriate downward look. She had feared he would ask other questions, and she was not quite prepared to give definite information concerning Mr. Blake, for he was very shadowy in her mind as yet. But Dr. Barnes was too conventional, too stiff to show any decided feeling concerning the information, and it did not occur to her that he really cared; perhaps he did not.

Little by little the news of the engagement of Miss Faine spread among her acquaintances, and she heard it hinted at in the boarding-house, at the office, and in Society.

She tacitly admitted it to some, smiled indifferently at others, and occasionally she flatly denied it. But always she enjoyed it fully and was glad to have been spared the pains of talking much about Mr. Blake. The few times she had had occasion to discuss him she had got a little mixed, and he never assumed a very definite shape in her mind. When she got her cheque from the office on Saturday she spent its contents in pretty accessories to her "trousseau," all of which were carefully put away and looked at and admired very often. She economised and planned for the wedding until the whole thing had got to seem a reality, and she would not have given up the dream for all the newspaper fame in the world.

Miss Faine buttoned her dark blue jacket closely across her chest and went into the street. She looked at her watch and found that she had just time to dress, after getting home, before it was time to go to the hotel where she was to dine with Marian and Fred. They had come to London for a day or two, and Marian had written that she would expect her. She took out her note and read:

"We have a great surprise for you—something you would never suspect, and I want you to look your very prettiest."

For the first time Edith began to be concerned as to the denouement of the little drama she had been playing. The trousseau was almost ready, the secret was well circulated among her acquaintances, and February was almost here. True, she had enjoyed it all—even more than she realised—but she was puzzled over how to end it.

She thought of telling her friends that it was only a joke concocted by herself—certainly it was innocent enough—but at once she knew that would not do. Her dignity, her love of truth, her reputation for veracity would suffer. She could not do that. She might say that Mr. Richard Blake had died suddenly, but that would only complicate matters. She might pretend a great many things, but she could not pretend to mourn. She almost dreaded to see Marian, for she felt quite guilty.

"If you two think you can fool me, you are mistaken, though I confess you act well."

An hour later, when she arrived at the hotel, she found Marian talking animatedly to a strange gentleman in the lofty hotel parlour. Another minute and there were kisses, embraces, and exclamations, and the man in the case sat silently by, unnoticed for a moment. Miss Faine recovered herself and looked at Marian for an introduction; the gentleman rose and also looked expectantly at Mrs. Fred Howard. That little lady looked at both, then laughed, and as she retreated, said:

"Now, if you two think you can fool me you are mistaken, though I confess you both act well. I am going to find Fred."

They were quite alone and both were embarrassed, Miss Faine most.

"Mrs. Howard evidently thinks we know each other," he began. "I am sure I don't know why she should. I am Mr. Blake, and you are——"

"Miss Faine," she answered, with a deep blush and a glowing smile.

He was mystified over the blush at the mention of his name as well as over the

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knowing smile—in fact, at the whole thing. She fairly dropped into a chair and said:

"Will you be kind enough to tell me your first name?"

He took a card from his pocket and handed it to her, regarding her quizzically. She held it between thumb and finger and read it a dozen times before she looked up. Then she handed it to him and said hurriedly:

"It's all a joke, Mr. Blake—a very practical and unfortunate joke. For Heaven's sake don't let Marian and Fred know—just let them think you know me, and at the first opportunity I'll explain everything, and you will see that it is a very serious joke. Miss Faine—don't forget my name, Edith Faine. Accept whatever may be said and don't be surprised at anything. I promise to straighten it all out afterwards. Marian is coming." Then, with an appealing look: "Please help me out."

What Mr. Richard Blake thought it would be difficult to say, but what he did was to appear perfectly at ease when Mr. and Mrs. Howard entered, and to admire Miss Faine extravagantly.

"Well, Miss Faine, how are you?" was Mr. Howard's greeting as he shook her hand and noticed the flushed face. Then, placing his hand affectionately on Mr. Blake's shoulder, he continued:

"Just to think, Marian has known about this for ever so long and never told me until a week ago. Dick and I have travelled the same territory for five years, and when I found out how it was, why, I just pretended ignorance and persuaded him to stay a day with Marian and me. Dick, I want you to understand that I knew it all, if you did keep as mum as an oyster. Miss Edith, do you know he has never told me a word about it?"

Miss Faine, in confusion, turned to Marian with some pleasantry, feeling that she would rather be anywhere else in the world than where she was.

"So you have suddenly grown very wise, have you, old man?" said Mr. Blake for the want of something else to say.

Marian was asked to sing; afterwards dinner was served and the time passed quickly. Marian and Fred were bright and talkative, feeling that they had surprised and pleased their guests. Miss Faine was perfectly miserable, but was intensely gratified at the cleverness Mr. Blake showed at every turn, and often when she was at an utter loss.

That gentleman, however, was never so puzzled in his life, and he watched every action, every expression, every remark on the part of the three companions to solve the mystery if possible. Once he thought the joke must be at the expense of Miss Faine, then some remark from her would make him believe that she was the perpetrator of a joke on Mr. and Mrs. Howard, and again he would decide that the whole thing, whatever it was, was concocted for his confusion; then he would console himself with the thought that at least he was partially alive to the situation, and occasional approving glances from Miss Faine told him he was successfully playing the part she had assigned him.

It was barely eight o'clock when Miss Faine pleaded an important engagement and stood ready to leave her friends at the hotel. Mr. Blake, hat in hand, was at her side, and Edith joined him in thanking Mr. and Mrs. Howard for a pleasant evening.

Edith Faine had never felt so wretched and embarrassed as when she found herself alone with Richard Blake. She wanted to speak, to tell him everything, to ask him what she should do, for she felt full of gratitude to him for having steered her safely through that miserable dinner. She was silent, and, noticing her embarrassment, he talked of commonplace things as they walked towards her boarding-place. He had seldom visited London, he was saying, and had but few acquaintances there. Howard, he thought, was a clever fellow, and when he had urged him to stay a day with him and Mrs. Howard he could not refuse; he had no idea of making so pleasant an acquaintance, and wouldn't she tell him all about the little joke and what he had to do with it. Whatever that was, he was innocent of it all and he hoped she would not feel otherwise than kindly towards him.

Where should she begin? How was she ever to make him, an utter stranger, understand the foolish caprice that had led her to this horrid deception? And what would he think of her when he knew all? All these things and more passed through her mind as she walked at his side, silent and miserable, and she wished she might go away forever from everyone she knew. For the first time since they left the hotel she spoke, frankly and quietly:

"Mr. Blake, it is all my fault, and I am sure if you only could know how wretched I am over it you would forgive me. It is most singular that your name should be Richard Blake—there's where the whole trouble came in."

Miss Faine said this seriously enough, but in spite of the solemnity of her tone and expression Richard Blake could not repress a smile. If that was really the "whole trouble" the case was hopeless, for he could think of no convenient way to change his name. He was wishing the "whole trouble" was in her name—that might be easily changed.

"You see," she began again, looking into his face, "I had no idea there was anyone in the whole world named Richard Blake—I just selected that name because I liked it, and if I had chosen any other everything would have been all right."

Still Mr. Blake was not enlightened, and though he was impatient for the facts he was amused and interested at her pretty confusion. Soon they had reached the door of her home and she invited him into the drawing-room, where he was to wait until she removed her hat. She went upstairs and bathed her burning cheeks, and, standing before her mirror, looked into her own face in questioning dismay. She did not know that at that very moment downstairs in the drawing-room, Dr. Barnes was introducing himself to Mr. Richard Blake! When she went into the room a few minutes later she felt like running away as fast as she could. Was this dreadful mistake to haunt her at every turn? This was certainly decidedly awkward, and she was greatly relieved when Dr. Barnes said "Good evening," and left her once more alone with Mr. Blake.

"Mr. Blake," she said, taking a chair near him, "I never had a sweetheart, and about four months ago, when one of my girl friends married, I happened to think that it must be ever so nice to have a wedding—I mean to plan for it, to tell one's friends all about it, you know."

Mr. Blake listened intently and encouraged her to talk freely by an interested and sympathetic manner.

"I have just been interested in my work—that was all—and when I thought it would be nice to have a wedding I didn't think of the man at all. There was no man in particular to think of, you see, and so I just thought I would select a name for him and that he would play a very unimportant part." She was beginning to feel more at ease now and laughed a low laugh as she leant back in her chair and said:

"I see now that he is a very important feature of a wedding."

He was glad of an opportunity to laugh, without seeming to ridicule, so he joined her heartily.

"So you were planning to have a wedding without a groom?"

"No," she explained. "I didn't see the end of it all—I was just enjoying the fun of telling some of my friends, I did not once think of an ending for the affair until I received the note from Marian this morning. Then I began to wonder what I should say when the wedding day arrived and there was no wedding. I did think of killing you—think of that! That was the only thing that had suggested itself to me, to say that Mr. Richard Blake had suddenly died; but imagine my feelings when I read your name on that card! Until then I had not thought of there being a real Mr. Richard Blake, and I knew then that you had to live!"

Both laughed heartily at this, and Edith was almost enjoying it.

"You see, I told Marian first of all," she continued, "and when she told Fred, why of course he thought you were the man. It is terrible that my own little joke should have turned out so disagreeably," and Miss Faine grew serious again. "Now I haven't any idea what to do. Do you think it best for

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me to say to Marian and Fred and the rest of them that I manufactured the whole story? Why, they would hardly believe it, would they?"

Mr. Blake did not think they would and said as much as he regarded the pattern of the carpet. He was thinking.

Richard Blake was a man who had seen and felt much; he knew the world and had lived in it. In the girl before him and the story she was telling he was learning something that was a revelation to him. He was learning that a bright young woman, attractive and gentle, as he could plainly discern, could live in the same world that he knew, mix with the passing throng, and yet be something apart from it and have little in common with it. He knew Society girls who flirted and danced and gossipped, but he had never known one who had so much imagination, determination and spirit of caprice combined with the good sense this young lady evidently possessed.

He thought he understood her—understood the motives and the childish dreams that prompted this odd little romance of hers. But he was at as great a loss as she as to what was best to be done now that things had taken so unexpected a turn.

He could see that the whole thing was very romantic and that the most romantic thing he could do would be to propose to her. Such a possibility would have occurred to most girls, but it had never suggested itself to Miss Faine. She looked at him with perfect confidence in his ability to help and vaguely wondered what he would say.

"Well," he said, after a pause, "it is rather a peculiar combination of circumstances, and I wish I knew how to release you from this self-woven net. I don't even know what to suggest." And Richard Blake bit his lip thoughtfully. "Of course it would make a nice ending to the story if we could be married in February, but that would hardly do, for we don't even know each other."

She answered quickly and without embarrassment.

"No, no, that wouldn't do at all."

And after a moment she added, "Certainly not," with a toss of her head and a firmness that she had not exhibited before.

Mr. Blake wondered a little at her decided disapproval of a suggestion that would not have been considered bad by some girls he knew, and perhaps his vanity was a trifle wounded.

There was silence for some seconds, and it was he who spoke first.

"I am not engaged, I haven't any sweetheart, and I am not considered such a bad fellow—suppose we let things stand as they are. It won't hurt you to let your friends think you are engaged to me, and I am sure I shall feel honoured. I am going away, you know, and we shall probably not meet again. In the course of time you will love and marry someone, and then you can fix up some story about this that will sound all right—say we didn't agree, or that you found someone else you liked better."

She was thoughtful a moment, then her face brightened gradually as she said:

"Will that inconvenience you at all? I don't think you will be likely to meet anyone who has heard of it—you just happened to know Fred Howard—I can just say we decided to put the wedding off for a year, or something like that."

And so it was decided. Richard Blake left the presence of Miss Faine that night in a very peculiar frame of mind. He was practically an engaged man, and the woman was one whom he had never seen before. He laughed at the situation and planned to have Miss Faine and Mr. and Mrs. Howard to dine with him next afternoon.

Some say Miss Faine is fickle; others say they never believed the story, and those who know her best contend that she may give up her ambition for Richard Blake, but they doubt it.

Mr. Blake himself is wondering if she would.

Ida Gallagher.

A CASE FOR REFORMATION.

Telling of a Rule that Worked Both Ways.

Mr. and Mrs. Josiah Greenleaf Hamilton were enjoying their first breakfast in their mutual home. The honeymoon was over, the hotel meals and the *table d'hôte* dinners would be enjoyed no more. Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton were "at home," not only in the sense in which society understands the term, but literally. Mrs. Hamilton realised the fact with a slight feeling of apprehension, Mr. Hamilton with a sense akin to joy. To him the honeymoon trip had been a useless expenditure of good money and valuable time. To her it had been the main thing, after the trousseau, that had reconciled her to matrimony.

Mr. Hamilton drew off the glasses with which he had been reading the paper, and put on his other spectacles in order to better look at his wife on the other side of the table. She presented a pretty sight, with her fluffy hair. Her breakfast jacket was of pink cashmere, so cunningly disguised with wandering embroideries and foams of lace that one could scarcely tell of what the foundation for all this ornamentation consisted. Her skirt was nothing more or less than an extremely frivolous petticoat of pink silk and beading, with countless numbers of useless little bow-knots in pretty ribbon, and the foot that was outstretched on the hassock under the table was ensconced in a *chic*, high-heeled slipper.

Mr. Hamilton mused upon his ideal of a wife and housekeeper. It was an ideal founded upon recollections of his own mother, who lived in the days when one good dress a year sufficed any woman, and who died while her son was still so young that her memory had become a sacred thing, undimmed by recent recollection. His mother, he remembered, always breakfasted in a severely plain frock, with her hair neatly disposed in a net, and round her neck a simple frill of white lace, fastened always with the same brooch, one containing the hair of her departed father. Would Lucille, wondered Mr. Josiah Greenleaf Hamilton, wear a lock of his hair in case he was called away before her?

"I fear not," he sighed to himself, "unless I beforehand thoroughly succeed in forming her mind."

Mr. Hamilton had never read "David Copperfield"—he considered novels unworthy the attention of a successful hide and leather merchant—but like the redoubtable David, he had married in the hope of forming the mind of the extremely giddy damsel whom he had selected for his helpmate. The

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law of attraction for one's opposite had led him to fall in love with Lucille, the other law that prevents many a man from letting well enough alone was urging him to begin the reformation right away.

"My dear," he said, in what he imagined was a firm and unyielding voice.

"Yes, Popsey," returned Lucille in the universally sweet tone she employed to everyone she considered worth speaking to, from the greengrocer to her dearest bosom friend.

Mr. Josiah Greenleaf Hamilton's brow became corrugated in a frown. "Popsey" was all very well as an endearment during the courting period, but it was quite inappropriate now. Perhaps it was too much to expect his wife to always refer to him as "Mr. Hamilton"—though such had been the habit of that ideal woman, his mother, but at least she might say "Josiah."

He began again:

"My dear, now that we are at home we ought to talk things over in a definite manner, and have our future course of action fully arranged."

"That's so, Pops," returned Lucille in the most cordial manner, at the same time filling a saucer with cream for Dodo, her fat pug, that was another of Mr. Hamilton's unmentioned grievances.

"You know, my dear, as married people, we shall find certain duties confronting us that perhaps never troubled us in our unwedded days," Mr. Hamilton continued. He was going to be very harsh with the pretty girl presently, but just now, in order to get to the point more easily, he was using the term "us" in order to tacitly class himself among those needing reformation.

"We are sure to, Pops," replied Lucille, with such amazing alacrity that her husband began to feel quite cheered, and his seemingly difficult task no trouble at all.

He considered where he would begin. Would it be best to tell her of his inborn objection to a useless pug dog, or to giddy morning gowns? Should he desire her to order a number of plain, sensible hats at once, or should he tell her that he considered "Popsey" a very improper form of salutation to be used by a wife of twenty to a husband of forty-four? Ought he to tell her that he wished her to belong to more charitable societies and fewer clubs for the appreciation of bridge whist, or might it not be as well to start at once on his pet grievance of all, her extravagance? To be sure, her wishes had never gone beyond his ability to gratify them, but he had not the slightest intention of living up to his income, and, in fact, had married in the hope of economising, and adding to his already respectable fortune.

The man who hesitates is supposed to be lost. Mr. Hamilton, at any rate, lost his chance to speak, for while he was ruminating, Lucille finished feeding the dog, and completed her idiotic proceeding by wiping Dodo's cream-bespattered jaw with her lace handkerchief. Then she came and perched herself on the arm of Josiah Greenleaf Hamilton's chair and said:

"Darling old Popsey, I'm so glad you've started on this subject, for it's one I've bothered my head about ever since I promised to love and honour you. There are such a lot of things in this household that need reformation."

So she saw it, too! Dear girl, she wasn't so frivolous.

"Now, Pops, there's no use beating about the bush, we might as well speak plainly, mightn't we, old boy?"

He was so gratified at the way in which she was playing up to him, that he quite overlooked the unreverential "old boy," and nodded benignly.

"So," she went on, "I'm going to say what I want to say, and after that you can do your speaking, dear. Now, first, this house. It's all wrong."

Mr. Hamilton gazed at the dusty chairs, the tables laden with articles wholly unsuited to a breakfast room—new slippers and parcels of goods sent home "on approval" were among them—and thought that the house indeed needed the attention and the ministering feather duster of a housekeeper such as his mother had been.

Mrs. Hamilton was continuing her remarks:

"And, Popsey, we'd better just tear out the whole inside and do it over. Those parcels over there are some sample chintzes and wall-paper, which I'm going to look at just as soon as you've gone to the city, leaving Dodo and me alone. And you needn't fear my taste, Pops, for I shall show every pattern to Dodo, and if he barks at them I'll not take them, for Dodo has darling taste—haven't you, old doggy-woggy? I thought I'd have this room pink. You know Clara Gibson? Well, she had her boudoir that way, and it was fine. Then we'll rip up all that faded, green, tarnished gold in the drawing-room, and have it in ivory and *café au lait*, with Louis Quinze chairs. As for your den, you positively must have a cosy corner in it done up in Japanese style, and then I'm going to make you learn to smoke cigarettes. They seem the only kind of smoke permissible in a cosy corner."

She paused to reflect, then went on.

"Then you know, dearie, your clothes aren't at all what they should be. That old tailor of yours isn't any class at all. You must give up wearing mutton-chop whiskers and ready-made neckties. Positively, dear, you'll never realise how your neckties made me suffer when you used to come a-wooing, and what I've gone through because of the way my sisters laughed at them. They guessed first that I—liked you, because Celia said I must be dead gone or I could never put up with such cravats. And your collars aren't right, either, and I wish you'd have more patent leather shoes. I saw a crack in those you wore at dinner last evening.

"And when you have had the house done up we must get some new servants and select a livery for them—something neat and showy, with red and yellow, is what I'd go in for, with white silk stockings on the men. And I have got to have a carriage of my own, if I'm to go out as much as I really think I ought to, in order to keep up our social standing. I ought to have some more diamonds, too. And, Popsey, there's just one thing more you must promise me. It's the most important of all. I've wanted to speak of it all through the honeymoon, and now we're going to run the house on a rational basis, with our friends coming in every other evening or so, I hope, to play a simple game of bridge, if nothing else. Popsey, I want you to promise to call me Lulu. Lucille is altogether too frumpy and aged for me, it doesn't suit my style any more than that horrible Josiah suits yours, Pops, and I'm sure I'd as soon call you Jehoshaphat as Josiah."

Mr. Josiah Greenleaf Hamilton has not, up to now, even started at the task of forming his wife's mind. He is too busy earning money to pay for her reforms in household decoration and trying to dodge her proposed reforms in his own ways and whiskers.

J. Cranford.

BUYING AND SELLING.

In response to many and oft-repeated requests, we have decided to throw our advertisement columns open to the small and the private advertiser. Many a bargain goes a-begging for want of a suitable medium for bringing buyer and seller into touch with one another, and we believe that *Short Stories*, with its colossal circulation, can do wonders in this respect. We shall, therefore, commence at once a miscellaneous advertisement column for the reception of genuine bargain announcements—wants, holiday apartments, exchanges, etc., at a uniform rate of 6d. per line of eight words, so that if you have something you want to sell quickly, and it's cheap, try a line in *Short Stories*, or, if you want to pick up a bargain, watch our miscellaneous column. All advertisements should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, *Short Stories*, 17 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and should reach us not later than Friday of each week, when they will appear eleven days afterwards.

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PETITE'S PROPOSAL.

A Very Pretty Story, Relating how a Darling Little Girl was the Cause of Great Happiness.

An accident, or, rather, the crowd about an accident, which had just occurred at the street corner, prevented the handsome greys, drawing Miss Beatrice Bloom's brougham, from going a step farther.

James climbed down from the box, and came to the carriage door to explain the delay to his mistress.

"A man has been run over by a dray," he said. "They won't keep us long."

"Poor man; I am sorry! I will go into White's tea-shop while we are waiting," and Miss Beatrice Bloom, tall, stately, dignified, a handsome orphan, a charming heiress, a social favourite, left her carriage to enter the tempting confectioner's just at hand.

At two o'clock on this same December afternoon, Petite and Raspberry, in the lonely garret of a tenement, were holding a conversation; that is, Petite did the conversing, while Raspberry, being a doll, could only listen in bland, smiling silence.

"Oh, dear," said Petite at last, "we'll die, Waspberry, if papa don't tomed soon; den we'll go up to the sky wiv mamma. It's a very long time since he's been goned. Let's go, find him; he'll be so glad!" And popping on an old hat, like an extinguisher, over her fair curls, and catching Raspberry by her only arm, the little sprite hopped down the long flight of stairs, reached the pavement without encountering one of the tenement boys, who had twice called her "yellow top" in the one week that she and her father had tried to realise the small tenement garret as "home" for the present, then scampering round the corner and running straight ahead, for many streets, she found herself in the heart of the great city.

"I fought I could tomed," she said confidentially to Raspberry; and for the next two hours she feasted her blue eyes on the wonderful things in the shop windows. "This is a weal nice one, Waspberry," she said, holding up her doll so that she, too, could see the tempting pink and white confections in White's window. "See the little wound ones wiv the nuts on, and the awful good butter-tups, and the house wiv frost all on it."

She stopped, for some feathery flakes of snow were sifting from the sky upon her, and melting into dark spots upon the remnant of a raspberry satin gown, in which her doll was dressed.

"Oh, Waspberry," said Petite, shiveringly, "I wants my papa!" and, forgetting the charms of the window, she turned quickly to cross the street, when she ran into Miss Beatrice Bloom, about to enter the shop.

"You tiny little girl!" exclaimed Beatrice; "where are you going all alone?"

"To find papa," replied Petite, looking up to the young lady's face, with eyes deeply troubled.

"But you can't get across the street now," said Beatrice, delaying the child with her gloved hand; "there is such a crowd. Where is your papa?"

"I don't know," Petite answered, the trouble deepening in her eyes; "but I know he's somewheres; Waspberry and me is finding him."

"Where do you live?" questioned Beatrice, clasping the little girl's cold fingers firmly, impressed by Petite's lovely face and artless manner.

"I don't quite know," replied Petite, "but somewheres."

"And what is your name?" continued Beatrice, studying more closely the general appearance of the little waif, with as sober a face as she could command.

"Mine is Petite and hers is Waspberry. May I go now, please?" and she tried to draw her little hand away. "The peoples is almost goned now, and papa might never det founded, if Waspberry and me don't hurry awful much."

"Wait a moment, dear," said Beatrice, "and we will see if this man knows where your papa is," and she nodded to a passing policeman, who hastened to her.

"No, Miss Bloom," he said, at once recognising the young lady, "I don't know anything of the child or her father—these small ones get lost often, and when there's nobody to mind them, we just send them to one or another of the homes; but this one is uncommonly nice-looking; her friends'll turn up all right; just let her come along with me."

Petite clung tightly to Beatrice's fingers as the policeman spoke, but she scanned his face with round eyes, as tearless and unfrightened as her doll's.

"I'll take her with me," said Beatrice, with a sudden resolution. "I—I think I would like to keep her for a day or two, while you are searching for her friends."

"Just as you like, miss," he responded, and managing to learn from the little girl that papa was "papa," her doll "Waspberry," and her own name "Petite, of tourse," he made a note of this slender clue, and touched his hat as he put the little one into Beatrice's brougham, persuaded that the child was much better off than she had ever been before.

"Is we going to find papa?" asked Petite, as the carriage rolled away.

"The kind policeman is going to look everywhere for him while you go home with me," replied Beatrice gently.

"And may papa tomed, too, when he's founded?" questioned Petite.

"I expect he will be very anxious to come and get you," laughed Beatrice; and, Petite, apparently satisfied with the reply, climbed on to her knees, and held Raspberry to the carriage window, that she might not miss any of the street sights.

"Oh, Waspberry, look!" she exclaimed, as they whirled round a corner, "they is carrying a poor man, under a blanket, all hurted to def; isn't it too bad, Waspberry?"

"That is the poor man who was hurt at the corner,"

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explained Beatrice, watching every motion of her new charge; "they are taking him to a hospital."

"I wish papa didn't get losted," said Petite, tears gathering in her eyes for the first time that day. "What does papas get losted for?" and she sat down on the seat as if outside attractions were all gone.

"Perhaps it is the little girls that get lost," observed Beatrice, drawing the golden head nearer to her. "Do you think you'll like to stay with me?"

"Ye-e-s, please, when papa tomes, too," Petite replied, brushing the tears from her fair little face with her cold hands.

And "papa"? Alas, it was he who, penniless and sick at heart, had been knocked down and run over by a heavy dray, as he crossed the street that afternoon, and it was he, on his way to a hospital, whom Petite saw, when looking from the window of Beatrice's brougham.

* * * * *

Spring was approaching, and in spite of constant advertising and the conscientious efforts of Miss Bloom and the policeman, no one claimed Petite, and she, with Raspberry, fitted out with a new arm and raspberry satin gown, had become an unquestionable part of Beatrice's household.

Beatrice's friends had been not a little amused at this, "her latest fad," but one glimpse of the fair-haired, blue-eyed maiden, and an introduction to Raspberry, invariably resulted in a complete surrender to the beguiling little protegée.

"I really believe I should adopt the little fairy myself, if I had a chance," said Mrs. Ravenswood at one of Beatrice's afternoon teas.

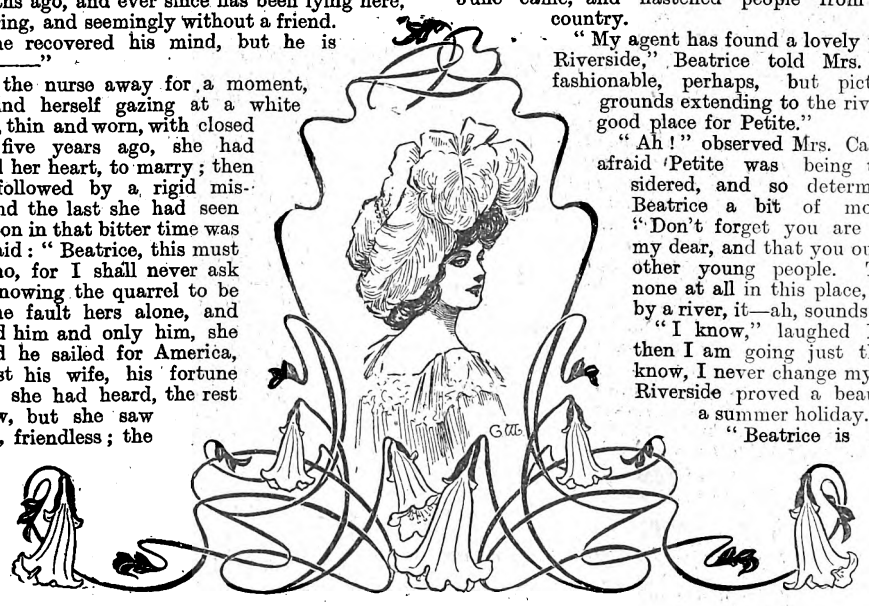
"But she is not adopted, you know," said Mrs. Calton; "her friends are expected to claim her at any time."

"Petite," said Beatrice, one Saturday morning, looking across a mass of blossoms which were piled in a reckless heap upon the dining-table, "would you like to help me tie these flowers into bunches, and then go with me to leave them at the hospital, so that the poor patients can have them?"

Petite danced up and down in delighted assent, then laying Raspberry on a chair, busied her dainty fingers in tying wax-stemmed roses, deep-scented carnations, and fragrant violets into clusters, to be distributed at the hospital by her own wee self, and an hour later she was handing them here and there to the occupants of a long row of hospital cots.

"This is a sad case," said one of the nurses to Beatrice, as they stopped before the last cot in the row; "he was run over several months ago, and ever since has been lying here, his reason wandering, and seemingly without a friend. A few days ago he recovered his mind, but he is lame for life, and——"

Someone called the nurse away for a moment, and Beatrice found herself gazing at a white cot, on which lay, thin and worn, with closed eyes, he whom, five years ago, she had promised, with all her heart, to marry; then a quarrel came, followed by a rigid misunderstanding, and the last she had seen of Ralph Pattington in that bitter time was on the night he said: "Beatrice, this must be a final yes or no, for I shall never ask you again!" Knowing the quarrel to be of her making, the fault hers alone, and knowing she loved him and only him, she bade him go, and he sailed for America, married there, lost his wife, his fortune also. This much she had heard, the rest she did not know, but she saw him now, helpless, friendless; the bitterness in the past was all gone, and the old love, mellowed by sympathy and pity, brightened her eyes.



His angry farewell on that night, five years ago, had now her benediction, and yet he knew it not.

"Hush, dear," she said softly, taking a bunch of white carnations from Petite's hand, as the little girl hurried towards her, "he is asleep; we must not wake him. I will give him the flowers," and stooping over him, she laid the small posy where his eyes must see it when they opened.

"Poor man," said Petite, tip-toeing from his cot, without venturing a glance at him, so afraid was she of arousing him.

"I will send some fruit and jellies for the case you were telling me of," said Beatrice to the nurse, who had just returned to her, "and if there is anything else I can do, please let me know at once."

She spoke the last words with so much stress, that Petite looked up into her face questioningly as they left the nurse.

"You don't know it all, little golden-hair," said Beatrice, lifting Petite in her arms as if about to place her in the carriage, "but you have helped me to be patient with my trouble, and perhaps some time the trouble will all go away."

Petite's eyes were still upon her with a deeply puzzled expression as the carriage whirled them out of the hospital grounds.

"Twouble," said Petite at last, having caught this word in Beatrice's strange address; "yes, that is what peoples has when their papas is losted. Is your papa losted?"

A few days later, Ralph Pattington received a note from certain bankers in the City, telling him that a generous sum of money had been placed on deposit for his use in their bank.

A week later they received a note from Ralph Pattington, courteously declining the gift, and this note they forwarded to Beatrice.

She trembled as she read it, but kept it because of the handwriting. Had she known that kind Fate, in the shape of a lawyer, had hunted out Ralph Pattington, and presented him with a moderate fortune and estate, left him by an uncle, she would not have felt offended at the returned gift.

The uncle's fortune speeded Ralph's recovery, and, making a handsome restitution to the hospital for the attention and care he had received there, he began a vigorous search for lost Petite.

* * * * *

June came, and hastened people from town to the country.

"My agent has found a lovely place for us at Riverside," Beatrice told Mrs. Calton; "not fashionable, perhaps, but picturesque, high grounds extending to the river edge, and a good place for Petite."

"Ah!" observed Mrs. Calton, who was afraid Petite was being too much considered, and so determining to give Beatrice a bit of motherly advice. "Don't forget you are growing older, my dear, and that you ought to be with other young people. There may be none at all in this place, and to settle by a river, it—ah, sounds so wet!"

"I know," laughed Beatrice, "but then I am going just the same. You know, I never change my mind."

Riverside proved a beautiful spot for a summer holiday.

"Beatrice is growing quite gay in this quiet place," said Mrs. Calton, who accompanied her, to those that called,

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" and dear little Petite becoming a perfect gipsy under that big hat of hers." And then she would tell Petite's story.

Shut in by high, dense hedges, no one knew much of the place " next door," until Mrs. Calton learnt through the cook, who was told by the milkman, that a strange gentleman had come there to spend the summer, and opened the house for the first time in many years.

" I believe I saw him the other morning," added Mrs. Calton; " if so, he is quite lame."

Beatrice said nothing, but her heart beat faster, and her colour deepened at the word " lame." Then, taking herself to task for foolish fancies, she caught Petite by the hand and ran out into the garden.

Petite's blue eyes were upon her, and she seemed reflecting in a child's vague way.

" What are you thinking of, my Petite ? " asked Beatrice, catching her up, and carrying her to a bench near by.

" I want papa," said the child.

" What ! with Raspberry and me ? " questioned Beatrice.

" Yes," nodded Petite; " why don't he be founded ? Why is he losted ? "

Beatrice's face lengthened.

" Dear little one," she said, " I don't know why he isn't found, but I can't spare you, even if he is."

" But you said he might come, too, wiv Raspberry and me; don't you 'member ? "

Beatrice smiled.

" Den it will be so lovely," continued Petite. " I'm so tired this way."

" Ah ! dear little Petite, don't—please, don't ! " and the stately and dignified Miss Bloom leant her head on the child's soft neck and cried.

Instinct was trying to tell her whose little child this was, and who was living " next door," yet it seemed but preposterous fancy.

" Waspberry and me loves you awful," said Petite, trying to comfort Beatrice; " we just only want papa founded, too, that's all."

" Yes, dear," replied Beatrice more calmly; " now run and get your hat, and we will go boating for a little while."

The gentleman " next door," stepping out upon a balcony almost overhanging his neighbour's ground, saw and heard this little scene in a stupefaction of surprise, delight, and unbelief. It was the first time since occupying the house left him by his uncle that he had given his neighbours a thought. His mind was engrossed in what, until this wonderful moment, had been a fruitless search for his little daughter, Petite, and now behold her found, almost upon his threshold ! Or was he dreaming, or his mind adrift, as it had been during that long hospital illness ?

No ! thank Heaven ! he could say " No," for there, on the river, but a little distance away, he could see his little one in a boat, with Beatrice at the oars. And why Beatrice with his child in charge ? he asked himself, in deepest bewilderment; and, mopping a sudden perspiration from his face and hands, he seized his stick and hat, and, hastening to his boat-house, drew out the boat, and was on the water.

' Petite is careless; she leans too far over the side," he said to himself, as if excusing himself for his eager pursuit.

" Be careful, Petite, or you will fall in," cautioned Beatrice, her back turned to the boat that was coming nearer and nearer.

" Then when papa is founded I would be dwounded." rhymed the little sprite, intending to draw back from the boat edge, but, instead, losing her balance and toppling in the water.

Beatrice's boat made a violent lurch as she reached out to catch the child.

" Wait, Beatrice ! " said a well-remembered voice near her, and Ralph Pattington, cool and reassuring in the face of danger, pulled his boat close to hers, and while she steadied it with her slender fingers, that it might not upset, he reached down into the water and grasped, and grasped, and grasped again, until he brought Petite to the surface.

" Let me take her," said Beatrice, holding out her arm for the unconscious child.

He obeyed; then clambering into Beatrice's boat, he set his own adrift, and rowed her quickly to land.

" To my house ? " he asked hurriedly.

" Mine, please; let it be mine," replied Beatrice, the colour surging to her pale, frightened face; and there together they fought death by drowning, and at length won.

Petite opened her blue eyes, and they rested on her father.

" Oh, papa ! " she gasped, with a little cry of delight they had never before heard, " you is founded, you is founded ! And I isn't dwounded, and you is to stay here wiv Waspberry and me."

" Am I, Beatrice ? " he asked involuntarily. " But I forget," he added quickly; " I said I was never to ask that question again. Petite must ask it for me when she is a little stronger."

And so it came to pass one August afternoon, when Beatrice, Petite, and her father were together, that Petite put her arms about Beatrice's neck, and said:

" Please will you let papa come and live wiv you always, and Waspberry and me, now he is founded ? "

" Yes," laughed Beatrice, in spite of the solemnity of the moment.

" Just wait till I tell Waspberry," said Petite, with a little caress, as she skipped off to find her doll.

" I understand now," said Ralph, taking a bunch of withered carnations from the pages of his pocket-book, " the message of forgiveness which these flowers brought me in the hospital. I am forgiven."

" I thought you had the forgiving to do," she said quietly.

M. C. Hyde.

" Doctor," she said archly, " some physicians say kissing isn't healthy. What do you think of it ? " " Well, really," replied the handsome young doctor, " I don't think you or I should attempt to decide that off-hand. Let's put our heads together and consider."

Freddie: "If after all that has been, Mabel, I should tell you that I found I did not love you as much as I love someone else, and that I could not marry you, would it be a great trial for you, dear ? " Mabel: " Yes, Freddie, dear. It would be a breach of promise trial."

" Yesterday was pa's birthday," said the young man's best girl, as they stood talking over the gate early in the evening. " Yes ? " he replied, absently. " What did you give him ? " " A pair of nice soft slippers. He is walking about the room in them now. You ought to see him." " I think I will. This might be a good time to ask him if I might have you."

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Arranged Matters.

"You are the world to me," he whispered. "All right," she answered; "you can be the sun. I'm going to marry your father."

Then He Wondered.

He: "Why, I never have any sense when I'm in the company of a pretty girl." She: "What a queer way of paying me a compliment, Mr. Sappy!"

Her Opinion.

Gladys: "He said he would die if I refused him." Ethel: "And still you refused him?" Gladys: "Oh, yes. I think he will live long enough to propose again."

As Women Do.

He: "I don't see how you can say such terrible things about another woman." She: "You don't understand, you silly. Why, Carrie is my dearest friend."

His Preference.

"Somehow or other I don't think I'd care to be the prettiest girl in the world," he remarked. She: "Why not?" He: "Because I'd rather be next to the prettiest."

Gave Vent to His Anger.

"Why are you crying, dear?" "Oh, mother, last night I showed Henry the seat on which we first courted. "What did he do?" "He went over and kicked it."

The Superiority of Women.

Ada: "Men are so slow! It took him nearly two hours to propose to me last night." Floss: "And how long did it take you to accept him, dear?" Ada: "Just two seconds."

The Height of Happiness.

Dorothy: "I do wish we were rich, father." Her father: "How rich would you like to be?" Dorothy: "Oh, awfully rich; rich enough to snub people and still be called agreeable."

In Times to Come.

The Hawk: "I have one great advantage over you. I don't need to keep dodging motor-cars all the time." The Cow: "No; but just wait till they get these airships going."

Repudiated the Offence.

Young Lady (in the music shop): "Have you 'Kissed Me in the Moonlight'?" Assistant: "No, miss; it wasn't me. It must have been the other assistant. I've only just come here."

Good Advice.

Mabel: "Do you think a girl should answer a young man's proposal by letter?" Tom: "Not one letter, but three." Mabel: "Three letters?" Tom: "Certainly. Y-e-s."

Of Course Not.

Wife: "George, the way you flirted with that red-headed girl in the shop was perfectly shameful!" Husband: "Well, my dear, as you have such a penchant for shopping, you must not be surprised if I have a counter-attraction!"

No Star-Gazer Needed.

He: "The astrologer described you exactly, and said that I would marry you." She: "What a waste of money! I could have told you the same thing myself if you had asked me."

A Biassed Arbitrator.

"The reason I can't get along with my wife is that she wants to submit all our differences to arbitration." "To arbitration?" "Yes. She always wants to refer disputes to her mother."

A Too Candid Friend.

Maude: "What is the quarrel between Alice and Kate?" Ethel: "Why, you see, Alice asked Kate to tell her just what she thought of her." Maude: "Yes?" Ethel: "Kate told her."

He Regretted Having Spoken.

He: "Before proposing, Miss Lulu, I wish to know if you have anything in the bank?" She: "Yes, Mr. Poorman, I I have a lover there. He is the cashier, and we are to be married next week."

He Had Done His Share.

He: "Mary, this milliner's bill is unusually large. I thought we had decided to be economical." She: "And we have been. Haven't you given up smoking and horse-racing and the club?"

A Reception.

Little Ethel (horrified): "We've invited too many children to our tea-party. There's only enough cake for them to have a tiny piece each." Little Dot (resignedly): "That's too bad. We'll have to call it a reception."

Of Course She Wouldn't.

Jack: "Miss Fay, will you marry me?" Miss Fay: "I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth." Jack: "Oh, I say—that's rather hard—I——" Miss Fay: "Goose! How could I? Who'd perform the ceremony?"

Choice of Two Evils.

Horrified Mother: "I just this minute saw Mr. Nicefello's arm round your waist. It's perfectly awful." Repentant daughter: "Y-e-s, mother, but it would be a good deal more awful to see his arm round some other girl's waist."

Insult to Injury.

"I'm tired of you laughing at my game," said the amateur golfer. "If I hear any more impudence from you I'll hit you over the head." "All right," replied the caddie, "but I'll bet you don't know what would be the right club to do it with."

What a Brute!

Clara: "Of all mean, selfish, worldly, despicable creatures I think Mr. Huggem is the worst." Dora: "Why, what has he done?" Clara: "When I refused him, he did not commit suicide, or do anything so rash at all. He got engaged to a girl I hate."

From the Frying-Pan Into the Fire.

Youth: "What is your father stamping about for?" Maiden: "I told him you wanted to marry me, and I'm afraid he's looking for his stick." Youth: "Phew! Go and tell him it's all a mistake, and I don't want to marry you." Maiden: "Horrors, no! Then he'd go like a shot for his gun."

He Sat Much Closer Then.

He was seated on the other side of the room. "Harry," she said, "if a fire were to break out suddenly in the house, what would be your first impulse, do you think?" "Well, my first thought would be for you, of course. I would get you to a place of safety, and then do what I could to extinguish the flames." "That would be very nice of you, Harry, to think of me first; but if a fire were to break out now, for instance, wouldn't you lose valuable time reaching me from right over there?"

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DEAF AND DUMB.

Telling the Consequences of a Deception.

"I've just dropped in for a few moments, Herbert," said young Edward Ogden, a fair-haired, handsome boy of about fourteen, entering the bachelor apartments of his cousin, Herbert Lawrence. "I'm on my way back to boarding-school, you know; I regret to say that it opens on the 1st of September. Mother instructed me to call here, and to remind you of that promised visit to Greenlawn Cottage."

"*Did* I promise, Edward, to pay her a visit? Oh, yes; I remember. It was last April, just before she left town, and I said 'upon my honour, I'd come,' and all that sort of thing." Here Mr. Lawrence mysteriously expressed his sense of how deeply the recollection of that promise affected him, by a nervous pull at his moustache. "When does she want me, Ned?"

"The first week in September, as you agreed, Herbert."

"I'm sorry, Ned; but I shall have to delay my visit till the 10th. I've positively engaged myself to join a shooting-party for the next few days. The 10th will be perfectly convenient to your mother, won't it?

"Perfectly, I expect. She only wishes you to keep your promise, some time during the month. My word!"—as Edward glanced at the clock over his cousin's mantel—"I'd no idea it was two o'clock, Herbert. I must hurry off, or I'm bound to miss the train."

"A moment more, Ned, if you please. Has your mother anyone staying with her at present? Any *young lady*, I mean?"

The boy laughed merrily.

"No, Herbert, or you may be sure, knowing your hatred for the species, that she wouldn't have asked you. Excepting herself and Mary Curtis, there's not a person at Greenlawn, male or female."

"Mary Curtis?" Herbert asked. "Who is she?"

"A young lady; but she hardly counts as one, poor thing. You've heard mother speak of her, haven't you? She's deaf and dumb."

"How charming she must be!" exclaimed Herbert, so seriously that his young cousin burst into a peal of laughter, long and loud. "I shall learn the mute's alphabet, Ned, so as to be able to converse with her. I've always considered that a woman's tongue is the greatest drawback she can possibly possess.

"Mother's told me of your odd sentiments, Herbert, before now. Well, I'm sure you'll like Miss Curtis. She has an interesting, lovely face, and is really very clever in her own *quiet* way. Mother is very fond of her, and so am I."

His cousin's words filled Herbert Lawrence with no slight curiosity to meet Miss Mary Curtis, and on arriving at his aunt's house one pleasant afternoon, about a fortnight later, the young gentleman felt that his curiosity had been growing stronger and stronger during his journey to Greenlawn.

"I say, Aunt Charlotte," he remarked, while occupying with Mrs. Ogden the tasteful little drawing-room into which he had been shown, "has *she* gone yet?"

"Whom, Herbert?" asked his aunt, opening her eyes in genuine astonishment at the interested manner which accompanied her nephew's use of the feminine pronoun.

"Why, Miss Curtis," was the reply. "Edward told me that she was staying with you. A charming, lovely girl, with the rare attribute of not being able to talk. I was really quite anxious to meet so precious a social curiosity. I'm sure we should like each other."

"Yes, Herbert, Miss Curtis is still staying here," responded his aunt, after a moment of hesitation; "would you like to be presented?"

"Above all things. Of course I sha'n't be able to converse with her, unless you teach me the manner of doing so. Is it hard to learn, by-the-way?"

Mrs. Ogden appeared not to have heard his question, however, and left the room a moment after it was spoken. She remained absent an unusually long time, Herbert thought, considering that her errand was so trivial a one as merely to inform Miss Curtis that he desired an introduction.

"Perhaps she's assisting the fair mute in her toilet," he meditated. "I suppose deaf and dumb girls share the flippancies of their talkative sisterhood. Women are still women, perhaps, even without their right of speech."

His aunt returned presently, accompanied by a young lady, who struck Herbert, the moment his eyes rested upon her, as exceedingly and fascinatingly beautiful. A mass of soft, wavy hair was brushed back from the whitest forehead imaginable. Two dark, lustrous eyes looked out from beneath golden lashes. A mouth of the most enchantingly sweet expression smiled amiably upon him, as Mrs. Ogden said, or rather *motioned*, using her fingers as a means of communication:

"Let me present Mr. Herbert Lawrence."

There was a somewhat awkward pause after the introduction had taken place, but Mrs. Ogden soon broke it by addressing Herbert.

"As you are unacquainted with the alphabet for mutes, I have requested Mary to bring paper and pencil. She converses very fluently in this way, if I may use the term. You will find her ready to reply almost before you have written your sentences."

Herbert glanced towards the young lady who was now seated opposite him, although at considerable distance; and as their eyes met, with a charmingly graceful gesture Miss Curtis pointed to a vacant chair at her side, using in the action a roll of tinted notepaper which she held.

Not long afterwards Mrs. Ogden was a smiling observer of her two guests, while they sat, with a small table between them, engaged in what appeared to be a conversation absorbing as it was silent. Herbert Lawrence soon found that the fair mute with whom he held communication was one of the most accomplished and brilliant women whom it had ever been his lot to meet. She wrote with a brevity, wit, and style that quite put to shame his own literary powers, and accompanied this *tête-à-tête*, to Herbert so novel and agreeable, with

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smiles and glances that were something more than merely attractive. Her quick perception of the ideas which he wished to express considerably lightened Herbert's labours with the pencil, and she bore her own share of the chirographic interview with an ease that truly surprised him. "Are you at all tired?" he wrote, at the end of an hour. Her answer was a prompt negative.

Miss Curtis did not appear at dinner that afternoon, nor yet at breakfast on the following morning; though this absence from meals—caused, as Mrs. Ogden told her nephew, by a feeling of sensitiveness before the servants that were strange to her—was the young lady's only evidence of being conscious how severe and alienating was her affliction. When in the society of Herbert and his aunt her bright, smiling looks were the very reverse of that melancholy which might have been so easily accounted for had she really exhibited it. Before two days had elapsed Herbert found himself forgetting her true condition, and assuming towards her a gay carelessness of manner that appeared thoroughly natural, and during the week which followed his stay at Greenlawn Cottage became every hour more agreeable. Before the end of that week—let us announce a plain fact plainly—Herbert Lawrence had told himself that he devotedly loved Mary Curtis.

At last it happened that one evening, as Mrs. Ogden was seated alone in that same pleasant little drawing-room where her nephew had first met the present possessor of his heart, Herbert entered, and approaching her side, said, in slow, calm tones:

"I have come to tell you, Aunt Charlotte, that this is to be my last night at Greenlawn. I shall be forced to leave to-morrow morning."

"Is not your intention a very recently formed one, Herbert?" Mrs. Ogden asked, in surprised tones.

"Yes—no—that is, I began to think of going yesterday morning." Then, after a slight silence, he continued: "Perhaps you care about hearing, aunt, my true reason for quitting Greenlawn to-morrow?"

"I should like to hear it, Herbert. Your going is a great disappointment to me. Miss Curtis and I had expected the pleasure of your society for at least a week longer."

"Does Miss Curtis think my society a pleasure?"

"Yes; I am sure that she does."

Another silence, which Herbert again broke.

"Well, aunt, my reason for going is simply this—I love Mary Curtis."

Mrs. Ogden started up from her seat with a little gasp of amazement.

"*You love any living woman*, Herbert! I can't believe it!"

"Nevertheless, it is true. I don't know why I make this confession to you, Aunt Charlotte, since of course I have not made it to her."

"And why not, Herbert?"

"Do you ask me?" he responded, with a thrill of intense mournfulness in his voice. "How could a confession of love from me to her be anything but the worst of mockeries?"

"You mean——?"

"I mean that the world would laugh at me if I made that unhappy girl my wife, and that we would both be pointed at afterwards as curiosities, in whatever society we entered. Not that I care much for the world's opinion, aunt, but in matters of this sort a man cannot wilfully disregard it. I could bear the ridicule, perhaps; but that *she* should be subjected to it is quite another matter. "No, no," he went on almost passionately, "even loving her as I do, it is better that I should make no effort towards discovering whether my love is returned. Do you not agree with me?"

Mrs. Ogden's face was concealed from Herbert's as she answered him, and a kind of faint tremulousness in her voice showed a depth of sympathy that he had not expected to find. Herbert was aware that his aunt fondly loved him, but he was nevertheless not a little surprised at her prompt compassion for the pain he suffered.

"I scarcely know how to answer your question, Herbert," Mrs. Ogden said. "Were certain prejudices of yours not well-known to me—had you not spoken, even before meeting Miss Curtis, as though you looked upon her affliction as almos a charm—had not——"

"I understand you, aunt," he interrupted. "I acted, thought, and spoke very foolishly, if you will, but I see my folly now. There is melody in the voices of those we love which no other sound equals. I think that if Mary Curtis could find a voice, and tell me that she would be my wife, Herbert Lawrence might safely call himself the happiest of living men."

"Then call yourself so at once, Herbert, for I *have* found a voice, and mean to keep it all the rest of my days."

"Can I believe my senses?" Herbert Lawrence gasped, as none other than Miss Curtis now glided across the room to where he was standing, and paused, her beautiful face a picture of roguish merriment, close at his side.

Mrs. Ogden gave vent to a peal of the noisiest laughter, and approached her nephew, managing to secure both his hands in both her own, and fixing upon him a pair of eyes that literally danced with fun.

"It was all my doing, you horrid woman-hater, and I am very glad that I did it, too. It's taught you a lesson that I hope you will never forget. Of course, if Alice had not been so perfectly charming I should have had very slight hopes of making you fall in love with her, and thereby prove to yourself what an essential attribute of woman is woman's tongue. Perhaps you're surprised at my calling her Alice and not Mary. Her elder sister, Mary, who *is* deaf and dumb, poor darling, had left Greenlawn a few days before your arrival, and Alice's visit had only just begun. There's the whole story in a nutshell. Alice never dreamt of deceiving you, nor I either, until your idiotic remark about poor Mary being a precious social curiosity vexed me into bringing about the whole affair."

Herbert and Alice Curtis are man and wife now, and a very devoted couple they make.

F. Wills.

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THE WOMAN HE LOVED.

A Sorrowful Tale of a Man who would not Trust his Sweetheart.

RODNEY DANE and Alice Farley sat on the verandah together, and he had been reading to her. Suddenly the latter looked up, and asked:

"Would you wholly trust the woman you love, Rodney?"

"Wholly," he answered. "There must be entire faith or no faith at all. Where there is not confidence there cannot be love. The woman whom I love," he added, smiling down into the face upturned to his, with a look in his eyes that brought to it a flush like that you see in the heart of wild roses when the sunshine first coaxes their petals apart, "will trust me wholly, as I shall trust her. I think *you* would trust me too, Alice, for you are the woman I love."

Then he bent down and kissed her, and the woman who was watching them from behind the curtains of a window close by shut her hands fiercely together, and her face was full of jealous pain as she witnessed the caress.

"I wonder what he would think if he knew what I do?" she whispered. "I wonder"—with a look of perplexity on her face—"if Alice Farley *is* deceiving him? It does not seem possible that she is capable of such deceit, and yet—what else can one think when they see what I have seen? If he knew—if he only knew!"

That afternoon, as Rodney Dane and Alice Farley were walking up and down the path that led along the river bank, Margaret Worth joined them.

"We have been talking about ghosts," Alice said. "I believe in them, and Rodney does not. What do you think about them?"

"I am half inclined to believe in them," answered Miss Worth, "though I have always been sceptical on the subject; but last night I saw one, I think. It was just as the clock was striking twelve—the traditional hour for ghosts, you know—when I saw what convinced me that there were stranger things in earth than I had dreamt of. I was sitting by my window, for I had had a headache all day, and was unable to sleep. I happened to look down the path, and I saw a ghostly figure coming towards the place where we are now standing. It was too far off for me to be able to distinguish its features, but in general appearance it resembled you, Miss Farley."

Alice Farley's face turned suddenly white, and the hand that was toying with a rose shook with some strong emotion. Then, feeling that Rodney Dane's eyes were on her, a strange, guilty-looking flush took the place of the pallor that Miss Worth's words seemed to have occasioned.

"It must have been a ghost in love," went on Miss Worth, with her keen eyes on Miss Farley's face, to note the effect of her words; "for it had evidently come to keep a ghostly tryst. It was met by another ghost, and the meeting was very much like that of lovers who are in the flesh."

Alice Farley's face was white again now, and the eyes she lifted for a moment to Rodney Dane's had a frightened look in them.

"Did you dream this, or is it a little romance of the imagination for our amusement?" asked Dane, mystified by Miss Worth's words and manner, and their effect on Alice Farley.

"I did not dream what I have told you about, and I did not imagine it," answered Miss Worth. "I saw precisely what I have told you. If I did not see ghosts, what did I see?"

"Don't let's talk about such things," Alice said, with a shiver. "The river has a tempting look—take us out for a row, Rodney."

But the river could not charm away the spell that Miss Worth's strange words had left behind them. Rodney Dane could not help wondering what meaning lay hidden under them, and Alice Farley knew well enough what he was thinking about.

"The little rift within the lute," Miss Worth kept whispering to herself, exultantly, as her keen eyes saw what thoughts were at work.

That evening Rodney Dane met Margaret Worth in the hall.

"What did you mean to-day?" he asked, in an imperative tone.

"I meant—I scarcely know what," she answered. "But your talk about ghosts brought to my mind what I had seen and I spoke of it."

"Of course you did not expect us to think that you thought you had really seen a ghost," he said. "What was it, or, rather, who was it, that you saw? I am curious to know, you see, what romantic maiden holds midnight meetings with her lover."

"I cannot tell you that, because I do not know," she answered. "It looked like Miss Farley, but it scarcely seems possible that it could have been she."

"Of course it was *not* she," said Dane, but for all he spoke so decidedly, Miss Worth knew that there was a sort of doubt—or perhaps fear was a better word to use—at work in his mind. It was a feeling he could give no name to, as yet, because it was so vague; but because of that vagueness it was all the more tormenting.

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It was on the following night that Rodney Dane saw the ghost that Miss Worth had seen.

He was sitting at the window, watching the lurid effect with which frequent flashes of lightning lit up a world of darkness. He could never sleep during a thunderstorm, so he stood looking out of the window.

A vivid flash made the landscape light as day, and showed to him a woman's figure stealing down the path. Before the lurid light had died away, the woman looked back as if fearful of being seen, and he saw the face of Alice Farley.

"Heavens," he cried, "where can she be going on such a night as this, and at such a time?" He threw up the sash and leant out into the night. Another flash showed her to him further down the path. Then there was quite an interval of darkness. When the next flash came, it showed him the woman he loved with a man's arm about her, and he saw her face lifted for a kiss.

The rest of that night was like a hideous dream to him. He scarcely knew what he was about as he made preparations to leave the place where his dream of life had come to him, and the terrible awakening from it.

"False! False!" he kept saying.

When morning came he was ready to go. He hoped to get away without seeing Alice, but he did not.

She met him in the hall.

"I am going away," he said, while his face was white. "I can scarcely be expected to stay longer after what I saw last night."

She grew pale to the lips.

"Oh, Rodney, if you only knew!' she cried. "Believe me, you would not blame me if you knew."

"Perhaps not," he answered coldly. "But not knowing, I judge by what I see."

"Oh, Rodney, trust me!" she cried. "You shall know the truth by-and-bye. I would explain it all to you now, but I dare not, until——"

"And yet you ask me to trust you!" he cried, breaking in upon her with words full of cruel scorn and unbelief. "I wish to Heaven I had never seen you—I hope I shall never look into your face again."

Then he turned away, and a moment later was gone; while Alice Farley stood there speechless and pale as death, and listened to the sound of his departing feet, and felt in a kind of numb way that her heart was breaking.

A week later Rodney Dane heard that Alice Farley had left her father's house for ever. Why, no one knew, but she was gone, and her father had forbidden anyone to speak of her to him. "Let it be as if she were dead," he said.

* * * * *

Five-and-twenty years after that day when he looked for the last time, as he believed, on the fair, false face of Alice Farley, Rodney Dane and his son were sitting in the private parlour of Dr. Graham's Asylum for the Insane. Dr. Graham had been Dane's schoolmate; Dane had come to visit Dr. Graham, bringing with him the young man who bore his name, and had a face so like his own that he was often startled at the likeness. It almost seemed as if he saw himself living life over again.

"I never saw a more striking resemblance," Dr. Graham said. "Looking at him I see you as you were at his age, and it seems as if you had kept your youth, while I have grown old."

By-and-bye, when the young man had left them, the two grey-haired men talked about the happenings of the years since they had seen each other.

"The last time I saw you, you will remember, was when you were on your way to some country place," Dr. Graham said. "From what you said to me I inferred that you expected to win a wife while there. Did you do so?"

Rodney Dane's face paled at the question. Five-and twenty years had not healed the wound that Alice Farley's supposed falseness had left in his heart. For, although he had tried to forget her, or, at least, to kill the love he had felt for her, he had never been able to do so. There had never been a day that he had not seen her as he saw her that last time, with the anguish of a breaking heart in her face. That look haunted him at night. It came to him like the ghost of something he had murdered. Though he told himself that she was false, and deserved no pity from him, he could not think of her without a strange thrill of regret and sorrow. For, you see, he had loved her as a man can love but once.

"No," he answered with a sigh, "I did not win the woman I told you of; or, rather, I won her and I lost her. You knew the woman I married—Margaret Worth—I think."

"I knew her well," Dr. Graham replied. "I used to think she cared more for you than she did for anyone else, but I never thought you would marry her."

"Things seldom happen as we think they are going to," Rodney Dane said, with a sigh. "Yes, I married Margaret Worth, and she was a faithful wife to me for many years. *She*, at least, was true," he added, while the memory of one who was false stirred his heart. He wondered if she were living or dead. For five-and-twenty years she had been dead to the world he lived in, but the grass of the grave might not be growing over her yet.

When young Rodney Dane joined them, after his walk through the grounds, Dr. Graham proposed that they should visit the Asylum.

"I have some strange cases under my charge," he said, as they entered the wards. "There is one," pointing to a woman who was standing at a window, looking out as if she hoped to see someone she had long been looking for, but who never came. Her face was hidden from them, but the snow-white hair that fell upon her neck told that she was no longer young.

"She has been here nearly fifteen years," Dr. Graham said. "Her story, told me by her brother, who put her in my charge just before his death, is like a leaf from a romance. This brother, years and years ago, was suspected of having committed a terrible crime. His father believed him guilty, and to save his life he fled from the home of his boyhood. Only one person had believed his story of innocence, and that person was his sister.

"For five years he wandered about the world, an outcast. Then the longing came over him to visit his old home again. He went back to it as a stranger, daring to make his identity known only to his sister, who had never lost her belief in his innocence. She met her brother secretly; but it seems that her lover witnessed their last meeting, and, believing that she was false, he left her in anger. She dared not tell him the truth, fearing that her father, who was a stern, unforgiving man, would set the police on the fugitive's track. In some manner, her father found out the truth, after all, and he was furious with wrath because she had disobeyed his command that she should never see her brother again. She was strong in her belief in that brother's innocence, and dared to say so. Then the old man, in his bitter, cruel wrath, drove *her* from home, and she sought refuge with her brother. Her trouble brought on a long illness. When bodily health came back, her mind was a wreck. Her brother kept her with him until he knew that he had not long to live. Then he put her in my charge, and she has been here ever since; and probably will still remain here, as her father died long ago, and she has no relatives. Since her brother died, I have been told that his innocence has been fully established by the confession of the guilty party. She seldom speaks to anybody, but is always watching and waiting for someone."

Rodney Dane's face had grown very pale as he listened to his old friend's story. Was it the story of the woman he loved that was being told him? Something assured him that it was.

The woman at the window turned suddenly, and faced them. Thus, after five-and-twenty years, Rodney Dane and Alice Farley met again. A cry, that had the sound of a sob in it, broke from the woman's lips. She sprang forward with outstretched hands.

"Oh! Rodney, Rodney, I have been waiting for this time so long, so long!" she cried, and her poor pale face was full of the unutterable pathos of the dead years. "I was not false to you, Rodney. Believe me!—oh! believe me!"

But her hands were not reached out to the Rodney Dane

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who had been her lover. Instead, she stood before his son, and to him her passionate plea was uttered.

"Alice," the Rodney of her past said, gently. "I am the man you mean. This man whom you mistake for me is my son. Have I changed so that you do not know me?"

"No, I do not know you," she said, looking at him as one might look at an utter stranger. "I never knew you. But you, Rodney—you have not grown a day older, it seems to me, than you were when I saw you last; while I—I have grown to be an old, old woman."

Young Rodney Dane looked from one to the other in perplexity.

"Alice," his father said, hoping to make the truth clear to her bewildered brain, "you are mistaken. This is another Rodney Dane. I am the one you knew."

"Why do you tell me that?" she cried. "I know better. You are an old man. This is the Rodney I knew," turning to the young man again. "Oh, Rodney, the man you saw me with was not my lover, but my brother, and I would have told you the truth, if you had trusted me a little. But you would not, and my heart broke when you left me, thinking I was false. Do you remember, Rodney, you said you prayed God you might never see my face again? But *I* prayed we might meet some time before I died, that I might tell you that I was true to you; and my prayer, not yours, has been answered. I could not die until I had told you the truth. Oh, Rodney, tell me that at last you believe me, and let me die in peace."

Rodney Dane signed to his son to give her the assurance she desired.

"I believe you," the young man said, with a strange feeling of being someone else. To his father it seemed, as he listened to the words that were meant for him addressed to another, as if he had died years ago, and this young man was the ghost of his former self.

"He believes me, and tells me so!" she cried, and her face was full of unutterable gladness. "I can die now."

She wavered like a reed in the wind, and would have fallen if her old lover had not sprung forward and caught her.

"The end's here," she whispered, her eyes on the young man's face—a look full of love that had outlived the sorrowful years. "Tell me again that you believe me, and kiss me once—just once, Rodney—to seal the peace between us."

Young Rodney Dane felt moved by something outside of himself. A great wave of tenderness for the woman who was lying in his father's arms swept over him. It was as if he became, for the time being, the man who loved her. He drew her to his breast and kissed her, and the man whose heart was mightily stirred by the love of long ago was obliged to see the kiss he longed to give, given by another.

"Good-bye," she said faintly, a great light coming into her face and making it radiant. "Sometime—sometime——"

Yes; sometime, somewhere, poor, weary heart, the tangled threads of Fate will be straightened out, and then——

There was a little flutter of the hands, one last look of love that could never die, and the woman Rodney Dane loved was dead in the arms of another. And it seemed to him that this was his punishment for his lack of faith in her, years ago, and a great sense of loss came over him as he looked through tears upon the face of the dead.

H. Trangmar.

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The Slave's Revenge.

"The stomach," says Souvestre, "is a slave which is obliged to accept everything imposed upon it, and finally avenges its wrongs with the slyness and cruelty of a slave."

The eminent French author has happily expressed an important physical fact. When one comes to reflect upon it, there is something unique and pitiable about the position of the stomach in the human body. Upon no other organ except the lungs can you impose anything from the outside world. And it is your interest as well as your desire to draw into your lungs pure, fresh air only. And air in some form is the only thing the lungs ever receive. On the other hand, the stomach is a general receptacle, entirely at the mercy of its owner as to what shall be put into it, when, where, and how much. A man can throw into it anything that can be swallowed—every variety of food, any sort of drink, any amount of both, up to the bag's elastic capacity; and, if he wants to, he can put a layer of marbles on top, and finish off with prussic acid.

The point is, as M. Souvestre says, that this most important of all our organs is our slave. It cannot resist, it cannot call the police, it has no recourse to the law; it just takes what comes, and abides its time. But how to take care of the health, how to prevent the outbreak of ailments, is a problem much more complex than it seems to be. Therefore, when the enslaved and outraged stomach turns and lashes its owner with the cat-o'-nine-tails called dyspepsia, it must not be assumed, offhand, that the owner *intended* to drive his servant to desperation.

Mr. Thomas Anderton, of 50 Mill Lane, Newcastle-on-Tyne, described in writing on June 3rd, 1897, how his stomach punished him, and what he did to cure his ills. He said: "For many years I suffered from indigestion and weakness. My appetite was bad, and after eating I had pain at the chest and bowels. I never felt well rested, was heavy and weary, got very weak, and at times had to leave my work. I tried several medicines, and spent pounds in physic, but got little benefit. A friend told me of the benefit he derived from taking Mother Seigel's Syrup. I got a bottle of this medicine, and after taking it could eat well, and the food agreed with me. I soon found that the medicine was doing me more good than anything I had taken. By taking a dose now and again I keep in good health."

It will be seven years next June since Mr. Anderton made that statement, and he has not been ill since—his stomach lashes him no more. Read for yourself what he says to us in a letter dated at his old home, on February 15th, this year: "Gentlemen, it may interest you to know that since sending you my testimony in 1897 to the value of Mother Seigel's Syrup, I have continued to enjoy good health. I still take the medicine as I need it, and would not be without it in the house. When I think of how I suffered I am sorry I did not know of it sooner. I never had a proper night's rest, and I became so weak and languid that I could not work. Nothing did me any good but Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. That *cured* me, and I shall always be grateful."

It is better never to be sick, but when we do fall ill it is a grand fact that a cure is at hand in the form of Mother Seigel's Syrup, which soothes the stomach and transforms it once more into a willing and faithful servant—not a rebellious slave.

A Woman's Power.

The smiles and favour of a beautiful woman are heaven enough for most men. But beauty and grace in women are founded on good health. Good health depends on good digestion, and that invariably follows the use of Mother Seigel's Syrup, a tonic made of roots and herbs. Beauty and strength spring up beside it, as flowers on a sunny slope. It brightens the eyes, clears the skin, and gives vigour, vivacity, and health to the languid and weak. All women need it occasionally.

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RIVALS FOR SOPHIE.

A Sad, Sorrowful Tale of a Practical Joke.

Johnson and I were rivals — bitter, wicked, deadly rivals —and the object of our dual affections was a young lady named Sophonisba Robinson.

Now, so far as priority of acquaintance goes, I certainly had the advantage over Johnson, for it was at a small party given by my parents in celebration of my fifth birthday, that Sophie and I first met. She was about three and a half, and well do I remember her a plump, apple-cheeked, golden-haired, blue-eyed little darling, in a white muslin frock with a pink sash.

She came in with her mamma, who led her up to me, saying:

"Now, Sophie, dear, take your finger out of your mouth, and kiss the little boy, and give him his popgun."

Sophie did so. From that moment I felt that she was mine; and I have continued to feel the same thing (on and off) ever since.

For many years, however, a cruel Fate kept us apart. Then we met again; and I found that the old, old wound was still there. I also found that Johnson had a wound of a similar nature, and the discovery was not altogether pleasing, for Johnson is rather a good-looking fellow, and no end of a ladies' man, while an excessive natural modesty prevents me shining in society as I otherwise might.

Before I discovered his unfortunate partiality for Sophonisba, Johnson and I had been the best of friends; from that moment we were implacable foes, perpetually plotting and planning to undermine and cut each other out.

Johnson found that Miss Robinson played tennis, and he wasted a whole month's salary in getting a suitable rig-out, and joining her club. The very next week Sophonisba resigned.

Then I discovered by accident that she was passionately fond of boating, and I spent no end of time and money in learning how to row. When I considered myself a sufficiently skilful sculler, I invited Sophonisba to spend an afternoon with me on the river. We went; and never shall I forget it. It was a glorious day in midsummer.

The great sun shone; the little birds sang; the tall trees rocked in the breeze; the golden corn waved, and all that sort of thing; and there, like an angel in the stern of the boat, beautiful, radiant, and gracious, sat Sophonisba, *my* Sophonisba.

"Oh! Sophie! Sophonisba!" I thought, "if in one boat we two might float adown the stream of Life together, how happy would I be."

I was just getting up steam to make this remark aloud to Miss Robinson when I caught sight of my hated rival, Johnson, standing on the river-bank, sniggering.

Of course I felt considerably upset and put out. The next moment, in my excitement, I caught a crab, upset the boat, and we were both put out. Fortunately for me (for I can't swim) we were in very shallow water, so, after about two minutes' struggling and gasping, I managed to recover my feet, and having wiped from my eyes the mud I had gathered at the bottom of the river, I looked anxiously round for Sophonisba.

Would you believe it? That wretched, interfering Johnson (who, by-the-bye, can swim like a fish) had actually dived in and rescued her. Why didn't he leave her alone? What had it to do with him? I daresay I could have got her out myself. Anyhow, I should have tried. Then, again, what right had he to take her home, leaving me to tow the boat back?

It was about six weeks later that Sophie and I met again. Then I found her just as gracious as ever—only it was to Johnson instead of to me.

But I didn't give in. Sophonisba could sing, so I endeavoured to regain her affections by playing her accompaniments. Then that Johnson was so abominably mean as to sing love-duets with her behind my back, while I played.

Next I tried to wheedle her affections with the violin. Johnson retaliated with the banjo and comic songs. I went in for the hornpipe, and Johnson came out with the Highland sword dance in costume. Then I gave a series of recitals in heavy tragedy, and Johnson gave a course of entertainments in parlour magic and table turning.

So we went on, hammer and tongs, until Johnson and I bade fair to become the two most accomplished young men in our town. And at the end of it all Sophonisba seemed to dislike us about equally.

But this kind of thing couldn't go on for ever, and it was equally certain that we couldn't both marry her.

So I determined to bring the matter to an issue. I redoubled my exertions, straining every nerve; and at last, after having been on my knees in a moist conservatory for half an hour and five minutes, I managed to wring from Sophonisba the confession that she "was not altogether indifferent to me, but she was afraid her father would never consent." Of course I suggested an elopement, and after a proper amount of hesitation Sophonisba consented.

It was arranged that I was to hire a carriage and call for Sophie at the house of a friend, and, in order to disarm the suspicions of this friend, I was to go closely disguised as a lady. Then we were to drive to Euston, proceeding thence by train to some friends of mine in the North of England; and the next morning we were to be married by special license.

I will not weary you by detailing the hopes and fears that alternated within my bosom, when the eventful evening at length actually arrived. Suffice it to say that I went; that I found Sophonisba waiting, closely wrapped and veiled ready for our journey; that she entered the carriage, and we drove off into the darkness.

How can I describe the bliss of that moment. I felt that at last I had triumphed indeed, and I positively gloated over the thought of the awful misery that would come upon Johnson when he heard of our elopement, and then to think that Sophonisba Robinson was mine at last!

I could scarcely wait until we were a safe distance from the house, before I turned to seize her in my arms, and imprint one long passionate kiss upon her lips—and I came in contact with a *heavy moustache!* It wasn't Sophonisba after all! It was Johnson!

It was only too true; Sophonisba had deceived us both; had induced us to adopt ridiculous disguises, and then made us elope with each other.

I need not say how sadly and quietly Johnson and I sought our respective homes that evening.

One word more. Sophonisba is married now. Johnson and I are warm friends again—but we are both bachelors.

R. Panfold.

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IN CONFIDENCE

Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

Matrimony for Managers.

"CONSTANT READER."—I don't think your letter at all childish, and your case interests me very much. You are twenty-three, and still unattached. You have worked in a situation for seven years and are now manager at a decent salary, and your master informs you that it is almost essential you should soon be married. You have never had an attachment in your life, but have a comfortable home. There are no nice girls in your neighbourhood. You hate dancing, and would not speak to a girl without introduction.

* * * * *

Altogether, you seem just the sort of man who would make a girl a good husband. But that you have never had an attachment suggests that you are not of a very affectionate disposition. That does not matter so very much, for many men do not develop that part of their character until much later in life. Your master may be quite right, from his point of view, that you should soon get married. But it seems rather hard to expect you to produce the woman of your heart at such short notice. As he seems to have such an interest in you, why not ask him to take you in hand himself, and introduce you to his own circle? Many masters anxious to find wives for their model *employés* have gone so far as to give their own daughters. Instead of looking about casually for a girl, try to get your master to help you in your search. He must be able to do so. For my own part, as you must know, if you have read *Short Stories*, it is impossible for me to undertake to introduce readers to each other, as if I consented in one case, I could not refuse in another, and that would turn this paper into a matrimonial agency.

To Squash Slanders.

So, "LAURA," some kind friend has been spreading slanderous stories about you, and you wish to bring it home to somebody. You believe it to be a certain young lady of your acquaintance, but cannot be sure about it. What you say is important—to stop the slanders spreading, and to make the person who started them apologise. What do I recommend?

* * * * *

You must be very careful not to fix the blame on the wrong person. Even if the lady you suspect had something to do with the affair, for all you know her own conduct may have been quite blameless. I advise you to do as I have often advised other readers. When next you meet the young lady, tell her that you have reason to believe that somebody has been spreading false stories about you. Point out that these stories are doing you great injury, and that they must at once stop. You need not accuse anybody, but the gentle hint you will thus give the person you suspect may extract a confession, and, in any case, will certainly convey a warning. If, later on, you succeed in tracing the source of the slanders, I do not advise legal proceedings, as they seldom result satisfactorily in private affairs. But if you can force the person to apologise you will have done the best thing possible.

Wants Curly Hair.

"I HAVE got soft, straight hair," writes "P. O. T." "Can you give me a remedy for making it curly?"

* * * * *

This is the first time I have heard of "soft, straight hair" as requiring a "remedy." "P. O. T." evidently does not know that her kind of hair is often quite as becoming as curly hair. No young man is likely to admire her more for curls which are artificially made. I take it that "P. O. T." *is* a young lady. That such a question would bother a young man seems scarcely likely.

Dance Matters.

A LADY you have met at a dance, "V. B.," is not compelled by etiquette to recognise a partner on meeting him afterwards. If she likes, she can do so, or not, as the case may be. In any case, it rests with the lady.

* * * * *

The best way, at a dance, for an engaged young man to avoid causing his sweetheart jealousy, is to dance with the older and less beautiful lady guests—preferably those of the maternal and dowager type. It is doing the old ladies a kindness, and young men often find them strangely interesting and attractive if properly dealt with.

A Cooling-off.

"PERPLEXED."—I think the coolness you speak of in the young lady to whom you are engaged must be the result of some falling-off in your affections. After a year's engagement it is quite often that little things happen which cause slight misunderstandings. Unless these affairs are instantly cleared up, the coolness increases, and the two parties find themselves drawn apart.

* * * * *

Now, this seems to have occurred in your case. Evidently your *fiancée* feels that you have not been properly attentive to her. Perhaps she has got wind of the friendship which has sprung up between yourself and the other young lady. She certainly feels slighted in some way. It is now your plain duty to declare your own feelings. You confess that the second young lady seems to be fonder of you; that she seems to have a nicer character; and more "true love." You admit that you feel yourself beginning to love her. Now this cannot have happened unless you have fallen off in some way towards your *fiancée*. My advice to you is to definitely choose between the two girls. The second girl seems to me to promise to make you the truer wife. As the first girl has offered to release you from your engagement, you have it in your own hands to break off. If your affection for her is waning, it will have waned almost entirely in another year. Better avoid all deception and declare your intentions at once.

Between the Tiffs.

"ARTHUR" was introduced to a girl some months ago, understanding her to be engaged to a young man also known to him. The other day he again met this girl, and on inquiring for her *fiancé*, was informed that the two had quarrelled, and were no longer seeing each other. As "ARTHUR" was very much struck with the girl, he asks: "Would it be safe now for me to pay her attentions?"

* * * * *

That is for the girl to decide. As she is free, apparently, from her engagement with the other man, there is nothing to prevent your showing her attention. She will soon enough pull you up if it should turn out that she is really in love with the other man. It is a trifle risky to step in so soon after the breach, as tiffs like that between lovers have a way of healing themselves, and the person who steps in between usually comes out worst in the encounter.

Cynthia

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SHORT STORIES

No. 798. Week Ending April 16, 1904 Price One Penny.

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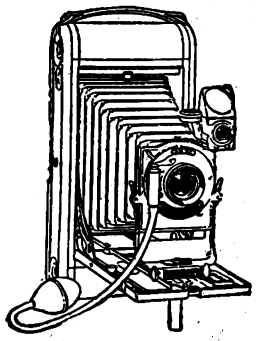

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No. 798.] Week Ending April 16th, 1904. [One Penny.

THIS SPLENDID NEW SERIAL HAS JUST BEGUN.

A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

Synopsis of First Chapters.

Mr. Theodore Racksole, American multi-millionaire, accompanied by his daughter Nella, arrives at the Grand Babylon Hotel. At dinner he orders Jules, the dignified head-waiter, to bring him a steak and a bottle of Bass.

Jules is annoyed at this strange order, and refuses to carry out the millionaire's instructions.

Calmly, without a word of expostulation, Racksole seeks out Félix Babylon, the proprietor of the hotel, and in less than twenty minutes contracts have been signed between the two parties, by which it is transferred to Racksole for the sum of £400,000.

The millionaire then orders the *chef*, Rocco, to cook him a steak, and to see that it is served, with a bottle of Bass, by Jules at their table in the dining-room.

When Racksole returns to his daughter, he finds that with her is a Mr. Reginald Dimmock, English companion to Prince Aribert of Posen. As Jules is serving the steak, Racksole sees him give a significant, ominous wink to this Dimmock. In the course of conversation, the latter says that his master is on the point of coming to the hotel.

Racksole stays talking very late that night to Mr. Babylon, and as he is making his way to his room in the small hours of the morning, he sees Jules emerging from Room 111—Nella Racksole's! What can it mean? Ten silent strides, and the millionaire, revolver in hand, is upon him.

By force, Racksole makes Jules return with him to Room 111. On opening the door, they find therein not Nella, but Dimmock!

The latter explains how the window of the room had been broken by a stone flung from the outside, and how, in order to save Miss Racksole from the discomfort occasioned thereby, he had volunteered to exchange rooms with her. The millionaire accepts the explanation, although the circumstances of the case worry him considerably.

Miss Spencer, the hotel clerk, is found to have left the hotel during the night in a very mysterious manner.

Racksole summons Jules, and, in a few words, during which he learns that the waiter has saved £20,000, dismisses him, forbidding him to enter the hotel again.

Prince Aribert arrives at the hotel and is received by Nella, who recognises him as the "Count Steenbock" she had met the previous Spring in Paris. He tells her that he is in London on important business, connected with his nephew, Prince Eugen, the reigning Duke of Posen, who is to follow him to the Grand Babylon immediately.

As they are talking Mr. Racksole and two men come into the room, carrying on a stretcher the dead body of Reginald Dimmock!

At the hotel that night is given a great ball by a Mr. and Mrs. Sampson Levj. In a little secret balcony, known only to the hotel authorities, from which the whole of the ball-room can be surveyed, Racksole finds Jules!

In the morning the millionaire is informed that during the night Dimmock's body has completely disappeared!

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THIS WEEK'S INSTALMENT.

SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Nella and the Prince.

It appeared impossible to Theodore Racksole that so cumbrous an article as a dead body could be removed out of his hotel, with no trace, no hint, no clue as to the time or the manner of the performance of the deed. After the first feeling of surprise, Racksole grew coldly and severely angry. He had a mind to dismiss the entire staff of the hotel. He personally examined the night-watchmen, the chambermaids, and all other persons who by chance might or ought to know something of the affair; but without avail. The body of Reginald Dimmock had vanished utterly—disappeared like a fleshless spirit.

Of course there were the police. But Theodore Racksole held the police in sorry esteem. He acquainted them with the facts, answered their queries with a patient weariness, and expected nothing whatever from that quarter. He also had several interviews with Prince Aribert of Posen, but though the Prince was suavity itself, and beyond doubt genuinely concerned about the fate of his dead attendant, yet it seemed to Racksole that he was keeping something back, that he hesitated to say all he knew.

Racksole, with characteristic insight, decided that the death of Reginald Dimmock was only a minor event, which had occurred, as it were, on the fringe of some far more profound mystery. And, therefore, he decided to wait, with his eyes very wide open, until something else happened that would throw light on the business. At the moment he took only one measure—he arranged that the theft of Dimmock's body should not appear in the newspapers.

It is astonishing how well a secret can be kept, when the possessors of the secret are handled with the proper mixture of firmness and persuasion. Racksole managed this very neatly. It was a complicated job, and his success in it rather pleased him.

At the same time he was conscious of being temporarily worsted by an unknown group of schemers, in which he felt convinced that Jules was an important item. He could scarcely look Nella in the eyes. The girl had evidently expected him to unmask this conspiracy at once, with a single stroke of the millionaire's magic wand. She was thoroughly accustomed, in the land of her birth, to seeing him achieve impossible feats. Over there he was a "boss"; men trembled before his name; when he wished a thing to happen—well, it happened; if he desired to know a thing, he just knew it. But here, in London, Theodore Racksole was not quite the same Theodore Racksole. He dominated New York, but London, for the most part, seemed not to take much interest in him; and there were certainly various persons in London who were capable of snapping their fingers at him—at Theodore Racksole! Neither he nor his daughter could get used to that fact.

As for Nella, she concerned herself for a little with the ordinary business of the bureau, and watched the incomings and outgoings of Prince Aribert with a kindly interest. She perceived what her father had failed to perceive, that his Highness had assumed an attitude of reserve merely to hide the secret distraction and dismay which consumed him. She saw that the poor fellow had no settled plan in his head, and that he was troubled by something which, so far, he had confided to nobody. It came to her knowledge that each morning he walked to and fro on the Victoria Embankment, alone, and apparently with no object. On the third morning she decided that driving exercise on the Embankment would be good for her health, and thereupon ordered a carriage and issued forth, arrayed in a miraculous, putty-coloured gown. Near Blackfriars Bridge she met the Prince, and the carriage was drawn up by the pavement.

"Good-morning, Prince," she greeted him. "Are you mistaking this for Hyde Park?"

He bowed and smiled.

"I usually walk here in the mornings," he said.

"You surprise me," she returned. "I thought I was the only person in London who preferred the Embankment, with this view of the river, to the dustiness of Hyde Park. I can't imagine how it is that London will never take exercise anywhere except in that ridiculous Park. Now, if they had Central Park——"

"I think the Embankment is the finest spot in all London," he said.

She leant a little out of the landau, bringing her face nearer to his.

"I do believe we are kindred spirits, you and I," she murmured; and then: "*Au revoir*, Prince!"

"One moment, Miss Racksole." His quick tones had a note of intreaty.

"I am in a hurry," she fibbed; "I am not merely taking exercise this morning. You have no idea how busy we are."

"Ah! then I will not trouble you. But I leave the Grand Babylon to-night."

"Do you?" she said. "Then will your Highness do me the honour of lunching with me to-day in father's room? Father will be out—he is having a day in the City with some stockbroking persons."

"I shall be charmed," said the Prince, and his face showed that he meant it.

Nella drove off.

If the lunch was a success that result was due partly to Rocco, and partly to Nella. The Prince said little beyond what the ordinary rules of the conversational game demanded. His hostess talked much and talked well, but she failed to rouse her guest. When they had had coffee he took a rather formal leave of her.

"Good-bye, Prince," she said, "but I thought—that is, no, I didn't. Good-bye."

"You thought I wished to discuss something with you. I did; but I have decided that I have no right to burden your mind with my affairs."

"But suppose—suppose I wish to be burdened?"

"That is your good-nature."

"Sit down," she said abruptly, "and tell me everything—mind, everything. I adore secrets."

Almost before he knew it he was talking to her, rapidly, eagerly.

"Why should I weary you with my confidences?" he said. "I don't know, I cannot tell; but I feel that I must. I feel that you will understand me better than anyone else in the world. And yet why should you understand me? Again, I don't know. Miss Racksole, I will disclose to you the whole trouble in a word. Prince Eugen, the hereditary Grand Duke of Posen, has disappeared. Four days ago I was to have met him at Ostend. He had affairs in London. He wished me to come with him. I sent Dimmock on in front, and waited for Eugen. He did not arrive. I telegraphed back to Cologne, his last stopping-place, and I learnt that he had left there in accordance with his programme; I learnt also that he had passed through Brussels. It must have been between Brussels and the railway station at Ostend Quay that he disappeared. He was travelling with a single equerry, and the equerry, too, has vanished. I need not explain to you, Miss Racksole, that when a person of the importance of my nephew contrives to get lost one must proceed cautiously. One cannot advertise for him in the London *Times*. Such a disappearance must be kept secret. The people at Posen and at Berlin believe that Eugen is in London, here, at this hotel; or, rather, they did so believe. But this morning I received a cipher telegram from—from His Majesty the Emperor, a very peculiar telegram, asking when Eugen might be expected to return to Posen, and requesting that he should go first to Berlin. That telegram was addressed to myself. Now, if the Emperor thought that Eugen was here, why should he have caused the telegram to be addressed to me? I have hesitated for three days, but I can hesitate no longer. I must myself go to the Emperor and acquaint him with the facts."

"I suppose you've just got to keep straight with him?" Nella was on the point of saying, but she checked herself and substituted: "The Emperor is your chief, is he not? 'First among equals,' you call him."

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"His Majesty is our over-lord," said Aribert quietly.

"Why do you not take immediate steps to inquire as to the whereabouts of your Royal nephew?" she asked simply. The affair seemed to her just then so plain and straightforward.

"Because one of two things may have happened. Either Eugen may have been, in plain language, abducted, or he may have had his own reasons for changing his programme and keeping in the background—out of reach of telegraph and post and railways."

"What sort of reasons?"

"Do not ask me. In the history of every family there are passages——" He stopped.

"And what was Prince Eugen's object in coming to London?"

Aribert hesitated.

"Money," he said at length. "As a family we are very poor — poorer than anyone in Berlin suspects."

"Prince Aribert," Nella said, "shall I tell you what I think?"

She leant back in her chair, and looked at him out of half-closed eyes. His pale, thin, distinguished face held her gaze as if by some fascination. There could be no mistaking this man for anything else but a Prince.

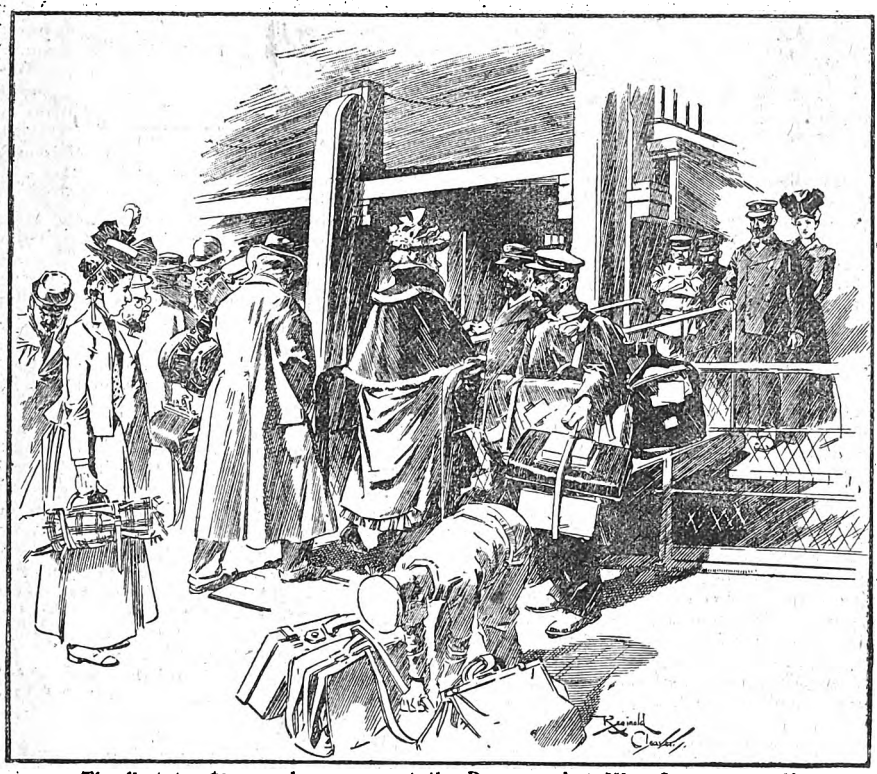
"If you will," he said.

"Prince Eugen is the victim of a plot."

"You think so?"

"I am perfectly convinced of it."

"But why? What can be the object of a plot against him?"



The first to step on shore was not the Baroness, but Miss Spencer herself.

"That is a point of which you should know more than I," she remarked drily.

"Ah! Perhaps, perhaps," he said. "But, dear Miss Racksole, why are you so sure?"

"There are several reasons, and they are connected with Mr. Dimmock. Did you ever suspect, your Highness, that that poor young man was not entirely loyal to you?"

"He was absolutely loyal," said the Prince, with all the earnestness of conviction.

"A thousand pardons, but he was not."

"Miss Racksole, if any other than yourself made that assertion, I would—I would——"

"Consign them to the deepest dungeon in Posen?" she laughed lightly. "Listen!" And she told him of the incidents which had occurred in the night preceding his arrival in the hotel.

"Do you mean, Miss Racksole, that there was an understanding between poor Dimmock and this fellow Jules?"

"There *was* an understanding."

"Impossible!"

"Your Highness, the man who wishes to probe a mystery to its root never uses the word 'impossible.' But I will say this for young Mr. Dimmock. I think he repented, and I think that it was because he repented that he—er—died so suddenly, and that his body was spirited away."

"Why has no one told me these things before?" Aribert exclaimed.

"Princes seldom hear the truth," she said.

He was astonished at her coolness, her firmness of assertion, her air of complete acquaintance with the world.

"Miss Racksole," he said, "if you will permit me to say it, I have never in my life met a woman like you. May I rely on your sympathy—your support?"

"My support, Prince? But how?"

"I do not know," he replied. "But you could help me if you would. A woman, when she has brains, always has more brains than a man."

"Ah!" she said ruefully, "I have no brains, but I do believe I could help you."

What prompted her to make that assertion she could not have explained, even to herself. But she made it, and she had a suspicion—a prescience—that it would be justified, though by what means, through what good fortune, was still a mystery to her.

"Go to Berlin," she said. "I see that you must do that; you have no alternative. As for the rest, we shall see. Something will occur. I shall be here. My father will be here. You must count us as your friends."

He kissed her hand when he left, and afterwards, when she was alone, she kissed the spot his lips had touched again and again. Now, thinking the matter out in the calmness of solitude, all seemed strange, unreal, uncertain to her. Were conspiracies actually possible nowadays? Did queer things actually happen in Europe? And did they actually happen in London hotels? She dined with her father that night.

"I hear Prince Aribert has left," said Theodore Racksole.

"Yes," she assented. She said not a word about their interview.

EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Arrival and Departure of the Baroness.

On the following morning, just before lunch, a lady, accompanied by a maid and a considerable quantity of luggage, came to the Grand Babylon Hotel. She was a plump, little

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old lady, with white hair and an old-fashioned bonnet, and she had a quaint, simple smile of surprise at everything in general. Nevertheless, she gave the impression of belonging to some aristocracy, though not the English aristocracy. Her tone to her maid, whom she addressed in broken English—the girl being apparently English—was distinctly insolent, with the calm, unconscious insolence peculiar to a certain type of Continental nobility. The name on the lady's card ran thus: "Baroness Zerlinski." She desired rooms on the third floor. It happened that Nella was in the bureau.

"On the third floor, madam?" questioned Nella, in her best clerkly manner.

"I did say on de tird floor," said the plump, little old lady.

"We have accommodation on the second floor."

"I wish to be high up, out of de dust and in de light," explained the Baroness.

"We have no suites on the third floor, madam."

"Never mind, no mattaire! Have you not two rooms that communicate?"

Nella consulted her books rather awkwardly.

"Numbers 122 and 123 communicate."

"Or is it 121 and 122?" the little old lady remarked quickly, and then bit her lip.

"I beg your pardon. I should have said 121 and 122."

At the moment Nella regarded the Baroness' correction of her figures as a curious chance, but afterwards, when the Baroness had ascended in the lift, the thing struck her as somewhat strange. Perhaps the Baroness Zerlinski had stayed at the hotel before. For the sake of convenience an index of visitors at the hotel was kept, and the index extended back for thirty years. Nella examined it, but it did not contain the name of Zerlinski. Then it was that Nella began to imagine, what had swiftly crossed her mind when first the Baroness presented herself at the bureau, that the features of the Baroness were remotely familiar to her. She thought, not that she had seen the old lady's face before, but that she had seen somewhere, some time, a face of a similar cast. It occurred to Nella to look at the "Almanach de Gotha"—that record of all the mazes of Continental blue blood; but the "Almanach de Gotha" made no reference to any barony of Zerlinski. Nella inquired where the Baroness meant to take lunch, and was informed that a table had been reserved for her in the dining-room, and she at once decided to lunch in the dining-room herself. Seated in a corner, half-hidden by a pillar, she could survey all the guests.

Presently the Baroness appeared, dressed in black, with a tiny lace shawl, despite the June warmth; very stately, very quaint, and gently smiling. Nella observed her intently. The lady ate heartily, working without haste and without delay through the elaborate menu of the luncheon. Nella noticed that she had beautiful white teeth. Then a remarkable thing happened. A cream puff was served to the Baroness by way of sweets, and Nella was astonished to see the little lady remove the top, and with a spoon quietly take something from the interior which looked like a piece of folded paper. No one who had not been watching with the eye of a lynx would have noticed anything extraordinary in the action; indeed, the chances were nine hundred and ninety-nine to one that it would pass unheeded. But, unfortunately for the Baroness, it was the thousandth chance that happened. Nella jumped up, and walking over to the Baroness, said to her:

"I'm afraid that the tart is not quite nice, your ladyship.'

"Thanks, it is delightful," said the Baroness coldly. Her smile had vanished. "Who are you? I thought you were de bureau clerk."

"My father is the owner of this hotel. I thought there was something in the tart which ought not to have been there."

Nella looked the Baroness full in the face. The piece of folded paper, to which a little cream had attached itself, lay under the edge of a plate.

"No, thanks." The Baroness smiled her simple smile.

Nella departed. She had noticed one trifling thing besides the paper—namely, that the Baroness could pronounce the English "th" sound if she chose.

That afternoon, in her own room, Nella sat meditating at the window for a long time, and then she suddenly sprang up, her eyes brightening.

"I know," she exclaimed, clapping her hands. "It's Miss Spencer, disguised! Why didn't I think of that before?" Her thoughts ran instantly to Prince Aribert. "Perhaps I can help him," she said to herself, and gave a little sigh. She went down to the office and inquired whether the Baroness had given any instructions about dinner. She felt that some plan must be formulated. She wanted to get hold of Rocco, and put him in the rack. She knew now that Rocco, the unequalled, was also concerned in this mysterious affair.

"The Baroness Zerlinski has left, about a quarter of an hour ago," said the attendant.

"But she only arrived this morning."

"The Baroness' maid said that her mistress had received a telegram, and must leave at once. The Baroness paid the bill, and went away in a four-wheeler."

"Where to?"

"The trunks were labelled for Ostend."

Perhaps it was instinct, perhaps it was the mere spirit of adventure; but that evening Nella was to be seen of all men on the steamer for Ostend which leaves Dover at 11 p.m. She had told no one of her intentions—not even her father, who was not in the hotel when she left. She had scribbled a brief note to him to expect her back in a day or two, and had posted this at Dover. The steamer was the *Marie Henriette*, a large and luxurious boat, whose state rooms on deck vie with the glories of the Cunard and White Star liners. One of these state rooms, the best, was evidently occupied, for every curtain of its windows was carefully drawn. Nella did not hope that the Baroness was on board; it was quite possible for the Baroness to have caught the eight o'clock steamer, and it was also possible for the Baroness not to have gone to Ostend at all, but to some other place in an entirely different direction.

Nevertheless, Nella hoped that the lady who called herself Zerlinski might be in that curtained state room, and throughout the smooth, moonlit voyage she never once relaxed her observation of its doors and its windows.

The *Marie Henriette* arrived in Ostend Harbour punctually

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at 2 o'clock in the morning. There was the usual heterogeneous, gesticulating crowd on the quay. Nella kept her post near the door of the state room, and at length she was rewarded by seeing it open. Four middle-aged Englishmen issued from it. From a glimpse of the interior Nella saw that they had spent the voyage in card-playing.

It would not be too much to say that she was distinctly annoyed. She pretended to be annoyed with circumstances, but really she was annoyed with Nella Racksole. At two in the morning, without luggage, without any companionship, and without a plan of campaign, she found herself in a strange foreign port—a port of evil repute, possessing some of the worst-managed hotels in Europe. She strolled on the quay for a few minutes, and then she saw the smoke of another steamer in the offing. She inquired from an official what the steamer might be, and was told that it was the eight o'clock from Dover, which had broken down, put into Calais for some slight necessary repairs, and was arriving at its destination nearly four hours late. Her mercurial spirits rose again. A minute ago she was regarding herself as no better than a ninny engaged in a wild-goose chase. Now she felt that after all she had been very sagacious and cunning. She was morally sure that she would find the Zerlinski woman on this second steamer, and she took all the credit to herself in advance. Such is human nature.

The steamer seemed interminably slow in coming into harbour. Nella walked on the Digue for a few minutes to watch it the better. The town was silent and almost deserted. It had a false and sinister aspect. She remembered tales which she had heard of this glittering resort, which in the season holds more scoundrels than any place in Europe, save only Monte Carlo. She remembered that the gilded adventurers of every nation under the sun foregathered there either for business or pleasure, and that some of the most wonderful crimes of the latter half of the century had been schemed and matured in that haunt of cosmopolitan iniquity.

When the second steamer arrived Nella stood at the end of the gangway, close to the ticket-collector. The first person to step on shore was—not the Baroness Zerlinski, but Miss Spencer herself! Nella turned aside instantly, hiding her face, and Miss Spencer, carrying a small bag, hurried with assured foot-steps to the Custom House. It seemed as if she knew the port of Ostend fairly well. The moon shone like day, and Nella had full opportunity to observe her quarry. She could see now quite plainly that the Baroness Zerlinski had been only Miss Spencer in disguise. There was the same gait, the same movement of the head and of the hips; the white hair was easily to be accounted for by a wig, and the wrinkles by a paint brush and some grease paints. Miss Spencer, whose hair was now its old accustomed yellow, got through the Custom House without difficulty, and Nella saw her call a closed carriage and say something to the driver. The vehicle drove off. Nella jumped into the next carriage—an open one—that came up.

"Follow that carriage," she said succinctly to the driver in French.

"Bien, madame!" The driver whipped up his horse, and the animal shot forward with a terrific clatter over the cobbles. It appeared that this driver was quite accustomed to following other carriages.

"Now I am fairly in for it!" said Nella to herself. She laughed unsteadily, but her heart was beating with an extraordinary thump.

For some time the pursued vehicle kept well in front. It crossed the town nearly from end to end, and plunged into a maze of small streets far on the south side of the Kursaal. Then gradually Nella's equipage began to overtake it. The first carriage stopped with a jerk before a tall, dark house, and Miss Spencer emerged. Nella called to her driver to stop, but he, determined to be in at the death, was engaged in whipping his horse, and he completely ignored her commands. He drew up triumphantly at the tall, dark house just at the moment when Miss Spencer disappeared into it. The other carriage drove away. Nella, uncertain what to do, stepped down from her carriage and gave the driver some money. At the same moment a man reopened the door of the house which had closed on Miss Spencer.

"I want to see Miss Spencer," said Nella impulsively. She couldn't think of anything else to say.

"Miss Spencer?"

"Yes; she's just arrived."

"It's O.K., I suppose," said the man.

"I guess so," said Nella, and she walked past him into the house. She was astonished at her own audacity.

Miss Spencer was just going into a room off the narrow hall. Nella followed her into the apartment, which was shabbily furnished in the Belgian lodging-house style.

"Well, Miss Spencer," she greeted the former Baroness Zerlinski, "I guess you didn't expect to see me. You left our hotel very suddenly this afternoon, and you left it very suddenly a few days ago; and so I've just called to make a few inquiries."

To do that lady justice, Miss Spencer bore the surprising ordeal very well. She did not flinch; she betrayed no emotion. The sole sign of perturbation was in her hurried breathing.

"You have ceased to be the Baroness Zerlinski," Nella continued. "May I sit down?"

"Certainly sit down," said Miss Spencer, copying the girl's tone. "You are a fairly smart young woman, that I will say. What do you want? Weren't my books all straight?"

"Your books were all straight. I haven't come about your books. I have come about the murder of Reginald Dimmock, the disappearance of his body, and the disappearance of Prince Eugen of Posen. I thought you might be able to help me in some investigations which I am making."

Miss Spencer's eyes gleamed, and she stood up and moved swiftly towards the mantelpiece.

"You may be a Yankee, but you're a fool," she said.

She took hold of the bell-rope.

"Don't ring that bell if you value your life," said Nella.

Nella lost consciousness, and slipped gently to the ground.

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"If what?" Miss Spencer remarked.

"If you value your life," said Nella calmly, and with the words she pulled from her pocket a very neat and dainty little revolver.

NINTH CHAPTER.

Two Women and the Revolver.

"You—you're only doing that to frighten me," stammered Miss Spencer, in a low, quavering voice.

"Am I?" Nella replied, as firmly as she could, though her hand shook violently with excitement, could Miss Spencer but have observed it. "Am I? You said just now that I might be a Yankee girl, but I was a fool. Well, I am a Yankee girl, as you call it; and in my country, if they don't teach revolver-shooting in boarding-schools, there are at least a lot of girls who can handle a revolver. I happen to be one of them. I tell you that if you ring that bell you will suffer."

Most of this was simple bluff on Nella's part, and she trembled lest Miss Spencer should perceive that it was simple bluff. Happily for her, Miss Spencer belonged to that order of women who have every sort of courage except physical courage. Miss Spencer could have withstood successfully any moral trial, but persuade her that her skin was in danger, and she would succumb. Nella at once divined this useful fact, and proceeded accordingly, hiding the strangeness of her own sensations as well as she could.

"You had better sit down now," said Nella, "and I will ask you a few questions."

And Miss Spencer obediently sat down, rather white, and trying to screw her lips into a formal smile.

"Why did you leave the Grand Babylon that night?" Nella began her examination, putting on a stern, barrister-like expression.

"I had orders to, Miss Racksole."

"Whose orders?"

"Well, I'm—I'm—the fact is, I'm a married woman, and it was my husband's orders."

"Who is your husband?"

"Tom Jackson—Jules, you know, head waiter at the Grand Babylon."

"So Jules' real name is Tom Jackson? Why did he want you to leave without giving notice?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Miss Racksole. I swear I don't know. He's my husband, and, of course, I do what he tells me, as you will some day do what your husband tells you. Please Heaven you'll get a better husband than mine!"

Miss Spencer showed a sign of tears.

Nella fingered the revolver, and put it at full cock. "Well," she repeated, "why did he want you to leave?" She was tremendously surprised at her own coolness, and somewhat pleased with it, too.

"I can't tell you—I can't tell you."

"You've just got to," Nella said, in a terrible, remorseless tone.

"He—he wished me to come over here to Ostend. Something had gone wrong. Oh! he's a fearful man, is Tom. If I told you, he'd——"

"Had something gone wrong in the hotel, or over here?"

"Both."

"Was it about Prince Eugen of Posen?"

"I don't know—that is, yes, I think so."

"What has your husband to do with Prince Eugen?"

"I believe he has some—some sort of business with him, some money business."

"And was Mr. Dimmock in this business?"

"I fancy so, Miss Racksole. I'm telling you all I know, that I swear."

"Did your husband and Mr. Dimmock have a quarrel that night in Room 111?"

"They had some difficulty."

"And the result of it was that you came to Ostend instantly?"

"Yes; I suppose so."

"And what were you to do in Ostend? What were your instructions from this husband of yours?"

Miss Spencer's head dropped on her arms on the table which separated her from Nella, and she appeared to sob violently.

"Have pity on me," she murmured, "I can't tell you any more."

"Why?"

"He'd kill me if he knew."

"You're wandering from the subject," observed Nella coldly. "This is the last time I shall warn you. Let me tell you plainly I've got the best reasons for being desperate, and if anything happens to you I shall say I did it in self-defence. Now, what were you to do in Ostend?"

"I shall die for this, anyhow," whined Miss Spencer, and then, with a sort of fierce despair, "I had to keep watch on Prince Eugen."

"Where? In this house?"

Miss Spencer nodded, and, looking up, Nella could see the traces of tears on her face.

"Then Prince Eugen was a prisoner? Someone had captured him at the instigation of Jules?"

"Yes, if you must have it."

"Why was it necessary for you specially to come to Ostend?"

"Oh! Tom trusts me. You see, I know Ostend. Before I took that place at the Grand Babylon I had travelled over Europe, and Tom knew that I knew a thing or two."

"Why did you take the place at the Grand Babylon?"

"Because Tom told me to. He said I should be useful to him there."

"Is your husband an Anarchist, or something of that kind, Miss Spencer?"

"I don't know. I'd tell you in a minute if I knew. But he's one of those who keep themselves to themselves."

"Do you know if he has ever committed a murder?"

"Never!" said Miss Spencer, with righteous repudiation of the mere idea.

"But Mr. Dimmock was murdered. He was poisoned. If he had not been poisoned why was his body stolen? It must have been stolen to prevent inquiry, to hide traces. Tell me about that."

"I take my dying oath," said Miss Spencer, standing up a little way from the table, "I take my dying oath I didn't know Mr. Dimmock was dead till I saw it in the newspaper."

"You swear you had no suspicion of it?"

"I swear I hadn't."

Nella was inclined to believe the statement. The woman and the girl looked at each other in the tawdry, frowsy, lamp-lit room. Miss Spencer nervously patted her yellow hair into shape, as if gradually recovering her composure and equanimity. The whole affair seemed like a dream to Nella, a disturbing, sinister nightmare. She was a little uncertain what to say. She felt that she had not yet got hold of any very definite information. "Where is Prince Eugen now?" she asked at length.

"I don't know, miss."

"He isn't in this house?"

"No, miss."

"Ah! We will see presently."

"They took him away, Miss Racksole."

"Who took him away? Some of your husband's friends?"

"Some of his acquaintances."

"Then there is a gang of you?"

"A gang of us—a gang! I don't know what you mean," Miss Spencer quavered.

"Oh, but you must know," smiled Nella calmly. "You can't possibly be so innocent as all that, Mrs. Tom Jackson. You can't play games with me. You've just got to remember that I'm what you call a Yankee girl. There's one thing that I mean to find out, within the next five minutes, and that is—how your charming husband kidnapped Prince Eugen, and why he kidnapped him. Let us begin with the second question. You have evaded it once."

Miss Spencer looked into Nella's face, and then her eyes

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dropped, and her fingers worked nervously with the table-cloth.

"How can I tell you," she said, "when I don't know? You've got the whip-hand of me, and you're tormenting me for your own pleasure." She wore an expression of persecuted innocence.

"Did Mr. Tom Jackson want to get some money out of Prince Eugen?"

"Money! Not he! Tom's never short of money."

"But I mean a lot of money—tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands?"

"Tom never wanted money from anyone," said Miss Spencer doggedly.

"Then had he some reason for wishing to prevent Prince Eugen from coming to London?"

"Perhaps he had. I don't know. If you kill me, I don't know."

Nella stopped to reflect. Then she raised the revolver. It was a mechanical, unintentional sort of action, and certainly she had no intention of using the weapon, but, strange to say, Miss Spencer again cowered before it. Even at that moment Nella wondered that a woman like Miss Spencer could be so simple as to think the revolver would actually be used. Having absolutely no physical cowardice herself, Nella had the greatest difficulty in imagining that other people could be at the mercy of a bodily fear. Still, she saw her advantage, and used it relentlessly, and with as much theatrical gesture as she could command. She raised the revolver till it was level with Miss Spencer's face, and suddenly a new, queer feeling took hold of her. She knew that she would indeed use that revolver now, if the miserable woman before her drove her too far. She felt afraid—afraid of herself; she was in the grasp of a savage, primeval instinct. In a flash she saw Miss Spencer dead at her feet—the police—a court of justice—the scaffold. It was horrible.

"Speak," she said hoarsely, and Miss Spencer's face went whiter.

"Tom did say," the woman whispered rapidly, awesomely, "that if Prince Eugen got to London it would upset his scheme."

"What scheme? What scheme? Answer me."

"Heaven help me, I don't know." Miss Spencer sank into a chair. "He said Mr. Dimmock had turned tail, and he should have to settle him, and then Rocco——"

"Rocco! What about Rocco?" Nella could scarcely hear herself. Her grip of the revolver tightened.

This is a reduced facsimile of our next week's cover. It shows how Nella Racksole is rescued from her perilous position by Prince Aribert.

Miss Spencer's eyes opened wider; she gazed at Nella with a glassy stare.

"Don't ask me. It's death!" Her eyes were fixed as if in horror.

"It is," said Nella, and the sound of her voice seemed to her to issue from the lips of some third person.

"It's death," repeated Miss Spencer, and gradually her head and shoulders sank back, and hung loosely over the chair. Nella was conscious of a sudden revulsion. The woman had surely fainted. Dropping the revolver she ran round the table. She was herself again—feminine, sympathetic, the old Nella. She felt immensely relieved that this had happened. But at the same instant Miss Spencer sprang up from the chair like a cat, seized the revolver, and with a wild movement of the arm flung it against the window. It crashed through the glass, exploding as it went, and there was a tense silence.

"I told you that you were a fool," remarked Miss Spencer slowly, "coming here like a sort of female Jack Sheppard, and trying to get the best of me. We are on equal terms now. You frightened me, but I knew I was a cleverer woman than you, and that in the end, if I kept on long enough, I should win. Now it will be my turn."

Dumbfounded and overcome with a miserable sense of the truth of Miss Spencer's words, Nella stood still. The idea of her colossal foolishness swept through her like a flood. She felt almost ashamed. But even at this juncture she had no fear. She faced the woman bravely, her mind leaping about in search of some plan. She could think of nothing but a bribe—an enormous bribe.

"I admit you've won," she said, "but I've not finished yet. Just listen."

Miss Spencer folded her arms, and glanced at the door, smiling bitterly.

"You know my father is a millionaire; perhaps you know that he is one of the richest men in the world. If I give you my word of honour not to reveal anything that you've told me, what will you take to let me go free?"

"What sum do you suggest?" asked Miss Spencer carelessly.

"Twenty thousand pounds," said Nella promptly. She had begun to regard the affair as a business operation.

Miss Spencer's lip curled.

"A hundred thousand."

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Again Miss Spencer's lip curled.

"Well, say a million. I can rely on my father, and so may you."

"You think you are worth a million to him?"

"I do," said Nella.

"And you think we could trust you to see that it was paid?"

"Of course you could."

"And we should not suffer afterwards in any way?"

"I would give my word, and my father's word."

"Bah!" exclaimed Miss Spencer; "how do you know I wouldn't let you go free for nothing? You are only a rash, silly girl."

"I know you wouldn't. I can read your face too well."

"You are right," Miss Spencer replied slowly. "I wouldn't let you go for all the dollars in America."

Nella felt cold down the spine, and sat down again in her chair. A draught of air from the broken window blew on her cheek. Steps sounded in the passage; the door opened, but Nella did not turn round. She could not move her eyes from Miss Spencer's. There was a noise of rushing water in her ears. She lost consciousness, and slipped limply to the ground.

TENTH CHAPTER.

At Sea.

It seemed to Nella that she was being rocked gently in a vast cradle, which swayed to and fro with a motion at once slow and incredibly gentle. This sensation continued for some time, and there was added to it the sound of a quick, quiet, muffled beat. Soft, exhilarating breezes wafted her forward in spite of herself, and yet she remained in a delicious calm. She wondered if her mother were kneeling by her side, whispering some lullaby in her childish ears. Then strange colours swam before her eyes, her eyelids wavered, and at last she awoke. For a few moments her gaze travelled to and fro in a vain search for some clue to her surroundings. She was aware of nothing except a sense of repose and a feeling of relief that some mighty and fatal struggle was over; she cared not whether she had conquered or suffered defeat in that struggle of her soul with some other soul; it was finished, done with, and the consciousness of its conclusion satisfied and contented her.

Gradually her brain began to grasp the phenomena of her surroundings, and she saw that she was on a yacht, and that the yacht was moving. The motion of the cradle was the smooth rolling of the vessel; the beat was the beat of its screw; the strange colours were the cloud tints thrown by the sun as it rose over a distant and receding shore in the wake of the yacht; her mother's lullaby was the crooned song of the man at the wheel.

Nella all through her life had had many experiences of yachting. She had yachted in all seasons and all weathers. She loved the water, and now it seemed deliciously right and proper that she should be on the water again. She raised her head to look round, and then let it sink back; she was fatigued, enervated; she desired only solitude and calm; she had no care, no anxiety, no responsibility; a hundred years might have passed since her meeting with Miss Spencer, and the memory of that meeting appeared to have faded into the remotest background of her mind.

It was a small yacht, and her practised eye at once told that it belonged to the highest aristocracy of pleasure craft. As she reclined in the deck-chair (it did not occur to her at that moment to speculate as to the identity of the person who had led her therein) she examined all visible details of the vessel. The deck was as white and smooth as her own hand, and the seams ran along its length like blue veins. All the brass-work, from the band round the slender funnel to the concave surface of the binnacle, shone like gold. The tapered masts stretched upwards at a rakish angle, and the rigging seemed like spun silk. No sails were set; the yacht was under steam, and doing about seven or eight knots. She judged that it was a boat of a hundred tons or so, probably Clyde-built, and not more than two or three years old. No one was to be seen on deck except the man at the wheel; this man wore a blue jersey; but there was neither name nor initial on the jersey, nor was there a name on the white lifebuoys lashed to the main rigging, nor on the polished dinghy which hung high on the starboard davits. She called to the man, and called again, in a feeble voice, but the steerer took no notice of her, and continued his quiet song as though nothing else existed in the universe save the yacht, the sea, the sun, and himself.

Then her eyes swept the outline of the land from which they were hastening, and she could just distinguish a lighthouse and a great, white, irregular dome, which she recognised as the Kursaal at Ostend, that gorgeous rival of the gaming palace at Monte Carlo. So she was leaving Ostend. The rays of the sun fell on her caressingly, like a restorative. All around the water was changing from wonderful greys and dark blues to still more wonderful pinks and translucent unearthly greens; the magic kaleidoscope of dawn was going forward in its accustomed way, regardless of the vicissitudes of mortals. Here and there in the distance she descried a sail—the brown sail of some Ostend fishing-boat returning home after a night's trawling. Then the beat of paddles caught her ear, and a steamer blundered past, wallowing clumsily among the waves like a tortoise. It was the *Swallow*, from London. She could see some of its passengers leaning curiously over the aft-rail. A girl in a mackintosh signalled to her, and mechanically she answered the salute with her arm. The officer on the bridge of the *Swallow* hailed the yacht, but the man at the wheel offered no reply. In another minute the *Swallow* was nothing but a blot in the distance.

Nella tried to sit straight in the deck-chair, but she found herself unable to do so. Throwing off the rug which covered her, she discovered that she had been tied to the chair by means of a piece of broad webbing. Instantly she was alert, awake, angry; she knew that her perils were not over; she felt that possibly they had scarcely yet begun. Her lazy contentment, her dreamy sense of peace and repose, vanished utterly, and she steeled herself to meet the dangers of a grave and difficult situation.

Just at that moment a man came up from below. He was a man of forty or so, clad in irreproachable blue, with a peaked yachting cap. He raised the cap politely.

"Good morning," he said. "Beautiful sunrise, isn't it?" The clever and calculated insolence of his tone cut her like a lash as she lay bound in the chair. Like all people who have lived easy and joyous lives in those fair regions where gold smoothes every crease and law keeps a tight hand on disorder, she found it hard to realise that there were other regions where gold was useless and law without power. Twenty-four hours ago she would have declared it impossible that such an experience as she had suffered could have happened to anyone; she would have talked airily about civilisation and the nineteenth century, and progress and the police. But her experience was teaching her that human nature remains always the same, and that beneath the thin crust of security, on which we good citizens exist, the dark and secret forces of crime continue to move, just as they did in the days when you couldn't go from Cheapside to Chelsea without being set upon by thieves. Her experience was in a fair way to teach her this lesson better than she could have learnt it even in the bureaus of the detective police of Paris, London, and St. Petersburg.

"Good morning," the man repeated, and she glanced at him with a sullen, angry gaze.

"You!" she exclaimed, "you, Mr. Thomas Jackson, if that is your name! Loose me from this chair, and I will talk to you."

(Another long instalment next week.)

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"WELL, Caroline, how have you enjoyed yourself?" asked Mrs. Wheatley, as her daughter, looking not a little fatigued, entered their room at the hotel, and threw herself languidly on a lounge.

Mrs. Wheatley was a wealthy widow, just then sojourning at a certain rather fashionable watering-place, with her daughter Caroline, and her niece, Josephine Stanley.

"Fairly well, mamma," was the reply. "These yachting parties are always pleasant, you know, although to-day has been fearfully warm."

And Miss Caroline began fanning herself with an exceedingly pretty black velvet riding-hat.

"Clive Grosvenor was devoted as usual, I suppose?"

"Yes; he is still unchangeably loyal," laughed Caroline.

"That man's attentions to you have been invaluable, my dear, in a social way. Young, handsome, enormously wealthy, and of unquestioned birth, he is one of the most powerful friends you could possibly have made. Only yesterday, Mrs. Churchill said to me, in that pointed way of hers, 'What a remarkable fact it is that Clive Grosvenor should make any girl instantly the fashion, so to speak, by merely behaving politely to her!' It was meant for a very cutting speech, but, of course, missed its mark. Everybody knows that Clive Grosvenor has behaved much more than 'merely politely' to you, Caroline."

"I think you are wrong there, mamma. Clive likes me, but——"

"Nonsense, my dear! We have discussed that point too often already, to quarrel about it now. And I always *do* feel like quarrelling with you, Caroline, whenever you make the absurd statement that the man is only friendly with you. Let us talk of other matters. How did Josephine appear to enjoy herself?"

"Poor Josephine! Nobody noticed her, I believe. Nobody ever does."

"She is such a nonentity," said Mrs. Wheatley.

"Not exactly that, mamma, either."

Caroline appeared slightly puzzled for an instant, and then continued:

"The fact is, Josephine has never been accustomed to the sort of people one meets here. Her life has been quiet, and humdrum, and commonplace. She is clever enough, and can talk cleverly enough, after her own style. But then her style is not theirs. Gay butterflies like Charley Standford and Fred Effingham, and Clive Grosvenor, too, for that matter, prefer something a little less dignified and conventional than Josephine Stanley."

"And, then, she is not pretty," said Mrs. Wheatley, "though some people, it is true, consider her face attractive. I suppose, also, her known poverty has a great deal to do with the way in which she is treated. I think, for my part, we had better send her home, Caroline. You know I always objected to the plan of bringing her here, and your persistence in the matter alone conquered my prejudice."

"You were convinced that she would enjoy herself, and very possibly return with a lover. That last belief was simply absurd, as I told you. Poor girls don't get lovers nowadays. And though nobody feels more compassion than I do for Ellen Stanley, my own sister, with her ridiculously small income, and her family of seven daughters, not counting Josephine, still——"

But Caroline had risen from the lounge, and disappeared from the room to dress for dinner, while Mrs. Wheatley's sympathetic remark was yet in course of enunciation.

* * * * *

"Will you agree to it, Clive?" said Charles Standford.

"It will be a jolly experiment," said Fred Effingham.

"Nonsense!" said Clive Grosvenor.

"Of course it's nonsense," acquiesced the first speaker. "Neither Fred nor myself pretends to assert the contrary. But, then, it will be, as Fred says, the jolliest sort of experiment. You are to devote yourself for the space of a month to one of the least attractive girls in the hotel, and perform the noble deed of perhaps calling from obscurity some unhappy creature who has long pined for distinction. Who knows but that some social diamond may be brought to light, as it were, from the rubbish of—of——"

"Spare yourself further metaphorical effort, Charley," said Clive Grosvenor, smiling. "I am not so conceited as to believe that my devotions would make a fashionable beauty out of an ogress."

"But we need not select an ogress," put in Fred Effingham. "There are plenty of girls in the hotel who have not the slightest claims to beauty, and yet do not merit so severe a title as that you suggest. The case, as it now stands, is simply this: Charley and myself are anxious to find out whether you are socially powerful enough, Clive, to make any woman popular whom you choose to treat with marked attention. Hitherto your lady friends have all been personally, or at least mentally, attractive. Our idea is to provide you with some tame, uninteresting specimen of maidenhood, and to enjoy the joke of seeing her raised into a position of conspicuous favour. We have selected the object of your future devotion."

"Is it possible?" laughed Clive. "May I inquire her name?"

"She is that stupid little cousin of Caroline Wheatley's."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Mr. Grosvenor; "do you expect me to undertake such a piece of voluntary martyrdom as——"

"Not quite so loud, Clive," Charley Standford interrupted.

The three friends had been seated on the hotel verandah during this conversation, enjoying their cigars and the pleasant August moonlight at a rather late hour in the evening.

"Recollect," Charley continued, "that there are such characters in the world as eavesdroppers, and somebody *might* be listening to this little discussion of ours. Indeed, I thought I detected a slight movement just now in one of those blinds yonder," pointing, as he spoke, towards a window which opened out on the verandah from the adjacent hotel drawing-room.

"Will you consent, Clive?" asked Fred Effingham.

Clive Grosvenor did consent after a half hour of further

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persuasion on the part of his two friends, and Miss Josephine Stanley was the young lady whom he agreed to honour with his attentions.

* * * * *

Byron awoke one morning to find himself famous. Of Miss Stanley it may be said that she awoke one morning to find herself—somebody. Clive Grosvenor's civilities had suddenly transferred themselves from Caroline to Caroline's cousin. People stared and wondered, and stared again. What *did* it all mean? No more whimsical man than Clive Grosvenor ever existed, but that his caprice should have assumed so extraordinary a form as in the present instance created universal surprise.

First one good lady and then another began to discover "a certain something, you know," about "that cousin of Caroline Wheatley's." From having been utterly obscure, Josephine Stanley found herself rapidly becoming popular among the guests at the hotel. Where everybody had previously ignored, everybody now noticed and smiled upon her. Meanwhile, Clive Grosvenor's devotion became daily more and more marked.

The new recipient of social favour bore her good fortune with little outward evidence that it had either amazed or delighted her. Nothing, perhaps, could ever have made Josephine Stanley's manners resemble those of the born-and-bred Society woman. She was incapable of flirting. She knew nothing of the artful ruses by means of which coquettes accomplish their proudest triumphs. She had a pair of soft, deep-blue eyes (assuredly the best feature which her face could boast of), but she never "used" them. She had a ready fluency of conversation, but she could not speak little tender falsehoods, which pass by the name of compliments, and look as if every syllable she had uttered were gospel truth. Briefly, she was a simple, sensible, good-hearted, straightforward girl, and by no means the "nonentity" which Mrs. Wheatley had chosen to call her.

That lady was greatly horrified, and still more angered, by-the-way, at Clive Grosvenor's sudden abandonment of Caroline, and his inexplicable devotion to her niece. But then, Mrs. Wheatley was a woman of the world, and chose to mask her chagrin, refraining, for the present at least, from all discussion of Mr. Grosvenor's inconstancy, except during one or two private interviews with her daughter Caroline.

"I suppose Clive has deserted me because he's disgusted with me, mamma," that young lady said, carelessly. "For my part, I never *particularly* liked him. Fred Effingham is much pleasanter, I fancy, though he doesn't possess thirty thousand a year, and isn't quite so much the fashion."

Whereupon Mrs. Wheatley had chidden her daughter rather severely on the subject of her annoying unconcern in so important a matter, and had announced her intention of "giving Miss Josephine a piece of her mind."

"What fault has poor Josephine committed?" asked Caroline, smiling. "You certainly cannot blame her, mamma, for being attractive enough to win Clive Grosvenor's attentions—you who complained only a fortnight ago of her being a nonentity!"

The piece of Mrs. Wheatley's mind was administered, however, and one evening, just at twilight, Josephine Stanley appeared on the hotel verandah looking a trifle paler than usual, and showing on her countenance the traces of recent tears. Clive Grosvenor presently came and stood by her side.

"You are looking ill," he said. "I trust that you do not feel so, Miss Stanley."

Josephine hesitated a moment, and then answered in a low voice, that trembled a little despite her efforts to master it:

"I have just heard a most disagreeable piece of news, Mr. Grosvenor. It will be necessary for me to leave for London to-morrow morning. Of course, the thought of doing so is far from pleasant."

"You more than astonish me," Clive Grosvenor said, in a voice that was full of very genuine earnestness. "Are Mrs. Wheatley and your cousin to accompany you?"

"No; I shall go alone."

There was quite a long silence between them. Clive Grosvenor's face was slightly averted from Josephine's, and he appeared absorbed in some rather deeply engrossing thought. Perhaps he was thinking about the real reason of her departure.

"As I shall have to leave rather early in the morning, Mr. Grosvenor," Josephine said, presently, "it will be necessary for me to spend this evening in preparations. I shall, therefore, have to bid you good-bye, now; unless you choose," she added, with a faint smile, "that it shall be only *au revoir* until eight o'clock to-morrow morning. However, I know your distaste for early rising, and shall not think of making such a cruel exaction."

She had given him her hand while speaking. They were standing where nobody could see them, and the twilight shadows were darkening every instant. Clive Grosvenor did not release her hand quite as promptly as Josephine expected.

"I shall feel quite lost for society when you are gone, Miss Stanley."

"I can scarcely believe that, Mr. Grosvenor."

"And why not?" he asked, still retaining her hand.

"Because"—she hesitated a second, and then her voice grew clear and firm—"because *that stupid little cousin of Caroline Wheatley's* will relieve you from a *voluntary martyrdom* by her departure, will she not?"

"Can it be possible!" exclaimed Clive Grosvenor, stepping back several paces in his astonishment, "can it be possible, Miss Stanley, that Fred Effingham or Charley Standford have been base enough——"

"To narrate your little conversation on this verandah one evening, about three weeks ago? Not at all, Mr. Grosvenor; I myself heard it."

"*You* heard it?"

"Every syllable. I had left my fan in the drawing-room, and came downstairs to procure it. Happening to hear myself alluded to, I played the eavesdropper during the next half hour. Atrocious, was it not?"

"The joke? It was infamous!"

"I did not refer to that. Why should I consider it so? It has been the cause of all my enjoyment this summer. People have deigned to notice me since your singular resolution was adopted."

"For that reason, perhaps, you have tolerated my society, despising me as you must have done."

She was silent, and Clive Grosvenor continued:

"Assuredly I despise myself. Can I *ever* hope for your forgiveness?" Then his voice grew very low and tender, and he had somehow managed to take Josephine's hand within his own once more. "Can I ever hope for something far dearer to me, Josephine, than even your forgiveness? Something quite inestimable, I mean. Your love, darling; a treasure which I value beyond everything in the world."

Those deep-blue eyes of Josephine Stanley's were glistening with tears as they met Clive Grosvenor's, but a smile played about her lips.

"How I could revenge myself, now, Clive Grosvenor, if I chose to be revengeful."

"*If*, dearest. But I am sure you would rather cultivate the divine virtue of forgiveness, and in promising to be my wife, heap coals of fire upon this offending head of mine."

Well, reader, I have only to add that Josephine was not found lacking in the "divine virtue," and that she is Mrs. Clive Grosvenor now.

Fred Effingham and Charley Standford have been sworn to inviolate secrecy concerning a conversation which once took place between themselves and Clive on the verandah of the hotel. Between the former young gentleman and Miss Caroline Wheatley rumour affirms that a marriage will shortly be celebrated.

Mrs. Wheatley is now reconciled to her niece, and generally speaks of her as "dear, clever Josephine." A slight alteration, is it not, in Mrs. Wheatley's previous estimate of Josephine's character and mental qualities? But, then, there are some people capable of accommodating their opinions to all sorts of social exigencies.

V. Lowell.

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This is the Last Coupon.

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Below you will find six signatures. Each of these signatures is the ordinary signature of the person to whom it belongs. The writing is not assumed for the occasion; it is just the way in which each of the persons signs his name to letters or to cheques. The first five sets of signatures have already appeared, and the numbers containing them can be had from any newsvendor, or from this office for 1½d. each post free.

What you have to do is to print in the space opposite each signature the name (initials, Christian name and surname) which you think it to be. No one but the Editor possesses the correct names of all the signatures shown. If you are in doubt as to the correct rendering of any signature or signatures ask some of your friends. When you have filled up the coupon cut it out and attach it to the five which have already appeared—arranging them in numerical order—then put all in an envelope addressed to THE EDITOR, "Short Stories," Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., which you must post so as to arrive not later than by first post on Tuesday, April 26th. The envelope must be marked "Signature" in the top left-hand corner.

CONDITIONS.

(1) The name must be clearly printed in ink opposite each signature.
(2) Only one name is allowed in each space.
(3) No alterations are allowed in the words.
(4) Each competitor may send only one set of coupons, but all the members of one household may compete. Each set will be accepted independently.
(5) In all cases the Editor's decision is final, and competitors may only enter on this condition.

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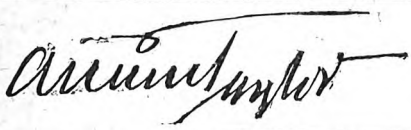
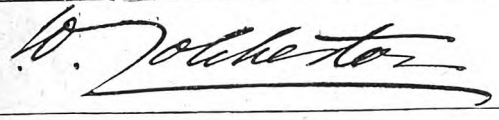
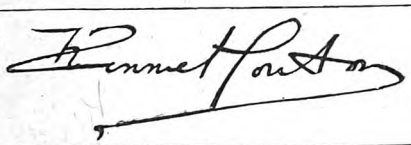
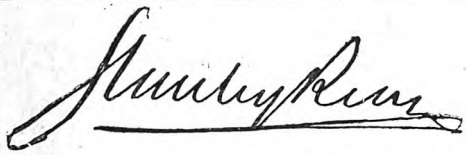
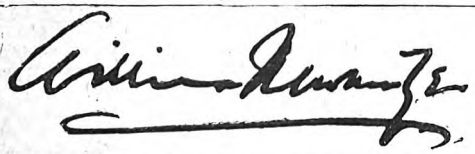
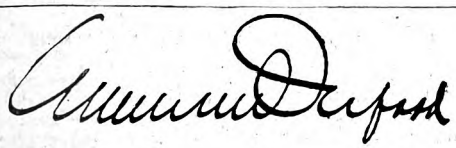
No. 30. 	
No. 31. 	
No. 32. 	
No. 33. 	
No. 34. 	
No. 35. 	

I hereby agree to abide by the conditions of the competition printed above.

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Unsolved Love Problems.

A Prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

XI.—Brian Cresswell's Choice.

Brian Cresswell's mother was an Irishwoman; moreover, as a charming, impulsive girl of eighteen, she had married his father after a month's acquaintance. That the marriage had turned out a complete success, was, so her friends told her, "more by good luck than good management," it might (in fact, they felt it ought to) have been a terrible failure, but as she replied with her irresistible smile, "it wasn't."

This marriage, being the cause of Brian's presence in the world, what wonder he should fall desperately and entirely in love with a stranger at first sight.

It was a dreary day in February, but Brian's habitual cheerfulness was not to be damped by such things as pouring rain, a bitter north-west wind, and unutterable slush, so he strode cheerily along a dripping street in the west of London on his way to his club, till suddenly a slight figure, in a flapping mackintosh and struggling with a refractory umbrella, ran full into him.

They cried, "I beg your pardon" in unison, and Brian looked down from his superior height on the most glorious pair of dark eyes he had ever seen, raised to his in half laughing apology.

The face was small, and only slightly tinted with pink, the features were delicately formed, especially the mouth, which possessed the sweet curves seldom found after childhood, while curly black hair, rendered rebellious by the damp, stood out round the finely-poised head, the eyes—but here Brian completely lost his footing and fell, head over ears, desperately in love.

It was only a glimpse, however, and then the umbrella was once more under control and the little lady continued her way.

Brian was not one who suffered from want of decision in a crisis, and he turned immediately to face the blast and follow the black mackintosh as it fluttered before him.

In a street sacred to doctors he saw her run lightly up the steps, and was almost immediately admitted. He eagerly scanned the brass plate at the door—"Henry Lytton, M.D., F.R.C.S."

Having waited in the rain an hour, and, finding she did not re-emerge, he concluded she lived there and was no patient.

For some days he haunted the neighbourhood, and was rewarded by seeing her several times, and each time she appeared in his eyes more beautiful than ever.

Such an inactive campaign did not long recommend itself to him, and one day he called boldly at Dr. Lytton's, and, sending in his card, requested an interview. After waiting in some trepidation for about thirty minutes he was at last summoned to the doctor's presence.

A tall, thin man with close-cropped, iron-grey hair, a tightly-compressed mouth, and piercing, grey eyes, set very close together, greeted him in a grave, professional manner.

"Her father, I suppose," he thought to himself. "Somehow I don't much like the look of him, but here goes," and he said his carefully-prepared speech: "I wish to consult you professionally, Dr. Lytton, and I would be much obliged if you will give me a thorough examination, as I should like to know if I am quite sound."

The doctor bade him strip, and for forty minutes there was a heavy silence broken only, from time to time, by curt commands from the doctor.

This ended, he bade him put on his clothes again, and Brian was surprised to his heart beating with a nervous suspense as he waited to hear what should be the verdict, but he pulled himself together saying, mentally:

"What rubbish, I am quite well. There must be something in that mental telepathy after all, and it is the agonies of all the poor diseased beggars who have been examined in this room before me that affect me."

Then he answered searching, and, in some cases, most unexpected questions from the great man, and again he was disagreeably surprised to find that when he thought about it there certainly were symptoms of a kind to describe.

At last the doctor spoke:

"I take it that you really want the truth?"

Brian bowed his head.

"Well, then, I must tell you that I find you are suffering from an obscure disease that I have made my especial study, but which has as yet no name."

With the natural tendency of the mind when suffering from shock, to seize on any triviality, Brian found himself wondering if it could be called "Lyttonensis," or "Lyttonitis," but after a silence he asked in a dazed manner:

"Is it dangerous?"

"Yes," was the answer.

"But—but," stammered the young man.

The doctor raised his hand, and went on impassively: "I know what you would say—you feel well. That may be, for the disease is not yet far advanced, but in four months' time you will be feeling ill enough to believe anything may be the matter with you."

Brian stood aghast. Was his little comedy, then, to become a tragedy? Was it possible death could be so near to him? Still, he was not going to let himself be knocked down tamely; he meant to make a fight for this bright and beautiful thing called life, when one is young and in love.

He drew himself up stiffly, drew a deep breath, and said:

"Is there no cure?"

"There used not to be," said Dr. Lytton, "but I have, I am glad to say, sufficiently separated its symptoms from another and better-known disease which supervenes in its later stages, to be able to cure it by an operation before it reaches that state."

Brian's colour came back, and his spirits rose. Only an operation!

"And will you perform this operation for me now?" he asked impetuously.

The doctor almost permitted himself to smile at such precipitancy.

"Gently, my good sir; you are by no means sufficiently advanced yet for an operation to be possible. Besides, where do you live?"

"My real home, that is to say, where my parents live, is in Ireland, but I have diggings in town, and chiefly live at my club."

The doctor reflected, and then said:

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"Have you any ties, business or otherwise, that would prevent you taking up your residence here with me for four or five months?"

Brian's heart gave a leap. Here was the chance he had sought. Four or five months in the same house as his divinity—why, it was cheaply obtained at the price of an operation; for, with characteristic inconsequence, he had flung all thought of danger to the winds, and only felt pleasure at the success of his plan. He replied, therefore, with joyful eagerness:

"I have no ties whatever. It would suit me excellently to come here, and I can come at once if you like."

Dr. Lytton looked somewhat surprised at the change in his tone, but appointed a date and hour for him to commence his residence with him.

A week later Brian was installed in the doctor's house. He found he had to observe strict regulations about his food and exercise, and to submit to frequent examinations, but was otherwise left to amuse himself as he liked. Need it be said that he contrived to see a good deal of the beautiful Lucille, and that she appeared not averse to his society, even when she had a good deal of it?

He made many discoveries, for Lucille was quite young, and as artless as perfect innocence, combined with a complete ignorance of the world, could make her.

He learnt that she was the ward of Dr. Lytton, and not his daughter, and her name was Lucille Lester. She was an orphan and she believed she would have a considerable fortune when she was twenty-one. Dr. Lytton was always most kind, but rather strict. She had another guardian, an uncle, but he lived right in the depths of the country and was rather cross, so, though she paid him a visit every year, she was glad to get back to the doctor.

All this and more she told him during their frequent conversations, undisturbed by the presence of the old lady, formerly Lucille's governess, who played propriety now she was grown up; and every day found Brian more in love with her beauty, her purity of mind, and her loving, child-like disposition.

The doctor was a busy man, seeing patients, attending hospitals, and delivering lectures, and he spent but little time with them, though when he was there little passed that his penetrating, grey eyes did not see.

At the end of a month he sent Brian to another specialist to hear his opinion of his case, and he was told:

"My diagnosis agrees exactly with Lytton's, and you cannot do better than remain under his care. He cured a man by a very clever operation a few months ago, and you seem a likely subject for a similar one. And let me tell you, young man, you are in the hands of the only man in England, I should say, in the world, who can help you."

And the specialist, who was a benevolent-looking old man, beamed at poor Brian till he felt that he ought to be proud of being a "likely subject" for this new operation, but somehow he felt more depressed than elated by the smiling assurance that his life was in this man's hands.

Dr. Lytton received in silence the repetition of his famous colleague's opinion of his powers, and at the end of his examinations he said:

"The disease has so far progressed that I think I could conduct a successful operation in two weeks' time."

Brian was delighted that the time of suspense and irksome restrictions should be drawing to a close. To his sanguine nature, there was no fear of failure, no dread of the operation, and he thanked the doctor with emphasis.

Dr. Lytton, however, checked his words by an impatient gesture, and motioned him to a chair.

"Will you kindly sit down? I am about to speak to you on private matters." And as Brian, wondering, obeyed, he continued: "Am I correct in supposing that you wish to marry my ward, Miss Lester?"

Brian was still young enough to blush, as he stammered:

"If I am so greatly honoured as to gain her consent."

"Tush!" replied the doctor. "I have been watching you, and I see you have made good use of your time. Lucille is still a mere child, and likely to be impressed by the first good-looking young man that pays her attention."

Brian, lifted to the skies by the first sentence, found the descent rude indeed, but lest indignation should betray him into impolitic speech, he determined to keep silence as long as he could. The doctor's next words, spoken with his grey eyes bent almost threateningly upon him, were a still greater surprise to him.

"I desire that you immediately leave here and give up all idea of ever marrying her."

All Brian's hot Irish blood rushed to his face at the tone of almost contemptuous command in the elder man's voice, but, still restraining himself, he only said:

"Why?"

"Because I say so."

Brian's breath came thickly, as he stood with his hands pressed against the table, and looked defiantly into the unflinching grey eyes.

"As her guardian?" he asked.

"As her guardian, in so far as it behoves me to look after her best interests, and," he added, with an almost insolent tone, "as a man, because I intend to marry her myself."

If a thunderbolt had fallen, Brian could not have been more astonished.

"You!" he cried, and laughed.

The genuine incredulity in his tone, and his laugh, stung the seemingly impassive man, and he answered sharply:

"Yes! Why not? I am still in the prime of life. At any rate, she stands more chance of happiness with me than with the first whipper-snapper that comes along attracted by her money."

"You're a liar, and you know it!" cried Brian in overpowering wrath. "I have enough money for both without touching hers; and it is for her to decide wherein lies her happiness."

Dr. Lytton was his cool, contemptuous self again.

"There is no need for such violent language. A child such as Lucille is no judge of wherein lies her true happiness. Ask her now, and she would no doubt choose you; six months hence, supposing you have left this house, she would be doubtful; a year hence, she would give herself to me and would never regret it to the day of her death."

Brian's blood was boiling, but his delicacy forbade his taking her love for granted before it had been declared. Nevertheless, he opened his mouth to protest, but Dr. Lytton went on smoothly, taking no notice:

"All I require, therefore, is that you should go into a nursing home till I can effect an operation, and that you should give me your word of honour as a gentleman never to seek to gain Lucille Lester's love from this time forth."

Then Brian burst out vehemently:

"I'm hanged if I give it!"

Dr. Lytton raised his eyebrows and replied, speaking rather more slowly than usual:

"Then you are a dead man."

Brian felt his blood run cold.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Simply this. Unless you give the required promise, I refuse to perform the operation, and unless you are operated on, you will be a dead man in three months' time; probably less."

Brian sat down heavily. Was death, then, so near?

Dr. Lytton, watching him, saw the drops of sweat gather on his brow, and said:

"The end is sudden—and painful."

Brian lifted his head and said bitterly:

"I believe you are inhumanity itself. Anyone human would have *some* pity in them. You offer me life, but at what a price! What is life without love?"

"Or what is love without life?" said the doctor with a meaning smile. "Come, I will give you till to-morrow to decide," and he left the room.

Thus Brian was left with this terrible choice before him. Life without love, or love without life. Now he saw why he had been sent to the great specialist, that he might know there was no escape for him. Had he not said: "Lytton is the only man in the world who can help you" **L. Hughes.**

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DEFINITIONS.

Relating how a Girl Fell in Love.

"Oh, dear!" yawned Violet Mace. "This is dreadfully slow. Rain, rain, rain! I don't believe it has left off for two minutes since yesterday morning. Thirty-six hours right off—two whole days and one night! I've read the newspaper and the last book from Mudie's. If it rains to-morrow I shall either go mad or be obliged to read some of the learned books which my grave brother pores over in solitude."

"Perhaps you might learn something even from them," suggested her companion with just a touch of sarcasm.

"Of course, my dear Ada, you will defend your sweetheart," was the retort. "I don't think that there ever were a brother and sister so different in tastes as Will and I. He will be a professor some day, I haven't the least doubt; and when I come to see you I shall find him up to his eyes in treatises, and you making references for him when you can spare time from your domestic duties."

Ada laughed pleasantly. She was very fond of her cousin, who was two years younger than herself, and whose merry spirits made things very agreeable for those with whom she came in contact. Ada was a little more sedate, but less so than you would imagine from Violet's words; she could join in out-door and indoor sports and games with as much ardour as she could listen to a lecture on botany or read an article on astronomy.

"I hope it will be fine to-morrow and the next day," said Ada with pretended sympathy, "so that we can have that game of lawn lennis. That will give you an opportunity of spending some of the superabundance of your animal spirits. I do not despair of your turning your attention to more serious things, some day, than playing tricks on people and otherwise having what you are pleased to call a good time. I noticed during our last game that you seemed somewhat interested in one of the members, who showed a certain gravity in his demeanour. You should try to secure such a man for a partner"—there was a peculiar intonation in Ada's voice just then—"as he would be able to steady you a little. You want a little ballast."

"Ballast!" cried Violet contemptuously, but there was just a little more colour in her cheeks. Stooping, she took up a book which was lying on the carpet and held it at arm's length. "With this sort of thing, I suppose? 'Social Economy at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century.' This is what Will studies. I'll just see what it is like; very little in it, after all, I expect."

Just then her brother entered, and Violet, believing that her absence would be more welcome than her presence, remembered that she had something to do in her own room and retired.

She took the book with her unconsciously, and, finding that she still held it when she reached her own room, she sat down and began to scan the pages.

"I don't see much in this, nor do I understand why Will wants to be quiet when reading it," mused Violet a few minutes later. "Look at these definitions. '*Capital* is a product saved and destined for reproduction.' I always thought that capital was money; why ever can't people say so plainly? '*Credit* is an anticipation of the future.' H'm! If I get things on credit I am anticipating part of my future income, that's all right; but what about the man who lets me have the goods? There are lots of funny things like that. Another time when I want to read something really funny I shall try one of Will's serious books!"

She was about to put the book down when she caught sight of the name of the author.

"Professor Plowden! I believe he is the old gentleman I once saw at Mrs. Margetson's. I remember he had a most attractive bald spot on the top of his head, and that he looked so simple that I thought how easy it would be to make an April fool of him or something of that kind. I can't imagine him to be the writer of a learned book; I'm sure it would be perfectly easy to play a joke on the dear man. Oh, how I should like to have the chance!"

An amused smile testified to the pleasure that such an escapade would afford to Violet Mace. But she little thought how soon the opportunity would present itself.

The two following days were fine, and the lawn tennis was a complete success. The grave young gentleman was Violet's partner in one game and paid her some attention afterwards, which brought upon her a little chaff from Ada and caused her to be more boisterous than usual in an endeavour to show that she didn't care.

Rather more than a week later a party was given by Mrs. Margetson to which Violet, her brother, and her cousin were invited. Violet had by this time almost forgotten the book on "Social Economy" and its author, but both were suddenly recalled to her memory by seeing the old gentleman with the simple face among the guests. In a moment the mischievous spirit was alive, and she determined to carry out her idea of quietly poking fun at the learned gentleman. It did not take her long to secure an introduction, and, to her great inward amusement, she was soon engaged in conversation with him.

"I've been reading very deeply lately, Professor Plowden," said Violet demurely, assuming what she thought to be an expression befitting a blue stocking. "I have been studying your book on 'Social Economy.'"

"Indeed! I should hardly have thought—— H'm! do you like that sort of study?"

"Immensely! Now, frankly, I see that you find it difficult to believe it. I will prove it to you. On page six you give a definition of 'capital'—I remember it perfectly." And she rattled off the Professor's own words.

The writer of the book showed his pleasure clearly on his clean-shaven face. Then Violet gave him his own definitions of "value" and "property" and quoted one or two sentences which she remembered, but the exact meaning of which she did not understand. She was so encouraged in her jesting by the smiles on the Professor's countenance that she became bolder and began to quiz him about his definition of "credit."

But the Professor did not appear to notice any trace of levity; he entered into an explanation which he thought would make it quite clear, then he began to press her with questions and remarks which threatened to turn the tables on her—for it naturally did not require much to place her beyond her depth—and made her half sorry that she had undertaken to poke fun at him. She breathed more freely when the Professor ceased talking economics and expressed

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his unbounded pleasure at the fact that his book had attracted such attention as to cause a young lady to read and derive instruction from it.

"I am sure you will shine as an economist one day, Miss Mace," he cried, as their conversation came to an end. "You must permit me to send you a complete set of my works. I shall take it as an honour as well as a pleasure."

Violet pretended to be delighted, but in truth she was rather dismayed. Will and Ada would laugh at her when the books came, and whenever she might chance to meet the Professor she would be in an awkward fix, for she could never wade through his works and yet he would be talking to her about the subjects dealt with therein. However, there was no help for it.

On the following morning, as she was sitting in the drawing-room, Violet was informed by Ada that a gentleman—not a messenger—was waiting to see her with a parcel of books from Professor Plowden. There was a sly smile on Ada's face which Violet accepted as the first result of her prank of the previous evening. Before she had time to realise what was happening, she found herself confronted by Mr. Laurence Jordan, the "grave gentleman" of the lawn tennis party, and saw a figure vanishing through the doorway.

"My uncle, Professor Plowden, asked me to bring these books to you, Miss Mace," she heard him say. "The dear old gentleman was so extremely delighted with your knowledge of economics that he would send them by no one else; he thought I might be able to help you with some more definitions."

Violet's eyes dropped and her face grew scarlet; all the old defiant air had vanished. She felt that the Professor's nephew was retaliating, that he was quizzing her, and she recognised that the Professor had seen through her jesting. It was decidedly humiliating to have this handsome fellow fighting her with her own weapons. And there was something in his voice, too, that made her tremble a little; there was a certain emphasis on the words "some more definitions."

"Don't!" she summoned up courage enough to say. "It isn't fair."

Although he tried to keep grave, the visitor was obliged to laugh.

"There is no book on domestic economy," he remarked, "which is more in a woman's line than such treatises as these. But my uncle believes that you require no instruction on that subject; he thinks you are mistress of that, and, accepting his opinion, I have decided to ask for the post of examiner."

Violet shot a swift glance at him, and the look she saw in his eyes made her tremble still more. She tried to retreat, and asked herself indignantly where Ada had gone to; but there was no retreat, for the visitor now held her hand.

"Violet, there is one other word the meaning of which I must explain to you—at least, its meaning to me! Can you not guess what that word is? Do you know what I meant by the post of examiner?"

"No, no! I don't want to know. I——"

"You know without being told? Then that will save me some trouble!"

"I didn't mean that——" began Violet, some of her old defiance returning.

But she had no opportunity of completing the sentence; that defiant glance of hers had been too much for Laurence Jordan and he clasped her in his arms. A woman likes a masterful lover, and Violet surrendered without further struggle.

"Do you know the definition of 'love,' dearest?" he asked tenderly.

"Cheek!" exclaimed Violet saucily.

"Well, the lady's cheek has a good deal to do with it, and so have her lips!" was the quick rejoinder.

And he had just time to snatch a kiss before Ada entered. Then Violet, forgetting her previous indignation at her cousin's absence, inwardly wondered why people are always in the way when you don't want them.

Geo. Day.

Now or Never!

On page 491 appears the concluding set of six signatures in our fascinating competition. Aren't you making an attempt to win the £10 or one of the other cash prizes offered? You have quite as good an opportunity as anyone else to become a successful competitor. Look carefully at the signatures and see if you cannot decipher them. Even if one or two floor you that is no reason why you should not enter.

The preceding five sets can still be obtained through any newsagent or direct from this office. Make up your mind to have a good try for that £10 *now*, or it may be too late.

"Brian Cresswell's Choice."

You will all agree with me that the Eleventh Problem, which appears on page 492 is an extremely interesting one.

What should you advise Brian Cresswell to do?

I will award a prize of one guinea to the reader who sends in what I consider to be the best advice to him under the circumstances related in the story. Reasons for his advice must be stated clearly, but should not exceed one hundred words. Replies must be written on one side of the paper only, in legible handwriting. My decision as to the winner will be final. Address your envelopes to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.," and mark them "Eleventh Love Problem," in the top left-hand corner. All letters must reach these offices by Friday, April 23rd.

"Phantom Shadows."

I hope that you are reading "Phantom Shadows." It is much too good a story to be missed. If you have not already started reading it, do so at once. You can quite easily pick up the thread of the story from the complete summary that is given. Week by week "Phantom Shadows" will grow more and more interesting.

A Hulme Reader Wins a Guinea.

I consider that Miss Marion Wadsworth, of 8 Lever Street, Hulme, Manchester, sent in the most sensible advice to Owen Rhys, the hero of the tenth Unsolved Love Problem, and I therefore award to that lady the guinea I offered.

Your Editor.

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Myra Brockley's Joke.

The Story of a Forged Cheque.

THURSDAY was market-day at Burwell, and on that day much business was commonly transacted in the town, the banks being kept open an hour later than usual in consequence. But on the last Thursday in July two events were in progress, each of which, in its own way, interfered with the ordinary course of affairs. The annual flower show was held in Mr. Rodwell's grounds, just outside the town, and a meeting of the creditors of Messrs. Hall and Whitehead, bankrupts, was called for the same afternoon, and necessitated the presence of Mr. Brockley, manager of the Burwell branch of the Burfordshire Banking Company.

This last circumstance caused George Hervey, the cashier, to be alone at the bank counter for upwards of an hour. Business, however, was slack, and nothing noteworthy occurred till a few minutes before closing time, when a young man entered the office and presented a cheque for payment. The cheque was drawn in favour of George Duncan or order; it was signed by one of the principal customers of the bank and was duly indorsed "Geo. Duncan" in a bold, masculine hand. The amount of the draft was £50.

One of the qualities most essential to the success of a bank clerk, as of a detective, is the power of noting every peculiarity of the persons who come before him in the way of business, without appearing to observe them.

All that the presenter of the cheque saw was that the cashier took the slip of paper, read it rapidly, glanced at the back to see the indorsement, and stuck it on the file before him, barely raising his eyes to ask, in careless tones, the usual question, "How will you take it?" before beginning to shovel out the gold. But in those few seconds George had taken stock of his customer—a clergyman and a gentleman, evidently; though but for his clerical hat and overcoat—which last-named article of apparel struck George as being inconveniently heavy for a fine summer day—he would have looked too young to be in Orders.

George pushed the sovereigns across the counter in the rapid, matter-of-fact manner affected by bank clerks, who appear anxious to impress upon the public that they are so familiarised with the touch and sight of these coins, as to be quite indifferent whether they pay them away in fives or in thousands.

The young man who brought the cheque seemed less accustomed to the handling of money. He counted it slowly, and picked up the pieces with some difficulty. His gloves appeared to be too large for his hands, and to impede the free use of his fingers.

"Allow me," said the cashier, picking up the coins and counting them into the clergyman's hands. A passing feeling of wonder as to who his customer was crossed his mind, together with a sense that his face was not unfamiliar to him, though he could not recollect when or where he had seen it.

As the young clergyman left the bank a fussy old lady entered, and demanded her pass-book, with a long explanation of why she wanted it. George answered her absently, following the movements of the departing stranger with his eye. As the latter reached the door, George observed that he wore a pair of dress trousers, the ends of which just showed below his overcoat.

"Been to a funeral, probably," he thought. "That accounts for the great coat to hide his black suit," and he thought no more of the matter till it was time to shut out the public for the day. He fastened the outer door of the bank and returned to his desk, pausing idly on his way to glance out of the bow window. As he did so his eye was caught by the figure of the stranger, returning rapidly towards the bank, and he lingered a moment to see if he wished to re-enter the office or would merely pass on his way. He did neither; but on reaching the side door that led to the manager's private rooms, turned and passed quickly in, having apparently either found the door ajar or used a latchkey.

"A friend of Brockley's, evidently. Where can I have seen him?"

But the question was not worth thought, and George plunged into his work with the intent of getting it over as quickly as possible.

Before he had half finished Mr. Brockley returned, with the preoccupied air of a man who had just heard serious or unexpected news.

"Awful thing!" he exclaimed. "Poor Hammerton was found dead in his bed this morning!"

"Hammerton! Which Hammerton?" asked George, shocked and bewildered.

"Old Peter Hammerton, the father. Went to bed all right last night, and was found dead by his servant this morning. Must have had a fit, they think."

"But," returned George, incredulously, "I have just cashed a cheque of his, dated this very day."

"You have! Where is it? Who presented it?"

George found the cheque, and placed it in the manager's hands.

"Here it is, made out, as you see, to George Duncan. I do not know if that is the name of the man who cashed it, for it was indorsed before he presented it, and I do not know that I have ever seen him before. A clergyman; young, short, and fair—certainly a gentleman, and, seemingly, a friend of yours. At least he went into your house about half an hour ago."

Without a word Mr. Brockley turned and went into the house. All the rooms seemed empty. He rang the dining-room bell.

"Who has called here this afternoon?" he asked of the servant who answered it.

"No one, sir."

"No one? Think again. Has no gentleman been here?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir, except Mr. Stevens. He came back from the show just about four o'clock, and ran upstairs quickly, as though he had forgotten something and came back to fetch it."

"See if he is in his room now, and ask him to speak to me."

"I know he is not, sir. I have just come past his room and it was quite empty. He must have gone out again. I see he has left his great coat behind him. He had it on when

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he came in, but I suppose he found it too warm for such a day as this. I was surprised to see him in it."

"Did you let him in?"

"No. He must have borrowed missus' latchkey. I was coming out of the pantry, and just as I opened the door I saw Mr. Stevens come in at the front. He ran upstairs, without stopping to take off his hat or coat. I looked to see that he had made the door fast, and then went down to the kitchen, and saw no more of him. I don't know when he went out."

"You are sure no one else has been in?"

"Not that I know of. No one could have come in without a latchkey, unless I had let them in; and I have not answered the door this afternoon, except to the milkman, and he comes the back way."

"Of course. Well, never mind. That is all I want to know." And Mr. Brockley returned to the office.

"How was the clergyman dressed?" he asked the cashier.

"In an overcoat, dress trousers, and a rather worn felt hat. He spoke as though he had a cold. I fancied he must have been to a funeral; partly because of the trousers, and partly because he was wearing a pair of black gloves, two sizes too large for him. There seemed to me something familiar about his face, though I could not say where I had seen it. I should know him again in a moment."

"Miss Brockley," he said, "have you ever seen this cheque before?"

"And you are sure that he went into my house?"

"Quite sure. I saw him from the window, just as I had shut the door, and I watched for a moment, thinking he was coming back to the bank, but he stopped at your door and went in."

The manager took up the cheque, and examined it again.

"Are you sure that your news is true?" asked George. "The ink of the signature looks very fresh, and the date is certainly to-day."

"There is no doubt about my news. I have seen the doctor who was called in. If this cheque is genuine, it must have been drawn yesterday."

"Genuine! You don't doubt that, do you? People often do make a mistake in the day of the month; or Hammerton might have post-dated it intentionally."

"He might, of course," returned the manager; "and the signature is like his, only a little shaky."

"If he had a fit coming on, his hand would be likely to be unsteady," said George.

"No doubt. Still, Hammerton was the most accurate of men, and if he put a date not that of the day on which he wrote, he did it on purpose; but I suppose we shall have no trouble about it with the executors."

"I never thought of that. How does the law stand in such a case?"

"Can't tell offhand. I will ask Manners to-morrow. Let us get on now with the books."

"I cashed three other cheques of Hammerton's to-day," persisted George, "but they were all some days old. By the way, did he have a new cheque-book within the last few days? These three did not come from the same book as the last one. There is a difference of nearly two thousand in the numbers."

Mr. Brockley turned to his records.

"No," he said. "The last we sold him for his private account was more than a week ago—C. 38,151 to C. 38,200."

"And this cheque is C. 36,275. But, after all, that proves nothing. He may have borrowed a blank cheque."

"Just so. Let us get on."

It seemed to George that the manager, for some reason, did not wish to pursue the investigation; or that he had in his mind some other plan for discovering the mystery. The two men worked on without further remark.

When they had finished, Mr. Brockley said: "You are going to the show?"

"Yes; I promised my mother to meet her there."

"My wife and daughter are there. Let us walk together."

George assented. The walk was silent; the minds of both men were preoccupied, George thinking chiefly of the disagreeable uncertainty about the cheque, and Mr. Brockley feeling painfully the sudden disappearance of a well-known figure in Burwell life.

The two men walked quickly and somewhat absently through the tents, which were now becoming too crowded to be pleasant places to linger in; and having accomplished this duty, they turned towards the private part of the grounds, where Mrs. Rodwell was entertaining her friends amongst the company with tea and tennis.

Just inside the gate that divided the lawn from the field, George grasped Mr. Brockley's arm.

"There's the man who cashed the cheque! That young fellow talking to Mrs. Merton; but he has changed his hat and his trousers."

"Nonsense! That's my nephew, Jack Stevens, who came to us last night, for a flying visit, on his way to his new curacy. If he had wanted to cash a cheque he would have done it in the morning, and not come away from the flower show for it."

But even while he spoke, Mr. Brockley remembered the maid's testimony, that his nephew had returned home, for some purpose or other, and that her account of his dress agreed with George's description of that of his unknown customer, who was, moreover, said to have gone into his

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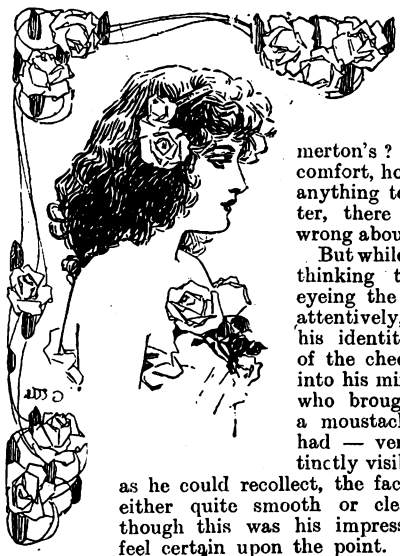

(Mr. Brockley's) house after leaving the bank. It was odd, certainly. How could Jack have got hold of a cheque of Hammerton's? There was one comfort, however, if Jack had anything to do with the matter, there could be nothing wrong about it.

But while Mr. Brockley was thinking thus, George was eyeing the young clergyman attentively, and doubts of his identity with the holder of the cheque began to creep into his mind. Had the man who brought the cheque got a moustache. Jack Stevens had — very light, but distinctly visible; whilst, so far as he could recollect, the face of the other was either quite smooth or clean shaven. But though this was his impression, he could not feel certain upon the point.

He made a point of speaking to Mr. Stevens, and grew more puzzled each minute. If this was the man whom he had seen in the bank, the reason why his face had seemed so familiar to him was clear enough. There was a striking family likeness between the curate and his cousin Myra, and George now saw a certain resemblance to his uncle also. The strange thing was that he had not known at once of whom his customer reminded him. But though Jack Stevens was young looking, he was not so absurdly young looking as he had fancied in the afternoon. The absence of moustache would, no doubt, make him look still younger. Was it possible that his moustache was false, and put on when his dress was changed?

At this moment Mr. Brockley strolled up.

"So you grew tired of the show, Jack, and came home in the middle?" he said.

"I?" returned his nephew. "No, I have been here all the afternoon. Myra went home to fetch her racquet, but she would not let me go with her."

"No," said Myra; "you were wanted here to play tennis with the Harcourt girls."

"And you really have not left the grounds?" repeated Mr. Brockley.

"Not since I came with Aunt, at half-past two."

"Curious," said his uncle. "Hervey here says he saw you in the bank, and Jane says you came into the house about four o'clock and ran upstairs while she was in the hall."

"I must be one of the unfortunate people with a double, then, for I have not been in either place this afternoon."

Myra laughed nervously.

"Better write an account to the Society for Psychical Research, papa. It seems a ghostly mystery; quite in their line."

"Or make a detective story of it," said the clergyman.

George Hervey felt uncomfortable. He was gradually becoming convinced that Mr. Stevens was *not* the man who had presented the cheque; and with the conviction, the impression that the writing of the draft was too fresh to have been traced more than a few hours before it came into his hands became deepened. He took the manager aside, and expressed his uneasiness.

The bank party left the show early. As soon as George and his mother found themselves alone in their lodgings the latter exclaimed:

"George, such a strange thing has happened! I have lost a cheque out of my book. Look here!"

George took the cheque-book that his mother offered him and saw that the counterfoil of the last cheque torn out was blank. He also saw that the blank counterfoil bore the number of the mysterious draft presented at the bank that afternoon: C. 36,275.

He started.

"When did you find this out, mother?"

"Just before I went out this afternoon. I was making up my accounts, and on looking, to be sure that I had not forgotten to enter any payment I had made by cheque, I saw that one cheque was gone."

"You are quite sure that you did not use it?"

"Quite. The last cheque I drew was on Tuesday. Mrs. Bryant came up to say that the collector for the Gas Company had called with their account, and as there were two quarters owing, the company threatened to cut off the gas if it was not settled at once. She had not quite enough money in the house to pay it, and asked if I would mind advancing a week's rent. Of course, I said that I would, as it would be due the next day, and then I found I had no money in my purse. Mrs. Bryant said that if I would write a cheque for the amount of the gas company's bill, she could give me change for the difference between that and the rent, and I did as she asked. Here is the counterfoil, 'Burwell Gas Co., £2 3s. 4d.' I am quite positive that that is the last cheque I drew. You gave me five pounds next day to go on with, you know."

"Was anyone in the room when you drew the cheque besides Mrs. Bryant?"

"Only Myra Brockley. She had been making a sketch of the old church out of our window, you know, and she was in the back room going on with it then."

"Myra Brockley! Think what you are saying, mother!" and George looked so startled and shocked as to astonish his mother.

She laughed.

"My dear George," she said, "I did not accuse Myra of taking the cheque. I only said she was in the room when I had the book out last. Why should she not be there? She was most innocently employed, I am sure."

George made an effort to recover his self-possession. He was horrified at the suspicion that had suggested itself to his mind, and would not for the world that his mother should guess at it.

"Most innocently, of course," he said. "But, mother, you must let me show this book to the manager."

"What in the world for? What business is it of his?"

"In all banking affairs, it is best to be on the safe side. Someone might pick up the cheque and use it who had no right to do so," and he hurried out of the room, giving his mother no time to ask further questions.

George walked as rapidly as he could to the manager's house, in the hope of being able to find Mr. Brockley before he should have gone out to prosecute the further inquiries he had expressed his intention of making that evening.

He was too late. The servant told him that Mr. Brockley had been gone for at least a quarter of an hour. He told her that he would await her master in his private room, and begged her to inform Mr. Brockley of his presence the moment he returned.

The time wore slowly on, and George's impatience and anxiety increased with every minute. When Mr. Brockley at last returned, he was accompanied by a detective.

"I am glad to see you, Hervey," said the manager, as he entered the room. "I am afraid there is no doubt that the cheque is a forgery; and the man that you and Jane took for Jack Stevens was clearly not he. Will you kindly give this officer an accurate description of the man as you saw him in the bank, and of his movements afterwards, so far as you observed them?"

"Will you let me speak to you alone first, Mr. Brockley? I have grave reasons for asking it."

Mr. Brockley hesitated. The more quickly the matter was investigated, and the police put on the track of the forger, the better. "Could not George's business wait until afterwards?"

But George was urgent, and the manager yielded, more because it seemed quicker to yield than to argue, than for any other reason.

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As soon as the detective had retired, George began at once: "Mr. Brockley, I came to-night to ask you to make no further inquiries into this matter. The error was mine in accepting a forged cheque. If I had known of Mr. Hammerton's death I should have refused it unhesitatingly, for I was, and am, convinced that it was freshly written when it was presented for payment. I will refund the fifty pounds to the bank, and I beg you most earnestly to let the matter rest."

Mr. Brockley stared.

"Let it rest?" he exclaimed. "Make no effort to trace a forgery? Do you know that what you are asking is something very like compounding a felony?"

"I do not know what it may be in law; but if you persist you will repent it to your dying day. Mr. Brockley, I implore you to listen to me!"

"I could not, if I would, now; for I have already informed the police, and telegraphed for one of the directors to come down. The matter is out of my hands."

"Then, Mr. Brockley, I can only tell you the facts that I wished, if it might be, to keep from you. You have been a true friend to me, and I would be the last to cause you suffering, if I could help it. Mr. Brockley, have you ever noticed the extraordinary likeness between your daughter and her cousin?"

"Are you mad, Hervey, or trifling with me to gain time? What has nonsense of this kind to do with the forged cheque, I should like to know?"

"I told you that the man who cashed the cheque so closely resembled Mr. Stevens that at first sight I took Mr. Stevens for him. It was only close observation that convinced me that Mr. Stevens was older looking than the other, and wore a moustache, while the other did not. I believe now that the person I took for Mr. Stevens was a girl in disguise. Stop a moment," for Mr. Brockley interrupted him with an indignant exclamation. "I have, I am sorry to say, further evidence. This cheque-book is my mother's. You will perceive that there is a cheque gone, with no record of its use on the counterfoil. Look at the number of that cheque."

Mr. Brockley did so, and started.

"My mother says that she never used it. The last cheque she drew was the previous one, in favour of the Burwell Gas Company, which she drew at the request of Mrs. Bryant, our landlady. While she had the book out only two persons, besides herself, were in the room, Mrs. Bryant and Miss Brockley. My mother did not open the cheque-book again until this afternoon, shortly before starting for the flower show. She then saw that a cheque was missing."

Mr. Brockley's face had exhibited a variety of expressions during this speech: impatience, astonishment, indignation, and, finally, contempt. Without a word in reply, he opened the the door, and recalled the detective.

"Mr. Coomber," she said, "our task will be easier than I expected. Mr. Hervey has practically incriminated himself. He comes to intreat me to stop the investigation, offers to pay up the fifty pounds, which as yet, he has of course, not had time to spend, produces his mother's book to prove that the forged cheque was torn out of it, and then coolly tries to stop my mouth by throwing suspicion upon my daughter, because, forsooth, she was in the room when Mrs. Hervey drew some other cheque. On his own admission, the cheque comes from his house, he cashes it when he is alone in the bank, and then makes up a cock and bull story that it was presented by an unknown clergyman, closely resembling my nephew, but really a girl in disguise. I think we can make a fair guess at the real culprit. I give Mr. George Hervey into your hands on a charge of forgery."

"I am afraid I cannot arrest Mr. Hervey without a warrant," said the police officer. "And if you will excuse me, Mr. Brockley, I would recommend you to pause a moment before applying for one. I understand that part at least of Mr. Hervey's evidence is corroborated by your servant; and before I left the office I saw Constable Gregson, who was on this beat to-day, and he says that about 3.45 this afternoon, or, maybe, 3.50, as he was walking up on the other side of the street, he saw a clerical-looking young gentleman come out of the bank. He noticed the overcoat, and dress-trousers, and passed much the same remarks in his mind as did Mr. Hervey."

"Then I suppose you think that this young clergyman went first to Mrs. Hervey's desk and stole a blank cheque, do you, Mr. Coomber?"

"I said, 'a clerical-looking young gentleman,' Mr. Brockley. Constable Gregson did not ask to see his Letters of Orders, nor, as far as I understand, did Mr. Hervey," and the detective smiled a complacent smile at his own pleasantry. "If you have no objection, Mr. Hervey," he continued, after a moment's pause, during which neither of his hearers seemed disposed to reflect his smile, "I should like to hear your reasons for assuming this person to be a woman."

"I do not intend to say anything further at present. My late remarks were intended only for Mr. Brockley's private ear."

"You are wise not to incriminate yourself further, Hervey. I am truly sorry for you, and will do what I can to incline the directors to mercy; but, to my mind, I fear no further doubt is possible. I could have forgiven everything but the dastardly attempt to shift suspicion from yourself to my daughter. Coomber, I shall hold you responsible for Mr. Hervey's safe production to-morrow."

"I will walk home with Mr. Hervey, and let one of our men watch his house till he is safely in the bank to-morrow."

"I have endeavoured to save you pain, Mr. Brockley," said Hervey, with some emotion. "And I hold to my offer. I am responsible for cashing the cheque, and I will make the loss good."

"Further words are an insult, sir. Coomber, see to your prisoner."

Hervey bowed and left the room, Coomber following him closely.

But all the detective's efforts could not induce him to utter another word with regard to the occurrences of the afternoon.

On the following morning, before Mr. Brockley's usual breakfast hour, a knock at the front door announced the arrival of the expected director, who had travelled by a night train. By the time that the meal was on the table, the new-comer was in full possession of Mr. Brockley's views on the matter of the cheque; before it was well over, Coomber was once more upon the scene, and had given his version of the facts and the conclusions to which they pointed.

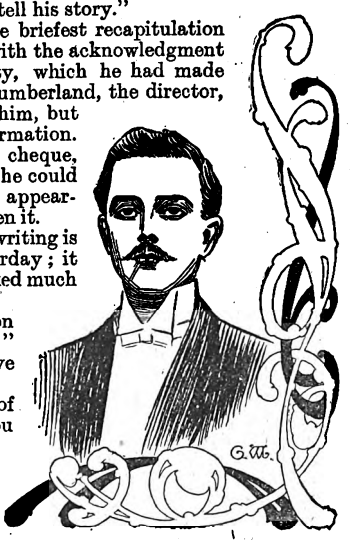
"Is Mr. Hervey safe?" asked the manager, impatiently.

"Walked up with me, and is waiting downstairs with Mrs. Hervey," replied the detective curtly.

The director looked at his watch.

"We have an hour before the bank opens," he said. "Let Mr. Hervey come in and tell his story."

George's story was the briefest recapitulation of the facts, and ended with the acknowledgment of his own responsibility, which he had made the night before. Mr. Cumberland, the director, put a few questions to him, but elicited no fresh information. At last he displayed the cheque, and asked the cashier if he could detect any change in its appearance since he had first seen it.



"Yes, the ink of the writing is blacker than it was yesterday; it had a blue tint, and looked much fresher."

"Did Mr. Hammerton ever use blue-black ink?"

"I do not know. I have not observed."

"You were ignorant of his death at the time you cashed this?"

"Of course; or I should have refused payment until I had been able to consult Mr. Brockley."

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Mrs. Hervey spoke to the loss of the blank cheque, and then the detective said:

"I have sent a man down to make inquiries at the gas collector's office to discover through whose hands Mrs. Hervey's cheque passed. My belief is that she tore off the two together, and handed them both over to Mrs. Bryant."

Mr. Stevens was then produced, and Jane, the housemaid, who protested that if the man she had seen was not Mr. Stevens, it must have been his ghost. Constable Gregson was of opinion that the clerical gentleman he had seen coming out of the bank was younger and of slighter build than Mr. Stevens, and George was inclined to believe that he wore no moustache; though he seemed less confident on this point than he had been on the previous day.

The director then asked to see the ladies of Mr. Brockley's family. The manager consented to the demand, but haughtily declared that the proceeding was wholly uncalled for.

Mrs. Brockley and Myra had been kept in absolute ignorance of the events and suspicions of the last twenty-four hours. Mr. Cumberland's presence at the breakfast table had told them that some business of importance was on foot, but they were accustomed to make no inquiries as to the affairs of the bank, and had not concerned themselves in any way about the present business. Great, therefore, was their surprise at being summoned to a conference in the bank-parlour.

Mr. Cumberland went to the point at once.

"Miss Brockley," he said, handing Myra the cheque, "have you ever seen this before?"

The colour rushed to her face, and the police officer interrupted quickly:

"It is my duty to warn you, miss, that anything you say——"

But Myra broke in hastily. "What is the matter? Is there anything wrong with the cheque? Is it not a good one?"

Both her father and Mr. Cumberland began to speak, but George interrupted them both.

"Whatever is wrong is my fault, Miss Brockley. I cashed it, and I am responsible to the bank. Please say nothing."

Myra looked from one to the other in evident distress and confusion, and her father said sternly:

"The cheque is forged, Myra. Mr. Hammerton was dead when it was drawn."

"Forged! Oh, papa, indeed—indeed, I did not know! How could I? I did not know Mr. Hammerton was dead till you told us at the show, and I never even looked at the signature on the cheque."

Her father's face became sterner still.

"What have you to do with it?" he asked.

Myra looked round, colouring more than ever.

"I will tell you all I know about it, papa. But may I not tell you alone?"

Mr. Brockley looked at the director, and he looked at the detective, who said:

"Just as you please, gentlemen. It is for you to proceed in this matter or not, as you see fit. But if I hear much more it may be my duty to step in."

Coomber had a regard for the young lady, and a grateful remembrance of kindness shown by her to his wife and children during a severe illness. He had no wish to take her into custody.

"You may withdraw, I think, Mr. Coomber," said the director. "But I fear, young lady, that I must hear your story."

Myra's story was soon told. Her likeness to her cousin was a standing family joke, and on the evening of Jack's arrival her mother had commented upon it afresh, and had laughingly said:

"I believe, Myra, that if you were to put on Jack's clothes no one would know you apart."

The idea had tickled her fancy, and on her return home to fetch her racquet on the following afternoon her eye had fallen on her cousin's coat and travelling hat hanging in the hall; she was seized with a sudden desire to dress herself in them and try the effect.

"I slipped off my dress and put on my habit?" she said; "looping up the skirt, so that it did not show under the coat, and when I looked at myself in the pier-glass I was so like Jack that I felt convinced no one could tell the difference. At this moment I heard a cry in the street, just under the window, and looking out, I saw that someone in the side street opposite our house had fallen heavily, and seemed unable to rise. A momentary impulse induced me—quite forgetting how I was dressed—to rush down and help him up; which accordingly I did.

"He said he had hurt his ankle, and could not walk for the moment. He would not have cared for this, but that he had to go to the Burfordshire Bank to cash a cheque, and was afraid he should be too late. If he could not get the money that afternoon it would be a great inconvenience to him in his business. He looked so distressed and worried that I was sorry for him. He said at last to me:

"'Would you be so very kind as to cash it?'

"I said at once, 'Give me the cheque, and I will get the money and bring it to you here.' It seemed to me a delicious joke actually to go into the bank and take in Mr. Hervey; and I had no idea of anything being wrong. I could hardly help laughing outright when Mr. Hervey took the cheque quite gravely, and gave me the money just as he would have done to any strange man. I took the money back to the man, called a cab for him, and helped him into it, and then I came home, and ran upstairs as fast as I could, for I saw Jane in the hall, and was afraid she would recognise me. I put on my dress again, and went back to the show, and found that neither mother nor Jack had noticed how long I had been away."

Mr. Brockley's astonishment as he listened to this avowal may readily be imagined. Mr. Cumberland could scarcely conceal his amusement; and George stood by, red and uncomfortable, feeling far more guilty than the narrator of the story, whose pleasure in her successful imposture seemed quite as great as her mortification at having been entrapped into active assistance in successful forgery. But when Mr. Cumberland made it plain that the matter could not be suffered to rest at this point, but that the forger must, if possible, be traced and punished, she began to regard the affair in a more serious light.

The first step—after sending Myra to the drawing-room, with orders not to leave the house in case her evidence should be again required—was to recall the police officer, and send him to pursue the clue furnished by Myra.

It is needless to go through all the steps by which the story was unravelled; suffice it to say, that the forger was found to be the son of the man by whom the bills due to the Gas Company were collected. The young man had betted heavily on a horse race, and had not the money to pay up.

In helping his father with his accounts during a few days' holiday at home, he discovered the blank cheque, folded up with one drawn by Mrs. Hervey. Amongst the cheques that were in his hands was one of Mr. Hammerton's. He knew Mr. Hammerton to be a rich man, likely to have a large balance at the bank, and he contrived to keep his cheque for a day or two, and practised the necessary imitation of his signature; but as he was taking the forged draft to the bank, he began to feel nervous lest he should be recognised, and his identity proved when the forgery should be discovered, as it was sure to be the next time Mr. Hammerton examined his pass-book.

He debated with himself how best to avoid the danger. The fall and the excuse were easily planned, and the success of the ruse was complete. He got off to Manchester, where he was employed as a clerk, but was traced, and confessed his guilt. His father, however, offered to repay the money. And in order to spare Miss Brockley the pain of appearing in the witness box—and, perhaps, with some idea that the affair would bring ridicule upon the bank if made public, Mr. Cumberland induced the other directors not to prosecute, but to be content with the recovery of the money.

W. Evans.

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In True Love's Eyes.

Relating How the Villain of the Piece Turned Hero.

"How can I go?" groaned Philip. "Oh, my darling, how can I leave you?"

It was a dark, raw day in late October. Splashes of rain blurred the windows of the drawing-room—dead leaves whirled by in gusts. On the beach, at the foot of the garden, the violet-black waves boomed ceaselessly.

Philip knelt at my side, his arm clasping my waist, his bonny, golden head crushing against the lace of my corsage. In an hour the *Scythia* would leave the Docks—further delay was impossible—the moment had arrived when we must "kiss and part."

"Great Heaven!" cried Philip, "why must my uncle fall ill in New York at this particular time—hardly more than two months before our appointed wedding-day—and cable me to his bedside? And why am I so poor that I dare not disregard his summons? Should he make a new will, you know, and leave his fortune to strangers, it would be very awkward for me. I go for your sake, Iris—I want to secure this fortune for you. Your friends do not look upon me with approval—they wonder how the beautiful Miss Daintree, with a score of lovers at her feet, can consent to marry a bank clerk——"

I put my hand upon his lips.

"Don't, Philip!"

"But it is true. There is Vaughan, with his inherited millions and long pedigree. A worldly-wise woman, Iris, would have turned her attention to him. To tell the truth, I have always felt a trifle jealous of Vaughan."

"Philip!" I cried, desperately, "these are our last moments together—will you waste them in talk like this? I have loved you poor—I can love you no better when you are rich. Indeed, I begin to hate your uncle's fortune, since it is that which calls you across the sea."

We clung together, shuddering.

"You will marry me when I come back, Iris?"

"If you return," I faltered.

"My uncle can only last a few days. No earthly power shall keep me more than a month. Ah! my best conception of Heaven," with an accession of gloom, "is a place where there are no partings! Darling, darling! Stop crying, or I cannot go at all."

"Don't mind me," I gasped, "I was never a heroine. If you do not hurry," and I pointed to the clock on the mantel, "the *Scythia* will sail without you. Oh, why prolong our misery, Philip? Say 'Good-bye' at once."

He turned my face upward in the dull-grey light.

"Good-bye, marvellous eyes!" emphasising every word with a devouring kiss—"good-bye, sweetest mouth that lover ever pressed—my beautiful queen, good-bye! Mind you don't flirt with Vaughan in my absence—I couldn't bear that, you know."

He tore himself from my arms, but turned back to cry: "Kiss me once—once more, Iris!"

Another embrace, heart strained to heart, then the door closed like a coffin lid, shutting life out and death in. He was gone down the long garden walk—my fair Viking, my lover! I fell on my knees, alone in the silent drawing-room, wild sobs shaking my body, wild prayers crowding to my lips.

"Oh, Heaven! Heaven! Bring him back to me in safety. There are so many things in the world that threaten happiness. I am very weak—I am full of forebodings of evil. Help me—help me, or I cannot endure it!"

A door opened—a limping step crossed the floor suddenly, someone bent over me, and with a sharp exclamation snatched me to my feet.

"This is cruel!" said a voice. "No living man is worthy of such tears, Iris! Hush! for Heaven's sake!"

Through a wet blurr I saw him standing beside me, frowning savagely—a lean, dark man, fastidious in dress, distinguished in bearing, and with cold, melancholy eyes, darkened by some violent emotion.

"How rude of you to intrude upon me here!" I said, bitterly; "and—how like you, Mr. Vaughan!"

He winced. He was a distant relative—so distant, indeed, that the tie of blood was never mentioned between us. His halting step was due to an accident, of which I was the cause. In my childhood he had rescued me from great peril, and by so doing injured himself for life.

"I meant no intrusion," he answered, with composure. "I was looking for your aunt. So Philip has taken his departure? Well," with a sneer, "he will return."

"How can one be sure of that?" I answered dismally. "The steamer may sink."

"It is a Cunarder."

"He may die in one of those dreadful American towns."

"His health is good."

"His uncle may keep him indefinitely."

"That's not Philip's luck. He is a favourite of the gods. No, he will come back, and bring a fortune to recompense you for the tears you are shedding to-day."

"I do not care for the money," I pouted. "I love him well enough without it."

His dark face grew alarmingly white.

"When you talk in that way I cannot listen," he hissed; "you sicken me!"

"I do not want you to talk at all!" I answered sharply. "It would be good taste on your part to leave me to myself

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You will find my aunt upstairs." And I walked away to the window.

"Iris!"

The halting step had followed me to the window. I felt his hot breath stirring my hair—the fixed gaze of his intolerable eyes. He was trying to hum some lines of a song:

"*I'll tell thee a part*
Of the thoughts that start
To being when thou art nigh."

But his voice broke suddenly.

"Iris, there are things that I cannot stand. You know, for instance, when you talk of your love for Philip, a knife seems turning in my heart. No, you need not look at me with that forbidding air. I will not keep silent longer! I will out with the whole truth. I love you! Oh, Heaven! I cannot remember the time when I did not love you, Iris—when I was not ready to lie in the dust and let you walk over me. Your lover I have always been—secretly or openly—always your lover! And, as Heaven is my witness, I believe I might have won you but for Philip."

My wrath blazed high.

"Are you lost to all sense of propriety and honour," I said, "that you talk to me in this fashion? Have you not been told that I am to marry Philip when he comes back?"

His lean, olive face was full of bitter defiance.

"When the floods are out, Iris, such small barriers as propriety and honour must go down before them."

"You know," I panted, "you know that I belong to Philip!"

His pinched, grey look frightened me.

"Yes," he answered, with a ghastly smile. "I would tear you from him, if I could; but," making a gesture of despair, "I cannot—I cannot!"

An angry answer rose to my lips, but something held it back—the thought of a night, far away in the past, when a child, in the delirium of fever, I had escaped from a careless nurse, and leapt from a window of this same house out on a projecting roof, icy with winter sleet. I remembered how no servant, and not even my aunt, had dared attempt my rescue, fearful that I might, if pursued, precipitate myself to the earth below—how Noel Vaughan, a mere stripling, and agile as a cat, had dashed upon the roof, secured and placed me in the servant's reach, and then, missing his own foothold, had fallen headlong, and sustained the injuries that maimed him for life.

"I see," he said, with a sudden change of manner, "all this distresses you, Iris. I am a precious fool—forget what I have said. If I suffer, no one shall be the wiser. I will come to your wedding; I would promise to dance thereat, if," glancing at his injured limb, "dancing was in my line. See those boats out there in the rain—notice the fishermen. Picturesque enough for the Bay of Naples, are they not? They would drown if they were not amphibious by nature. I will not wait to see your aunt to-day."

The next moment he was gone. I stood alone by the window, feeling as though a suffocating wind had blown upon me.

My aunt had guests at dinner that night. While my French maid was dressing me, I sat staring absently into the silver-white, tossing seas, bearing Philip farther and farther from me every moment.

Marie gathered my bronze hair to the top of my head, and pinned it there with a golden comb; gowned me in a dress of a dull-pink hue; like a crushed rose; fastened my waist in a jewelled belt, and pinned a great knot of half-blown tea roses in my corsage.

"Oh," she said softly, "mademoiselle is as lovely as an angel!"

I went down to the drawing-room.

All the guests save one were assembled there. My aunt whispered in my ear:

"Dear me! Noel has just sent a note of excuse, and now we must sit down to table with that unlucky number, thirteen. Well, thank Heaven, I am not superstitious!"

I was placed beside a popluar M.P.—a smiling, rotund person, very fond of hearing himself talk.

"It's a pity Vaughan is growing so cynical," he said to me in a confidential tone. "He has no feeling whatever for your sex—never looks twice at any woman." I remembered the scene in the drawing-room, and felt myself colouring hotly. "Perhaps the belles have pursued him a little too closely. With his wealth and position he is a desirable *parti*; and his lameness—well, that was incurred in a manner so praiseworthy"—and he beamed benevolently on me—"that all women ought to find it an additional attraction."

I had no more interest in Noel at that moment than in Saturn and his rings, but I smiled vaguely, and answered:

"Oh, yes!"

"Philip St. Mark sailed to-day, eh?" continued my neighbour. "I hope his journey may not prove altogether fruitless. I know that uncle—an eccentric party, mad over a hundred and one schemes for suppressing the evils of the times. Upon my soul, he is not likely to leave much money to Philip."

I did not express the dismay which I felt. One need not be surprised to hear unpleasant things at a dinner-party of thirteen. Coffee was served in the drawing-room, and somebody played the piano, and then the guests departed.

"I fear," said my aunt, settling herself comfortably in an easy chair, "that the dining-room was too warm, Iris, and the sherry not properly cooled. Dear, dear, you have looked all the evening like a ghost, child. A voyage across the Atlantic in these days is nothing——"

A sharp, sputtering sound interrupted her. On a buhl table by her side, a lamp was flaring oddly—perhaps in a draught of air. I stepped forward to adjust it. As I lifted the shade of rose silk, it flashed and shrivelled in my hold—a whirl of scorching crimson leapt full in my face, stinging like a swarm of bees. The lamp exploded. In an instant I stood, sheeted, like a martyr, in fire.

With terrified shrieks my aunt snatched the rugs from the floor and wrapped them round me. Instantly the servants were on the spot. Through the puffs of grey smoke which filled the room, I saw pale, scared faces appearing and receding, saw my dinner-dress dropping from my body in curious black flakes, the scorched tea roses with it. Then a blood-red mist gathered before my eyes—I was writhing in excruciating torture; the drawing-room—nay, the whole world, seemed in some state of horrible upheaval. My aunt, and a surgeon who had been summoned, wrapped something about me, and I was carried up the stairs to my own chamber.

* * * * *

"Oh, Heavens! She is burnt!" I heard Marie, the maid, say.

"Hold me, somebody," my aunt answered, like one on the verge of distraction. "I cannot look at her—it is not Iris—that blackened thing! Take me away, or I shall faint!"

"A blackened thing!"—that was what she called me. The beauty which had been my pride, my power, my glory, which men had worshipped and women envied—where was it now? Gone in a breath of red flame. Then I thought of Philip, and prayed to die.

Some soothing drug was given me, that for a time deadened physical suffering. Yet I knew that Marie was still sobbing at the foot of my bed.

"Ah, the marvellous beauty—it is lost, it is destroyed! And the lover on the sea—what will he say?"

Dark days followed. In spite of my aunt's protests, I secured a hand mirror, lifted it to the level of my face, looked once, and flung it from me with a heart-broken cry.

"Oh, Heaven! What have I done," I said, "that such punishment should fall upon me? Shut the light away, aunt; hide me from all eyes; let no one look upon me again!"

My aunt, shuddering, pressed me to her heart.

"Your life is spared, Iris—be thankful for that."

"Thankful that I have outlived my beauty? No, no—you ask too much! Stop all preparations for my marriage, and write immediately to Philip, and—tell him—tell him that

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I am disfigured past recognition—I release him from his engagement—from this moment he is free."

Weeping bitter tears, my aunt wrote as I dictated. Then a great shadow fell on the old house. All joyful preparations were at an end there. Mourning had taken the place of joy; despair of happiness. I felt dazed, annihilated, by the sudden blow. Of my rich ropes of bronze hair, only a short crop, like a boy's, remained. I walked again through the old familiar rooms, but the servants had taken care to remove every mirror from the walls, and the very reflection of my own figure on the polished woodwork made me hysterical.

I recall but one pleasant memory of that dreary time; day after day my aunt brought to me great baskets of orchids, and violets, lilies, and roses of every hue, silently heaping the bloom and fragrance before me, until I at last said:

"Does our conservatory yield all these flowers, aunt?"

She shook her head.

"Mr. Vaughan sends them. He has tried very hard to see you, but I told him you absolutely refused to receive visitors."

"Quite right," I answered, "the Iris whom he knew is dead." And I buried my face in the roses, and hot tears dropped on their pink petals.

At last came a letter from Philip. I fled with it to the solitude of my own room, and in fear and trembling broke the seal. He was wild with grief at my misfortune, and refused—absolutely refused—to break the engagement. If my beauty was marred he would love me with redoubled ardour. The preparations for the wedding must be continued. His uncle was in a dying condition, and would not permit his nephew to leave him for a moment, therefore, he could not fly to me, as his heart dictated; but as soon as release was possible, he would return and kiss away my tears.

The letter dropped from my nerveless hands. He meant it all—yes, I was quite sure that Philip was sincere in those tender assurances; but did he understand the magnitude of my misfortune? I remembered his ardent love for beauty, his antipathy to everything unsightly, repulsive.

"When we stand face to face again," I said to myself, "when he sees me as I am—will he still talk about keeping his engagement, or insist upon our marriage?"

Assailed by intolerable doubts, and unable longer to breathe indoors, I sallied forth upon the beach at the foot of the garden, and there began to pace aimlessly about in the ashen November twilight. Westward the moon shone, jewel-like on a sky of smoky crimson. I felt the soft, cool sands under my feet, the briny breath of the sea on my cheek, a rush of new life in my veins. And presently I heard a familiar voice calling my name: "Iris! Iris!"

He had espied me from afar, and was now hurrying over the beach to meet me. To escape was impossible. I stood quite still, and suffered him to approach. When he was within hand's reach, I flung back the veil from my face. He looked at me steadily. Neither by sound nor sign did he betray the shock which he must have felt. Limping a step nearer he extended both hands.

"Thank Heaven!" he cried, in a voice tremulous with strong joy.

"And why?" I queried bitterly.

"You live—you have regained health and strength. All is well with you again, Iris."

"All is well with me? You talk like a madman, Noel."

"I am mad—with the delight of seeing you once more. I could not batter down the walls of the house, you know, nor reach you by any fair means, and all the while I feared you might die."

"Why, I have prayed for death!" I answered sharply. "And, as you see, in vain. To the few who really seek it, it comes slowly."

"Don't talk like that!" he cried. "You have grown morbid with much suffering, Iris. What is this rubbish about releasing Philip from his engagement? He will not be released. By Heaven, I should long to shoot him if he would! Stop thinking improbable things. True love is eternal—deathless—not a matter to be affected by trifles——"

"Look at me, Noel."

"I am looking. You are as you have always been—incomparable. Your beauty is as deathless as love—fire could not injure it—it has not suffered. I see no change in you, Iris—none whatever."

"You must be beside yourself!"

"The man who loves you once will love you for ever. He is a good fellow—that Philip"—cheerfully. "He is made of the right stuff."

I was dumb with amazement. Then my heart gave a bound. Because Noel, my rejected suitor, could look upon me with composure; because I did not horrify or even startle him, I seemed to grasp and hold again a little of life—of the glad, sweet world—of love, even. Something of my own self was suddenly restored to me, and with it belief in God—belief in Philip! Noel Vaughan must have read my thoughts in my face. He grasped the hands which the fire had spared—they were still fine and white—held them a moment—released them reluctantly.

"My poor child, what torments you must have suffered! Take courage. By this time Philip is probably on his way to you. News of his uncle's death reached us to-day."

"Oh," I cried out, in mingled joy and consternation, "what shall I do?" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Give him such consolation as you can, Iris, for his great expectations have all vanished in thin air. The uncle's fortune was squandered long ago, on various schemes—nothing remains for Philip. However, I have heard of a capital business opening, which I shall offer him when he comes. It may, in some measure, console him for his disappointment."

He walked with me back to the garden, rattling on with extraordinary vivacity—praising Philip, whom, as I knew, he secretly detested, and striving in every way to divert my thoughts from myself. He put his own sorrows under foot that he might soothe mine.

"I shall wait until your marriage, Iris," he said, lightly; "until Philip is established in his new position, and then turn rover for awhile. I have sheep farms in Australia, and a sojourn in the bush has, at least, the charms of novelty to recommend it. Change is good for a man—it rubs off the rust of life."

I looked at him remorsefull

"Noel, I do not think I ever knew you until to-night," I said.

He coloured to his temples, and seemed about to answer; then lifted his hat without another word, and walked away.

One week later Philip came back.

It was a dreary night, with snowflakes whirling by the long windows, and a tumult of waves whitening the bay. My aunt, pale and unnerved, looked on apprehensively, while Marie dressed me in my plainest gown, and, by a few dexterous touches, prepared me for the ordeal.

"You are very dismal, aunt," I said, trying to laugh, "and your mood is infectious. I feel like some prisoner of the Terror, making a toilet for the guillotine."

Presently, we heard carriage wheels at the door.

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"My poor child," groaned my aunt, "shall I go down with you?"

"No," I answered, "I will meet him alone," and I gathered my failing courage, and, with a firm step, descended the staircase.

He was standing before the hall fire drawing off his gloves. The red light played on his tall figure and handsome, fair face. He looked fatigued and out of spirits. As he heard the rustle of my garments, he turned, stared wildly, then reeled back a step.

"Philip!" I said, in alarm—"Philip, it is I!"

At least, he recognised my voice. Doubt became certainty. Perhaps he had tried to prepare himself for this meeting—for the change of which I had warned him. But human nature is weak. His imagination had failed to compass the truth.

"Not—Iris?" he gasped, in a voice that I shall never forget.

"Yes—Iris!" I answered.

"Great Heaven!"

He staggered, and fell like a log to the floor of the hall.

Here was something so eloquent—so decisive—that no appeal from it was possible. In that moment of horror love expired. My whole thought was to save him further trial; so I knelt beside him, as he lay prone and senseless, kissed him once—such a kiss as we give the dead, full of the anguish of final farewell—then rose and stole quietly out. I never saw Philip St. Mark again.

Life went on, as it always goes, whether sorrow rules it or joy. The meadows grew green in Spring and tawny in autumn; the blue bay smiled in sunshine and darkened in storm. I had dropped out of Society—out of my place in the gay world, as completely as though I lay with the coffined dead. In my lost dominion new belles and beauties reigned; I was virtually forgotten.

Time softened my disfiguring scars and smoothed away something of their harshness. My hair grew long, bright, luxuriant again. I still preserved the dazzling arms and hands and the grace of figure, about which my admirers had raved in previous days; but never again would I be known as the beautiful Miss Daintree.

One day I read of Philip's marriage with a rival—one who had once stoutly contested honours with me. I chanced to be sitting in the garden, when Noel approached, and laid the newspaper containing the announcement upon my lap. He was still a constant visitor at the house—his Australian sheep farms were, as yet, unvisited.

"Don't break your heart over this piece of news, Iris," he said.

I looked up into the only eyes that had refused to see any change in my poor face.

"Have no fear," I sighed. "Philip St. Mark has passed completely out of my life."

He leant over my garden chair.

"Iris, I want you to marry me!"

"What! Marred as I am—hideous——"

"Hush! You are the loveliest woman in the whole wide earth!"

"Your folly is inconceivable, Noel. Who but you would go on nursing such delusions, year after year, shutting your eyes upon facts that are plain to the rest of the world—seeking no cure for your madness?"

"Good Heavens! I would not be cured for the universe. Don't trifle. I am desperately in earnest, Iris."

I tried to smile.

"Often I have heard that love is blind, but now I am sure of it!"

"Iris, Iris, give yourself to me. Have you not kept me in despair long enough?"

"Very well," I said. "Since you are so foolish, Noel, and so persistent, take me!"

And I stretched out to him my unmarred hands.

E. W. Parsons.

OUR BACHELOR'S OBSERVATIONS.

Man proposes—and the young lady sends him round to papa to see if he opposes.

A woman never finds out the virtues of her first husband until she marries a second time.

One woman always pays more attention to what another woman has on than to what she says.

An ugly wart is a difficult thing to get off one's hands. An ugly daughter is still more difficult.

A woman in love is more or less foolish, but she never finds it out so long as the man is good to her.

Whenever a girl begins to lecture a young man on financial economy he can safely ask her to name the happy day.

A woman never sees a baby without wanting to run to it and a man never sees one without wanting to run from it.

A girl's features may be stamped on a young man's heart, but it's always her complexion that looms up on his coat-collar.

A man will not admit that there is a taint of insanity in his blood—until his rich uncle dies and leaves all his property to a society for stray animals.

A girl's opinion of a young man before she marries him is very like his mother's opinion of him; after marriage she thinks more as his father thinks.

The first year a man kisses his wife whenever he comes home, the second year he kisses her whenever he goes out; after that he kisses her whenever she makes him.

Call a girl a chick, and she smiles; call a woman a hen, and she howls. Call a young woman a witch, and she is indignant; call her bewitching, and she is charmed. Call a girl a kitten, and she rather likes it; call a woman a cat, and she'll hate you. Queer sex, isn't it?

To remain a woman's ideal, a man must die a bachelor.

Moonlight is accountable for many mistaken matches.

Love in a cottage is all right. The thing is to get the cottage.

Girls like a drooping moustache, especially when it droops their way.

The average woman will forgive her rival anything but her beauty.

In order to tell a woman's age correctly a man must first ascertain it.

Lovers who would avoid quarrels should never stroll in cross roads.

The talk of women is usually about men: even their laugh is "He! he! he!"

Silence gives consent, but most women prefer to employ the word "No" for this purpose.

If you think you are too tall, marry an extravagant woman, and you will soon find yourself short enough.

When a young lady offers to hem a handkerchief for a rich bachelor, she means to sew in order that she may reap.

Some wives worry because they imagine their better half is in love with every doll-faced girl he happens to look at.

It seems a palpable injustice that the woman who is two-faced has no more complexion to worry about than the woman who isn't.

A man with an unmarriageable daughter is very much in the same predicament as a bankrupt. He is willing to put his property into the hands of a receiver.

If it is true that old maids are more numerous than they were seventy-five years ago it may only prove that the girls are more particular than they used to be.

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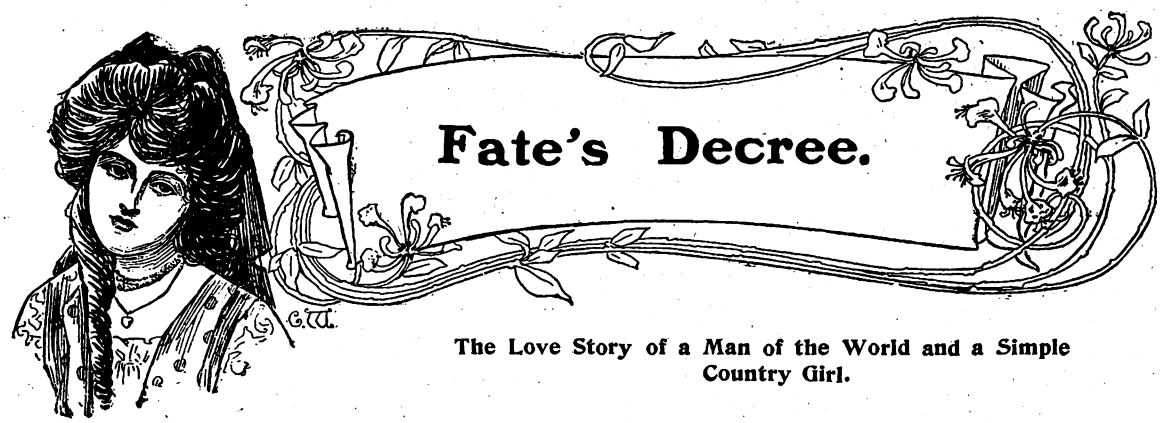

Fate's Decree.

The Love Story of a Man of the World and a Simple Country Girl.

THE man of the world flecked a speck of dust from his patent-leather boots with a dainty silk handkerchief.

"Of course," said Mrs. Branscombe, "I shall do my best for my sister's child—get her a good husband, and all that; but, you see, Maisie is such a simple, shy sort of girl."

"My dear Mrs. Branscombe," observed the man of the world, "don't do *too* much for her."

Dr. Houghton had a lazy way of making such remarks. The fear of offence never seemed to weigh on him. Exceedingly ambitious, though he would never admit it, his regular, clear-cut features were stamped with the impassiveness to all emotion that marks the successful man of the world.

"You are extremely impertinent!" exclaimed Mrs. Branscombe, without, however, showing any signs of displeasure. "I know what you mean when you warn me not to do too much for her. You like that country flavour Maisie carries about with her. That is characteristic of you—superfastidious, pleasure-exhausted man that you are. It's a novelty—all that unaffected ingenuousness which clings to the poor child. You would call it awkwardness, stupidity, in a sister of your own."

"But——" interrupted the young physician, raising his hand.

"But," went on his lecturer, completely ignoring him, "but you like to amuse yourself with it when you encounter it in a simple, little country girl. Ah, you men are all alike. But Maisie, remember, is a relative of mine, and since Fate has thrown her into my way for the particular purpose of polishing up her rusticity, I mean to do my duty by her—even," she concluded, turning a smiling face and bright, keen eyes upon her victim, "at the risk of making her as frivolous and conventional a person as myself."

Dr. Houghton stroked his moustache reflectively and smiled.

"You know your charms are irresistible," he said.

"You also can be irresistible—when you choose. I should not wonder if you intend being so while I am gone." Mrs. Branscombe looked at him intently.

"While you are gone?"

"Yes. Maisie is to stay here, you know—under the protection of the ancient Miss Mariner. The old governess is excellent so far as she goes, but that's not very far. I am afraid she would be no match for you were you to suddenly take it into your head to make love to my little niece from the country.

"Oh, don't stare!" she continued. "You are quite capable of it. You would experiment with her. It would be a new case for you to study. It would interest the professional soul of the physician while it would exhilarate the palate of the man of the world." She looked at him intently.

"Why do you repeat that? Why do you call me a man of the world? I am a hardworking, impecunious drudge of a doctor. The two terms are far from the same thing."

"Oh, no false modesty! You know you are determined to succeed—to climb very high!" She laughed at his silence. "No, it never pleases a man like you to have his ambition unmasked, of course. Nevertheless, how can one help seeing and understand?"

She stood up, and Houghton took the hint as a sign to go. Mrs. Branscombe continued to smile at him with her keen, practised eyes, then she put out her hand.

"Don't relinquish your purpose, that's all. Climb high, by all means. I like to see such successes. They're a glorious thing. Most people are the servants of circumstance, either unwilling or too lazy to disobey its commands. But you are its master. You are determined that nothing shall prevent you from attaining your ends. That is the reason why I do not wish you to find my little Maisie too interesting."

It was on Houghton's lips to ask this vivacious little lady what she really meant. But he considered it would be a needless subterfuge; he knew quite well what she was hinting at.

"There is no telling what a man may do," he remarked lightly. A moment later he was gone.

Dr. Houghton did not pass Mrs. Branscombe's pretty ivy-clad villa till some days afterwards, when that lady's carriage drove up to the door. The grotesque figure of the old governess, Miss Mariner, alighted, followed by the fair young form of Miss Maisie Langworthy.

The young girl bowed shyly, blushed prettily, hesitated, and finally put out her hand. She had the air of not knowing exactly whether this were quite the right thing to do. But her rosy embarrassment in the setting of her broad, summer hat and her thin, white, muslin dress, pleased the critical sense of this undemonstrative and rather hard-to-please young man in an astonishing degree.

To be sure, he had in a way promised Mrs. Branscombe not to obtrude any attentions upon her inexperienced charge. But he reflected that merely being civil was not paying attentions. At any rate, and however he may have squared the matter with his conscience, he accepted the half-hesitating invitation which Miss Maisie extended to him to enter the villa.

He spent half an hour in Mrs. Branscombe's pleasant drawing-room, and for the rest of the day was somewhat pensive, and his cases absorbed him, perhaps, a shade less than usual.

A week later Dr. Houghton was invited to a garden-party held in the delightful grounds of one of the increasing number of fashionable women who believed that the clever young physician was the only person who thoroughly understood the various peculiarities of their constitutions.

This lady was a widow of uncertain age, the possessor of a very fat bank-book, and a figure that corresponded. To all intents and purposes, however, thanks to sundry visits to beauty doctors, Mrs. Chomley was a young woman. There was a consciousness of this fact in the smile with which she detained the rising celebrity at her side.

On this occasion Dr. Houghton was not such an attentive listener to the lady's chatter as he usually was. Now and

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again his cold, earnest eyes would persist in wandering to a certain little tea-tent. Mrs. Chomley noticed it.

"Leave me this instant, sir," she said, half seriously, "if you want to talk to that simple child over there."

"Must I?" asked Houghton, with gravity.

But the stout widow had already turned her back upon him.

Maisie was standing near a white canvas tent, wherein were grouped a number of young ladies, with haughty, critical eyes, engaged more in entertaining a cluster of slim, limp youths in ultra-fashionable garments than in the strawberries and cream and other dainties which adorned the little round tables. Maisie was entirely ignored by them, as she stood with a certain wistfulness upon her fair, childlike features.

"What brutes women can be to each other," commented Houghton, striding over the lawn.

Maisie brightened up with the most innocent pleasure at sight of him. She put out her hand as though they were quite old friends.

"Well, how do you like all this?" asked the doctor, smiling down at her. Maisie was eight inches shorter than Houghton.

"Oh, it's lovely!" she answered.

"Do you really find it so?"

The girl looked up quickly, and in his downward glance found a complete comprehension of the situation. She blushed slowly, in a pale, delicate fashion, which reminded Houghton of the fascinating accomplishment which superb young women of the world never seem to possess nowadays.

"Of course I am not one of them," Maisie remarked innocently. "They talk of things I don't understand. I don't know the people they know. So—it's natural."

"Natural that you should be left out in the cold?"

She looked a little frightened. He seemed to be accusing these animated, fluent, bright-eyed young ladies.

"Take my arm," he commanded gently; "we'll walk round the fruit garden."

Maisie put her hand obediently on his coat-sleeve.

* * * * *

"I want to have a serious talk with you," observed Mrs. Branscombe to Dr. Houghton, when she returned a fortnight later.

"I know quite well what you're going to say," he rejoined meeting her glance with one in which she read something that made her tighten her lips a little.

"You have not kept your promise."

"I could say that I never made a promise," replied the physician; "but that, after all, would only be literally true."

"I'm glad you're honest, anyway. It's all I can say for you. What has become of your vaunted common-sense, and your prudence? You know very well that you will be making the greatest mistake of your life if you allow this flirtation to go on to its final consummation. Maisie is the best little creature in the world, but she would make you as suitable a life's partner as a dove would an eagle."

Dr. Houghton regarded her coldly and with unmoved face.

"What," she added, exasperated at his silence, "what can you, with your temperament, see in the child, indeed?"

"I don't know," he confessed, after a moment's hesitation.

Mrs. Branscombe shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, and what do you propose to do? I can't allow you to dangle about the girl, giving her a possible interest in you which is not likely to culminate in anything. Maisie is not the sort of woman I care for—as a type; that type of yielding, unassertive woman who stirs no one to enthusiasm. But I will not have her trifled with. Your self-interest and duty bid you do a certain thing."

"I have been telling myself that for three weeks past."

"Then, act upon it at once! Go to Mrs. Chomley to-day and put yourself beyond the possibility of committing any folly."

"Women are astonishing. You propose that I should——"

"Offer yourself without preliminaries—of course not. But begin pursuit in that direction in a way which will leave no room for doubt. You know she would marry you. And, logically, that is the sort of marriage you should make."

Mrs. Branscombe followed her guest as he walked towards the door.

"Shall you go to Mrs. Chomley?" she inquired finally.

He stood for a whole minute, his brows contracted, his eyes fixed intently on the ground.

"Yes!" he said, at last.

* * * * *

"Maisie! My poor, poor child! Run for the doctor, someone! Quick! quick! There's not a moment to lose. There—lay the dear child down gently. My dear Miss Mariner, you are not hurt, are you? How—how did this terrible affair happen?"

But the poor old lady, with a vanished fringe and shaken nerves, was utterly unable to tell a lucid story. From her hysteric phrases, gasped out between sobs, and the short, abrupt answers of the footman, who stood very white and trembling before her with the sleeve of his coat torn, Mrs. Branscombe was able to piece together the story of how the carriage had been overturned and the coachman killed instantly.

"Who shall I go for, ma'am? Dr. Houghton?" cried the voice of one of the servants out of the confusion.

When Dr. Houghton arrived, a quarter of an hour later, Maisie had not yet opened her eyes. It was with white lips, after an agony of suspense in the silent room, that the young physician again raised his head.

"A complicated fracture," he said briefly.

Mrs. Branscombe was led weeping from the room. Besides her grief at her niece's misfortune, she was heartily ashamed of herself. She felt as though vengeance had descended upon her for her disloyalty to the daughter of her sister.

She refused to be comforted, and walked up and down her room, shuddering at every step, at every opening and shutting of the doors. When she could stand the suspense no longer she went downstairs to the drawing-room, into which Maisie's inanimate body had been carried. The door was open, and two or three servants were standing in a little whispering group about it. Dr. Houghton came towards her. The distracted lady laid her hand on his arm. Her throat was dry.

Her agonised eyes tried to read the doctor's face.

"She will be a cripple for life!" he said.

* * * * *

"And when do you intend to be married?"

Mrs. Branscombe asked the question with averted face. Dr. Houghton was standing in her drawing-room, where Maisie was reclining on a couch. Six months had elapsed since the distressing accident.

"As soon as possible," replied the young physician. "Maisie will not be able to stand a severe climate this winter. Her health has been too much shaken. I thought if you would let her be married from your house I could take her at once to the south of France."

Mrs. Branscombe remained silent for a moment.

"How will it suit your profession to go abroad and leave everything?"

"I don't know. But in any case that cannot count now."

"No; that cannot count now," Mrs. Branscombe repeated.

She afterwards confessed that, to her, weddings were always depressing, but that this particular one was the most torturing she had ever witnessed.

"And so," said Mrs. Chomley, who had made the bride a magnificent present and showed the doctor the most animated cordiality, "here is that promising Dr. Houghton with a delicate, crippled girl of a wife on his hands for life! It seems positively tragic! No money upon either side. The poor man has nothing but checks to success in his profession. It seems, my dear, really like the wreck of a brilliant career."

"My dear Mrs. Chomley," remarked Mrs. Branscombe, after a long silence, "I always held that human beings were superior to Fate. I think otherwise lately. I feel the change as the first warning that I am growing old. But what I have been asking myself during the last six months is whether Dr. Houghton was a man of the world, after all?"

H. Muston.

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BETWEEN TWO STOOLS.

Relating How a Half-Hearted Lover Fell to the Ground.

It was the last masked ball of the season. Two genteel loungers who had strolled in to look at the costumes now sat in one of the little alcoves that opened upon the balcony, smoking and chatting over their cigars.

"Where are you going for a holiday?" said the one.

"On the Continent, I think. Party of us going; all the club; all save Durand."

"And he?"

Halbert laughed.

"He will not be induced to go very far this summer," he said. "He's done for, evidently."

"What! you don't mean he is in earnest with the dashing Octavie? I fancied he was not so far gone as that."

"I think he cares more for Octavie than he is willing to confess, even to himself. But he is off on a new trail now. There is a lovely wild rose of a girl been visiting friends of his. She is from Haresfield, fifty miles from town. Her father has a superb country residence, and she is an only daughter. He is invited up there for shooting and fishing by her brother. If he goes—farewell, Durand. The wild rose is very fresh and very fair, and her parents know it. They know, too, that Durand is rich as a young Crœsus, and wonderfully susceptible for one of his years and experience. I feel sorry for Octavie."

"Bah!" sneered the other. "You waste your pity. Women of her style do not need it!"

"You do Octavie a wrong," said Halbert. "She is grossly misjudged by most people. She is unconventional in her conduct at times, but she is a good girl, with a heart which I believe is deeply touched just now. I believe she loves Durand passionately."

"I doubt if Octavie is capable of loving!"

"And therein you wrong her. I believe she would make Durand an exemplary wife. Octavie excites my interest and pity. She always has. An orphan—with money, beauty, dash, spirits, wit, no caution, no adviser—she became a social code to herself. She dressed handsomely, but startlingly; she said witty things; her sayings became the property of the club-rooms; she attracted men by her dash and sparkle until she acquired the name of a heartless coquette. But nobody can lay a finger upon one wrong act in the girl's life, and if Durand would marry her, Society would accept her and make the best of it. She is not really dropped, you know—is simply looked on with suspicion. I wish Durand would marry her, but he has not the moral courage. I think he is going off to Haresfield to wean himself from her fascinations. He will come back wearing a wild rose as his talisman of safety. My cigar is smoked out. Let us move on."

They moved on, and did not see the figure of a woman who had sat just outside on the balcony. She had gone out of the heated ballroom to rest and breathe the pure night-air for a moment with her mask off.

She was of fine figure, which was well displayed by her lovely costume. Her rich, bronze hair fell in luxurious freedom over her handsome shoulders, her large brown eyes were full of unshed tears, her beautiful mouth drooped at the corners, her white hands had dropped the mask on her lap, and were clasped convulsively upon her bosom. It was Octavie.

She had heard all the loungers' conversation.

"So he is going to Haresfield," she said; "and to her! We will see!"

She picked up and adjusted her mask, drew her mantle over her shoulders, and glided back among the dancers. She was the observed of all observers—her grace, her charm, her matchless dancing! The masked and unmasked fashionable lookers-on were eager to see her face, but when the hour for unmasking arrived she had gone.

Two weeks later, a tall young fellow, in a straw hat, left his luggage to follow him, and, with a careless glance at the group of loungers about the little station, started across the fields for the hotel, half a mile away on the banks of the river at Haresfield.

He was, perhaps, twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old, clean-shaven, brown-haired, dark-eyed, with a handsome, weak mouth, and an irresistible smile and perfect teeth.

It was Durand.

As he walked leisurely along he heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs. Looking up he saw a handsome, high-spirited black horse, on which was seated a lady, in a perfectly-fitting riding-habit—a lady who reined in her horse when she saw him, and leant forward with a bright smile and bow.

"Octavie! by Jove!" he cried, surprise, pleasure, consternation, all mingled in his face and voice. Then he was over the pasture fence at a bound and standing beside her.

"Are you not glad to see me?" she asked, with one of her bright smiles, as she playfully touched his shoulder with her riding-whip.

"Glad? Why, yes, of course! Always glad to see you, you know, only it's so very sudden and unexpected! Called to see you last week in town, and was told you had gone into the country. Thought it queer you didn't say anything about it last time I saw you."

"Oh, it was very sudden!" smiled Octavie. "I was talking with Mrs. Allen—Mrs. Hugh Allen, you know—about summer resorts, and chanced to mention Haresfield as a nice, quiet place, where one could have plenty of air and exercise, and not be obliged to dress to death. She jumped at it immediately. Said she was here once a few weeks, and she made up a party of six of us in less time than I can tell you, and we came the next day. Have been here a week. I heard you were coming last night."

"Who told you?" queried Durand, as he lifted his hat and ran his slender, white fingers once or twice through his crisp hair.

"Who? Oh, Mr. Errall—Hugh Errall. He was up at the hotel, and said he expected you daily. We were all so surprised and pleased."

"Then you have met Errall?"

"Yes, and his sister came to call upon us to-day! Such a lovely girl—pink-and-white! We all thought her very

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pretty, and she and I struck up quite a friendship. I am invited there to spend the day soon."

A half-shadow crossed the face of Durand. He could not have told why, but he did not like the idea of these two women being friends. It seemed so incongruous! Sylvia Errall and Octavie!

"I am keeping you in the hot sun," she said, "when you want to get to the hotel, I know. Tra la! I will see you later."

She touched her horse, and was gone, with a bright, backward smile and glance, and Durand walked on at a swifter pace.

"So, after all, I am to be under the same roof with Octavie," he mused. "Instead of running away from her, I have run to her, and I'm hanged if I know whether I am glad or sorry. She holds a wonderful fascination for me, but I doubt if it's the sort of feeling a man ought to have for the woman he makes his wife."

Yet, when Errall came up that night, explaining how impossible it was for him to meet the train, and asking Durand to remove his luggage to the beautiful residence, Durand declined.

"Thanks!" he said; "but I will make my headquarters here, old fellow. All my traps for hunting and fishing and riding fill up lots of space, and would be no end of a bother at a private house. I will be with you gladly as much time as you will want me, but will stay here."

He went home with Errall and spent the evening. Sylvia Errall greeted him with that quiet and well-bred reserve that was so habitual to her. How fair she was! Like a blush-rose! And how low her voice! And her eyes!—but he had never seen them fully—the white lids always veiled them.

She sang and played dreamy music to him, and talked to him in her low, sweet voice, and begged him to consider her father's house his house, whenever he was so inclined, as he took his departure.

"What a difference!" he said mentally, as he walked towards the hotel. "I wonder how it would have seemed if she had said: 'Tra la! I will see you later!' when I left? Yet, somehow, Octavie says these things so splendidly! A fellow can't but enjoy them."

Three or four of the party were out on the balcony when Durand came up to the steps.

Mrs. Allen leant down and called to him to come up.

"I am smoking my cigar—I can't!" he answered.

"Shall I come down," said a gay voice, "and keep you from melancholy till you finish it?"

It was Octavie.

"Yes, come," he said, and they walked in the moonlight until all the others had left the balcony. And when he slept that night, it was the bright repartee and ringing laugh of Octavie, not the gentler tones of Sylvia Errall, that haunted his dreams.

But that was Octavie's last hour. Durand rose the next morning with a firm resolve to keep himself master of the situation.

"I must not compromise myself *here*," he said; "it is very different from London. There it was looked on as a flirtation. Here it would be thought to be a betrothal, and I don't want that idea to go out. I can be polite and civil, and all that sort of thing, without compromising myself."

And he was polite and civil and cordial when he was in Octavie's presence, which he managed should not be often. Most of his evenings were spent with Sylvia Errall, listening to her sweet, low voice, in speech and song, her carefully-worded phrases, her mild smile, which never became a laugh, and watching her slow, easy grace of movement, and telling himself she would do honour to his position and wealth were she his wife.

"She never startles—she is never striking," he said; "she is like the moonlight."

One day Octavie came down to spend the day, according to agreement. Hugh Errall and Durand came home from a two days' hunt and found her there, and Durand stayed to lunch.

Octavie never looked better. Striking she was always; her rich colouring, her fine figure, the general effect of the woman, made her that; but she seemed to fascinate and charm the gentle Sylvia with her wit and repartee, instead of shocking her, as Durand half expected.

Hugh was in the best of spirits, and his laugh was always ready if Octavie opened her lips, anticipating a witticism.

Durand, who had been strangely nervous when he first found himself in the presence of the two women, soon grew at ease, and made himself delightfully entertaining.

"I think Miss Somers—or Octavie, as you all call her—is charming," said Sylvia the next day to Durand. "I like her dash and sparkle, and she seems so *genuine*, and so earnest."

Durand, who was easily swayed by the opinions of others, felt his heart thrill. After all, Octavie *was* really charming.

He thought of her as he walked up the river path in the starlight, a few hours later. And as if in answer to his thoughts, he found her sitting alone on the balcony, enveloped in a white shawl.

"I know you do not object to smoking," he said, "so I will sit down here and finish my cigarette. May I?"

"Yes," she said, "and let me help you." She took the cigarette with a graceful gesture and a gay laugh, and held it close beside her lips. "Would I not make a fine profile picture now?" she asked.

Just then a window-blind was opened, and a blaze of light enveloped them. She gave back the cigarette, and then fell to talking lightly, while a thousand tumultuous thoughts surged through Durand's brain.

To the average man of the world a spice of *abandon* about a woman they know to be good is fascinating and attractive, whatever the world may say of it. Durand was compelled to admit to himself that he enjoyed the bright, changing variety of Octavie's society better than he did the unexplainable sameness of Sylvia Errall's demeanour.

It never occurred to him that a woman like Octavie Somers could be moulded into anything a man she loved would want her to be. His heart was not great enough to comprehend that.

One night he sat in the hotel, reading the evening paper. He and Errall had been out all day, and Errall had dined with him, and sat at a little distance, also reading.

Two strangers were carrying on a conversation in the office. Suddenly the attention of Durand was called by their mentioning a familiar name.

"'Didn't I see that dashing Miss Somers in the dining-room to-night?" queried one.

And the reply came: "Yes, she is here, handsomer and faster than ever, I should judge—I saw her smoking on the verandah with a gentleman the other night."

There was a dead silence for a second.

Durand paled behind his newspaper, but did not stir. Then, with a little spring like a young panther, Hugh Errall stood before the last speaker.

"You have lied and defamed a friend of mine," he said, in a low, quiet voice. "Take back what you just now said, or I will knock your teeth down your throat."

The man was a coward, as all men who speak lightly of women are, and fairly quailed in the white heat of Hugh's face.

"I—I beg pardon," he said. "I didn't suppose she was a friend of yours. I only spoke in jest."

"I would advise you not to make use of a lady's name in your jests hereafter," said Errall, as he turned away.

Durand followed him out into the starlight.

"Thank you for what you did, old fellow," he said. "It *was* a lie. Miss Somers held my cigarette in her hand a moment the other night on the verandah, and I suppose that that loafer saw it by chance. He deserves a good thrashing."

They said "Good-night," and Durand went to his room with a strange feeling at his heart.

How white and shaken Errall had been! Could it be that he cared for Octavie—that he loved her? The thought made him restless.

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The story of Errall's defence of her name reached Octavie the next day. It had spread through the hotel, as such news will, like wildfire.

The next day she saw him alone she tried to thank him, but her tears choked her, and she covered her face with her hands. He took them both in his.

"I need no thanks," he said softly. "What man would not defend the woman he loved? I love you, Octavie. Will you be my wife?"

And she wore his diamond engagement-ring that night.

Durand heard a chance reference to the romantic *finale* of the sensation the next day. A sudden agitation seemed to seize him. He grew cold and hot by turns, and was like a man beside himself.

His heart and soul all rallied and cried out against another man's possessing this peerless creature, who had been his, virtually so long.

Ah! he would see her—he would talk to her; he would tell her she must not make this sacrifice, for sacrifice it surely was.

"Octavie is romantic," he said, "and she thinks she must give herself to repay this man for his defence of her. But it must not be. I have been mad, blind, to let it go so far."

It was hours before he could see her alone. Then he drew her aside into an alcove.

"Octavie," he cried, a fire in his dark eyes she had never seen there before—"Octavie, what do I hear? Are you betrothed to Errall? Have you promised to be his wife?"

"Yes," she answered, very softly.

He seized her hand.

"Why did you do it?" he cried. "Did you not *know* I loved you—had loved you for a long time? You are sacrificing yourself to a romantic idea, Octavie, in marrying Errall—it must not be!"

She drew her hands away and looked him straight in the eyes.

"It *must* be," she said. "I am *not* sacrificing myself to any idea; I am going to marry Hugh Errall, because I love him."

"Love him?" he repeated, like one dazed.

"Yes," she said, "with all my heart. No other man has any place in my life—he fills it completely."

He heard her with a sharper pain in his soul than he had ever supposed it possible for him to suffer.

"I had dreamt—I had fancied——" he began, and paused.

"Yes, I know," she said. "*I* had dreamt, too—dreamt that you could make me into anything high and true and noble that you desired; but you did not try, and I began to study you—afterwards to compare you with Hugh Errall, and I found him so much nobler that all my heart has gone to him. I have been a motherless girl, Mr. Durand, all my life—gay, spirited, passionate; but I always knew a loving hand could lead me to any height. I have been praised, admired, flattered, scolded, censured, slandered, and it all has made me reckless. Now I am *loved*, and by that love I mean to grow to all womanly grace and worth!"

"But *I* loved you, Octavie!" he cried, his selfish heart in a wild passion of pain at the loss of her.

"No," she said; "no man loves a woman who waits for *his friend* to defend her name. Good-night."

Two months later, when the party had all gone back to the city, Durand lingered behind.

"A man is a fool who grieves his life away over any woman," he said. "And Sylvia Errall would be a model wife, I doubt not."

So he asked her to accept the vacancy.

"Are you not aware that I am betrothed to my cousin, now in America?" she asked, turning her calm eyes upon him in surprise. "I supposed you knew of it—an engagement of long standing, and known to all my friends. I am sorry this has occurred."

So was Durand.

Reynold Frazer.

Excessive Fatness.

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"Antipon" expels the fat from the system by absorbing and eliminating it without the slightest strain on the constitution. It is quite harmless; a child might use it without danger to health. There is no question about it. Hundreds have testified to its almost magical power. It is pleasant to the taste, easy to take (being a liquid), and wonderfully economical. The treatment can be followed without anyone else knowing anything about it. "Antipon" helps to strengthen the system by increasing the appetite and improving digestion. At the same time as it reduces weight it enriches the blood, gives renewed nerve power, clears the skin, and beautifies the complexion.

Excessive fatness will spoil the beauty of the most attractive women and the handsomest men. Once the tendency to corpulence asserts itself it is difficult to arrest development. No matter how you starve yourself or go in for violent exercise, the fat still increases, and, without "Antipon," will go on increasing. This marvellous remedy will speedily improve matters. The double chin, flabby cheeks, bulky neck, protuberent abdomen, large hips, and all other indications of excessive fatness will very soon subside into normal proportions, and, once reduced to symmetry, will permanently remain so reduced. You will not get stout again. "Antipon" will take off from 8oz. to 3lb. within a day and a night of the first dose. The reduction then proceeds steadily until proper dimensions are regained, together with restored health, excellent appetite, and a feeling of exhilaration and buoyant energy which very stout people can never experience.

"Antipon" is sold by Chemists and Stores, in bottles price 2s. 6d. and 4s. 6d., from stock or on order; or, should any difficulty arise, may be obtained (on sending remittance), post free, in private package, direct from the "Antipon" Company, 13 Buckingham-street, Strand, London, W.C.

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"'Antipon' not only speedily absorbs and throws out of the system all superabundant adipose matter, but increases strength and vitality."

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Requests for further information or advice will at all times receive prompt attention. All correspondence regarded as strictly confidential.

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On the Look-Out.

She: "They say that persons of opposite qualities make the happiest marriages." He: "That's why I'm looking for a girl with money."

Might Rely Upon Him.

"Well, old fellow, it's all settled. I am going to be married in two months. You will come to the ceremony, I hope?" "Count upon me. I never desert a friend in misfortune."

She'd See to That.

They were returning home, and the glamour of the elopement had somewhat worn off. "Marry in haste and repent at leisure," said Jack, just the least bit worried. "Oh, don't worry, dear," said she, sweetly; "I'll see that you don't have any leisure."

He Saw His Reflection.

"Mamma," said Jamie, mysteriously, "did I ever have a little brother that fell into the well?" "No," said his mamma. "Why?" "Because when I looked into the well this morning there was a little fellow down there that looked just like me."

A Counter-Question.

"Would you want me," the heiress asked, "if I were penniless?" "Would you want me to want you," the flabby-looking earl replied, "if I had no title?" Then they agreed to lay the matter before her father without further consideration.

A Select Assembly.

Papa: "You were up late last night, daughter." Daughter: "Yes, papa; our fresh-air club met on the verandah." Papa: "Who belongs to your fresh-air club?" Daughter (slowly and somewhat reluctantly): "Well—Jack, and—and—I."

The Difference.

Mr. Twicewed: "It's funny to me that people can ever look upon marriage as a lottery." Miss Youngthing: "How delightful to hear a man speak like that. Now, tell us why you think as you do?" Mr. Twicewed: "Why, in lotteries there are prizes."

It Had Slipped His Memory.

"She seemed infatuated with you, and yet she refused you?" "Yes." "I wonder if your declaration was ardent enough?" "Well, I told her she was the only woman I had ever loved." "You forgot that you were a widower." "By, Jove! that's a fact."

Where It Would Be Felt.

Mother: "Yes, doctor, my daughter is passionately fond of music. It is her life, her soul! You cannot keep her from the keyboard. Do you think it possible for her genius to develop madness, doctor?" Dr. Blunt: "Certainly; but in the neighbours only, my dear madam."

She Knew All About It.

Helen: "Charley Dasherway has been calling on me three months now. Don't you think it's time he proposed?" Clara: "Oh, no; it was nearly six months before he proposed to me."

Almost Related.

Miss Harcashhe: "Did you say you were nearly related to the Ponsomby family?" Miss Millions: "Oh, yes; my sister once accepted Lord Ponsomby's brother's youngest son—but the match fell through."

Disliked It.

Miss Clara: "Don't refuse in that awkward way, pet. Why don't you kiss the gentleman?" Little Pet (apologetically): "Please 'scuse me, Mr. Nicefello. I'm not so fond of tissing gentlemen as Sister Clara is."

He Had Personal Proof.

Young Wife: "Yes, father always gives expensive things when he makes presents." Husband: "So I discovered when he gave you away." And then he went into the library to draw a cheque for the monthly millinery bill.

Kissing by Deputy.

"Where is my wife, Miss Lowe?" he asked of the new governess. "She has just gone upstairs, sir." "Well, will you kindly give her this kiss for me? I've got a train to catch, and haven't time to take it to her myself."

He Wished to be That One.

She: "Well, if I can't live on my income, and you can't live on yours, where would be the advantage in our marrying?" He (thoughtfully): "Well, by putting our incomes together one of us would be able to live, at any rate."

Where the Wonder Is.

"Do you think there is anything remarkable in love at first sight?" asked the romantic youth. "Not at all," answered the cynic. "It's when people have been courting each other for four or five years that it becomes remarkable."

Ambiguous Sympathy.

Ethel (to her *fiancé*): "What do you think, dear? Jack Oliver proposed to me last night. I suppose he didn't know of our engagement." Her Fiancé: "Is that so—what did you tell him?" Ethel: "I told him I was sorry I was engaged to you."

A Rough Guess.

Golding (who has given his consent): "I hope, young man, that you know the value of the prize you will get in my daughter?" Young Man: "Well—er—no, sir; I don't know the exact value, but as near as I can find out it's in the neighbourhood of £50,000."

How It Came About.

He: "And so you're really going to marry that professor? You, the heroine of a thousand engagements! How did you ever come to accept him?" His cousin (a Girton girl): "Why, you see, he proposed in Greek, and when I refused him I got mixed in my negatives and accepted him, and now I'm too proud to acknowledge my blunder."

He Was Annoyed.

Young Wife: "There's a gentleman in the library, dear, who wants to see you." Young Husband: "Do you know who it is?" Young Wife: "You must forgive me, dear, but that cough of yours has worried me so of late, and you take such poor care of your health, and—and, oh, if I were to lose you, my darling?" Bursts into tears. Young Husband: "There, there, dear! Your fondness for me has inspired foolish and unnecessary fears. I'm all right; you mustn't be alarmed. But I'll see the physician, of course, just to satisfy you. Is it Dr. Pellett?" Young Wife: "No, it is not a doctor; it's a—a life insurance agent!"

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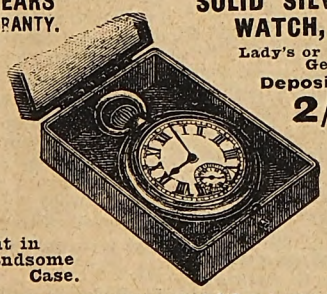

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

Three and a Theatre.

"M. H." is engaged to Percy. Staying in the same house as "M. H."—a boarding-house—is Frank, who has been paying some attention to "M. H." The other day Frank suggested that "M. H." should accompany him to the theatre. Of course "M. H." instantly replied: "Oh, thank you, but I usually go to the theatre with my *fiancé*." Instead of instantly collapsing, the pressing Frank said: "How very nice. But supposing he comes with us, too? I will get seats for the three." "M. H." wants to know how such a strange invitation should be met.

* * * * *

Very simply, "M. H." As the young man seems inclined to invite an unlimited number of people to the theatre, perhaps he would not mind taking yet another, making the party four. This should be your mother, or aunt, or, if that seems too cruel, say, a girl cousin or friend. There would then be four of you, each provided with a partner. Nobody need then be jealous, and the attentive Frank would be able to turn his pressure in another direction.

Methods of Proposing.

WHAT a funny idea of yours, "J. D.," that "there is a formal ceremony in proposing to a young lady, just as there is in a wedding, but not so sacred." I never heard it put that way, but as evidently you seriously seem to believe it, perhaps there are others in the same position.

* * * * *

Of course, there is no ceremony in proposing whatever. No two people have sealed the bonds of love in the same way, as you will easily find out by asking any married man or woman or your acquaintance. After a certain period of courtship, two young people realise that they are all-in-all to each other. One day, when the man has thought matters seriously over, and has decided that he is financially able to marry, he "pops the question." It doesn't matter how he does it. He may do it by a hint, or by a chance word. It is a matter of temperament whether a man makes a flowing speech, or whether he just mutters two or three words. Propose in whatever way is natural to you. Don't believe any more in that ceremony idea.

The Modest Marriage.

"ROBERT." No properly-minded girl, engaged to a young man, would expect that in their little home she should enjoy all the good things she has been accustomed to at her father's home. What if all your knives and forks are not silver, and your ornaments not antiques, and your pictures not old masters? You are young, and no doubt the girl's father himself was in no better position when he was first married. Don't be afraid that your sweetheart will be ashamed of the home you can offer her. If she is as nice a girl as you say, she will be prepared to rough it, and to rise in the world with you. Besides, she is engaged to you, not to furniture and china.

A Strange "Gentleman."

"WHAT should I do?" asks "MARY." "A gentleman I meet in the street—whom I don't know—always winks at me as he passes. I should like your advice."

* * * * *

This is the first time, "MARY," I have heard of a *gentleman* who winks at strange girls in the street. He must be a new breed which I have not read of in my natural history. Take no notice of him at all, and if he should continue to embarrass you, tell your brother or father of it, and arrange that the rude man shall be taught a lesson in good behaviour. I take it, of course, that you have given him no encouragement, and that you write in an earnest manner.

A Paternal Problem.

I DO not often receive a request for advice from a stern father, but "PATER" writes to me this week: "I have been so struck with the sound commonsense and knowledge of the world shown by your answers, that I want to place the following problem before you. I am a man of private means, and shall leave my daughter a nice little income on my death. Now, I wish her to marry some young man who will not merely live on her means, but will himself be in a good position. Instead of this, my daughter is receiving attentions from a penniless young fellow, who is absolutely idle, and good for nothing. I believe he is not really in love with her, but only seeks her money, so as to save himself the necessity of working.

"Whenever I mention him to her she says, 'Father, he loves me, and I love him. We cannot part.' Now, what can I do in the matter? I do not wish to wreck my daughter's happiness, but I feel that this young man is no proper match for her."

* * * * *

As "PATER" is well-to-do, perhaps he will not mind putting himself to a little expense to rid his daughter of her objectionable lover. If "PATER" really believes that young man to be worthless, and not truly in love with his daughter, he should certainly take active steps to terminate the marriage. As harshness might defeat this object, I recommend him to take his daughter away for some time—abroad, for choice—where she will have every opportunity of meeting other people, and forgetting her present suitor. Or else "PATER" has in view a certain young man who would really suit his daughter. Such a young man might act as a very good foil to the other, and it would be well worth "PATER'S" while to try to find him. As a last resource, "PATER" should forbid the young man to visit the house, or to see his daughter. This may seem hard, but it often saves two young lives from unhappiness, if based on proper judgment.

In Defence of Old Maids.

"EDNA" is the eldest of a family of six, and is nearly thirty. She is the one old maid in the family, and is despairing of ever meeting a man to marry. She is plainer than her sisters, who have, accordingly, always received the best attentions. She is very kind-hearted.

* * * * *

Why be afraid of being an old maid? It is growing quite fashionable nowadays. Many women realise that marriage is not the best thing for everybody, and there must be certain natures which can lead happier lives freed from the cares of a household. I always think it is the right sort of girl who remains an old maid. She is well fitted to remain unmarried, as a general rule. And what a good time she often has, if she is on visiting terms with her brothers and sisters. Don't be alarmed at being left "on the shelf." Queen Elizabeth, Florence Nightingale, and some of the greatest women in history were spinsters, so why not yourself?

Cynthia

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MISCELLANEOUS ADVERTISEMENTS.

Will be inserted in this column at the rate of 6d. per line of 8 words or part thereof. All advertisements should be addressed to Advertisement Manager, "Short Stories," 17 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., 11 days prior to date of appearance.

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Gent's magnificent 18-carat gold-cased Chronograph **Stop Watch**; jewelled movement; perfect timekeeper; 10 years' written warranty; also fashionable **Curb** (pocket to pocket) **Double Albert**, same quality (stamped and guaranteed), with handsome seal attached; three together sacrifice for 10/6. Approval before payment.
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Fashionable Curb Chain Padlock **Bracelet**, 18-carat rolled gold (stamped), in handsome case, 6/6; another, heavier quality, large and thick links (stamped); sacrifice, 8/6; approval before payment.
A Bargain—8/6—Lady's real Opal and Diamond Half-hoop Ring; solid gold; Government Hall-marked; set with four real Diamonds and three matchless Opals; approval.
Field, Race, or Marine Glass, high power, military binocular 10 achromatic crystal lenses, 40 miles' range, wide field, in saddler-made sling case; sacrifice, 10/6; approval before payment.
A. DAVIS, Pawnbroker and Jeweller, 524 High Road, Chiswick, London, W.

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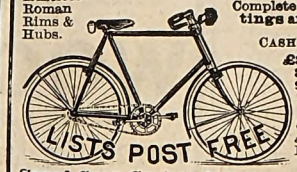

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—"Times," 24-7-73.

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A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

Synopsis of First Chapters.

Mr. Theodore Racksole, American multi-millionaire, arrives at the Grand Babylon Hotel, and in consequence of an altercation with Jules, the all-important head waiter, he purchases the hotel for £400,000, with the intention of dismissing Jules from the staff.

Reginald Dimmock, English companion to Prince Aribert of Posen, dines the same evening with Racksole, who suspects that there is some sort of secret understanding between the young equerry and Jules.

The millionaire that night retires to bed very late, and is greatly surprised to see the waiter emerge from a room which he believes to be occupied by his daughter Nella.

Investigating the matter, Racksole finds that Dimmock is inhabiting the rooms, he having volunteered to change apartments with Nella, as a window of those she had intended to occupy had been broken by a stone flung from the outside. The millionaire accepts the explanation, although the circumstances of the case worry him considerably.

The next morning he learns that Miss Spencer, the bureau clerk, has left the hotel during the night, without giving any warning whatsoever.

Racksole dismisses Jules the first thing in the morning, forbidding him to enter the hotel again. Prince Aribert of Posen arrives, and Nella recognises him as a gentleman she has met in Paris as "Count Steenbock."

Dimmock is seen to drop dead in the quadrangle of the hotel. The cause of death is mysterious. More mysterious still is the way in which Dimmock's dead body disappears during the night—a coincidence being that Racksole discovers Jules in the hotel precincts.

The affair is kept very quiet, and does not leak out into the newspapers.

Prince Aribert is in great grief, and tells Nella that he has been informed that his nephew, Prince Eugen, the hereditary Grand Duke of Posen, who is almost of an age with himself, has disappeared in Ostend or the neighbourhood. Aribert imagines that Eugen is the victim of a plot, and decides to return to the Continent at once.

On the morning following the Prince's departure, Miss Spencer comes to the Grand Babylon disguised as the Baroness Zerlinski. Nella, suspicious of the woman's manner, watches her, and sees her take a note out of a cream puff that is served to her at lunch.

Suddenly the identity of the Baroness as Miss Spencer strikes Nella. Discovering that she has set out for Ostend, Nella decides to follow her, and tracks her to a house in that town. Boldly confronting Miss Spencer with a revolver, she learns various important facts about the Dimmock mystery; but by a trick, Miss Spencer eventually bests Nella.

The latter faints, and, awakening, finds herself on board a yacht.

Jules, otherwise Mr. Tom Jackson, is approaching her.

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THIS WEEK'S INSTALMENT.

TENTH CHAPTER.
At Sea.

Nella's eyes flashed as she spoke, and the contempt in them added mightily to her beauty. Mr. Thomas Jackson, otherwise Jules, erstwhile head waiter at the Grand Babylon, considered himself a connoisseur in feminine loveliness, and the vision of Nella Racksole smote him like an exquisite blow.

"With pleasure," he replied. "I had forgotten that to prevent you from falling I had secured you to the chair." With a quick movement he unfastened the band. Nella stood up, quivering with fiery annoyance and scorn.

"Now," she said, fronting him, "what is the meaning of this?"

"You fainted," he replied imperturbably. "Perhaps you don't remember."

The man offered her a deck chair with a characteristic gesture. Nella was obliged to acknowledge, in spite of herself, that the fellow had distinction, an air of breeding. No one would have guessed that for twenty years he had been a hotel waiter. His long, lithe figure, and easy, careless carriage seemed to be the figure and carriage of an aristocrat, and his voice was quiet, restrained, and authoritative.

"That is nothing to do with my being carried off in this yacht of yours."

"It is not my yacht," he said, "but that is a minor detail. As to the more important matter, forgive me that I remind you that only a few hours ago you were threatening a lady in my house with a revolver."

"Then it was your house?"

"Why not? May I not possess a house?" He smiled.

"I must request you to put the yacht about at once, instantly, and take me back." She tried to speak firmly.

"Ah!" he said, "I'm afraid that's impossible. I didn't put out to sea with the intention of returning at once, instantly." In the last words he gave a faint imitation of her tone.

"When I do get back," she said, "when my father gets to know of this affair, it will be an exceedingly bad day for you, Mr. Jackson."

"But supposing your father doesn't hear of it——"

"What?"

"Supposing you never get back?"

"Do you mean, then, to have my murder on your conscience?"

"Talking of murder," he said, "you came very near to murdering my friend, Miss Spencer. At least, so she tells me."

"Is Miss Spencer on board?" Nella asked, seeing perhaps a faint ray of hope in the possible presence of a woman.

"Miss Spencer is not on board. There is no one on board except you and myself and a small crew—a very discreet crew, I may add."

"I will have nothing more to say to you. You must take your own course."

"Thanks for the permission," he said. "I will send you up some breakfast."

He went to the saloon stairs and whistled, and a negro boy appeared with a tray of chocolate. Nella took it, and, without the slightest hesitation, threw it overboard. Mr. Jackson walked away a few steps and then returned.

"You have spirit," he said, "and I admire spirit. It is a rare quality."

She made no reply.

"Why did you mix yourself up in my affairs at all?" he went on.

Again she made no reply, but the question set her thinking; why had she mixed herself up in this mysterious business? It was quite at variance with the usual methods of her gay and butterfly existence to meddle at all with serious things. Had she acted merely from a desire to see justice done and wickedness punished? Or was it the desire of adventure? Or was it, perhaps, the desire to be of service to his Serene Highness Prince Aribert?

"It is no fault of mine that you are in this fix," Jules continued. "I didn't bring you into it. You brought yourself into it. You and your father—you have been moving along at a pace which is rather too rapid."

"That remains to be seen," she put in coldly.

"It does," he admitted. "And I repeat that I can't help admiring you—that is, when you aren't interfering with my private affairs. That is a proceeding which I have never tolerated from anyone—not even from a millionaire, not even from a beautiful woman." He bowed. "I will tell you what I propose to do. I propose to escort you to a place of safety, and to keep you there till my operations are concluded and the possibility of interference entirely removed. You spoke just now of murder. What a crude notion that was of yours! It is only the amateur who practises murder——"

"What about Reginald Dimmock?" she interjected quickly.

He paused gravely.

"Reginald Dimmock," he repeated. "I had imagined his was a case of heart disease. Let me send you up some more chocolate. I'm sure you're hungry."

"I will starve before I touch your food," she said.

"Gallant creature!" he murmured, and his eyes roved over her face. Her superb, supercilious beauty overcame him. "Ah!" he said, "what a wife you would make!" He approached nearer to her. "You and I, Miss Racksole, your beauty and wealth and my brains—we could conquer the world. Few men are worthy of you, but I am one of the few. Listen! You might do worse. Marry me. I am a great man; I shall be greater. I adore you. Marry me, and I will save your life. All shall be well. I will begin again. The past shall be as though there had been no past."

"This is somewhat sudden—Jules," she said, with biting contempt.

"Did you expect me to be conventional?" he retorted. "I love you."

"Granted," she said, for the sake of the argument. "Then what will occur to your present wife?"

"My present wife?"

"Yes, Miss Spencer, as she is called."

"She told you I was her husband?"

'Incidentally, she did."

"She isn't."

"Perhaps she isn't. But, nevertheless, I think I won't marry you." Nella stood like a statue of scorn before him.

He went still nearer to her. "Give me a kiss, then; one kiss—I won't ask for more; one kiss from those lips and you shall go free. Men have ruined themselves for a kiss. I will."

'Coward!" she ejaculated.

"Coward!" he repeated. "Coward, am I? Then I'll be a coward, and you shall kiss me whether you will or not."

He put a hand on her shoulder. As she shrank back from his lustrous eyes with an involuntary scream, a figure sprang out of the dinghy a few feet away. With a single blow, neatly directed to Mr. Jackson's ear, Mr. Jackson was stretched senseless on the deck. Prince Aribert of Posen stood over him with a revolver. It was probably the greatest surprise of Mr. Jackson's whole life.

"Don't be alarmed," said the Prince to Nella; "my being here is the simplest thing in the world, and I will explain it as soon as I have finished with this fellow."

Nella could think of nothing to say, but she noticed the revolver in the Prince's hand.

"Why," she remarked, "that's my revolver."

"It is," he said, "and I will explain that, too."

The man at the wheel gave no heed whatever to the scene.

ELEVENTH CHAPTER.
The Court Pawnbroker.

"Mr. Sampson Levi wishes to see you, sir."

These words, spoken by a servant to Theodore Racksole, aroused the millionaire from a reverie which had been the reverse of pleasant. The fact was, and it is necessary

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to insist on it, that Mr. Racksole, owner of the Grand Babylon Hotel, was by no means in a state of self-satisfaction. A mystery had attached itself to his hotel, and with all his acumen and knowledge of things in general he was unable to solve that mystery. He laughed at the fruitless efforts of the police, but he could not honestly say that his own efforts had been less barren. The public was talking, for, after all, the disappearance of poor Dimmock's body had got noised abroad in an indirect sort of way, and Theodore Racksole did not like the idea of his impeccable hotel being the subject of sinister rumours. He wondered, grimly, what the public and the Sunday newspapers would say if they were aware of all the other phenomena, not yet common property; of Miss Spencer's disappearance, of Jules' strange visits, and of the non-arrival of Prince Eugen of Posen. Theodore Racksole had worried his brains without result. He had conducted an elaborate private investigation without result, and he had spent a certain amount of money without result. The police said that they had a clue; but Racksole remarked that it was always the business of the police to have a clue, that they seldom had more than a clue, and that a clue without some sequel to it was a pretty stupid business. The only sure thing in the whole affair was that a cloud rested over his hotel, his beautiful new toy, the finest of its kind. The cloud was not interfering with business, but, nevertheless, it was a cloud, and he fiercely resented its presence; perhaps it would be more correct to say that he fiercely resented his inability to dissipate it.

The millionaire from his hiding-place saw Rocco engaged in a mysterious occupation.

"Mr. Sampson Levi wishes to see you, sir," the servant repeated, having received no sign that his master had heard him.

"So I hear," said Racksole. "Does he want to see me personally?"

"He asked for you, sir."

"Perhaps it is Rocco he wants to see, about a menu or something of that kind?"

"I will inquire, sir," and the servant made a move to withdraw.

"Stop," Racksole commanded suddenly. "Desire Mr. Sampson Levi to step this way."

The great stockbroker of the "Kaffir Circus" entered with a simple, unassuming air. He was a rather short, florid man, dressed like a typical Hebraic financier, with too much watch-chain and too little waistcoat. In his fat hand he held a gold-headed cane, and an absolutely new silk hat—for it was Friday, and Mr. Levi purchased a new hat every Friday of his life, holiday times only excepted. He breathed heavily and sniffed through his nose a good deal, as though he had just performed some Herculean physical labour. He glanced at the American millionaire with an expression in which a silght embarrassment might have been detected, but at the same time his round, red face disclosed a certain frank admiration and good-nature.

"Mr. Racksole, I believe—Mr. Theodore Racksole. Proud to meet you, sir." Such were the first words of Mr. Sampson Levi. In form they were the greeting of a third-rate chimney-sweep, but, strangely enough, Theodore Racksole liked their tone. He said to himself that here, precisely where no one would have expected to find one, was an honest man.

"Good-day," said Racksole briefly. "To what do I owe the pleasure—"

"I expect your time is limited," answered Sampson Levi. "Anyhow, mine is, and so I'll come straight to the point, Mr. Racksole. I'm a plain man. I don't pretend to be a gentleman or any nonsense of that kind. I'm a stockbroker, that's what I am, and I don't care who knows it. The other night I had a ball in this hotel. It cost me a couple of thousandandsomeodd pounds, and, by-the-way, I wrote out a cheque for your bill this morning. I don't like balls, but they're useful to me, and my little wife likes 'em, and so we give 'em. Now, I've nothing to say against the hotel management as regards that ball; it was very decently done, very decently, but what I want to know is this—Why did you have a private detective among my guests?"

"A private detective?" exclaimed Racksole, somewhat surprised at this charge.

"Yes," Mr. Sampson Levi said firmly, fanning himself in his chair, and gazing at Theodore Racksole with the direct, earnest expression of a man having a grievance. "Yes, a private detective. It's a small matter, I know, and I dare say you think you've got a right, as proprietor of the show, to do what you like in that line, but I've just called to tell you that I object. I've called as a matter of principle. I'm not angry—it's the principle of the thing."

"My dear Mr. Levi," said Racksole, "I assure you that, having let the Gold Room to a private individual for a private

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entertainment, I should never dream of doing what you suggest."

"Straight?" asked Mr. Sampson Levi, using his own picturesque language.

"Straight," said Racksole smiling.

"There was a gent present at my ball that I didn't ask. I've got a wonderful memory for faces, and I know. Several fellows asked me afterwards what he was doing there. I was told by someone that he was one of your waiters, but I didn't believe that. I know nothing of the Grand Babylon, it's not quite my style of tavern, but I don't think you'd send one of your own waiters to watch my guests—unless, of course, you sent him as a waiter; and this chap didn't do any waiting, though he did his share of drinking."

"Perhaps I can throw some light on this mystery," said Racksole. "I may tell you that I was already aware that a man had attended your ball uninvited."

"How did you get to know?"

"By pure chance, Mr. Levi, and not by inquiry. That man was a former waiter at this hotel—the head waiter, in fact—Jules. No doubt you have heard of him."

"Not I," said Mr. Levi positively.

"Ah!" said Racksole, "I was informed that everyone knew Jules, but it appears not. Well, be that as it may, previously to the night of your ball I had dismissed Jules. I had ordered him never to enter the Babylon again. But on that evening I encountered him here—not in the Gold Room, but in the hotel itself. I asked him to explain his presence, and he stated he was your guest. That is all I know of the matter, Mr. Levi, and I am extremely sorry that you should have thought me capable of the enormity of placing a private detective among your guests."

"This is perfectly satisfactory to me," Mr. Sampson Levi said, after a pause. "I only wanted an explanation, and I've got it. I was told by some pals of mine in the City I might rely on Mr. Theodore Racksole going straight to the point, and I'm glad they were right. Now, as to that feller Jules, I shall make my own inquiries as to him. Might I ask you why you dismissed him?"

"I don't know why I dismissed him."

"You don't know? Oh, come now! I'm only asking because I thought you might be able to give me a hint why he turned up uninvited at my ball. Sorry if I'm too inquisitive."

"Not at all, Mr. Levi, but I really don't know. I only sort of felt that he was a suspicious character. I dismissed him on instinct, as it were. See?"

Without answering this question, Mr. Levi asked another. "If this Jules is such a well-known person," he said, "how could the feller hope to come to my ball without being recognised?"

"Give it up," said Racksole promptly.

"Well, I'll be moving on," was Mr. Sampson Levi's next remark. "Good-day, and thank ye. I suppose you aren't doing anything in Kaffirs?"

Mr. Racksole smiled a negative.

"I thought not," said Levi. "Well, I never touch American rails myself, and so I reckon we sha'n't come across each other. Good-day."

"Good-day," said Racksole politely, following Mr. Sampson Levi to the door. With his hand on the handle of the door, Mr. Levi stopped, and, gazing at Theodore Racksole with a shrewd, quizzical expression, remarked:

"Strange things have been going on here lately, eh?"

The two men looked very hard at each other for several seconds.

"Yes," Racksole assented. "Know anything about them?"

"Well, no, not exactly," said Mr. Levi. "But I had a fancy you and I might be useful to each other; I had a kind of fancy to that effect."

"Come back and sit down again, Mr. Levi," Racksole said, attracted by the evident straightforwardness of the man's tone. "Now, how can we be of service to each other? I flatter myself I'm something of a judge of character, especially financial character, and I tell you—if you'll put your cards on the table, I'll do ditto with mine."

"Agreed," said Mr. Sampson Levi. "I'll begin by explaining my interest in your hotel. I have been expecting to receive a summons from a certain Prince Eugen of Posen to attend him here, and that summons hasn't arrived. It appears that Prince Eugen hasn't come to London at all. Now, I could have taken my dying davy that he would have been here yesterday at the latest."

"Why were you so sure?"

"Question for question," said Levi. "Let's clear the ground first, Mr. Racksole. Why did you buy this hotel? That's a conundrum that's been puzzling a lot of our fellows in the City for some days past. Why did you buy the Grand Babylon? And what is the next move to be?"

"There is no next move," answered Racksole candidly, "and I will tell you why I bought the hotel; there need be no secret about it. I bought it because of a whim." And then Theodore Racksole gave this little Jew, whom he had begun to respect, a faithful account of the transaction with Mr. Félix Babylon. "I suppose," he added, "you find a difficulty in appreciating my state of mind when I did the deal."

"Not a bit," said Mr. Levi. "I once bought an electric launch on the Thames in a very similar way, and it turned out to be one of the most satisfactory purchases I ever made. Then it's a simple accident that you own this hotel at the present moment?"

"A simple accident—all because of a beefsteak and a bottle of Bass."

"Um!" grunted Mr. Sampson Levi, stroking his triple chin.

"To return to Prince Eugen," Racksole resumed. "I was expecting his Highness here. The State apartments had been prepared for him. He was due on the very afternoon that young Dimmock died. But he never came, and I have not heard why he has failed to arrive; nor have I seen his name in the papers. What his business was in London, I don't know."

"I will tell you," said Mr. Sampson Levi; "he was coming to arrange a loan."

"A State loan?"

"No—a private loan."

"Whom from?"

"From me, Sampson Levi. You look surprised. If you'd lived in London a little longer, you'd know that I was just the person the Prince would come to. Perhaps you aren't aware that down Throgmorton Street way I'm called 'The Court Pawnbroker,' because I arrange loans for the minor, second-class Princes of Europe. I'm a stockbroker, but my real business is financing some of the little Courts of Europe. Now, I may tell you that the Hereditary Prince of Posen particularly wanted a million, and he wanted it by a certain date, and he knew that if the affair wasn't fixed up by a certain time he wouldn't be able to get it by that certain date. That's why I'm surprised he isn't in London."

"What did he need a million for?"

"Debts," answered Sampson Levi laconically.

"His own?"

"Certainly."

"But he isn't thirty years of age!"

"What of that? He isn't the only European Prince who has run up a million of debts in a dozen years. To a Prince the thing is as easy as eating a sandwich."

"And why has he taken this sudden resolution to liquidate them?"

"Because the Emperor and the lady's parents won't let him marry till he has done so! And quite right, too! He's got to show a clean sheet, or the Princess Anna of Eckstein-Schwartsburg will never be Princess of Posen. Even now the Emperor has no idea how much Prince Eugen's debts amount to. If he had——!"

"But would not the Emperor know of this proposed loan?"

"Not necessarily at once. It could be so managed. Twig?" Mr. Sampson Levi laughed. "I've carried these little affairs through before. After marriage it might be allowed to leak out. And you know the Princess Anna's

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fortune is pretty big! Now, Mr. Racksole," he added, abruptly changing his tone, "where do you suppose Prince Eugen has disappeared to? Because if he doesn't turn up to-day he can't have that million. To-day is the last day. To-morrow the money will be appropriated elsewhere. Of course, I'm not alone in this business, and my friends have something to say."

"You ask me where I think Prince Eugen has disappeared to?"

"I do."

"Then you think it's a disappearance?"

Sampson Levi nodded. "Putting two and two together," he said, "I do. The Dimmock business is very peculiar—very peculiar, indeed. Dimmock was a left-handed relation of the Posen family. Twig? Scarcely anyone knows that. He was made secretary and companion to Prince Aribert, just to keep him in the domestic circle. His mother was an Irishwoman, whose misfortune was that she was too beautiful. Twig?" (Mr. Sampson Levi always used this extraordinary word when he was in a communicative mood.) "My belief is that Dimmock's death has something to do with the disappearance of Prince Eugen. The only thing that passes me is this: Why should anyone want to make Prince Eugen disappear? The poor little Prince hasn't an enemy in the world. If he's been 'copped,' as they say, why has he been 'copped'? It won't do anyone any good."

"Won't it?" repeated Racksole, with a sudden flash.

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Levi.

"I mean this: Suppose some other European pauper Prince was anxious to marry Princess Anna and her fortune, wouldn't that Prince have an interest in stopping this loan of yours to Prince Eugen? Wouldn't he have an interest in causing Prince Eugen to disappear—at any rate, for a time?"

Sampson Levi thought hard for a few moments.

"Mr. Theodore Racksole," he said at length, "I do believe you have hit on something."

Rocco was photographing the body.

TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Rocco and Room No. 111.

On the afternoon of the same day—the interview just described had occurred in the morning—Racksole was visited by another idea, and he said to himself that he ought to have thought of it before. The conversation with Mr. Sampson Levi had continued for a considerable time, and the two men had exchanged various notions, and agreed to meet again, but the theory that Reginald Dimmock had probably been a traitor to his family—a traitor whose repentance had caused his death—had not been thoroughly discussed; the talk had tended rather to Continental politics, with a view to discovering what princely family might have an interest in the temporary disappearance of Prince Eugen. Now, as Racksole considered in detail the particular affair of Reginald Dimmock, deceased, he was struck by one point especially, to wit: Why had Dimmock and Jules manœuvred to turn Nella Racksole out of Room No. 111 on that first night? That they had so manœuvred, that the broken window-pane was not a mere accident, Racksole felt perfectly sure. He had felt perfectly sure all along; but the significance of the facts had not struck him. It was plain to him now that there must be some thing of extraordinary and peculiar importance about Room No. 111. After lunch he wandered quietly upstairs and looked at Room No. 111—that is to say, he looked at the outside of it; it happened to be occupied, but the guest was leaving that evening. The thought crossed his mind that there could be no object in gazing blankly at the outside of a room; yet he gazed; then he wandered quickly down to the next floor, and in passing along the corridor of that floor he stopped, and with an involuntary gesture stamped his foot.

"Great Scott!" he said, "I've got hold of something—No. 111 is exactly over the State apartments."

He went to the bureau, and issued instructions that No. 111

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The picture shows how the chef gets the better of the millionaire. The incident will be graphically described in next week's "Phantom Shadows."

was not to be re-let to anyone until further orders. At the bureau they gave him Nella's note, which ran thus:

"Dearest Papa,—*I am going away for a day or two on the trail of a clue. If I'm not back in three days, begin to inquire for me at Ostend. Till then leave me alone.—Your sagacious daughter,*

"Nell."

These few words, in Nella's large, scrawling hand, filled one side of the paper. At the bottom was a P.T.O. He turned over, and read the sentence, underlined, "*P.S.*—Keep an eye on Rocco."

"I wonder what the little creature is up to?" he murmured, as he tore the letter into small fragments, and threw them into the waste-paper basket. Then, without any delay, he took the lift down to the basement, with the object of making a preliminary inspection of Rocco in his lair. He could scarcely bring himself to believe that this suave and stately gentleman, this enthusiast of gastronomy, was concerned in the machinations of Jules and other rascals unknown. Nevertheless, from habit, he obeyed his daughter, giving her credit for a certain amount of perspicuity and cleverness.

The kitchens of the Grand Babylon Hotel are one of the wonders of Europe. Only three years before the events now under narration Félix Babylon had had them newly installed with every device and patent that the ingenuity of two Continents could supply. They covered nearly an acre of superficial space. They were walled and floored from end to end with tiles and marble, which enabled them to be washed down every morning like the deck of a man-of-war. Visitors were sometimes taken to see the potato-paring machine, the patent plate-drier, the Babylon-spit (a contrivance of Félix Babylon's own), the silver grill, the system of connected stock-pots, and other amazing phenomena of the department. Sometimes, if they were fortunate, they might also see the artist who sculptured ice into forms of men and beasts for table ornaments, or the first napkin-folder in London, or the man who daily invented fresh designs for pastry and blanc-manges. Twelve *chefs* pursued their labours in those kitchens, helped by ninety assistant *chefs*, and a further army of unconsidered menials. Over all these was Rocco, supreme and unapproachable. Half way along the suite of kitchens, Rocco had an apartment of his own, wherein he brought out those magnificent combinations, those marvellous feats of succulence and originality, which had given him his fame. Visitors never caught a glimpse of Rocco in the kitchens, though sometimes, on a special night, he would stroll nonchalantly through the dining-room, like the great man he was, to receive the compliments of the hotel *habitués*—people of insight who recognised his uniqueness.

Theodore Racksole's sudden and unusual appearance in the kitchen caused a little stir. He nodded to some of the *chefs*, but said nothing to anyone, merely wandering about amid the maze of copper utensils and white-capped workers. At length he saw Rocco, surrounded by several admiring *chefs*. Rocco was bending over a freshly-roasted partridge which lay on a blue dish. He plunged a long fork into the back of the bird, and raised it in the air with his left hand. In his right he held a long, glittering carving knife. He was giving one of his world-famous exhibitions of carving. In four swift, unerring, delicate, perfect strokes he cleanly severed the limbs of the partridge. It was a wonderful achievement—how wondrous none but the really skilful carver can properly appreciate. The *chefs* emitted a hum of applause, and Rocco, long, lean, and graceful, retired to his own apartment. Racksole followed him. Rocco sat in a chair, one hand over his eyes; he had not noticed Theodore Racksole.

"What are you doing, M. Rocco?" the millionaire asked smiling.

"Ah!" exclaimed Rocco, starting up with an apology. "Pardon! I was inventing a new mayonnaise, which I shall need for a certain menu next week."

"Do you invent these things without materials, then?" questioned Racksole.

"Certainly. I do dem in my mind. I tink dem. Why should I want materials? I know all flavours. I tink, and tink, and tink, and it is done. I write down. I give de recipe to my best *chef*—dere you are. I need not even taste, I know how it will taste. It is like composing music. De great composers do not compose at de piano."

"I see," said Racksole.

"It is because I work like dat dat you pay me tree tousand a year," Rocco added gravely.

"Heard about Jules?" said Racksole abruptly.

"Jules?"

"Yes. He's been arrested in Ostend," the millionaire

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continued, lying cleverly at a venture. "They say that he and several others are implicated in a murder case—the murder of Reginald Dimmock."

"Truly?" drawled Rocco, scarcely hiding a yawn. His indifference was so superb, so gorgeous, that Racksole instantly divined that it was assumed for the occasion.

"It seems that, after all, the police are good for something. But this is the first time I ever knew them to be worth their salt. There is to be a thorough and systematic search of the hotel to-morrow," Racksole went on. "I have mentioned it to you to warn you that so far as you are concerned the search is of course merely a matter of form. You will not object to the detectives looking through your rooms?"

"Certainly not," and Rocco shrugged his shoulders.

"I shall ask you to say nothing about this to anyone," said Racksole. "The news of Jules' arrest is quite private to myself. The papers know nothing of it. You comprehend?"

Rocco smiled in his grand manner, and Rocco's master thereupon went away. Racksole was very well satisfied with the little conversation. It was perhaps dangerous to tell a series of mere lies to a clever fellow like Rocco, and Racksole wondered how he should ultimately explain them to his great master-*chef* if his and Nella's suspicions should be unfounded, and nothing came of them. Nevertheless, Rocco's manner, a strange, elusive something in the man's eyes, had nearly convinced Racksole that he was somehow implicated in Jules' schemes—and probably in the death of Reginald Dimmock and the disappearance of Prince Eugen of Posen.

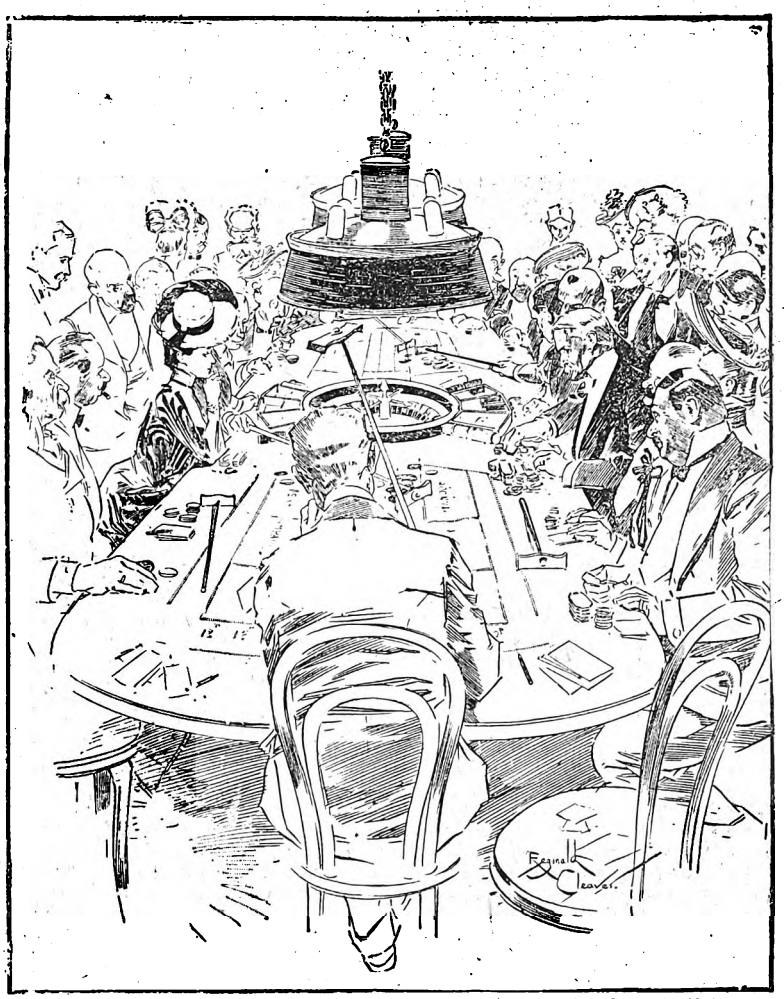
That night, or rather about half-past one the next morning, when the last noises of the hotel's life had died down, Racksole made his way to Room 111 on the second floor. He locked the door on the inside, and proceeded to examine the place, square foot by square foot. Every now and then some creak or other sound startled him, and he listened intently for a few seconds. The bedroom was furnished in the ordinary splendid style of bedrooms at the Grand Babylon Hotel, and in that respect called for no remark. What most interested Racksole was the flooring. He pulled up the thick Oriental carpet, and peered along every plank, but could discover nothing unusual. Then he went to the dressing-room, and finally to the bath-room, both of which opened out of the main room. But in neither of these smaller chambers was he any more successful than in the bedroom itself. Finally he came to the bath, which was inclosed in a panelled casing of polished wood, after the manner of baths. Some baths have a cupboard beneath the taps, with a door at the side, but this one appeared to have none. He tapped the panels, but not a single one of them gave forth that "curious hollow sound" which usually betokens a secret place. Idly he turned the cold-tap of the bath, and the water began to rush in. He turned off the cold-tap and turned on the waste-tap, and as he did so, his knee, which was pressing against the panelling, slipped forward. The panelling had given way, and he saw that one large panel was hinged from the inside, and caught with a hasp, also on the inside. A large space within the casing at the end of the bath was thus revealed. Before doing anything else, Racksole tried to repeat the trick with the waste-tap, but he failed; it would not work again, nor could he in any way perceive that there was any connection between the rod of the waste-tap and the hasp of the panel. Racksole could not see into the cavity within the casing, and the electric light was fixed, and could not be moved about like a candle.

He felt in his pockets, and discovered a box of matches. Aided by these, he looked into the cavity, and saw nothing; nothing except a rather large hole at the far end—some three feet from the casing. With some difficulty he squeezed himself through the open panel, and took a half-kneeling, half-sitting posture within. There he struck a match, and it was a most unfortunate thing that in striking, the box being half open, he set fire to all the matches, and was half smothered in the atrocious smell of phosphorus which resulted.

One match burnt clear on the floor of the cavity, and, rubbing his eyes, Racksole picked it up, and looked down the hole. It was a hole apparently bottomless, and about eighteen inches square. The curious part about the hole was that a rope-ladder hung down it. When he saw that rope-ladder Racksole smiled the smile of a happy man.

The match went out.

Should he make a long journey, perhaps to some distant



The adventure that happens to Mr. Racksole in the Kursaal at Ostend will be told in a forthcoming instalment of "Phantom Shadows."

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corner of the hotel, for a fresh box of matches, or should he attempt to descend that rope-ladder in the dark? He decided on the latter course, and he was the more strongly moved thereto as he could now distinguish a faint, a very faint tinge of light at the bottom of the hole.

With infinite care he compressed himself into the well-like hole, and descended the ladder. At length he arrived on firm ground, perspiring, but quite safe and quite excited. He saw now that the tinge of light came through a small hole in the wood. He put his eye to the wood, and found that he had a fine view of the State bathroom, and through the door of the State bathroom into the State bedroom. At the massive marble-topped washstand in the State bedroom a man was visible, bending over some object which lay thereon.

The man was Rocco!

THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.
In the State Bedroom.

It was, of course, plain to Racksole that the peculiar passage-way which he had, at great personal inconvenience, discovered between the bathroom at No. 111 and the State bathroom on the floor below must have been specially designed by some person or persons for the purpose of keeping a nefarious watch upon the occupants of the State suite of apartments. It was a means of communication at once simple and ingenious. At that moment he could not be sure of the precise method employed for it, but he surmised that the casing of the waterpipes had been used as a "well," while space for the pipes themselves had been found in the thickness of the ample brick walls of the Grand Babylon.

The eye-hole, through which he now had a view of the bedroom, was a very minute one, and would scarcely be noticed from the exterior. One thing he observed concerning it—namely, that it had been made for a man somewhat taller than himself; he was obliged to stand on tip-toe in order to get his eye in the correct position. He remembered that both Jules and Rocco were distinctly above the average height; also that they were both thin men, and could have descended the well with comparative ease. Theodore Racksole, though not stout, was a well-set man with large bones.

These things flashed through his mind as he gazed, spell-bound, at the mysterious movements of Rocco. The door between the bathroom and the bedroom was wide open, and his own situation was such that his view embraced a considerable portion of the bedroom, including the whole of the immense and gorgeously-upholstered bedstead, but not including the whole of the marble washstand. He could see only half of the washstand, and at intervals Rocco passed out of sight as his lithe hands moved over the object which lay on the marble. At first Theodore Racksole could not decide what this object was, but after a time, as his eyes grew accustomed to the position and the light, he made it out.

It was the body of a man. Or, rather, to be more exact, Racksole could discern the legs of a man on that half of the table which was visible to him. Involuntarily he shuddered, as the conviction forced itself upon him that Rocco had some unconscious human being helpless on that cold marble surface. The legs never moved. Therefore, the hapless creature was either asleep or under the influence of an anæsthetic—or (horrible thought!) dead.

Racksole wanted to call out, to stop by some means or other the dreadful midnight activity which was proceeding before his astonished eyes; but fortunately he restrained himself.

On the washstand he could see certain strangely-shaped utensils and instruments which Rocco used from time to time. The work seemed to Racksole to continue for interminable hours, and then at last Rocco ceased, gave a sign of satisfaction, whistled several bars from *Cavalleria Rusticana*, and came into the bathroom, where he took off his coat, and very quietly washed his hands. As he stood calmly and leisurely wiping those long fingers of his, he was less than four feet from Racksole, and the cooped-up millionaire trembled, holding his breath, lest Rocco should detect his presence behind the woodwork. But nothing happened, and Rocco returned unsuspectingly to the bedroom. Racksole saw him place some sort of white flannel garment over the prone form on the table, and then lift it boldly on to the great bed, where it lay awfully still. The hidden watcher was sure now that it was a dead body upon which Rocco had been exercising his mysterious and sinister functions. But whose body? And what functions?

Could this be a West End hotel, Racksole's own hotel, in the very heart of London, the best-policed city in the world? It seemed incredible, impossible; yet so it was.

Again he remembered what Félix Babylon had said to him, and realised the truth of the saying anew. The proprietor of a vast and complicated establishment like the Grand Babylon could never know a tithe of the extraordinary and queer occurrences which happened daily under his very nose; the atmosphere of such a caravanserai must necessarily be an atmosphere of mystery and problems apparently inexplicable. Nevertheless, Racksole thought that Fate was carrying things with rather a high hand when she permitted his *chef* to spend the night hours over a man's remains in this State bedroom, this sacred apartment which was supposed to be occupied only by individuals of Royal Blood. Racksole would not have objected to a certain amount of mystery, but he decidedly thought that there was a little too much mystery here for his taste. He thought that even Félix Babylon would have been surprised at this.

The electric chandelier in the centre of the ceiling was not lighted; only the two lights on either side of the washstand were switched on, and these did not sufficiently illuminate the features of the man on the bed to enable Racksole to see them clearly. In vain the millionaire strained his eyes; he could only make out that the body was probably that of a young man.

Just as he was wondering what to do, he saw Rocco with a square-shaped black box in his hand. Then the *chef* switched off the two electric lights, and the State bedroom was in darkness. In that swift darkness Racksole heard Rocco spring on to the bed. Another half-dozen moments of suspense, and there was a blinding flash of white, which endured for several seconds, and showed Rocco standing like an evil spirit over the body, the black box in one hand and a burning piece of aluminium wire in the other. The aluminium wire burnt out, and darkness followed blacker than before.

Rocco had photographed the body by flash-light!

But the dazzling flare which had disclosed the features of the dead man to the insensible lens of the camera had disclosed them also to Theodore Racksole. The dead man was Reginald Dimmock!

Stung into action by this discovery, Racksole tried to find the exit from his place of concealment. He felt sure that there existed some way out into the State bathroom, but he sought for it fruitlessly, groping with both hands and feet. Then he decided that he must ascend the rope-ladder, make haste for the first-floor corridor, and intercept Rocco when he left the State apartments. It was a painful and difficult business to ascend that thin and yielding ladder in such a confined space, but Racksole was managing it very nicely, and had nearly reached the top, when, by some untoward freak of chance, the ladder broke above his weight, and he slipped ignominiously down to the bottom of the wooden tube. Smothering an excusable oath, Racksole couched, baffled. Then he saw that the force of his fall had somehow opened a trap-door at his feet. He squeezed through, pushed open another tiny door, and in another second stood in the State bathroom. He was dishevelled, perspiring, rather bewildered; but he was there. In the next second he had resumed absolute command of all his faculties.

Strange to say, he had moved so quietly that Rocco had apparently not heard him. He stepped noiselessly to the door between the bathroom and the bedroom, and stood there in silence. Rocco had switched on again the lights over the washstand, and was busy with his utensils.

Racksole deliberately coughed.

(Another long instalment next week.)

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AUNT JEMIMA'S RING.

A Tale of Three Uncomfortable Days.

"ONLY three days ago," said my irreverent brother Harry, "we were all looking out for Aunt Jemima's knock. Now we are all looking out for her ring!"

"Oh, Harry!" exclaimed my eldest sister Margaret, who did not appreciate jokes, and, moreover, had a greater respect for our Aunt Jemima than I fear the rest of us had.

"It's not a matter to joke about," said mother seriously. Poor patient little mother! I am afraid the seven of us were somewhat of a trial to her, at times, though she loved us all dearly. As a matter of fact, there are only five of ourselves, but then Margaret and Horace, the respectable ones of the family, as I always call them, are engaged, and so we always include them.

To begin at the beginning, our Aunt Jemima, from whom I may mention we all have expectations, had come to pay us her bi-annual visit. Every six months she and her maid and her boxes and trunks, and her parrot, Peter, without whom we believed she never went anywhere except to church, swooped down upon our happy household, and for the space of a fortnight demoralised us.

We were passably well off, and lived in a big, old-fashioned house in Hampstead, but though it was big and rambling, it was almost an impossibility to get away from Aunt Jemima! She never gave any of us a moment's peace, from the hour she set foot in the house until she turned her back on us. And when that time came, I fear that every one of us, from mother down to the scullery maid, gave a sigh of unmitigated relief. She was one of those fussy old maids who, having no business of her own to look after, filled up her time by interfering in that of everybody she came into contact with.

She lectured mother about the house, the servants, her extravagance, and our impertinence. I am afraid the latter there was some reason for.

She ordered cook about so, that that dear old thing, who had been with us twenty years and had seen us all grow up from babies—I am the baby, and she was with us when I was born—invariably gave mother notice before Aunt Jemima had been in the house a day or two, and of course had to be implored to stay.

She—I mean Aunt Jemima, not cook—read us all lectures on a variety of subjects, from keeping our tempers to keeping a house clean, lectures which we listened to meekly, and laughed at afterwards. Poor Aunt Jemima! She meant well, but she would fuss!

And now her ring was lost—a very valuable marquise ring, a family heirloom for I don't know how many generations. We, as well as Aunt Jemima, were all positive she had had it on her finger at dinner the night before, because we had all been admiring it, Margaret's lover, Dick Marchmont, especially.

Aunt Jemima vowed she remembered taking it off at night; but at morning it was missing. Aunt Jemima was, as you can believe, furious; we were—well—uncomfortable, and poor little mother miserable.

Well, the house was ransacked from roof to basement. My brother Harry said it was worse than spring-cleaning, because then only the girls did the work, but in this case the boys had to help! But the ring could not be found, though we searched high and low.

"There's a thief in the house, and it's that cook of yours, Janet; all cooks are thieves—more or less," said Aunt Jemima. At this even mother bridled up.

"That is an unfair thing to say, Jemima, and you know it. I would trust cook with untold wealth. Think of the years she has been with us. You must be out of your mind to suggest such a thing!"

"Bravo, mother, give it to her," said Harry under his breath. Aunt Jemima looked both sour and surprised at mother's sudden spirit, and said no more about poor cook, who had always been in her black books.

"Well," she said, "all I know is that it will have to be found, and I shall stay in this house until it is!"

"Cheerful prospect!" murmured my brother Harry.

We were all in the morning-room in solemn conclave, Aunt Jemima bolt upright in the most uncomfortable chair she could find. At this moment my sister Margaret rushed in, with a troubled face.

"Oh, mother," she said, "a terrible thing has happened."

Mother turned pale, and rose from her chair.

"What is it?" she exclaimed.

"You know Jane went out this evening for an hour—a policeman has just called to say that she has been run over by a cab, one of her legs broken, and she has had to be taken to the hospital."

"Good gracious!" murmured poor little mother. I slipped to her side, and put an arm round her. I was the youngest and her favourite, though perhaps I should not say it.

"She is the thief, and this accident is a judgment upon her!" exclaimed Aunt Jemima promptly.

"Nonsense, aunt," my sister Celia cried, "how absurd you are!"

"Absurd, indeed!"

"Yes," said Celia boldly, "absurd!"

"Hush, children," said mother, in the quiet voice that we all loved so—"you forget your aunt has lost a very valuable possession and is naturally somewhat anxious and upset. Someone must go at once, see about this terrible thing, and, if possible, question Jane about the ring."

"Certainly!" snorted Aunt Jemima.

"She may," continued mother, "have put it away for safety, seeing it lying about. It was taken off your finger at the dinner-table last night, you recollect, Jemima, and you wear so many rings, you would probably not miss one.

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and Jane may have found it there, and forgotten to tell us."

"A likely tale!" exclaimed Aunt Jemima.

"No doubt she can explain it all."

"I'll go over at once," said Harry, "and see what she says." And he was off like a shot on his errand. We waited for his return with some anxiety, but Aunt Jemima could not forget to remind us that her belief was that Jane had stolen it, and this was her punishment.

"What a miserable evening!" said Margaret to me in a whisper.

"What a miserable day," I said. "But where is Dick to-night?"

"Gone to Manchester for three days," said Margaret, somewhat dolefully, for, in spite of her calm and dignified manner, she was devotedly attached to her lover — who was in every way worthy of her. I hope when I have a lover—a real lover—I mean, that mine will be as good and as honourable.

"What a pity!" I murmured; "he would have so comforted us all."

"I must write to him."

"I shouldn't tell him about the ring," I suggested, "it will only worry him for nothing, and he can't do anything all that distance off."

"I don't think I can," said Margaret, "it has been nothing but Aunt Jemima's ring all the day. I shall dream of it!"

In due course Harry came back.

"Well," demanded Aunt Jemima, "have you got it?"

"No!" said Harry fiercely.

"Harry, Harry!" It was dear mother's gentle voice. Harry went cool in a moment. We all love her so.

"Forgive me, aunt, and mother!" he said, more softly. "I saw the doctor who took in the case, and he told me she was suffering from a very severe shock, as well as the broken leg, and must not be questioned. In fact, she had been given a sedative, and to awake her would be dangerous. She was identified by one of the tradesmen's books she had gone to pay, our name and address of course being in it."

"Poor Jane," sighed my mother.

"Never mind, mother," said Celia, "we will all three take it in turns to be servant."

"And I'll help," said Harry. "Jane will be all right if she is kept perfectly quiet for two or three days, the doctor says."

"Most unfortunate," sighed mother.

"I consider it most providential," said Aunt Jemima.

"If she is the thief," said mother, "which I do not believe for one moment."

Truly it was a dismal evening, and the next day was as bad, if not worse, for Aunt Jemima the first thing in the morning instituted another search even more exhaustive than the previous one; under carpets, behind the piano, and every other piece of furniture in the house. At noon Harry put on his hat, and avowed his intention to go out and stop out until midnight.

Margaret, Celia, and I—we had resolutely declined to let mother help—were tired out. Horace, of course, was in the City—only Aunt Jemima seemed indefatigable. But our efforts were fruitless. No ring could be found.

To add to our discomfort, cook came up, and, as usual during Aunt Jemima's visit, gave poor mother a month's notice. Aunt Jemima had found time to go down into the kitchen, and, as cook said, had as good as charged her with stealing the ring.

"What should I want to steal her ring for?" exclaimed cook vehemently. "I, with a good place that I have had for twenty years and never a misword, a good mistress, and money in the post-office!"

Then for once mother, aroused, put her foot down, and spoke to Aunt Jemima more determinedly than any of us could have believed it possible. As a consequence, Aunt Jemima subsided into a fit of the sulks, and would not speak a civil word, or an uncivil one for that matter, to anyone. In short, it was about as disagreeable and unpleasant a day as it has ever been my fate to spend. I began to pity Aunt Jemima's maid with all my heart.

That was the second of our uncomfortable days on the occasion of this visit of Aunt Jemima. The morning of the third day, she arose with a new suspicion.

"Where," she demanded at breakfast, "was Mr. Marchmont?"

Aunt Jemima had a peculiar habit of springing surprises upon one, making unexpected remarks which would never have occurred to anyone but herself.

"In Manchester," said Margaret, assuming that the question was addressed to her.

"I wonder," said Aunt Jemima, "if he can clear up the mystery of this ring."

Margaret almost sprang from her chair.

"Do you mean to imply that he has stolen your miserable ring?" she cried. "Who on earth next will you try and fix the blame upon, Aunt Jemima?"

"Pardon me," said Aunt Jemima in her most acid manner, "it is not by any means a miserable ring, but an exceedingly valuable one, and very dear to me from its associations."

"Ring for breakfast, ring for tea, ring for dinner," murmured Harry, but Aunt Jemima heard him and literally withered him with a glance.

"Have you been to question Jane?" she demanded, in her most tragic tones.

Harry confessed that he had not, but would go after breakfast.

"Please do. This matter must be cleared up."

Then, though half afraid, I ventured to put my little spoke into the wheel of the conversation.

"What about Anne, your own maid?" I remarked. It was a thunderbolt out of the blue with a vengeance. Aunt Jemima turned upon me with—was it Sheridan in the play who said it?—such a "disinheriting countenance"?

"Anne!" she ejaculated, "Anne is the soul of honour!"

"'So are we all—all honourable men,'" quoted my brother Harry under his breath.

"I am astonished at you, Felicia, for one moment suggesting such a thing!" pursued my Aunt Jemima, eyeing me malevolently.

"But everyone else appears to be under suspicion," I said boldly, "so why not Anne?"

"Anne! Anne, indeed!" and Aunt Jemima drew herself up "pokerback fashion," and glared at us in turns.

Then dear mother's gentle voice broke in:

"You forget, baby dear, that your aunt has had Anne for so many years, so she knows her fidelity."

I am not quite sure, but I believe my mother was sarcastic; if so, it was for the first time in her life. I lifted my eyes to hers, and in a glance, was forgiven.

"Calling Felicia that tomfool name!" exclaimed Aunt Jemima, "you ought to have more sense!"

Harry stepped into the breach, as he invariably did.

"I'm going over to see Jane," he said, "and I'll come straight back and tell you all I learn." And off he went, with a grimace at Aunt Jemima which, fortunately, she did not see. In less than an hour he was back again.

"Well?" demanded Aunt Jemima.

"She knows nothing of the ring and is very hurt and upset that you should imagine that she should," said Harry.

"What did she say?" said Aunt Jemima.

"It would be a bit more kind, to say nothing of more womanly, if you asked how she was!" replied Harry, who had evidently had a bad quarter of an hour. "To tell you the plain truth, she was so hurt at your suspicion that she nearly went into hysterics. I was bundled out of the place, and it's the last time I go there, for you or for anyone else!"

"I will go myself," said Aunt Jemima.

"No, you won't."

"And why not, pray?"

"Because before I left I gave them instructions you were not to be admitted under any circumstances!"

I, who, excepting Celia, was the only one present, stared at Harry aghast. So, for that matter, did Aunt Jemima.

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She was too petrified to speak. Before she recovered, Harry had gone. But he found time to whisper to me :

"She's lost it herself, the old fool. Back to dinner at seven. Hope Dick will turn up. He'll tackle her, if anyone can."

And no one saw any more of Harry for that morning and afternoon. The third uncomfortable day passed by with leaden feet. Lunch was a dismal "ceremony." It is the only word I can think of in the least appropriate. I went out. Celia was busy. Mother went to lie down. Aunt Jemima, I believe, started to watch her maid pack her belongings, thought better of it, and ordered her to unpack again. I don't think a thousand a year would have tempted me to be Aunt Jemima's maid !

About five minutes to seven I heard Dick Marchmont's knock and ring at the door. I knew it, and as I knew also Margaret was not ready—some callers had delayed her—I, being ready, ran down and met him.

"Come into the drawing-room," I said breathlessly, "and do, for gracious' sake, see if you can explain away our troubles."

"Whatever is the matter ? Margaret ? "

"No, no, she's all right, and will be down in a moment. It's Aunt Jemima ! "

"Oh ! " said Dick Then his face changed. "Great Heavens," he cried, "that reminds me ! "

"What of ? Oh, but never mind that—let me tell you, Dick. She's lost a valuable marquise diamond ring and——"

"I know she has," said Dick coolly, "and here it is ! " And he produced it from his vest pocket.

I gasped.

"You recollect she—but, oh, Margaret "—and Dick turned to embrace his sweetheart, leaving me dumfounded, ignoring even my very presence.

"Baby, I will explain all over the dinner-table."

This was a dismissal, so I ran away, leaving the lovers very near each other. I just had time to tell mother all was right, when the dinner-gong went.

Aunt Jemima, very dignified, met Dick with a haughty bow, which I think more amused him than hurt him. But as soon as we were all seated, he addressed her.

"Miss Verrinder, I think I have an apology and an explanation to give you. You will remember, three evenings ago, showing me this ring ? "

Aunt Jemima stared.

"Then you——" she began.

"Oh, dear no, I am not a thief ! "

This was, in all innocence, such a very apposite remark that we all laughed, much to Dick's mystification. And Aunt Jemima went red.

"I admired it greatly," Dick went on, "but I returned it to you. When I came back here for my cigarette case, which I had left, I saw it on the floor beneath your chair. I put it in my pocket for safety, and, I must admit, forgot it. This evening, when dressing—I have been to Manchester, as Margaret can tell you, on business—I discovered it. Will you allow me to return it to you, with many regrets and apologies if I have put you to any pain by my forgetfulness ? "

I confess I have never seen Aunt Jemima so absolutely dumfounded. She put the ring on her finger without a word. But I didn't enjoy my dinner at all—I was so eager to tell Dick about our three uncomfortable days.

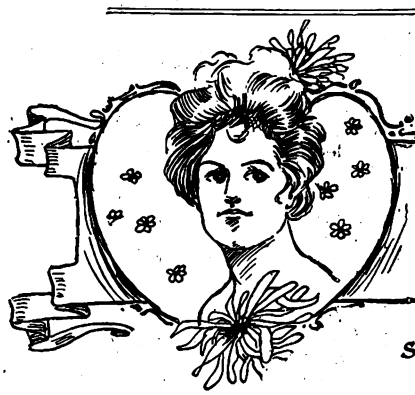
When Margaret and Celia and I did tell him later, he was very vexed.

"I must have been thinking of Margaret," he said.

"Or Manchester ! " said my sister tenderly.

I have a Dick of my own now, only his name is something else—never mind what—so I understand these things better, and Aunt Jemima has not been to stay with us for over a year !

Clifton Bingham.



A Satisfactory Arrangement.

Showing that What is Sauce for the Goose is Sauce for the Gander.

"And this is the girl that my nephew Paul has married ! " said old Major L'Estrange to himself. "Why, she is nothing but a child ; and a lovely child, too."

The soft, yellow twilight was enfolding the drawing-room in its enchanted glamour ; and Dolores, rising from her piano, stood with large eyes and heightened colour to receive her new uncle. She was only seventeen, but as she stood there in a gown of the purest white she looked a gem of womanhood.

Young L'Estrange looked first at his wife and then at his uncle with natural pride.

"Here she is, sir ! " said he. "My little Dolores ! "

And the old gentleman courteously advanced, holding out one slender, aristocratic hand.

"I am very glad to see you, my dear," said he courteously, and not without a tender accent of affection.

And from that moment all Dolores' secret fear and dread of her husband's uncle vanished.

"I am so glad you are not a cross old crab," she said impulsively.

Has Paul given me such a bad character as that ? " said the old gentleman smiling.

"Oh, no, no ! " cried Dolores. "But he always says : 'My uncle will like this—my uncle will disapprove of that, until, don't you see, I have learnt to be afraid of this unseen potentate ! But," with a shake of the blue-black curls, "I am not afraid *now !* Oh, I am sure I shall love you very, *very* much ! Might I kiss you, please ? "

"You might try," said the Major, looking very much pleased ; and from that moment Major L'Estrange and his niece-in-law were sworn allies and firm friends.

"And you love him very much ? " said the Major, speaking, of course, of the one Prince Charming.

"Oh, yes ! " cried Dolores. "I am sure, Uncle Gerald, that there is no one like him in all the world. *No* one ! "

"And he is good to you ? "

"Yes, always."

"And you are happy ? "

"Yes, and—except——"

"Hallo ! " said Uncle Gerald, "here's a flaw in the diamond—a crumple in the rose-leaves ! There ought to be no such thing as an *except !* "

"There isn't," stoutly maintained Dolores. "Only——"

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"It's the same thing," said Uncle Gerald, shaking his head. "An '*only*'! Come, Dolores, what is it? Open confession, remember, is good for the soul. What is the meaning of this mysterious 'only'?"

Dolores hung down her head; the ink-black lashes dropped over her peach-blossom cheek.

"It isn't anything at all, Uncle Gerald," said she. "Only—I *should* like a little money to spend sometimes."

"Eh!" said the Major. "Why, how is this? Paul isn't a miser, I hope."

"Not in the least!" cried Dolores. "But—but—I hardly know how to explain myself—he thinks I ought to come to him for every penny I spend. He thinks I should keep within a certain limit. Of course, he's right; but it is a little hard sometimes. There's no need for a woman spending money, he says."

"Ah!" commented the Major.

"And I wanted some chocolates dreadfully yesterday," said Dolores, laughing and blushing. "Of course it's ridiculous—a grown woman like me wanting chocolates like a child; but, indeed, Uncle Gerald, I couldn't help it; and I was ashamed to ask Paul for money to buy candles with; and if there's an organ-grinder or a beggar or a poor woman selling buttons and boot-laces, why, I have my rings and my ribbons and my bracelets, but nothing else."

The Major smiled, and stroked his moustache as he sat there in the shadow of the twilight.

"It is a hard case," said he.

"Yes, isn't it?" cried Dolores earnestly. "I told Paul he ought to give me a regular sum for pin-money, but he only laughs at me, and says I am a little goose. How would he like it himself, I wonder?"

"Ah!" said the Major, "how indeed?"

"And flowers!" cried Dolores, clasping her hands. "There was a flower-girl along yesterday with the sweetest lilies and tube-roses, and I could not buy one. Oh, Uncle Gerald, I did so want those flowers! But Paul says it makes a woman extravagant to have all the money she wants! Would the lilies have been extravagant, Uncle Gerald?"

"No," said the old gentleman, looking at the beautiful speaking face. "I don't think they would. But now, little Dolores, there comes your pony up the drive. Go away, and leave me to sleep."

But the Major did not sleep at all. He meditated. He faced the financial problem of the L'Estrange household, and resolved to conquer it.

Paul L'Estrange came home that evening in excellent spirits.

"My dear uncle," he said, "I shall have to call on your generosity once again. Only fancy my meeting Hall and Ovington on the Parade this afternoon! And they tell me that Colonel Praed and young Jennings are in town also. So I have just ordered a little bachelor supper at the club for to-morrow evening."

"Ah!" said Major L'Estrange.

"I looked at that chestnut mare, sir," added Paul. "She is simply perfect, so I told the man to bring her up here. I am to have her for seventy-five pounds. It's a bargain!"

"Indeed?"

Paul L'Estrange turned quickly round and looked at his uncle

"Is anything the matter, sir?" said he.

"The matter? No. Why should there be?"

"Only your tone was so peculiar—that is all."

"Well, to tell the truth, I was thinking," said Major L'Estrange.

"Of what, sir?" questioned Paul.

"Of where you meant to get the money to pay for all these things," drily answered the old man.

"Why, from you, of course!" said Paul, half puzzled, half amused. "You have always given me all the money I wanted."

"But that is no sign that I shall always continue to do so," deliberately remarked the old gentleman. "Look here, Paul, I am thinking of turning over a new leaf."

"I don't understand you, sir!"

"Don't you? Then I must endeavour to elucidate my meaning a little. The money is mine, isn't it?"

"Most assuredly it is!" Paul answered, with knitted borws.

"Well, then, I have a right to deal it out as I please. And I am seriously thinking of stopping your allowance!"

"Of stopping my allowance, Uncle Gerald?"

"Yes. If you want anything you can come to me for it, you know."

"Like a schoolboy, Uncle Gerald!" cried the young man, with crimsoning temples.

"Why not?" serenely questioned the old gentleman. "Do you know, I've an idea that it makes a man extravagant to have the handling of too much money. That, I believe, is your opinion also."

"Mine, eh?" echoed Paul.

"It is what you tell your wife," said Uncle L'Estrange, with a twitch of the corners of his mouth.

Paul looked puzzled.

"But she is a woman, sir!"

"And, therefore, she has no wants? Is that logic, my boy?"

"I am always ready to give her anything she wants!" exclaimed the young man.

"Exactly the platform which I occupy in respect to you," said Gerald. "And yet you don't seem satisfied with the arrangement I propose. Come! Let's be judicial, my boy. Let us be perfectly impartial. If my niece's money is to be dealt out to her a penny at a time, so must my nephew's!"

"My dear uncle," cried Paul, jumping up, "I never looked at the thing in that light before! My poor little Dolores! What a sordid old miser I must have appeared to her! Why didn't someone do me the favour to tell me what an egregious idiot I was making of myself? What shall I do, Uncle Gerald? Shall I make her a regular allowance—so much a week?"

"I dare say we shall find some satisfactory method of adjusting the balance," said Major L'Estrange, with a smile. "It was a real trouble to little Dolores, and so I thought I would just hold up a looking-glass to you, Nephew Paul. But don't look so grave: you shall have your supper at the club, and your chestnut mare, and all those other little luxuries of life which have grown to be necessities to you. But Dolores must have her chocolates and flowers and other such things also."

"With all my heart, uncle," said Paul, laughing.

And so little Dolores won her cause, after all. She came to her uncle the next day.

"Oh, uncle," said she, "I am so sorry I told you that about Paul."

"Why, my dear?" asked the Major.

"Because we have talked the matter all over," said Dolores, "and he is so good. I am to have a regular allowance all of my own. Isn't he splendid? And I wouldn't have him think I complained of him for all the world!"

"Don't be afraid, my dear," said the Major. "It shall be a State secret between us two for ever and a day. And you are sure you're quite happy now?"

"Oh, yes, *quite*," declared Dolores, with emphasis.

But she did not know that Uncle Gerald was the magician who had wrought this wonderful change.

Carrie Smith.

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Bertha's Trial.

Telling How She Successfully Passed Through It.

"And so you are going to America, are you, Phil?"

"Yes, I'm off next week."

"You are a foolish fellow in my opinion, Travers. With a good situation here, in a safe house, a good reputation, and a first-rate chance to rise. You are going to throw it up for a mere chance."

"Yes, but, Richards, what is a fellow to do? I might manage very well as a single man, but you see I'm in love, and want to marry."

"Then why, in the name of common-sense, *don't* you marry? You could keep house decently enough on three hundred pounds a year. And if your lady-love is made of the right kind of metal, and loves you, she would much prefer to do so to having you run a great risk in America."

"So she would, bless her loving heart! But I'm not going to permit her to do any such thing. She has been used to comparative luxuries, though her father has nothing but his good income, every penny of which is absorbed in his style of living. No, no! Bertha Clark is to be my wife—not my maid-of-all-work, nurse, seamstress, and washerwoman—so long as I have health and strength."

"But suppose you don't succeed?"

"I *shall* succeed. I feel perfectly sure of it. I shall come home, before long, in good health, and the possessor of a fortune."

"Well, I'm glad you feel so sanguine, old fellow, and I heartily bid you God-speed. But are you sure that Bertha will wait for you?"

—"Sure of her as I am of myself."

"Maybe you're right; but if it was my case, I wouldn't trust a girl in such a matter. I should expect her to accept the first good offer that came to hand."

Philip Travers had never had a doubt of Bertha Clark's love for him, nor any reason to doubt her constancy; but still, the remark of Richards disturbed him.

What right had he to expect a woman to wait for him, when his fortunes were so uncertain? Could he blame her, if, after a reasonable time, she *should* accept "the first good offer that came to hand"?

* * * * *

"Bertha, you have not heard from Phil lately?"

"No, papa."

"And what do you expect to do? You have waited for him now two years, and none of his letters have been at all encouraging."

Bertha twirls her empty tea-cup in her saucer, to charm the tea-leaves into the right position to tell her fortune.

"Rome was not built in a day, you know, papa."

"But, Bertha, you don't know what you're talking about. Girls are always unreasonable. Here you are, past twenty-three years old, and with less and less prospect of marrying. Constancy is all very well, but there can be too much of a good thing. Remember how many good chances you have thrown away since Phil left you, on that wild-goose chase of his and now you do not even know whether he is alive or not."

"Yes; but papa——"

"There is Mr. Grainger, now, who would be glad to marry you, and put you in a better position than either of your sisters is in. A most respectable man, too, by all accounts, if he is not young. He spoke to me on the subject yesterday—said he should have offered himself before this if you had not been so shy and cold. It would be a shame for you to refuse him if he did ask you."

"I certainly shall refuse him, papa. A pretty husband he would make for me—fifty years old at least, and a pretty wife I should make for him—marrying him for nothing but his money! I'm not afraid of being an old maid. I can earn my own living!"

"You're very silly, Bertha Clark!"

"Dear papa, you don't compliment yourself when you call me very silly; everybody says I resemble you in every respect."

And she imprinted a kiss upon her irate father's cheek, and left the room.

* * * * *

"Well, James, what is it?"

"A gentleman in the drawing-room, miss, asking to see you."

"Who is it, James?"

"That oldish gentleman, miss—Mr. Grainger!"

"Mr. Grainger? What a bore! I know papa has encouraged him to this!" said Bertha, to herself, much annoyed. "But, after all, the man is entitled to decent treatment, I suppose? I'll go down, and if he asks me any questions, I can but answer them and end his suspense."

So she tripped down to the drawing-room, where she found her visitor alone.

She had never found herself *tête-à-tête* with him before. She had never noticed how gentlemanly and even winning he was in his manners. She should like him extremely well, she thought, but for the fact that he had proposed for her to her father. He talked a good while upon indifferent subjects, displaying much tact and good sense, as well as general information.

Bertha began to hope that the dreaded question was not to be asked her. In the course of the conversation, he alluded to his having lived in the United States. As he spoke the name a slight blush came to her face, which he evidently noticed.

"By-the-way," he said, "I met a young man in America, a friend of your father's—Philip Travers."

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"Did you indeed?" she asked, trying to conceal the interest she felt under the mask of indifference.

"Yes," he replied. "A very fine fellow, but not very successful. Only about one in a hundred succeeds out there."

He seemed to her to watch her face as he said this, to mark the effect of his words. Her papa, she thought, must have told him something.

Presently he said, moving his chair nearer her own:

"Miss Clark, I am a comparative stranger to you, but I have every means of proving, and have proved, to your father, my respectability. I am rich—so rich that it is impossible for me to enjoy my riches without someone to spend them with me. I could not reasonably ask a young and pretty woman like you to fall in love with an old, grey-headed fellow like me, but if you could like me well enough to marry me, I should treat you so well that I believe love might come afterwards."

She looked at him gratefully.

"Your offer is one that commands my thanks," she said; "but though I like and respect you, I cannot accept it. I could not marry one whom I did not love."

"And you do not love me the least bit in the world—you are quite sure?"

His manner of putting the question was rather impertinent, after what had passed, for he came and took her hand, and pressed it warmly. She flushed scarlet, and withdrew her hand quickly from his, saying:

"A gentleman generally takes 'no,' for an answer."

"But I'm not going to take 'no,' for an answer!" In a moment a grey wig, and a false nose lay on the carpet at her feet, and Phil Travers stood before her. "And yet, I think I'm a gentleman."

"Oh, Phil, how could you?"

"I wanted to try you a little, Bertha. I wanted to be sure that you loved me still—poor as I might be."

"What do you suppose I care for your poverty? Was your faith in me so slight as to need confirmation of this kind?"

"Bertha, don't be angry; but tell me that you love me, and forgive me," he pleaded.

"Of course I love you, miserable doubter! And, of course, I must forgive you! So you have come back as poor as you went?" she said, stroking his black hair, and smiling.

He returned her smile, with interest.

"We can work together, can't we, Bertha?"

"Of course we can."

(Interval for kisses.)

He sat and held her hand in silence for awhile, looking into her happy eyes. By-and-by he said:

"What a pity this lily hand should be soiled by labour!"

"That is what hands were made for, I take it," said she gleefully.

"Not such a hand as this," said he, kissing it. "Such hands were made to wear diamond rings."

Suiting the action to word, he put a magnificent jewel upon her finger—a diamond worth a small fortune.

"Phil, what does this mean?" she asked, turning pale.

"It means, dear love, that I am rich—so rich that it is impossible to enjoy my riches without *you* to spend them with me. I have been fortunate in America. Will you love me just as well, knowing that I am almost a millionaire?"

"I'll try." **Mabel Varney.**

Walter: "If you were going to propose to a girl, what is the first question you would ask her?" Wilter: "If we were alone."

She: "Why should the average woman lead people to believe she's younger than she really is?" He: "She doesn't. She merely tries to."

"Jack says this new horse he has bought is a bargain." "Then it is a safe horse for a lady?" "Why?" "Because a woman can always drive a bargain.'

Your Editor Chats.

A Last Warning.

You have just got time to enter our great signature competition, full particulars of which were given in last week's number.

Numerous valuable cash prizes were offered, and the form of the competition was such as to enable anybody, irrespective of their age or station in life, to enter it.

In the preceding six numbers of this paper were reproduced a variety of people's signatures, which were more or less difficult to decipher. What you are required to do, if you wish to make an attempt to win a handsome cash prize, is to print in the space reserved the name which you think the signature represents. You will derive great amusement in the course of your endeavours. All attempts must be posted so as to arrive at these offices not later than by first post on Tuesday *next*, April 26th, so you will see that you have no time to lose. Copies of *Short Stories* containing the signatures can be obtained from any newsagent for a penny each, or direct from these offices, for 1½d. each post free.

Rally Your Friends.

All of you, I am sure, are following with keen delight the story of the combat for supremacy between Jules and his associates on the one hand, and Theodore Racksole and his staunch allies on the other, as related by Mr. Arnold Bennett in that splendid serial "Phantom Shadows." But are you giving your friends and acquaintances the chance of enjoying it also? If not, why not? Do them and, incidentally, myself, a favour by passing this copy on to them, so that they can commence reading "Phantom Shadows" at once. As it proceeds, you will find that the story increases in power, right on until the last word is told. There will continue to be profuse illustrations by Reginald Cleaver, which will add great interest to the relations. Next week's cover, however, will not depict an incident from the serial, but will illustrate a dramatic episode in a particularly exciting short story, contributed by one of your favourite authors.

The Twelfth Unsolved Love Problem.

Those readers who have never yet tried to win a guinea in an Unsolved Love Problem contest, and those that have, will be afforded another opportunity to do so next week, when the final problem, entitled "The Test of Ruth Lawson," will appear. I think that every single reader will like this story, for it is an exceptionally awkward plight in which Ruth Lawson finds herself.

By-the-way, remember that attempts to solve the eleventh problem, "Brian Cresswell's Choice," must reach these offices by Friday, April 22nd.

Your Editor.

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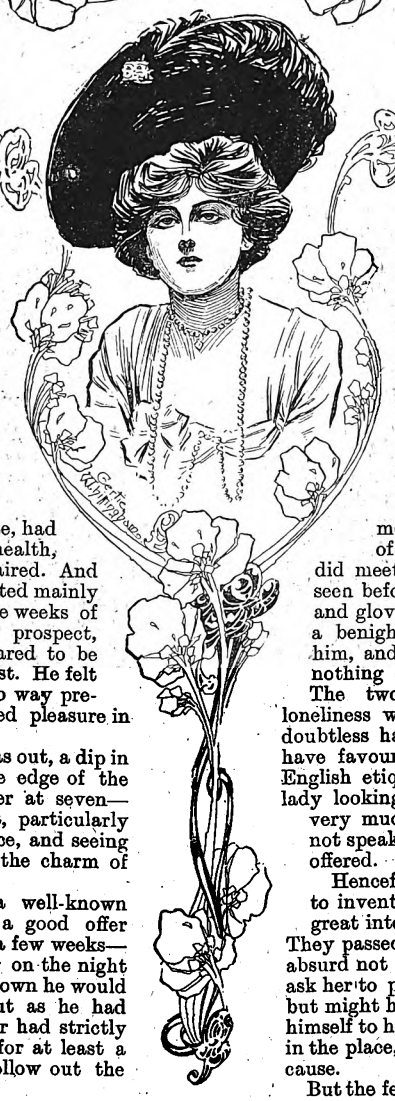
BOLTON'S CHANCE.



Relating the Use He Made of it.

A STEADY drizzle had set in towards evening, and very melancholy the little watering-place looked with its gardens deserted, the bandstand shut up, and the sea parade stretching away in dreary perspective into the distance.

But a solitary visitor had braved the weather, and, wrapped in waterproofs, was pacing the deserted parade, sniffing the salt breeze with an air of evident satisfaction, despite the melancholy aspect of the surroundings.

Jack Bolton, the latest arrival at Oldgate, had been ordered down for the benefit of his health, and was forbidden to leave until it was repaired. And as over-work and long hours had contributed mainly to his illness, the mere idea of having some weeks of leisure before him was a very pleasant prospect, although Oldgate out of the season appeared to be one of the dullest places on the English coast. He felt it a luxury to be an invalid when it in no way prevented bodily activity, and so he anticipated pleasure in his loneliness.

A gallop along the sands when the tide was out, a dip in the sea, a cosy nook, and a novel on the edge of the cliff, and a comfortable, if solitary, dinner at seven—what more could a man want, he thought, particularly one who had been toiling for a bare pittance, and seeing so many people that solitude had all the charm of novelty.

He had given up an engagement on a well-known journal, and had been obliged to refuse a good offer which had been made him; and when in a few weeks—so he cheerfully meditated over his dinner on the night of his arrival in Oldgate—he went back to town he would have to find something else or starve; but as he had thirty pounds in his pocket, and the doctor had strictly forbidden him to think about the future for at least a month—why, he just meant to strictly follow out the doctor's orders.

A month is a long time to a happy-go-lucky nature, particularly when one is young, and Bolton was only three-and-twenty. So for a week his contentment and enjoyment were great, galloping a refractory mare over the splendid stretch of sand; swimming out to the buoy-bell, a quarter of a mile out at sea, that chimed dolorously night and day; devouring novels and minor poetry, chatting and smoking with the old fishermen on the jetty, and sometimes sailing out with one of them into the Channel, with a delightful sense of freedom amidst the seething green waves. But at the end of a week he felt that something more was needed. The grey autumn evenings were lonely, and solitude was no longer a luxury. Novels palled on his taste.

Then he bethought himself of the inhabitants of Oldgate, and wondered if their society was worth courting. And then one evening he had a mental vision of a solitary girl, dressed in black, whom he was conscious of having seen about the place a good deal; and though he had not critically noticed her, he seemed to be dimly conscious that she had a graceful figure and an abundance of yellowish hair, very elaborately done for such an out-of-the-world maiden.

It was odd that the thought of her should take possession of him all at once like this, but it did, and before he went to bed he resolved to see what he could do towards making her acquaintance. "For," he said to himself, with disinterested benevolence, "she must be very dull."

Next day he actually gave up his morning ride and swim for the chance of meeting her on the cliff or parade. He did meet her, and wondered why he had not seen before that she was pretty, and wore dress and gloves in a style that seemed lost on such a benighted place as Oldgate. So she passed him, and he felt interested; but beyond that nothing occurred.

The two had the place to themselves, their loneliness was common to both, and both would doubtless have felt grateful to anyone who would have favoured them with an introduction. But English etiquette being as it is, and this young lady looking very much a lady, and Bolton being very much a gentleman, he saw that he could not speak to her unless some reasonable excuse offered.

Henceforth the whole object of his days was to invent or find such an excuse, and this added great interest to his stay for several days. They passed one another constantly, and it seemed absurd not to go up to her and just lift his hat and ask her to pardon the impertinence, if such it was; but might he do himself the honour of introducing himself to her, as they seemed to be the only people in the place, and ought, therefore, to make common cause.

But the fear of a snubbing, together with the other reasons to which I have referred, kept him from doing this, although it was very aggravating, as day after day went by and nothing happened to give him the chance he wanted.

One evening, before the dusk of a sad, grey day, when the sea was mourning dolefully on the sand, Bolton wandered down the gardens smoking a big cigar to comfort his lonely heart, when he heard a rustling noise among the shrubs at the side of the walk. He hit them with his stick, and a little spaniel ran out, and then round a bend in the path came the girl in black, panting and hurried.

This was the opportunity Bolton had prayed for.

"You are trying to catch your dog?" he asked.

"Oh, yes; have you seen him?" she panted.

"Yes, there he goes; I'll catch him for you," and off he started.

For ten minutes there was a great havoc done amongst the dripping rhododendrons, and much yelping from an extremely obstinate little dog, and then Bolton, wet, dirty, and hot,

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came forward, holding by the scruff of its neck the snarling little King Charles, also wet, dirty, and hot.

"Have you a chain or string?" gasped Bolton; "you want to lead him, I suppose."

"The string broke and I've lost it," she explained. "Thank you so much, I'm afraid it has been a lot of trouble to you."

"Not at all," I say; "I'm afraid I haven't any string, either."

"Oh, never mind!" she said, holding out her arms, "I'll carry him home."

Bolton looked doubtfully at the bedraggled little beast. He was about to offer his handkerchief as a leading string, when a better idea presented itself.

"Oh, no," he said decidedly, "he's much too dirty for you to carry; I'll carry him home for you. I don't mind being dirty."

"I don't like to put you to so much trouble," she protested.

"I sha'n't mind it a bit," he said. "Which is your way home?"

Then they started. Bolton broke the silence first.

"We seem to have the place very much to ourselves, don't we?" he said.

She laughed. "I think you are the only visitor here."

"Then she is a resident here," thought Bolton; "poor girl!" The spaniel wriggled up in his arms and tried to snap at his chin.

"Yes," he said, "I think I am, and I have found it a trifle lonely; but after this little episode I hope I may have the pleasure of your acquaintance. I have been grumbling to myself for some days past at the laws of etiquette that kept us strangers. In fact, I had been thinking," he said frankly, "what excuse I could possibly offer for introducing myself to you, and I feel quite grateful to this disreputable little dog of yours, although he is trying to bite my chin. May this stand in place of a formal introduction?" he asked.

She smiled. "I don't think we need be formal here; and I am really under a great obligation to you."

"I am more than rewarded," he said. "Oh, is this your house?" as they stopped in front of a white house with wide bow windows.

"You'll come in and let me introduce you to mamma?"

"In my present state I'll ask you to excuse me. May I call to-morrow?"

"Oh, to be sure," she said, as he deposited King Charles on the doormat inside. "Come whenever you like; mamma is not particular about times and seasons."

He promised to call on the morrow, and there was an unusual briskness in his walk as he made his way lodgingwards.

"What eyes she has!" said he to himself, and this ejaculation was not called forth by the spaniel's charms. "What on earth can they do in this benighted place all the winter?" he mused; and then he went to his dinner, very well satisfied with his day's work.

Next morning Bolton called on his heroine's mamma, and after much polite conversation, was invited to dinner.

It was a bright, cheery room that he was ushered into that evening, glowing in the light of a blazing fire, and contrasting delightfully with the churlishness of the scene outside.

The room was cosy, and possessed an abundance of pictures and books, but the faded window curtains and the carpet, old and shabby, bore witness to slender means.

A sword and a portrait of an officer in scarlet, the late Major Meade, his heroine's father, hung over the fireplace. Her mother and her aunt, who lived with them, addressed the young lady as Kitty, and Bolton, who had known many of that charming name, thought he had never seen one so worthy of it before.

The next few days were certainly much pleasanter for Kitty's companionship. She wasn't very clever, perhaps, and she wasn't very modern, like most of the young ladies Bolton knew in town; but her prettiness, her quiet friendliness, and the loneliness of her way of life, drew him to her. She had a beautiful voice, and sometimes of an evening would sing to him, and Bolton would often watch her sitting in the low, homely drawing-room, in the firelight, her beautiful head bending over the keys, and then he would look out into the night and watch the long, white lines of foam gleaming in the darkness, and the flashing light from the lighthouse tower, and find himself unconsciously and passionately wondering why Fate had made him so poor.

Now that he had been nearly a month from town, the shrinkage of his money and the gloominess of his future prospects began to worry him. One morning, however, just at the expiration of the month, he received a letter from one of his town chums:

"Dear Bolton,—*I have an offer to make to you. Old Nuggetts was going to put in an ad. the other day for a man to do some special work in Ireland, when I bethought myself of you, and mentioned your name to him as a likely sort of man. He said at first he thought that you were too young and inexperienced, but I reminded him that you had had your nose to the grindstone for some years now, and knew the routine of the whole business pretty well, so he commissioned me to write to you straightway. If your doctor will let you take it up, I should advise you to do it. It's not permanent, of course, but it means five pounds a week and expenses paid for a few months at least, and it may lead to something better. We should not want you to come here for instructions for a fortnight yet, so you will have time to think it over. I hope you are mending fast.—Yours sincerely,*

"J. Dowley."

Bolton wrote off a letter full of gratitude, accepting the offer. To act as special correspondent was such an alluring prospect to him that he quite forgot to consult the doctor about it.

And now only a fortnight of Kitty's companionship remained, and this passed all too quickly. At last the parting came. A day or two before the expiration of the fortnight, Bolton received a telegram bidding him come up for instructions at once. He went and paid a formal farewell to Mrs. Meade and her sister. Kitty was out. He did not mind this, as he wanted to say good-bye to her alone. On the seafront he saw the familiar figure in black coming towards him. "I have had a telegram," he said, "ordering me up to town this afternoon." He thought she turned a shade paler.

"Then you're going?"

"Yes, I'm on my way to my lodgings now, to pack."

The tone of conversation on both sides was polite, almost distant. Perhaps both wanted to hide what they felt.

"Oh! don't let me stop you, then."

"I'm so sorry I'm going; I've got quite to like this place."

"Really? I'm afraid you've found it dull."

"I did at first, but it's quite a wrench to leave it. I hope I shall see something more of you."

"You'll come and see us if you're near at any time."

"Of course I will."

"I hope you'll get on well in Ireland."

"Thank you. I shall have to work hard, I expect. There, I must be off!"

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

He pressed her hand and seemed as if about to say something more as she turned from him. He walked on a little way, and then turned and looked after her. Her wistful look haunted him.

He thought of the dreary winter before her, and wondered if he had been more to her than he had thought. Perhaps the autumn days had been brighter to her for their friendship. And as he watched her solitary figure receding, he felt a sudden pity for her, a strong desire not to leave her like this. Soon he was at her side, telling her in hurried, passionate words how his life's happiness depended upon his love being treasured and valued by her. There were at least two happy people in Oldgate that evening, and as Bolton hurried to the train, there seemed a note of joy even in the wild moaning of the sea.

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"I say, Tomkyns, who's that Johnny with Miss Alwyse?"

"Oh, that's Bolton. The famous Bolton, you know."

"What's he done?"

"Blest if I know."

"I say, Freddy, what has the famous Bolton done? Tomkyns here doesn't know."

"Oh, he wrote a political pamphlet or something. I heard some fellows at the club say it was awfully smart. I say, what a mob there is here. Come down and try the champagne cup, it's first rate."

Meanwhile "that Johnny" was deep in conversation with the beautiful Miss Alwyse.

"Oh, Mr. Bolton," she said, "*do* call. We are at home on Wednesday. Papa enjoyed your pamphlet so much. He said it was the best bit of satire he had read for years, and then they whirled off into the crowd of dancers.

Bolton walked home to his lodgings that night in a very sanguine frame of mind. The daughter of a Cabinet Minister had flattered him with an account of her august papa's appreciation of his work, and he was to call at the great man's house.

Some eight months had passed since he left Oldgate, a time of many ups and downs, mostly downs, but a pamphlet of his had taken the public fancy and had given him some little social distinction, though it did not make much difference in his banking-account.

Arrived at his rooms he sat and thought for awhile.

"There's something in Shakespeare," he mused, "about a tide in the affairs of man which taken at the turn will land him—I forget it, but it means that every man has one chance in his life and if taken, it will give him success. My chance has come, unless I'm mistaken," and, with a yawn, he went to bed.

Two days later he presented his card at the Cabinet Minister's house. He was received very kindly by the great man's wife, and in due time received an invitation to dinner.

The Right Hon. James Alwyse was genuinely interested in the young author, and being in want of a private secretary thought to himself that here was his man. "But I have half promised it to Bertie," he confided to his spouse, and as Bertie was his nephew, Bolton's chance of the post was small.

"Hallo, Bolton," said one of his acquaintances a few weeks later as he entered an eating-house in Fleet Street, "we don't see much of you here nowadays. You've been among the nobs, I hear. Mackay told me so, he knows everything. Look here, man, do me a good turn; let me make a par out of it for *Society Scandal*. How does this sound? 'The talented young author of "Tricks and Travesties" is a frequent guest at the table of the Right Hon. James Alwyse, M.P. It is no secret that Miss Alwyse, who possesses beauty of a high order, possesses also £60,000 of her own!' How does that sound, eh?"

"There doesn't seem to be much connection between the two sentences of your paragraph," said Bolton, as good-humouredly as he could.

"Ah! my boy, that's all very fine. Waiter, take this chop away and put it on the grill three minutes longer!—that's all very fine. I tell you what"—folding a pair of unwashed hands on the cloth before him, and leaning over to Bolton—"you keep it up, go in and win; that sort of thing pays better than hard work. You're a lucky beggar."

"You very rightly call me a beggar. I refused a dinner last night because I couldn't afford a shirt."

"Never mind; you'll be giving your own little dinners next summer. I heard from Mackay that you were dancing with Miss Alwyse on Friday, and again on Monday, and——"

"Look here, Mackay is a fool!" cried Bolton impulsively.

"Yes, my dear boy, I've often told him so myself, and I say, Bolton, Mackay says the girl's money is very well invested—5 per cent.—that's over three thousand a year. Old Alwyse used to dabble in finance once. He must be worth a pile. That girl is worth winning, Bolton."

Bolton came forward, holding by the scruff of its neck the snarling little King Charles.

When Bolton left he knew every detail of the case, together with Mackay's ideas about it, and much edified he felt in consequence.

But he was not easy in his mind. There was a substratum of truth in his friend's observations; he was undoubtedly a welcome guest at the Minister's table, particularly to one member of the family. And away in the little village in the west was Kitty—Kitty who was so proud of his success and so hopeful for the future—Kitty to whom he was all in all, and he in the turmoil and stress of his life had almost lost his longing for her. Seeing hundreds of fresh faces daily, ever bent on advancing his worldly prospects—at first for Kitty's sake, and then more selfishly—what wonder if new hopes, new desires had found their way into his head; nay, within the last few weeks had not a new love been springing in his heart?

But he resolved to abide by his promise. Kitty should know nothing of this; and if his letters to her were shorter than formerly, he excused it by pleading the stress of his work.

To be befriended and favoured by a girl so womanly and lovable as Miss Alwyse, with wealth and bright surroundings to set off her charms, could only end in one way.

Sometimes he rebelled against his better self; he told himself he had no right to sacrifice love at the altar of pity,

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and his fondness for Kitty sprang from that. Miss Alwyse had no idea that he was engaged. He had no intimate friends to whom he had spoken of his engagement, so no rumours of it had reached her ears. If he had been in love with Kitty, doubtless Miss Alwyse, with a woman's quick instinct, would have found it out, but, alas, he was not.

And now one night he found himself dancing with Miss Alwyse for the last time of the season.

"Mamma has asked you to come and stay at Holmhurst?" she said to him.

"Yes; it is very kind of her."

"I hope you mean to come. Are you fond of the country? We have such a wonderful avenue; it's the envy of the country."

"I think I shall be able to shake the dust of town off my feet for two or three days after next week."

"I'm so glad. You look quite pale, you know; you're working too hard."

"I *am* working hard." It was quite delightful to have so charming and wealthy a woman so solicitous about his health.

And a letter of Kitty's was in his dresscoat-pocket. He had thrust it in while dressing, and meant to have read it in the cab, but he had forgotten it.

As he put Miss Alwyse in her carriage she pressed his hand.

"It is good-bye till the tenth, then?"

"Yes, yes, till the tenth; I shall count the hours, I believe."

A low, musical laugh, and the carriage bowled away. He stood there light-hearted and gay till he remembered the letter in his pocket.

Ten days later he was smoking in his sitting-room and packing his things preparatory to departing on the morrow for Holmhurst. Three days in a country house with a girl who obviously cared for him, and a Cabinet Minister who, he had reasons to believe, meant to offer him his private secretaryship; this surely was his chance. His advancement had been slow, but the tide had turned now—and Kitty kept him back from going on and winning the full measure of possible success. Should he write and ask her to release him; should he confess all—his new love? It was a terrible situation to be placed in.

At this juncture a telegram was handed to him:

"*Kitty is very ill, and asks for you. Come at once.* — M. Meade."

He sat as one paralysed. Then he broke out into an imprecation. "Now, of all times I can't go! I can't get away again for a month. It's bitterly cruel!" "Kitty is very ill and asks for you—asks for you." "Poor little Kitty!" He began throwing out from his bag things that he wouldn't need now. "There's a train to-night," he muttered, "Fate is against me always."

He snapped the lock of his bag and rang for a cab.

Two hours later he was walking along by the side of the sea to Mrs. Meade's house. The scene brought back some of the old tenderness for Kitty. "But my love for her is dead. It is a ghost of a passion now—a ghost!" he kept repeating.

He came in sight of the familiar bow windows—how his heart beat when he came in sight of them six months ago, when he snatched a few happy days' holiday at Christmas. And then the moon came from behind a cloud and he saw something that smote like a dagger in his heart—straw in the street.

"My poor little Kitty!" he groaned, and tremblingly rang the bell.

Mrs. Meade herself opened the door.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come!"

"Is she——?" he could get no further.

"She will know you now. She has been delirious all the afternoon."

He entered the dark room.

"Is that you? Oh, Jack, Jack!"

"My darling!" he said, bending over her and kissing her passionately.

He sat with her for an hour—a year it seemed—and she was so glad he had come. And, outside, the low wash, wash of the waves sounded. It had been music to him once; he has never heard it since without thinking of that dark room. At last the doctor came. "Go downstairs a few minutes, old man," he said kindly. Noiselessly he went into the dining-room. There was the piano, and her music on the top—a song he had written on the music-holder. Poor Kitty, she would never touch those keys again.

He went to the window and looked out at the lighthouse light and the lines of foam. A bowl of roses scented the room. He seemed to have resumed his life where he had left it off when he last left Oldgate at Christmas.

The time between—London, Miss Alwyse, his future hopes and plans—all were nothing. Three hours ago he was reviling the Fate that sent him down here, and now, now everything was nothing except Kitty. "Oh, my God, spare me her and take everything else," he groaned, and bowed his head on the table, and sobbed as only a man can. The doctor came softly down. "Old fellow, it's kinder to tell you the worst, she can't live through the night; you had better go to her again," he said huskily.

Choking down his sobs, Bolton went to her bedside.

Two hours later he was kneeling by a lifeless form that he now realised was more to him than anyone dead or living.

When he re-appeared in London someone said to him: "Why, Bolton, you've lost a good thing. Alwyse meant to offer you his private secretaryship, and now his nephew has got it. I say, old man, who's dead? What! Were you engaged? I am so awfully sorry for you. There, I won't say any more, I know words are of no use at such a time."

Miss Alwyse heard why Bolton had not fulfilled his engagement, and cried a good deal in the privacy of her room.

Bolton is still in harness, but his ambition is dead. His editor, however, has a high opinion of him, and has promised him the war-correspondentship of his paper when the opportunity occurs. And, Bolton, whose only hope is work, absorbing work, that gives no time for thought, prays daily for war.

Douglas Montgomery.

The Groom (at the first stopping place): "It's no use, Clara; we can't hide it from people that we are bride and groom." The Bride: "What makes you think so, George, dear?" The Groom (dejectedly): "Why, here the waiter has brought us rice pudding."

Nellie: "Why are you crying, love? I should think you would be very happy engaged to such a nice young man as he is!" Annie: "Oh, I'm afraid he won't be true to me!" "Why, he's very, very good, isn't he?" "Yes, but I'm afraid he's too good to be true!"

Harry wanted to give Lucy a birthday present, but couldn't make up his mind what it should be; so the next time he called he frankly told her the difficulty under which he was labouring. "Want to make me a present, Harry?" exclaimed Lucy, in well-counterfeited astonishment. "Why, Harry, you forget yourself!" Harry took the hint, and offered himself on the spot.

Stranger (at the door): "I am trying to find a lady whose married name I have forgotten, but I know she lives in this neighbourhood. She is a woman easily described, and perhaps you may know her—a singularly beautiful creature, with pink-and-white complexion, sea-shell ears, lovely eyes, and hair such as a goddess might envy." Servant: "Really, sir, I don't know——" Voice (from head of stairs): "Jane, tell the gentleman I'll be down in a minute."

Caller: "Why are you waving your handkerchief so wildly?" Muriel: "Since papa has forbidden Jack the house we have arranged a code of signals." Caller: "What is it?" Muriel: "When he waves his handkerchief five times, that means, 'Do you love me?' and when I wave frantically in reply, it means, 'Yes, darling.'" Caller: "And how do you ask other questions?" Muriel: "We don't. That's the whole code"

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The Match-makers.

Relating how Things Worked Out in a Different Manner than as They were Arranged.

A low, rambling cottage. Quaint porticos nearly covered with climbing roses, and a long verandah shaded with ivy, gave a cool, inviting look to this little home. From one of the verandah columns and a large tree a few feet away swung a gay hammock. Half reclining in this was a young girl—a sparkling, dark-eyed brunette. One elbow rested carelessly on an open magazine, while a bit of embroidery lay at her feet. Her eyes were absently fixed on the stately house which could be seen through the intervening orchard.

"What a pity it is Mr. Browning is such a confirmed bachelor!" mused she. "If he would marry some nice young person, how much comfort we might take with her. His sister told me herself not long since that she wished John would marry. Then she could go to her daughter in London."

Here Miss Muriel bestowed a very disapproving frown upon the aforesaid house. Evidently its owner's shortcomings did not disturb its equanimity. It never flinched.

Muriel's face cleared, and she sat erect.

"I have it!" she exclaimed half aloud. "Cousin Winnie! She's the very one for him! I will invite her up to spend a few weeks with us, and if her big blue eyes do not melt his heart, I shall conclude it is made of stone. We'll have him to tea often while she is here. I will get up a picnic in their honour. It will be a fine match for Winnie, and I shall take a great deal of credit to myself for having brought it about."

The magazine fell to the ground. The hammock gave a backward lurch, and Muriel was half way up the steps, stooping to pick a rose as she passed.

"Mamma, mamma! Where are you?" she called, as a hasty glance showed the little sitting-room opening from it to be without an occupant. "Robert," she called to the gardener, "have you seen Mrs. Gilday?"

"She's gone to see Mrs. Dake, miss, I think," replied Robert, with a nod of his head towards the neighbouring house.

Muriel returned to the sitting-room.

"Mother and Mrs. Dake seem to have become quite intimate of late," she thought. "Mrs. Dake was here yesterday. Perhaps mamma wouldn't be pleased to have Mr. Browning marry and his sister go home. I will not say anything to her of that brilliant idea of mine. She will be pleased, however, to have Cousin Winnie here for a visit, so I'll write to her at once."

A dainty, perfumed envelope, addressed in flowing characters, soon lay upon the hat-rack in the hall.

The side door opened, and Mrs. Gilday entered. One looking at her sweet face and shining bands of brown hair would hardly suspect how tragical had been her married life. At twenty a bride, at twenty-five a widow. How much of sorrow, suffering, and humiliation had been crowded into that brief time it would be hard to estimate.

Only once had Muriel ventured to ask of her father. She had not forgotten the look which came over her mother's face.

"He died when you were a baby, dear," was all she said.

Years after Muriel heard from an old nurse who visited them that her father was a gambler who had spent most of her mother's fortune and died from the effects of drink.

Ever since she could remember they had lived in this pretty cottage at Glen Park. Her mother had given music lessons and superintended the care of the orchards. A small legacy had been left her, sufficient to keep her daughter and herself from poverty.

"Hallo, mamma!" cried Muriel gaily, as her mother entered. "You look as young and blooming as a girl of sixteen. Someone inquired the other day if we were sisters, and methinks I shall soon be asked if you are my daughter! You needn't blush! It reminds me of my own inability in that line.

Mrs. Gilday smiled at Muriel's nonsense.

"Have you been writing?" she inquired. "I notice your desk is open."

"Yes, to Cousin Winnie; asked her if she could come out for a visit. She must be dreadfully tired of sewing. It will do her good to take a holiday. Don't you think so, mamma?"

"Yes, certainly. I had thought of getting her to sew for us after a bit, but she shall have her visit first—that is, if she can so arrange it."

The Fates seemed to favour Muriel's little scheme. Cousin Winnie wrote:

"What a kind-hearted little person you are! I am tired of sewing. Shall be only too glad to accept your invitation."

About this time Mr. Browning gave up his daily trips to London and took to making frequent calls at Mrs. Gilday's cottage. They were all business calls. A letter to deliver; some inquiry in regard to the care of poultry or his garden. Mrs. Gilday was an authority on such subjects. Or perhaps Mrs. Dake sent compliments, and would they all come over to tea that evening?"

Winnie noted with great complacency that he never seemed

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in any haste to terminate these calls. On one occasion he lingered all the afternoon when he had merely "dropped in to borrow Mrs. Gilday's pruning shears." Surely Cousin Winnie's blue eyes and pretty, quiet ways were producing the desired effect.

There was another affair which seemed to require a share of Muriel's notice at this time. The attentions of a certain young man whose name was Frank Evans were evidently becoming somewhat too pronounced. He and Muriel had been to school together, carried their dinner in the same basket, and quarrelled as to who should take the basket home again. Later on he had escorted her to parties, picnics, and other merry-makings. She still exercised the sisterly right, which she had always claimed, of telling him her opinion of his actions. So now, when he took to lingering on the pleasant portico in the early mornings when she knew he had started for his father's office, she showed her disapproval, and on one occasion told him plainly that he "ought to be at work."

He started on, laughingly protesting, while after his departure Cousin Winnie said deprecatingly:

"Now, Muriel, that was too bad to drive him off in that way. What would your mother say if she had heard it?"

"Haven't any idea," replied Muriel, carelessly. "It's the truth I told him. He is not rich, and he ought to be at work instead of dawdling his mornings away here." To herself she added, "I hope he isn't going to get spooney; that will spoil him entirely. He is nice enough to take one about, but when I marry it will be——" And she was lost in a reverie in which a tall, fair-haired hero with a military bearing was metaphorically dying to have her accept his name and fortune.

The weeks sped by, each filled with an unusual number of drives, afternoon teas, and tennis parties. Muriel was very busy in these days. The frequent *tête-à-têtes* enjoyed by Winnie and John Browning were brought about by the tact of our enterprising heroine.

Winnie had announced that she should return to town the following week. The long-talked-of picnic was arranged for the Thursday previous to her departure.

The day, like its predecessors, dawned calm and cloudless. The occupants of house and cottage were astir at an early hour. Everybody was going. At half-past nine, various traps filled with young and old, all in gay spirits, could be seen wending their way down past the park to the foot of the neighbouring hills.

At last the appointed place was reached. Here the horses were tied, and the party began explorations for a suitable place for dining. After that most important feature of a picnic was over, the younger members of the party declared their intention of pushing on to the top of the wooded hills. To Muriel's disappointment, John Browning counted himself among those who were "too old for such a scramble."

Muriel, Frank Evans, and Winnie started on as leaders of the party. The two former were quite accustomed to climbing hills, but Winnie was not, and before half the distance was accomplished seated herself on a fallen tree, declaring that "she could not go another step." Frank gallantly offered to keep her company while the rest went on.

Muriel clambered on, out-distancing the others. When the stragglers overtook her they said that Frank and Winnie had decided to come on; so on their return Muriel sat down behind a clump of bushes, intending to wait for them. Soon she heard their voices, but did not at once retrace her steps to join them. Just then she heard Frank say:

"I have loved you, Winnie, ever since you were here a year ago."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Muriel to herself. "Is that possible?"

Of Winnie's reply she only caught the word, "Muriel?"

"Nonsense!" said Frank. "I have only a brotherly interest in her."

"My sentiments, too," thought Muriel. "Shall I rush out? No, that will only startle them. It will be embarrassing enough for Winnie to have to refuse him."

But the next words she heard were a double surprise. Winnie had accepted Mr. Evans.

"How can she think of him?" groaned Muriel. "He is not to be compared with Mr. Browning. Young, poor, and—such a tiny moustache! Poor Mr. Browning! What will he do now? Such a nice man, too!"

With these and similar reflections, Muriel left her flowers on the stones where they had fallen from her hands and hastily emerged from behind the bushes. Frank and Winnie had passed on, utterly oblivious of everything but themselves. Muriel hastened on, joining the party she had left a few moments before.

That evening, to Muriel's surprise, John Browning stopped to tea with them. After that was over he sauntered out to the verandah to enjoy the moonlight and a cigar. Winnie excused herself on the plea of "packing," and went to her room.

Mrs. Gilday and Muriel remained in the drawing-room to unpack the hampers and set things to rights.

"My dear," began Mrs. Gilday, emptying the contents of a saltcellar into the sugar bowl. "My dear, I have something to tell you. Perhaps I ought to have told you before."

Here she dropped the saltcellar on the floor. Muriel looked at her mother in surprise. Never had she seen her show such evident embarrassment.

"I hope you will not be displeased," she went on, "but I have promised to marry Mr. Browning."

Muriel gave a little gasp.

"Dear mamma, I am so glad!" she firmly ejaculated.

"Are you really?" said Mrs. Gilday, with a relieved expression. "I was afraid you might not be pleased."

"I am—quite pleased—and surprised."

Here Muriel dropped into a chair and began to laugh hysterically.

"What a matchmaker I am, to be sure!" she thought. Then she exclaimed aloud:

"Mother, I have found my vocation—the management of a Matrimonial Bureau!"

K. Porter.

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AN AFFECTION OF THE HEART.

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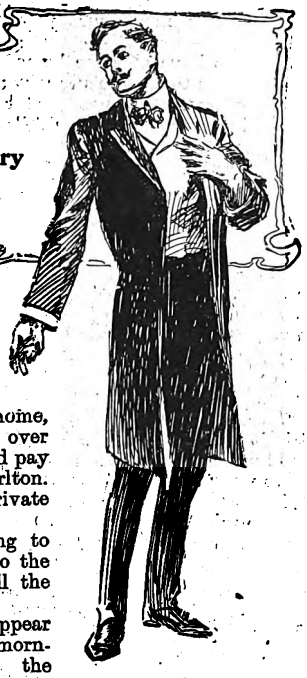

SILENTLY and swiftly it flows, the strong tidal river. On past fields and pasture-lands, smoothing rugged corners, winding in and gliding out, until, taking a bend by an old farmhouse, it splashes across some ancient boulders, and escapes to the sea, there to await the returning tide.

Away in the distance the shining harbour may be seen, with small craft dancing on the sunlit waves, while every here and there rise the tall masts of some foreign barque, hoisting sails for a morning departure.

Spring is sweet, and Spring is fair, and a maiden's thoughts may soon be lost in reverie when she wanders amongst the apple-blossom in a quaint Cornish orchard.

Gladys Charlton wends her way down the daisied slope to a low wall, past which the brimming water hurries in its haste to be gone. Here she finds a seat, and gives herself up to the enjoyment of a quiet hour with the birds, flowers, and sunshine. She realises an ideal restfulness, and wonders how it can be that only yesterday she was right in the heart of the Metropolis.

Gladys is studying to be a doctor. Do not frown, and say: "I disapprove of her; women-doctors are a delusion"; for her motives are of the truest and best.

Her own mother had died when Gladys was eleven years old, and in less than three years Mr. Charlton married a second wife—a peevish, jealous woman, who made her little step-daughter's life so unbearable that her father sent her away to school; and from that time the girl ceased to have any love for her home, though formal relations were duly observed between herself and Mrs. Charlton.

When school-days were nearly over, Gladys dreaded the prospect of an existence in Cornwall, and sought for some loophole by which to escape from such a dreary life. She frequently visited at the house of a kindly old doctor and his wife at St. John's Wood, and perhaps all she saw and heard there induced her to choose the medical profession as her vocation.

Mr. Charlton gladly gave his consent, for he, too, had misgivings as to how things would be when his daughter came home. And though Gladys had her faults, she was well fitted for her work, being strong, energetic, gentle, and clever withal.

It is now the mid-term recess, and Gladys is free for three weeks. Her thoughts are happy ones while she queries with herself as to how she shall pass the time; then her mind wanders back to London, and she becomes unconscious of everything, save a labyrinth of questionings concerning the future, the good she will strive to accomplish, and I know not what besides, for the damsel had so many beautiful ideas.

But the most ethereal dreams have a practical ending, and the "young girl-graduate" is disturbed in the midst of her solitary musings. Someone discovers her retreat, and Gladys rises to meet the newcomer.

"Roy?"

"Yes; why not? Jack told me you were at home, so I thought I would come over here this lovely morning and pay my respects to Dr. Charlton. What is the fee for a private consultation?"

"Now, Roy, I'm not going to be teased. Let's go down to the beach, and I'll tell you all the latest news."

But Royland does not appear to care about anything this morning unless it concerns the narrator, and simply grows more and more abstracted. At last Gladys gets cross, and says impetuously:

"Really, Roy, you are terribly dense and provoking! Ten minutes ago I told you that Hermann Sternberg had taken his degree; and now, when I speak of his large practice, you say: 'S-tern-b-berg? Has he left college?' You *are* so stupid!"

"I was wondering about your future, Gladys dear. Don't be vexed because I seemed stupid. But do you really think that you have chosen wisely?"

"*Of course*," is the somewhat scornful reply. "But I don't like you to call me 'dear' now I'm grown up—it's silly!"

And then Gladys grows more gentle as she relaxes into her old manner with Roy, and unfolds her wonderful plans for the benefit of the human race.

Her listener remains silent for a while, and then says smilingly:

"But, Gladys, couldn't you carry out some of these nice ideas now? You say that when you are duly qualified you will have a regular supply of cream and flowers sent up for the Children's Hospital. Wouldn't it be easy to pack a few hampers and send them off during the recess? Why wait until you are settled and have a row of letters after your name?"

Miss Charlton looks a little crestfallen, and answers slowly:

"I never thought of it. You think of everything, Roy."

"In spite of my stupidity," is the laughing retort. "But now I must give *you* some information. Uncle Kenneth is dead, and has left me his money, so, unless I choose, there is no need for me to go on studying for the Bar. What would you advise me to do—give up, or go on?"

"Why, give it up, Roy. I always thought it a pity that you should choose such a profession. You are very good, but not a bit clever. You must go and travel; it will enlarge your ideas. I think this money is a providence."

"Would you miss me?" asks Royland thoughtfully.

"Perhaps a little—that is, when I'm at home; but, you know, my life is too busy to miss people much."

* * * * *

The birds sing their evensong; trees rustle to the sweet tune which the gentle breeze is playing; and blue mists

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rise from the neighbouring valleys as the day's work is ended.

The kine have all gone home, and the flowers close their tender petals to Nature's lullaby; but the air is scented with their perfume. An enchanted hush comes over the land; everything says, "Good-night."

Gladys Charlton will never forget how she stood gazing across the sea that evening.

Suddenly a voice broke the stillness, and Royland Rivers stood beside her.

"Will you wish me a prosperous journey, Gladys? I have taken your advice. I shall be gone a long, long while before you see me again, for I am not *quite* clumsy enough to stay and plead my cause in vain. I know now that it would be useless to ask for more than friendship. Someone more worthy than myself will cross your path in days to come, and try to turn it into his. If so, believe that I shall wish you all happiness. Forgive me if I ask you not to trust to ambition; but grand ideas are useless without *everyday patience and heroism*. There, don't be bothered, Gladys dear; it isn't your fault, only my big mistake. I know I'm stupid and blundering; but say good-bye. I must go."

No reply— the girl is so taken by surprise.

Roy has a true man's heart, and it resists the strong temptation to take one last kiss; so he raises two cold hands from the fence upon which they are clasped, presses them to his lips like a knight of old, and, ere Gladys can frame a single sentence, he has gone.

But the air seems burdened with sadness, the gloaming s less pleasant, and a feeling of oppression lingers behind. Gladys is glad to return to London.

* * * * *

Five years have passed since Royland Rivers said good-bye to Gladys Charlton. She has never heard anything of him since, though at first she half expected he would write. Now, however, new faces and fresh hopes engross the lady doctor. Roy's prophecy appears likely to come true. Gladys is already practising, but rumour says it will not be for long; and the busybodies are gossiping about her and another doctor, "wondering when the wedding will come off," whether Dr. Sternberg clears more than a thousand a year, how they will manage about Gladys' patients, and much more besides, though Hermann and Miss Charlton have not yet breathed a word of love to each other.

Early summer is looming in the purple haze of distance, everyone longs for something fresh or suggestive of the country, and Islington flower-girls, who stand where the pathway of Upper Street is broad and shady, find a ready sale for the clustering bunches of Lent-lilies, violets, and snowdrops.

Dr. Gladys has just been requested to visit a sick child, and pauses to buy the little one some primroses as she hurries along in the morning sunshine.

"Please, mum, I'm sure I'm that sorry; but a lady wot's been here a visitin' have sent her doctor for to see our little un," said a poor woman who opened the door at No. 23 Back Court, in response to Dr. Charlton's summons.

"Well, never mind," is the cheery reply; "just ,give Lina these, Mrs. Hemming, please, and say that I'll run in to-morrow. How is she?"

"Rather less feverish," says Hermann Sternberg, M.D., as his tall figure appears in the doorway. "Good-morning, Miss Charlton; I suppose I must abdicate in your favour?"

"Oh, no; I haven't any desire to interfere. Lina and I are excellent friends; but I'm going into Cornwall next week for a few days, and I shall be glad if you will attend well to her interests; she's such a nice child, and her mother is so poor," continues Gladys, as she and Dr. Sternberg walk away together.

Miss Charlton has a great idea of her friend's wonderful abilities; almost unconsciously he dwells in her thoughts a good deal, and she mentally raises him to a standard-point far beyond his fellows. At every dinner-party, on every possible occasion, Hermann has singled her out from all others. She is proud to be his confidante, and this morning his manner suggests that he hopes she will become something dearer still. Gladys can scarcely tell the reason why, but she feels that it is so, and grows shyly glad at the thought.

The same evening an exquisite bunch of white flowers is left at Dr. Charlton's door, with Dr. Sternberg's "kind regards." There is a small note attached, which is evidently gratifying to the lady doctor, for, after reading it she leans back in her chair and looks anything but professional. Something softens her eyes, and a gentle expression comes over her face. Cupid smiled and said: "Ah, it may have taken months of my skill, but I have surely aimed aright."

Some folks think that women-doctors are minus feeling; just a bundle of nerve and learning—let them dismiss the idea. Gladys Charlton neither adopted man-like airs, strode heavily, nor smoked. She had boarded with girls who did all three, but *her* life and bearing remained free from *anything* approaching the masculine style.

* * * * *

When Dr. Charlton returns to town she is very busy, and does not see Hermann Sternberg for three or four days. However, after once meeting him, she makes inquiries concerning the little patient in Back Court; but he evades a direct reply.

"But, tell me," insists Gladys, "how you really think she is going on?"

"Why, to tell you the truth, Miss Charlton—you know I wasn't properly her doctor—it isn't a monetary case; and I've been so very busy that I've really had no time to go. Do you know that Lady Mayborough has called me in to attend her children? They're down with scarlet fever."

But only scorn meets this piece of information. Gladys looks white and angry; she treats Hermann with contempt, as she exclaims:

"Thanks for your candour, Dr. Sternberg; *I* will never ask you to spare one moment from your monetary patients again. I thoroughly despise such meanness. For the future, I beg that you will kindly leave that poor child to the tender mercies of a woman! Pray do not stand a minute longer. Lady Mayborough's children may be requiring your valuable services. Good morning."

It cost Gladys an effort to say this to the one person for whose good opinion she had learnt to care the most; and there was a feeling of terrible aching and disappointment for many days afterwards. It is poor comfort when people say at such times:

"Well, he's not worth troubling about; you may feel thankful you've made the discovery in time."

And you *may* be thankful in *one* way; for when your friends die suddenly, you may express your thankfulness that they were spared a long illness and lingering death; but it does not make your grief grow less; you experience sorrow just the same, and the shock is even greater.

Dr. Charlton hides her trouble from the curious gaze of the

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world and expends her spare energy in an increase of work.

* * *

Little Lina is dying; her face grows wee and wan, in spite of its unusual loveliness, and when Gladys asks what she would like, the only reply is:

"I wants *him;* I fink he could make me better; I wants him to tell Lina more 'bout ickle lambs."

"To whom does she refer?" queries Dr. Charlton.

"She means our Sam's master, miss," interposed Mrs. Hemming; "he's sent her lots o' fruit and things; he's bin here himself, too; she's allers a-callin' for him; he's such kindly ways wi' children."

Just then there is a knock at the door.

Surely Gladys has heard that voice before—but what nonsense! Yes, it *must* be he, and Royland Rivers comes into the room.

He starts a little on seeing who is there; but soon calms, and says very quietly:

"Good-evening, Miss Charlton; how is your patient?" and then turns to the sick child, who brightens at his approach. Can this tall, dignified man, with firm and resolute face, be the Roy of long ago? And, if so, why has Gladys never met him until now? But this is no time for such wonderings.

Together they watch beside the little one, as daylight fades and evening shadows fall across the old city. The small face is full of pain at first, but gradually it wears away and all is still, save for the distant murmur of the multitudes who throng the outer street, little heeding that angels are hovering in the twilight air.

"She is conscious to Someone above, though not to you," says Royland, to the weeping mother. "Do not fear; there is no dark river for children—only a brook, with easy stepping-stones. Lina will soon be in the Homeland."

And as he spoke the frail spirit passed away.

* * * * *

"Why did you never write to any of us, Roy?" asks Gladys, as they walk along Highbury Place, an hour later.

"Where was the use? Besides, Gladys, I didn't do altogether as you wished. I came to London, after being on the Continent for a few weeks, and continued my studies."

"You did? No; you cannot mean it. I should have seen your name somewhere."

"Hardly," rejoins Roy; "Uncle Kenneth wished me to take his name with the property."

"What! Are you the clever barrister, Kenneth, whom everyone is talking about?"

"The same," answers Roy, indifferently; "but we won't discuss such a 'dense' individual as myself."

Miss Charlton feels uncomfortable.

"Gladys, is something I heard to-day about you and Dr. Sternberg true?"

She thinks he refers to their quarrel, and answers:

"Yes."

All through that long summer night Gladys lies awake reviewing the past. Since she has discovered Hermann's true character she has been very wretched, and has looked upon her idol as shattered.

The gold had worn off with nearer acquaintance, the basis was dross. Surely this is not the case with Royland Kenneth. His life has only become truer and better with the world's "wear and tear." Gladys knows that he inspires her with a slight feeling of awe. His power is the greater now. He can stand a test.

As the weeks pass on, however, Mr. Kenneth and Dr. Charlton meet very seldom, and he grows more distant each time.

Gladys asks him the meaning of it once, and says she thinks that he means to retaliate and make fun of her, because she used to be thoughtless and conceited in her younger days.

"Cannot we ever be friends?" she pleads, as they part one evening at the house of a mutual friend.

But the answer is cold enough.

"Our lives are too widely separated now, Gladys. Besides, I am really so 'intensely provoking,' you know. I wonder that you care to ask such a question."

And then Roy turns away to assist a pretty girl, with whom the "people" say, he is greatly taken.

Poor Gladys! It is very hard. Why do things always go contrary? Why are the "tables turned," so to speak? Once Roy loved her, now he does not; but she cares for him. Oh, dreary suspense! Why, if he loves this pretty Gwendoline Maynard, does he not marry her? And why is she, Gladys, doomed to see her friends grow faithless?

* * * * *

Another Spring comes round, and Dr. Charlton is at home. She looks weary and worn; but restlessly seeks all the dissipation which a country life affords.

There is a picnic to Marazion. Royland Kenneth is present, and tries to get near Gladys in the waggonette, but she avoids him; and when the rest all climb to the castle, intending to mount as high as "Arthur's Seat," she finds a cosy corner, halfway up St. Michael's, and; resting amongst the grass-grown rocks, considers herself free from intrusion.

Below her lies the little jetty, and a few cottages; then comes a stretch of blue-green water between the Mount and Marazion, while tiny steamers sail to and from Penzance.

Gladys is pondering over Hermann Sternberg's marriage. She had seen it announced the day before, and the bride was Gwendoline Maynard! She feels quite sorry for Roy, and yet——

Mr. Kenneth himself disturbs the reverie, as he had done some six or seven years previously, all amongst the apple-blossom. He refers to Hermann's marriage, and gently expresses his sorrow and sympathy.

"Why?" is the reply; "unless losing Gwendoline has made you more feeling for others?"

"I lose Gwen! What do you mean?"

"That I never really cared for Hermann," says Gladys.

"But you told me—that is, when I asked you——"

* * * * *

Once more they stand together by the brimming river, once more the dews fall and the mists rise over the sea; but this time two foolish folk have learnt to understand each other, and this time also the little birds peep over their nests and whisper: "See, those are happy lovers!"

But they must have found themselves in a practical world, after all, for, as their voices die away in the distance, we hear Gladys say:

"After all, Roy, you must have been 'terribly dense' not to have understood this before."

What was "this?"

* * * * *

The result of "this" was that Dr. Charlton sold her practice to another lady, and became Mrs. Kenneth.

They live in London, but go to Cornwall every other year to "sentimentalise" for a month, as Roy says.

R. Foxgrove.

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A Logical Query.

Edith: "I thought you and Mabel were fast friends." Nellie: "We used to be." "And you are not now?" "No." "What's his name?"

She Was Willing.

Gus: "If you don't give it to me at once I'll kiss you." Madge: "And if I do give it to you will you let me alone?" Gus: "Certainly." Madge: "Well, you can't have it."

Hubby Before Everything.

Hubby: "Yes, dear, you look nice in that dress; but it cost me a heap of money." Wife: "Freddie, dear, what do I care for money, when it is a question of pleasing you?"

True Love.

"Henry, you do not love me." "How can you say such a thing, when I've kissed you thirty times in ten minutes?" "If you really loved me you would not have counted the kisses."

Mercenary Papa.

"Did you tell papa how tender your love is for me, darling?" "I did, sweetheart, but he only laughed, and said that it was legal tender he wanted to see before we could do business."

Lost, Stolen, or Strayed?

Lena: "Fred didn't blow his brains out because you jilted him the other night; he immediately came and proposed to me." Maud: "Did he? Then he must have got rid of them in some other way."

A Cutting Rebuke.

Author: "And how do you like my novel?" Lady: "Oh, you ought to write in a more popular vein, so that even the ignorant can understand it!" Author: "What is there about it that isn't clear to you?"

Putting His Foot Into It.

Miss Highflier: "Oh, Mr. Sappy, how nice it was of you to name your new hunter after me! What is she like?" Young Sappy: "Well, she's a regular stunner, Miss Highflier. Not much to look at, don't-cher-know, but very fast." (And he cannot make out why she is so cool to him now.)

Under Certain Circumstances.

"Gertrude," he said, fixing his intense gaze upon her downcast brow, "would you object if I should pass my arm about your waist?" "Yes, George," she replied, gazing at his manly feet. "I should object, but I might yield to pressure."

A Hint to Employés.

Bob: "How do you stand with your employer so well, Tom; you never laugh at his jokes?" Tom: "No; but I dine at his restaurant, and, pretending not to see him, I re-tell all his stories, saying loudly, 'I can't tell it as well as he can, but here's a rattling good yarn Mr. Davidson told us this morning.' I've been promoted three times this year."

A Dead Certainty.

Friend: "Do you think you will marry a rich girl?" Poet: "I'll have to if I keep on in this business."

Asked and Answered.

Miss Rickets: "Why don't you marry Mr. Munn? Are your parents opposed to it?" Miss Giddy: "No; but Mr. Munn seems to be."

A Secret.

Maud: "Miriam is trying to keep her engagement a secret." Martha: "How do you know?" Maud: "She told me so."

Then He Did Feel Happy.

Mr. Waife (trying to entertain his lady-love's six-year-old sister): "Do you know who I am?" Flossie: "Yes! Papa says you're Edith's last chance."

He Assented Cordially.

Mrs. Wobbles: "I shall never forget, dear, how idiotic you looked when you proposed to me." Mr. Wobbles (with emphasis): "I was idiotic."

He Wasn't at Home.

He: "And did you see Monte Carlo while you were at Nice?" She: "No; papa called on him, I believe, but from his disappointed appearance when he returned to the hotel, I think Mr. Carlo must have been out."

A Little Encouragement.

"If I thought any girl would marry me," remarked Mr. Linger, "I'd propose to-morrow." "If that is how you feel," replied Miss Spokes, with a glance at the clock, which indicated 11:45, "you need not wait very long."

His Declaration.

Mrs. Rusher: "Has Mr. Goldcoin, with whom you have been dancing all the evening, at last declared his intentions, Mabel?" Mabel: "Yes, aunt." Mrs. Rusher: "I am so glad! And what did he say?" Mabel: "He declared he would never marry."

Comparisons Were Odious.

"Are your coats padded?" asked Angelina, as her head reposed gracefully on William's manly breast. "No. Why do you ask?" he inquired fondly. "Because they are so much softer than Martin's coats, or John's either, for that matter." The engagement is now off.

She'd Find Out.

"They say that stolen kisses are the sweetest," he said, as they sat on the seat looking at the moon. "Indeed?" she said. "Yes. What do you think about it?" "Oh, I have no opinion at all; but it seems to me, if I were a young man, I wouldn't be long in doubt as to whether they were or not."

One For Algy.

Algy (who is not as big a fool as he looks): "Did you give my cawd to Mith Bondclipper?" Servant: "Yes, sir." Algy: "What did she say?" Servant: "She told me to tell you, sir, that she was sorry she was not in." Algy: "Ah, indeed! Please tell your mithtress that I thaid I wath glad I didn't call."

A Lost Opportunity.

Mrs. Hunnemune (as the train emerges from a long tunnel): "Dear me, John, did you kiss me just now in the dark?" Mr. Hunnemune (glancing round to find the perpetrator of the outrage): "No, indeed! I wonder who dared to!" Mrs. Hunnemune (simply): "Nobody. But you missed a splendid chance, John."

The Sacrifice.

"George," said she, in a low voice, "would you make a sacrifice for my happiness?" "Certainly," he replied. "Would you give up smoking for my sake?" "Give up smoking for your sake!" he repeated. Then, after a silence, he exclaimed hoarsely, "I can refuse you nothing. I will do so. Hereafter when I smoke it will be for my own sake."

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A BROKEN DREAM.

Telling How a Goddess Suddenly Became Mortal.

"Look out, Fred! Have we toilers on foot no rights a plough-driver is bound to respect?"

"Good Heavens, Millie! Did I touch you? You seemed deeply absorbed gazing into the misty beyond."

"I was watching that brilliant equipage, so unlike the carts and hay waggons of these parts, and I see it has turned down our lane. Go to work, Fred, as I do, and don't dare pretend you are anything else but a toiling farm hand if they should stop to speak to you."

Mildred Avery pulled her blue sunbonnet over her face, and grasped her light pitchfork with energy. Her strong, graceful form seemed fully equal to her work of piling up the fragrant hay. Fred Lorimer, a young collegian home for his summer's holiday, a ward of Mildred's father, evidently thought she looked the picture of health, for even while industriously continuing his task, his eyes wandered constantly towards the fair young hay-maker.

Up the green lane a carriage, drawn by a fine pair of black horses, rolled noiselessly on until it stopped by Lorimer and Mildred Avery. Two handsome, stylish young fellows occupied it; one of them sprang out and approached the hedge. Mildred, apparently unconscious, as Fred wheeled the horse about on his return trip, stolidly pursued her work.

"Heigh! You girl, there!"

Mildred turned towards the young man.

"Well, sir?"

"Can you direct us to the house of Alfred Avery, somewhere in this vicinity?"

"Drive on to the end of the lane—you'll see the house then—a big white one in the middle of a lot of trees."

The young man was evidently surprised, for Mildred could not render her voice unmusical; he did not immediately turn away.

"Ah, thanks! We are very uncertain, you know. Glad to find ourselves so near our journey's end, you know."

Mildred worked on, making no answer. Her father, in his shirt sleeves, was at that moment balancing himself on the top of a load of hay at the other end of the field.

As the young man was hesitatingly moving away she called out:

"Do you want Mr. Avery?"

Perhaps this irritated the seeker after information, for he replied:

"Can't see that it concerns you, my pretty maid. But I don't mind telling you that we do want Mr. Avery, and perhaps his handsome daughter as well. So, fair maiden, are you satisfied?"

Before the astonished Mildred could think what to do, Fred had jumped from his seat and was striding fiercely towards the hedge.

"Look here, young fellow, you need to be taught manners. We don't speak to young ladies in that fashion in the country."

The man retreated from the advancing farmer in dismay.

"Dear me! What impetuous creatures these country boys are, to be sure! I assure you, I meant no harm. I beg the young person's pardon if what I said was disagreeable to her."

"Young lady, you mean!"

"Young lady—oh, very well, if she likes to be called so,"

"If she grants it you may count yourself lucky to get off without punishment. If not, I'll come and thrash you till she's satisfied."

"Oh, come, Gray," exclaimed the young man in the carriage; "don't get into a controversy with Squire Avery's farm hands—it wouldn't be policy, you know. Apologise as meekly as is necessary and come on."

"Sorry, I assure you—no offence meant—hope you'll excuse me," said Gray, backing before the gleaming eyes of the athletic harvester.

"Come back, Fred. It's all right," Mildred exclaimed in a strange smothered sort of voice, and Fred rejoined her as the carriage wheeled swiftly away. "I know them, Fred—at least, I know the one in the carriage," she said softly, with cheeks that were rosier than even the heat warranted.

"Oh, do you? And am I to apologise, then?"

"No—at least—I don't know how we shall meet them. It is Leo Maynard and his friend, Carroll Gray. I met Leo frequently when I was at my Aunt Margaret's in London last winter."

"Humph! And I suppose he has come out here to see you?"

Mildred made no reply. She stood with one hand on the handle of her fork, gazing dreamily towards the dim forest in the distance. She was thinking of the time she had last met Leo Maynard. It had been in a crowded ball-room, where the pulsations of an enchanting waltz, the fragrance of rich flowers, the soft glow of little lights, the graceful rhythmic motion of beautiful women and men around them, all combined to intoxicate the senses and make living seem a delicious enchantment. Nothing had seemed real in such a moment. She had felt herself the exquisite being Maynard's manner seemed to imply; he was a knight of olden time—romantic, mysterious, chivalrous—both were fascinated and under a spell; and since then to each the other existed only as the central star of a beautiful dream—real nowhere but in mthe emory. To-day they would meet again for the first time since that night.

"Fred, let's go home. We can slip in the back way, go to our rooms, and appear at the proper time, clothed and in our right minds. You see, we cannot send the servant down with a not-at-home message; having come so far, the traditions of the country demand that they be fed, entertained, and refreshed before they depart."

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Fred groaned.

"I don't fancy the prospect. Let's run away to the woods, and follow the brook to the coolest, greenest nook we can find, and pretend we never saw them. You know we are only Squire Avery's farm hands."

"You lazy fellow! You want to shirk your duties in either character. Come, call someone to take the horse, and let's get along."

It was high noon when Mildred descended the wide staircase of the roomy old farmhouse, dressed afresh in soft, creamy drapery, with a dash of colour about her head and neck, and half a dozen roses in her hand. Dark, soft waves of hair fell away from a broad white forehead, and a new animation glowed in her deep hazel eyes and well-rounded cheeks. She could hear the men from the hayfield laughing and joking with each other as they dashed the cool water over their moist faces; the savoury steam of substantial edibles floated through the rooms, and the clatter of dishes sounded from the long dining-room. The doors of the cool, spacious room stood open, and men's voices came to her from the room.

"Ah, here is my girl at last!" exclaimed Squire Avery, heartily. "Come in, Millie. I suppose you know one of these young gentlemen—ah!"

Both young men sprang to their feet, both had advanced to greet her. But Carroll Gray stopped in dismay, his face turning a mottled pattern of white and red.

"Bless my soul! It's the fair maiden herself!"

Leo Maynard turned pale.

"And I called you one of Squire Avery's farm hands!"

"Good gracious! What a dreadful mistake! Miss Avery—dear me—can you ever forgive me? No, I suppose you can't, you know. I—I—whatever is a fellow to say under such an awful combination of circumstances?"

Mildred laughed merrily.

"Say nothing. It was a very natural error. Mr. Maynard, I am glad to see you again. Mr. Gray, pray be seated. You are fully forgiven—Squire Avery's farm hands are not such very formidable people when you become accustomed to them."

Both men plunged again into a sea of abject apologies. A great clanging dinner bell clashed out noisily at the moment, and Mr. Avery recovered his usual genial tone.

"Heigho—dinner is ready. Millie, here, would not let us change our custom in haying time of eating altogether—saves time and work, you know, for people that are hurried to death. Come out—come and partake of a good, plain, old-fashioned dinner, served as farmers serve it." And the group, with the genial, prosperous farmer at the head, moved out to the dining-room.

A long table extended the length of the room, and a small throng of well-washed labourers were gathering round it. At the upper end the family were grouped, and here Mr. Avery led his visitors and introduced them to his wife and other members of the family. Carroll Gray sank into the abject sea again when he saw Lorimer, where he floundered hopelessly until Millie helped him out. They were all seated at last, presenting in modern guise a fair picture of ancient feudal customs. Two sturdy girls waited at the table, but Mrs. Avery and Mildred divided many duties between them.

It was all new and strange to Leo Maynard. He thought of dinners partaken under softly-masked electric lights, where rare flowers heaped up, and magnificent table furnishings, almost hid the guests from one another's view; where low delicious music from concealed players lulled the senses to a sweet quiet; where wine sparkled, and delicate perfume mingled with every breath; where noiseless servants moved about with skilful unobtrusiveness; where Mildred sat beside him in silken evening dress, rich flowers on her bosom and jewels in her hair and at her white throat; when she had seemed to him so fair, so exquisite a creature that all these had seemed too poor and plain for her.

And now—this homely meal in the glare of noonday, Mildred herself sitting down with a dozen dusty working men, and even administering to their greedy wants—what a contrast! How this goddess had become mortal in a moment! He had seen her, too, dressed as a servant and toiling like one. Where was all that delicate charm which had made her seem so unlike ordinary girls? His was not the nature to grasp the beauties of the practical, to appreciate the strength and helpfulness of this true woman. The magic spell, woven in hours of sensuous luxury once broken, he felt only affright and wondering dismay. He longed to get away from a scene the effect of which upon his senses he couldn't understand.

As soon as they reasonably could do so, the young men made their excuses and rose to go. Maynard's face was sad and dejected, and his lips refused to utter the suave, flattering words usually so ready to spring from them. He took Mildred's hand and looked into her grave, frank, brown eyes; but no tender tones, no plans for the future, no hopes for a brighter meeting were uttered by either. It was a simple, serious "Good-bye" over a broken charm, a faded dream, and both knew it was the last.

And years afterwards, when Mildred was the wife of the rising young lawyer and politician, Frederick Lorimer, Leo Maynard was a name forgotten in her memory, and unknown out in the great world of which she was an active part.

Stanley Hammond.

"Your friend, Mr. Barlow, isn't a very polite man. He was positively rude to me last night," said Maude. "That's Henry's great fault," said Ethel; "he has very little respect for age."

Tomlinson: "Good-bye, Miss Elenora." Miss Elenora: "But you have already said 'good-bye' to me, Mr. Tomlinson." Mr. Tomlinson (who is always ready with some pretty speech): "Have I, really? One can't do a pleasant thing too often, you know."

Jack: "I never kissed a girl in my life until I met you." May Ketchum: "I've heard that from others." Jack: "Who told you?" May Ketchum: "Ever so many; it's an awfully old lie."

"Well, old man," says artist number one, "how's business?" "Splendid!" says number two. "I've just got a commission from a millionaire. He wants his children painted very badly." "Good! I congratulate you, my boy. You're the very man for a job like that."

Son: "What is the meaning of a 'single' woman, dad? I've never heard of a 'double' one." Father: "A single woman, my boy, is one that has only a single idea in life, a single ambition, a single desire." Son: "And that is——" Father: "To get married."

ARE YOU GENEROUS? ARE YOU MEAN?

ARE YOU CLEVER? ARE YOU DULL?

Whatever you are it is as well to know other things concerning yourself, so send a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope to Ranee, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. A reliable delineation of your character will reach you in return—this will give you the required information.

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Not in Vain.

Telling of a Love that Passed Understanding.

MR. VAIDEN paced the room nervously. At each turn he glanced at the clock on the mantel, and many times he paused at one of the large windows, and, pushing aside the heavy crimson curtains, looked out anxiously into the white December night.

The cloth had been laid for a late supper, but the table had not been set. Evidently Mr. Vaiden was expecting a guest. When the clock's slender golden finger pointed to nine, he gave an impatient sigh and flung himself into an easy-chair before the glowing hearth. There was a large portrait of himself hanging above the richly-tiled mantel, but at this moment he did not resemble it in the least.

The portrait showed a man of probably forty years; with a kind and benevolent expression, earnest, gentle eyes, a white, high brow, with heavy, brownish hair waving away from it, and curling, brown moustache. It was the kind of face and the expression that belong to philanthropists and to men who unselfishly give up all they value in life for others.

The man sitting before the grate had the brown, waving hair and heavy, curling moustache, the white, blue-veined brow, but there was no trace of benevolence in his eyes or general expression.

Mr. Vaiden was alone, shut in by oaken doors and heavy curtains from the eyes of the world that adored him and trusted him, and his inner soul—his real self—looked out from his eyes.

"So," he said slowly, his lips showing bloodless beneath his moustache, "I have worked and schemed all these years for nothing, have I? I have played the public benefactor; I have crushed down all my own desires for a different, a freer life, just to mislead my brother into the belief that I was a saint, with the hope and trust that he would disinherit that roving young scamp and leave his millions to me! And all this for nothing, eh? Well, we shall see! The lawyer dead, one of the witnesses dead, and the other—but confound that Ratcliffe! I fear him as I fear nothing else on earth, man or monster! For there is always the girl. I dare not do anything that might arouse her suspicions, for I would lose all these thousands ten times over rather than lose her!"

There was a terrible passion in his face now.

"She is not his daughter, but the old man worships her; and, mean as he is to everyone else, he is good to her. So, because of her, I am afraid of him, and have to be careful—careful! I must bargain with him, instead of—silencing him. Oh, it is like walking over dynamite with a lighted torch in your hand! It is wearing me out, body and soul!"

He rose and paced the room again, one hand clasped with nervous force over the opposite wrist. His brow showed deep furrows now, and his temples beat fitfully. He looked old and haggard. Presently his eyes turned with the look of a desperate, half-crazed animal towards an old-fashioned desk in one corner of the room.

"If I only dared burn it!" he muttered. "Now—before he enters this house. But that old John Ratcliffe—I dare not—I dare not!"

There was a sound of wheels coming up the drive, and his expression changed instantly. He took several rapid turns to compose himself, and when his guest entered, five minutes later, he was received with outstretched hands by the original of the portrait—by the Mr. Vaiden of the gentle, earnest eyes that met yours so squarely, the Mr. Vaiden of the benevolent expression.

The guest was a young and handsome man. One saw at a glance that he was of a proud and passionate nature. There were passion and high spirit in his flashing, dark eyes, in the lines about his mouth, in his fine nostrils—aye, in every movement. Coming in out of the cold, his face was white, and there were flecks of snow on his clothing, but his eyes burnt like fire.

"My dear boy!" exclaimed the elder man, with affection, "you are welcome!"

"Uncle," replied the young man, coldly, giving, and immediately withdrawing his hand, "it would be an odd circumstance were I not welcome in this house."

"It would, indeed, Arthur," said Mr. Vaiden cordially. "Come to the fire, while I ring for supper. I have been waiting."

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting," said the young man, "especially as I have dined on the train. And, uncle, if you can postpone your supper, I will detain you only a few minutes in this interview, as I wish to catch the next train back."

"What, Arthur! Do you mean that you will not be my guest?"

"I shall neither break bread nor sleep in this house until it is mine by law, as it is now by right."

There was silence for a moment. Then Mr. Vaiden said, in a tone of deep emotion:

"My dear boy, you grieve me to the heart. That you should feel hurt—aye, that you should feel bitter—that my brother should have left you only a hundred pounds, is to be expected. Were I in your place, I should feel the same. But I have sent for you for the sole purpose of making you what I consider a generous offer. My brother, out of charity, adopted you and treated you as a son, and I believe that he would have made you his heir, had not your course—your passion for wandering—displeased him. Heaven knows," his voice trembled with emotion, "so far as I am concerned, you were welcome to all his fortune and lands, for my wants are few. But, Arthur, he left his wishes in his will, and they must be respected."

"And your generous offer, most noble uncle?" said the young man, his lips curling in a fine scorn.

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"Arthur, I wish to make over to you—absolutely — twenty thousand pounds."

For a moment the younger man was speechless. Then he laughed; but almost instantly his face darkened, his nostrils swelled and his eyes fairly flamed. One hand closed convulsively, and he flung out the other in a violent gesture of unrepressed anger at his uncle.

"Now, listen!" he cried, in a tone that commanded obedience. "Your brother was my own father! He was separated from my mother—a poor Italian singing-girl — by you, because you wanted his money, and she died in wretched poverty and misery; but he loved her to the day of his death. Me he would not give up, although you did persuade him to disown me. I have seen his marriage certificate, and I believe that it still exists! I believe, too, that he meant for me to have all that he possessed, and that the will which gives it to you is your own forgery. You, sir, I believe to be a traitor, an impostor, and a forger! I am an open enemy. I accept no hospitality from any man in my own home, nor do I accept from you twenty thousand pounds of my own money. But this I will do. When my father's fortune is lawfully mine—as, sir, it will be—I will remember your offer and return your generosity. If you wish to confer with me at any time, you will find me up at the mountain village. I am staying for the present with Mr. John Ratcliffe, in the village——"

"What!" cried Mr. Vaiden, taken completely by surprise and turning deadly pale. "You are staying there—there? How did that happen? I—I had not heard."

"It was not necessary that you should. Sir, I wish you a very good night."

For a long time Mr. Vaiden stood with bent head in the centre of the room. But, when a train went rushing by, he walked to the window and watched it climb round the mountain-side above his home, and so on to the town of Bingley, a distance of half a mile.

"So he is staying there!" he muttered, with evil eyes. "If he should take her from me—so help me Heaven! I would stop at nothing!"

Suddenly the burly, black form of a signalman became visible, etched against the snow on the mountain-side and the red glow from his own fire. He had stepped aside for the train to pass, and was standing, evidently lost in thought, his pipe in his mouth, his flag under his arm, and his hands thrust deep in his pockets.

"Ah!—I have a thought——"

But the blackness of the thought made him shudder and drop the curtain, shutting out that figure.

* * * * *

The good people of the tiny Scottish village hanging under the brow of that rugged mountain had never ceased to puzzle over the domestic affairs of old John Ratcliffe. Why he, so much superior to them all in every respect, should have come to such a retired place, and dwelt there so many years with the beautiful girl whom he called Gertrude, all this was a mystery to the good folk.

Gertrude was the deepest mystery of all. She was not John's child, but that was all anyone knew. She was eighteen at the time my story begins, with the wild, strong beauty of a thorough-bred racer. Her hair and eyes were warm and black, her skin white as milk, but the rich blood glowed like wine in cheek and lip. Her throat was round and strong and beautiful; her well-formed arms and hands, her delicate nostrils, her superb figure—all had the same look of strength. She was like the winds and wild seas and lashing rains in her passions of delight or rage.

"She's not like our girls, Heaven be praised!" the simple villagers said. But Mr. Vaiden loved her, and had determined to move Heaven and earth to win her.

"When once she is mine and under my influence——" He thrilled in contemplation of the hour when she should be his.

Gertrude possessed a remarkable influence over old John Ractliffe, whose stubborn will no one else had ever been able to bend or break. Many a conflict had those two wills, the old one and the young one, had. The last and most violent of all had been when the old man was sitting on a bench in front of his pleasant cottage, smoking his long-stemmed pipe. Gertrude came out with a pitcher, on her way to the dairy to get cream for supper. She paused near him.

"I have taken a lodger," she said quietly.

"What?" almost shouted the old man. "I'll have no lodger in this house!"

"Oh, yes, you will," replied the girl. "He is already in the house. I have given him my room, and I'll sleep in the attic."

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" roared the old man. "He shall not stay here!"

"He shall!" said Gertrude, with flaming eyes. "If I choose to do the cooking and extra work, it is nothing to you. I have told him he might stay—there is no accommodation in the village; he is in the house now, and if you dare to put him out"—she dropped her bare, lovely arms to her sides and looked steadily into his eyes, uttering each word slowly and distinctly—"I also shall leave the house in which I cannot be mistress!"

He knew she meant it. He smoked a moment, and then said, in a different tone:

"What is his name?".

"Arthur Vaiden."

He almost leapt off the bench, uttering a fierce ejaculation. Almost immediately, however, he composed himself, and gruffly bade the girl go on after the cream.

"So," he muttered, "the jade will have her will. But the uncle must not know he is here."

That was a month ago, and to-night the girl stood at the kitchen window, watching the head-light of the train that bore Arthur Vaiden back to his mountain refuge. It was midnight, and the old man had gone to bed; but the girl waited. She could not sleep while the train climbed the perilous mountain-road. There was a feverish crimson in her cheeks, and her eyes had the fire of a hungry animal's, as she watched the light growing nearer.

"He is coming back," she whispered—"he is coming back! Oh, Heaven, I don't know what to pray!" She fell on her knees on the bare floor and put her hands over her hot face. "Oh, Father, only be with him along that dangerous way!"

She knelt there, sobbing that simple but eloquent prayer over and over for an hour. Then the outer door opened suddenly. He came in, covered with snow. She leapt to her feet, but not so quickly but that he saw the attitude, the agitation, the tears. He went to her and took her hands warmly.

"Why, child," he said, "you have waited for me? Why did you do that?"

He stooped and kissed her forehead gently, respectfully; but, at touch of his lips, she burst into sudden convulsive sobbing. Taken by surprise, he drew her to his breast as he would a child.

"What is it?" he asked, laying her face against his and soothing her—aye, and feeling his own pulses beat more full and strong against the tumultuous throbbing of hers. She looked at him with those eager, beautiful eyes, leaning a little from him and yet clinging to him.

"What is it?" she repeated. "Did you think I could go to sleep while you were on that dangerous road?"

Was the road more dangerous than this sweet beating of

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his pulses ? the young man wondered vaguely, as he drew her closer to him.

"You must not worry about me, child," he said, awkwardly; "you,—you must not care."

"Not care ? " she said, putting one white, strong arm up about his throat, and speaking with lips that curled like a crimson seashell. "Why, did you not know, if anything happened to you, or—or took you from me, I should not live ! "

He turned very pale. He remembered a portrait upstairs in his trunk of a cold, proud woman, and a line that ran across beneath the face: "From your promised wife." He knew now that he had never loved her—that he had never been loved as this girl loved him, with all the passion of her warm, untrained nature. There comes a moment sometimes, to the strongest man, when his strength leaves him.

"She is like an opal," he thought, trembling a little; "she is gorgeous as the rainbow, and she loves me ! "

He bent his head and laid his lips on hers in a long kiss, from which the girl at last broke away, her beautiful throat swelling with sobs born of the exalted ecstasy of her love.

"I love you !—love you !—love you ! " she sobbed; and then fled away up the stairs to her attic, and, flinging herself face downwards across her white bed, lay there motionless some time.

Gertrude's love was so great and terrible a thing that it completely filled her soul, to the exclusion of all other passions. There was a wearing doubt in her mind that such happiness could last, so she prayed always that it might continue. If he kissed her, she ran from him, sobbing; if he went away, she paced her room for hours, pausing only to fall on her knees and stammer the prayers that struggled from her excited breast.

"It hurts—it hurts to love so ! " she said, over and over again. "But I would not have it different; suffering for him is happiness."

And the month passed, and still she loved him dearly, and still she prayed.

One day, when he was away, his uncle came by the afternoon train and remained through the night. He attempted to press his suit with the girl, but she did not even understand him; and at last he gave up in disgust, and retired to the guest-chamber.

Gertrude went to her room, and, worn out with the feverish unrest of her love, fell asleep on the floor beside the low chair at which she was praying. She looked very beautiful in her dark red bodice and light skirt, with her arms bare to the elbows.

And in her sleep she beheld a vision. She saw Arthur Vaiden in a dimly-lighted room, which she recognised as his uncle's private study. He was standing before an old desk, fitting a key in the lock, quietly and boldly. The outlines of his figure stood out against a light screen behind him; his eyes were fixed full upon the door, as if prepared for any comer.

She awoke, shuddering. She seized her lamp and went to the door of his room. It was empty. She entered and set down the lamp. It was snowing; and there was a high wind; t beat at the doors with terrible force and rattled the casements. It was eleven o'clock.

"He has not come yet," she whispered, and fell on her knees to say a prayer for him. Something was lying on the floor, which he had dropped and forgotten to pick up; the portrait of a pale, cold woman, with "From your promised wife" traced beneath it.

It seemed but a few moments, but it was in reality an hour, that she knelt there motionless. Then she got up slowly, unconscious of her suffering, and set her sharp heel on the woman's face.

"The month is up ! The month is up ! " she cried, running like a wild thing from the room. "And now to die—to die ! "

She ran noiselessly, bare-headed and bare-armed, down the stairs, but paused at Mr. Vaiden's room. His door was ajar, and he and old John were talking in low, earnest tones.

Two Hours in a Cell.

"I wonder how a fellow feels locked up in there ? " said the writer to the Governor of a big prison as we were peeping into a cell through the grated iron door.

"If you want a taste of it, I'll lock you up for a couple of hours," answered the Governor pleasantly.

"All right, go ahead ! " I stepped inside and he locked the door with a clang, and left me. No sound, no view, nobody to talk to. I lay down on the iron cot and wondered when they would take me out and hang me; or whether I was likely to get a new trial. At the end of the second hour the Governor released me. "Had enough ? " he asked.

"Quite enough," I answered.

And yet I would rather take a month of that sort of thing than the long confinement Mr. George Robinson got—*in his house*, mind you—after the fashion he told of in a statement signed on August 24th, 1899, at his home, Rawcliffe, R.S.O., Yorks.

"I was laid up for *eleven weeks* with acute dyspepsia and the maladies that are part and parcel of it," he said. "The trouble began back in 1888. The first of it was just weakness, loss of appetite, and a low, miserable state of feeling. Then there was pain at the chest and stomach after eating—time when *well* people are at their best. After that I couldn't sleep of nights, except by naps and catches, when I got completely tired out. So the complaint went on, getting worse and worse, until I was laid up for eleven weeks. My doctors didn't seem able to relieve me for more than a day or so at a time.

"On a neighbour's word I tried Mother Seigel's Syrup, and *began to mend almost at once.* My breathing and appetite both improved, and in a few weeks I was in sound health."

It is five and a half years ago since Mr. Robinson made that declaration, and over fifteen years since he began to suffer, as he has described. On February 25th this year at his home, still at Rawcliffe, he made another declaration and signed it, in which he says to us: "Since I wrote to you, nearly five years ago, concerning my almost miraculous cure by Mother Seigel's Syrup, I am pleased to say that I have continued to enjoy good health. All the old weakness and depression are gone, seemingly for good, and I feel as strong and well as a man could wish to be. I had been prostrate eleven weeks when I got my first bottle of Mother Seigel's Syrup. Several doctors had attended me, but I got no better until I commenced on Mother Seigel's Syrup. Almost from the first I began to mend, and in a few weeks was as well as ever. As I have said, my cure was almost miraculous."

Disease, and debility resulting from disease, are the cruellest of gaolers—they will never voluntarily release their victims. But let the prisoners cry out for help to Mother Seigel, and she will give them quick freedom from their toils, with health and strength into the bargain.

Indigestion and Dizziness.

Six Months' Suffering ended by

"Whatever I ate," says Mr. Morgans, of 2 Wellfield Terrace, Dola, Llanharran, Glam., "gave me terrible pain. Severe headaches and dizziness often compelled me to abandon my work. After suffering for six months without relief, I found my cure in Mother Seigel's Syrup. I have remained well and not lost a day's work since.

MOTHER SEIGEL'S SYRUP.

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"Let him break into the house like a thief, if that is his errand," Mr. Vaiden was saying, biting his nails nervously. "If we can depend on the train being wrecked, he will never reach the top of this mountain again. But I cannot believe that even he, bold as he is, would break into the house to look for the will. If I had thought that, John, I should have destroyed the will, in spite of your superstitions."

"Those that destroy wills," muttered the old man, shaking his head, "always seem to get found out. Better destroy trains. Where will it be?"

"At the curve. There is a precipice just where I tore up the line——"

The kitchen door creaked.

"It is the wind," said old John.

"Oh, Heaven, let me be in time—let me be in time!" cried the girl, as she sped through the cruel night towards the mountain-side. "Let me save him, even for her—and then let me die—only die!"

Her hair was streaming down her back, her head and arms were bare, her feet in slippers; but she felt nothing, cared for nothing.

Only to save him, and then to die! Those were the only thoughts in her mind. No anger with him, no reproach, no sense of personal wrong affected her. She had felt all the time that something must happen.

The girl had never loved anybody or anything before; therefore she was not to be judged. She was wholly untrained, uneducated. She knew every tree and rock on the mountain, every wild flower, every fern; she knew what the winds and the rains and the terrible storms said; she knew the music of the brooks; and, at a wild bird's first note, she knew whether it was nesting, singing to its young, or grieving for a lost mate. But she knew nothing of the world, and she had no creed beyond her simple prayers.

She knew a place on the mountain where a dangerous track wound down to the bottom of the valley where the railway ran. She sped to this place—to the very edge of the precipice. She grasped the limb of a tree and leant over—far over. Would she have time to descend that perilous path and stop the train? She would try; at least she would die trying to save him—for her!

Then, all in a second, as she hung over that brink, round a curve—close, close—burst the bright head-light of the approaching train. She flung out her free arm with a terrible cry. Merciful Heaven—the train! And the curve only a quarter of a mile beyond the place where she stood! Too late! too late! too late!

A thousand noises sung in her head, a thousand lights dazzled her vision, a thousand thoughts crashed through her brain. Then one thought took shape and stood out clear, distinct; at least, she could die with him. What! with him? No, no—for him. Her body on the line would stop the train.

"Oh, Heaven!" she cried—poor child, her last prayer—"let it not be in vain! Let me die, but save him—through me—for her! And, oh, forgive him, as I forgive him!"

Then, without one instant's hesitation, without one shrinking fear, she cast her beautiful young body out from the precipice, and it sunk like a spent arrow, down, down, through the midnight to the track below.

Arthur Vaiden was sitting half asleep, but with one hand on the pocket containing his father's will, as the train climbed the mountain. Some days before, an old and trusted servant of his father's had found, among some clothing willed to him by his late master, a sealed envelope, marked, "For my dear son, Arthur Vaiden." This he turned over to the young man, and it was found to contain a key and these feebly written lines:

"*This key opens right top drawer—old desk—study. My will and marriage certificate there. Leaves all to you. If ever a woman loves you as your mother loved me, be good to her. I am watched.* "Your Father."

Arthur Vaiden had made a bold move, and the will was his.

Suddenly came a succession of alarm cries from the engine, almost human-like in their distress and appeal. The sleepless eyes of the engine-driver had discerned a figure on the track. It was a close shave, but it was a steep up-grade, and he managed to stop the train within three feet of the girl.

"She has fallen from the cliff," those brave men said, turning pale as they bent over her.

She was not dead, but dying. She spoke his name with difficulty. The men passed it along wonderingly, and presently the crowd parted and he came to her, white as the death-white of her own poor face. A great and glorious light transfigured that face now.

"It was not too late," she said, slowly and faintly. "I have saved you—for her. You see, I found her portrait and knew all. I could not live then. I am so glad to die! Do not grieve—I forgive you! At least, I had one month of your love! If she loves you, she will not begrudge me that."

Then she struggled up.

"I forgot!" she cried. "He has torn up the line by the curve——"

In speechless grief the young man lifted her and laid her against his breast. Those beautiful eyes, dimmed by pain, were still able to thank him.

"You have been so good to me always," she whispered, "and I have had a whole month of your love. It was all I prayed for. I am satisfied."

He laid his face upon hers until Death came and took her into its own all-powerful arms.

"It is best," he said, with a strong sob, as he laid one last kiss on her lips. "I could never have married her, and, in either event, she would have died. A love like hers—so pure, so strong, so exalted, so unselfish—is more suited to an angel than to a woman."

Then his father's words came to him: "*If ever a woman loves you as your mother loved me, be good to her.*" He shuddered. "I was not good to her," he mused, deeply moved. "But no man can be good enough for a woman who loves like that. No man can even understand such love. She had the purity and the very strength of these wild cliffs in her nature. She was a very passion-flower of the mountain."

Edward Harris.

Mother (angrily): "Did he dare kiss you more than once?" Daughter (evasively): "Well, mamma, I know it wasn't less than once."

The Actress: "The manager seems to think that some day my voice will break the record." Jealous Rival: "Perhaps—if you sing in a phonograph."

Lottie: "I'm afraid Fred doesn't care for me as much as he did." Edith: "Nonsense! What makes you think so?" Lottie: "I got a letter from him to-day, and there were at least three places where he might have put in a 'dear' or a 'darling' and didn't."

"I don't care much for that man Blithersley," said the proud papa. "Why?" asked the proud mamma. "I listened to him for an hour to-day while he told me about what his baby had said, or tried to say, and just as I was about to tell him about ours he left me, saying he had to catch a train."

He (after popping the question): "Why do you cry, my angel? Did I offend you by my proposal?" She (still sobbing): "Oh, no, dear, it is not that. I am crying for joy. Mother always said to me, 'May, you are such an idiot that you would not get even a donkey for a lover,' and now I have got one after all."

Widow: "Do you think marriage is always a failure?" Bullfinch: "Always a failure! Well, I should say not. Why, I know a case where a wife fairly idolises her husband, and he—why he can't keep away from her a minute." Widow: "Bless me, how long have they been married?" Bullfinch: "Nearly a week.'

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Concerning the Trousseau.

No, "KITTY," the trousseau of a young lady about to be married does not include her household linen, knives and forks, antimacassars, and china, as you seem to think. The trousseau is a girl's personal equipment, those things which she requires for her own use, not for the household. At the same time, articles such as you mention are usually provided by a fond parent, though they do not come under the heading of "trousseau."

A Tact Trifle.

"HOSTESS" is at home two days during the month, and generally has a good many callers. She asks my advice as to how to tactfully get out of the following predicament: She is engaged in a very interesting conversation with one guest, when a fresh caller is announced. Should she leave off the conversation and devote herself to the new caller? While this would be strict etiquette, would it not be rather hard on the person with whom she was talking, to suddenly leave her?

* * * * *

I think a little tact would soon put the matter right. On the new guest arriving, "HOSTESS" should exchange a few well-chosen remarks, nice and to the point, should see that tea was given her, and, if possible, that she was left talking to some other guest, and then return, with an apology, to the guest with whom she was talking. To leave the latter for any length of time would be in bad taste, though only too many hostesses offend in this particular, out of supposed adherence to etiquette.

Teaching Him Manners.

"JESSIE" is in sad trouble. She recently met "FREDDIE," to whom she took a great fancy. This she told her friends. Now, "FREDDIE," though a very nice boy, has the very slightest knowledge of good manners. Whenever "JESSIE" meets him she bows very nicely, but "FREDDIE" never raises his hat. This has gone on for such a long time that "JESSIE" asks my advice as to how to convey to "FREDDIE" his proper duty when meeting a lady.

* * * * *

Let "JESSIE" go out with her brother, or cousin, or male friend, and when next they meet "FREDDIE," and she recognises him, let her request her escort to raise his hat in a very conspicuous way. If "FREDDIE" does not see from example what is the proper thing to do, then he must be lacking in intelligence as well as knowledge of good breeding, and would scarcely be a nice man for "JESSIE" to wish to cultivate.

A Lover Who Won't Write Love-Letters.

WHAT is to be done with a lover who will not write love-letters? This is the trouble of "BLUE EYES." "I have known mine for eighteen months," she writes, "but as he does not stay in the same town as I do, and his business at times takes him further away, we do not see much of each other. When he is away, he seldom writes to me, and sometimes a month has elapsed without any news of him. I have asked him about this, but he only says he has not much time, and does not like writing love-letters. He seems to love me very much, and is most affectionate and loving when we are together."

* * * * *

Many people, "BLUE EYES," dislike committing their thoughts and feelings to writing. In many cases, this is because they have not the gift. It is usually a good sign, as we know how often a love-letter is a mere essay in beautiful writing, meaning little or nothing. The most deliberate flirts write the best love-letters, and often write them to many different girls. You should take consolation in the hope that all your young man's best feelings are reserved to be poured into your ear alone.

Should He Break It Off?

"A. C. A." (Brighton) writes: "For two years I have been 'keeping company' with a young lady, and honestly I say that I really love her. For a fact, I know she also loves me, and regards me as her future husband. But my future prospects are so poor, that I cannot ask her to marry me. Shall I be doing wrong if I ask her to think no more of me, at least until such time as I shall be able to woo her again? Her parents and mine know of our engagement."

* * * * *

I do not see why you need break off the engagement. Surely, if she loves you and regards you as her future husband, she will not mind waiting until your prospects improve? In any case, tell her the whole truth about your prospects, and leave it to her to decide as she thinks best. If she wishes the engagement broken off because you are too poor, then you should do so, but not otherwise.

A Speechless Swain.

"I HAVE a very awkward affliction," writes "SOUTH AFRICAN." "I cannot keep up a conversation with ladies, and sometimes have to sit with 'my mouth stuffed with teeth,' as they call it out here, and listen. I cannot think of anything to talk about—that is to say, anything suitable to ladies' society. I am twenty-three, and have not been very much in ladies' society."

* * * * *

This is a very frequent complaint, and often affects people who are far from deficient in brains. I think it often arises from the mistaken idea that ladies expect a special brand of conversation served up to them, that the speaker must be always sparkling, or intense, or something unusual, and that unless one can shine in this way, one had better keep silent. It is not really the case. A lady likes the man in her society to talk in the way most natural to him. Little daily adventures, troubles, experiences, opinions, anything, so long as the speaker is natural, are liked. Sometimes, if the speaker cannot do anything better, he should not be ashamed to make a remark about the weather. Silly as it may seem, perhaps the lady will make some comment which will enable the gentleman to start an interesting story or discussion. I have known the most delightful conversations—sometimes blossoming into very intimate talks—spring from some such remark.

Cynthia

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MISCELLANEOUS ADVERTISEMENTS.

Will be inserted in this column at the rate of 6d. per line of 8 words or part thereof. All advertisements should be addressed to Advertisement Manager, "Short Stories," 17 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., 11 days prior to date of appearance.

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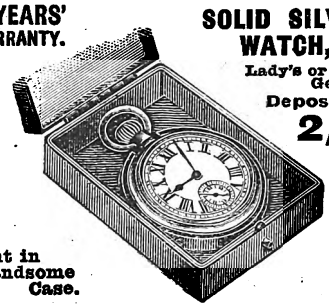

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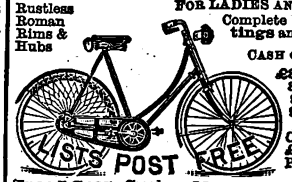

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SHORT STORIES

Down, down the stairs he rushed! He did not see the abyss at his very feet, and Lucilla was powerless to utter a warning cry.

(A Thrilling Episode from the Dramatic Story, "The Sins of the Fathers." See inside.)

No. 800. Week ending April 30, 1904.] [PRICE ONE PENNY.

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Short Stories

No. 800.] [One Penny.

For the Week Ending April 30th, 1904.

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS.

The Tale of a Deep-Laid Scheme of Revenge.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

The night was very dark. Even the feeble light of the crescent moon had been blotted out by great, grim masses of black cloud—sure heralds of the coming storm. The salt sea whispered weirdly, and the narrow strip of foreshore that separated it from the great cliffs hard by scarce showed the silver of its fine sand through the all-pervading darkness. Under the cliff stood a knot of men, talking in earnest whispers, and with heads close together. The deep, awesome stillness that heralds a storm made it expedient that their voices should be low. For the work they had to do demanded caution.

"They're late in coming," muttered the leader of the party. "Surely my information was correct."

He peered out to sea—a dark, determined face, with black eyes and square chin. But neither sight nor sound reached him. Minute after minute sped by, and still no sign of that for which they waited. But Preventive Officers were used to long night watches in those days, and Luke Rutherford and his men were regarded as one of the most vigilant and determined little bands along the coast.

A soft plash of muffled oars, followed by the sharp grate of a boat's keel upon the dark shore told the watchers their work was at hand. Each man looked to his weapons. There was a flash in the black eyes of Luke Rutherford that was not wholly due to his zeal in the service of King and Country. Another force was stirring within him to-night—a hope he dared not breathe to living man. Setting his teeth, he bade his men wait the signal of his first shot, and moved stealthily out from the black shadow of the overhanging cliff.

Four dark figures were bending low over the boat. No word was spoken. No sound broke the ominous stillness of the night.

As each figure rose erect some huge cask or bundle was lifted from the boat. But as yet no man moved. Each waited till his fellows had lifted their burdens from the boat.

Nearer and nearer crept Luke Rutherford, straining his eyes to catch a glimpse of the men as their faces showed through the brooding blackness. There was but one face of the four for which his dark eyes sought hungrily, greedily, revengefully.

Presently he saw it, and deliberately lifted his weapon to his shoulder. There was a flash, a cry of alarm from the surprised smugglers, an answering cry from the little band of Preventives in the dark shadow of the cliff, and—confusion!

Resistance was useless. The smugglers fled over the sand, pursued by the eager officers of the law, and amid a rattle of shots from the latter's rifles.

But Luke Rutherford remained behind. He had other work to do—work that was deadly, dastardly, fiendish—and he meant to do it.

Stepping down to the boat's side, he knelt on the dark sand by the prostrate figure of a man—the man he had shot. A bullet wound was in his chest—a wound that might or might not have been fatal. It was that doubt which Luke Rutherford meant to decide.

"Well," said he grimly, "so the time has come at last, Sam Snow! I warned you it *would* come."

The wounded man opened his eyes. He was a handsome young fellow, with a certain air of dash and recklessness that had won him the open admiration of many a fair inhabitant of Greycliffe. Even now, lying between life and death, the sound of a light laugh trembled on his lips.

"Oh, it's the fortune of the game," he said gaily, though the wound in his breast gave him great pain. "Besides, it mayn't be my last cargo after all, you know. I don't think it's incurable."

Luke Rutherford was reloading his gun. When he had finished, he let his eyes wander furtively around him. Finally they came back to the man on the sand.

"I'm going to make sure of that," he said hoarsely, and stood upright, his loaded weapon pointed at the man's heart.

Samuel Snow uttered an involuntary exclamation.

"In cold blood?" he gasped.

Luke Rutherford nodded.

"You hound!" muttered the helpless wretch. "Surely the law is satisfied!"

"Yes. But *I* am not."

"You!"

"Yes—I. For more than a year we two have had a hard and bitter fight for the love of Lucy Langton, and at last she has chosen you. I have never been thwarted in my life, and I will not be now."

There was a quick flash in the darkness, and the life of Samuel Snow, gay, careless, reckless, defiant, went out to

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meet the coming storm. Luke Rutherford moved away to meet the returning officers.

"I can easily account for the second shot," he muttered, "by affirming that he tried to stab me. He had a knife in his hand."

As he disappeared a dark form rose from the sand on the other side of the boat. It was the figure of a man, and came cautiously round and knelt down by the body of the dead man.

"So he killed my brother in cold blood!" he muttered hoarsely. "Well, *his* reckoning shall come too. And if my vengeance falls not on him, it shall fall upon his children in the time to come. It's lucky I dropped down unseen by the side of the boat, or this deed might have gone unrequited. Oh, that I had had a weapon with which to strike him to the earth in his cold-blooded, murderous purpose! But he shall pay the penalty. And if I find no way to avenge you, my brother, I will teach my sons to hate his sons, till some time the day of reckoning will come and you shall be avenged."

The sound of voices reached his ears and he crept stealthily away over the dark sand and was lost to view.

* * * * * * *

David Snow, house and estate agent in the town of Greycliffe, sat moodily gazing into the fire that blazed on the broad hearth in his well-furnished sitting-room. He was a prosperous-looking, middle-aged man—dark almost to swarthiness, and with a vague indication of something in his clean-shaven face that made him feared rather than loved.

The door opened and his son entered the room. A greater contrast could not have been imagined than was presented by these two. For Sydney Snow was fair, with frank, open brow and clear blue eyes. His cheery, genial smile was as ready as his quick wit and gaiety of heart. But to-day the world had gone awry, and a shadow saddened the generally genial face. His father noted the look and rallied him upon the fact.

"Why so sad, Sydney?" he said banteringly. "If I didn't know you better, lad, I should imagine you had been crossed in love."

Sydney threw himself into a chair.

"You've hit it!" he said, with an attempt at a laugh. "That's just the trouble. And the worst of it is, there's no help for it."

David Snow started. There was a queer light in his dark eyes that was not intelligible to his son.

"Who's the girl?" he asked shortly.

Sydney hesitated for just one moment. Then he answered the question.

"Lucilla Merton."

He was looking out of the window now, and did not see that the look on his father's face had deepened to an expression of bitterest hatred. And when he turned his head again the look had vanished.

"Ah," murmured David Snow, and the ejaculation seemed to come from between set teeth. "The fair guest of Mrs. Rutherford and her son Rex. Blows the wind in that quarter, my son? Well, I'm sorry. But don't despair."

Sydney made a wry face.

"That's the worst of it," he said, affecting a carelessness of tone he did not feel. "It's Rex Rutherford who has cut me out."

David Snow's dark face was now well under control.

"Quite so," he said coolly. "It's not the first occasion of the two families coming into collision. My uncle Samuel and his grandfather were rivals. The former was a smuggler, the latter a Preventive Officer, and—well, my uncle was accidentally shot one dark night down by the shore. My father was present, and he related the incident so graphically to me on his death-bed that I have never forgotten it. So once more the old rivalry springs up, and the feud is renewed! Truly history repeats itself."

He rose from his seat and laid his hand affectionately on his son's shoulder. The hand was firm and steady as a rock.

"Don't lose heart," he counselled. "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip, you know."

But Sydney found little comfort in the old adage, and, turning abruptly, he left the room. His father watched him as he went out. When the door had closed, his face again darkened, till its aspect was truly terrible.

"Not yet," he muttered, "not yet is the murder of my uncle avenged! But the hour is drawing near. I have waited—waited to see if I were destined to mete out justice to his race—the race of that cold-blooded murderer, Luke Rutherford. And Fate is answering me. Upon me the duty devolves. This rivalry is but a trivial thing, but a straw shows which way the wind blows. It is not for my son—though God knows how dear he is to me—that I take this duty to myself.

"My father made me swear that, should Fortune favour me and circumstances lead me on, I would avenge the murder of his dead brother. And now—now—all things point to the execution of that vengeance. I have plotted for it—schemed and worked to bring it about.

"The trump card is now in my hand. For Rex Rutherford and his mother live in the very house wherein my father and his men were wont to conceal their contraband goods. He deemed me a fool for letting the house so cheap. But he little dreams how significant was the apparently benevolent smile with which I answered his unspoken surprise."

He was smiling now. But the smile was not indicative of benevolence. The black eyes were flashing, the swarthy face dark with revengeful menace. But the white, strong hands were steady and firm. It was clear that, once imbued with a set resolve, David Snow was not the man to waver or falter in fulfilling that purpose to the very uttermost.

* * * * * * *

The Rutherfords were at breakfast. The household was a small one, consisting only of mother and son. Lucilla Merton was their guest, and Sydney Snow's suspicion that she was not wholly indifferent to handsome Rex Rutherford was not very wide of the truth.

Mrs. Rutherford was the daughter of the famous Preventive Officer. She had married a cousin, thereby retaining her name, but was now a widow. Rex was her only son, and she loved him with all a mother's fondness. Her eyes were not shut to the secret of the two young people—a secret which, as yet, had not been verbally confessed—and the knowledge pleased her not a little. For she loved this sweet girl almost as dearly as she did her own son, while Lucilla warmly reciprocated the feeling.

"Where are you young people going this morning?" inquired Mrs. Rutherford, beaming upon them in turn. "It is such a bright, sunny day that it seems positively sinful to remain indoors."

"Then why not come with us?" asked Rex.

But Mrs. Rutherford shook her head. Her intuitive sense of perception advised her to decline that pleasure.

"No," she said decisively, "I have so many things to do."

Lucilla looked up.

"Then let me stay and help you," she said.

But Mrs. Rutherford only smiled and shook her head.

"My dear," she said, "when you are as old as I am, you will have discovered that you cannot intrust certain little domestic tasks to the care of even the dearest friend in the

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world. It is the ultra-preciseness of mature years—and—and it is silly—silly and conceited. Yet there it is, and what is one to do ? "

She sighed with a comic assumption of injury, at which both Rex and Lucilla laughed.

"Well," said Rex, as the two ladies rose from the table, "I thought of taking Miss Merton to see the ruins of Dane's Castle. The drive will be delightful."

He turned inquiringly to Lucilla.

"Oh, that will be lovely ! " she said enthusiastically. "I have often wanted to see the old castle."

So Rex went off to see about the dog-cart, and in less than a quarter of an hour he was round at the front door, the reins in his hand, waiting for her to come out. She looked very sweet and charming as she stood on the steps by the side of his mother. One little foot on the step of the dog-cart, one little hand tightly clasped in his, and she was up on the seat beside him. His mother was smiling at them as they drove away, and the soft Spring air fanned their faces with its perfumed breath.

The drive was a long one, yet all too short. And when it ended, they wandered among the old, time-worn ruins and let their recollections glide back to old historic days, when the now crumbling castle was tall and stately and impregnable. But when they left the ruins and wandered out among the shady woods the present came back to them anew, and they looked into each other's eyes. The look was a revelation to both, and Rex stood still.

"Lucilla," he whispered, "is it possible ? Is there any hope for me ? Will you be my wife ? "

And Lucilla's eyes drooped as she breathed the answer :

"Yes."

Rex took her two hands and pressed them to his lips.

"Oh ! " he whispered rapturously. "And I thought you were getting to care for Mr. Snow ! "

Lucilla smiled.

"He was not so short-sighted," she said. "He is a nice young fellow, and I like him very much—as a friend. But ——" And once more she lifted those eloquent eyes to his face.

"And you loved me all the time ? " he persisted, drawing her nearer to him under the great shady trees.

Lucilla pouted.

"You are very inquisitive, sir," she said.

But Rex had caught her in his arms and was raining kisses on the red, ripe lips.

"If only you love me one half as dearly as I do you," he said passionately, "I shall be more than content."

It was dusk when the dog-cart took them home to Greycliffe. And once more the drive was long, yet tantalisingly short. For time flies quickly when love is near.

* * * * * * *

Once more the night was very dark. The lapse of sixty years had made no appreciable difference to sea or cliff. But to-night the wind was high and the rain descending in hissing sheets that mingled with the salt spray of the broken white surf and dashed against the rocky walls of Greycliffe. It was a night to seek the shelter of one's own fireside.

Yet one was out in that whirling tempest of wind and sea and rain—a man, fighting the elements, and groping his way along the dark wall of the cliff. Ever and anon he paused and touched with his hand the black rock beside him, as though searching in the dense darkness for something he knew to be there.

At last he touched a great square ledge, upon the soil of which grew a few stunted tufts of grass. The cliff was less perpendicular here, and he mounted the ledge, with his face to the wall, and felt still farther up for a projecting spur of rock. Finding it, he put forth all his strength and drew himself up by it till again his free hand touched something in the cliff side. An iron ring this time, concealed by rank grasses, and once more he drew himself up. Not without care had he studied the old map of the cliff handed down to him by his father.

Sixty years before many had whispered that the Greycliffe smugglers carried their contraband wares to a great cave in the cliff side. But none had ever discovered it, and the rumour had been discredited. But the cave did exist, and David Snow knew the track by which it might be reached.

Slowly and painfully he toiled up the steep cliff side, his hands bleeding, his breath coming in long, laboured gasps. For the lapse of years had made the access almost impracticable, and several of the cunningly concealed stepping-stones had been worn away. Still on he toiled, till he was some sixty feet above the sand below.

The face of the cliff at this point was jagged and torn. Great rocks projected out in shapeless confusion. Some were almost hidden from view by others set before them, and towards this mass of rock David Snow was steering. At length he reached it, and, lifting himself suddenly up, dropped among the rocks and disappeared.

"It's work for a Hercules ! " he said under his breath, as he groped with his hands among the débris between the great black rocks. "But I'm on the right track now ! "

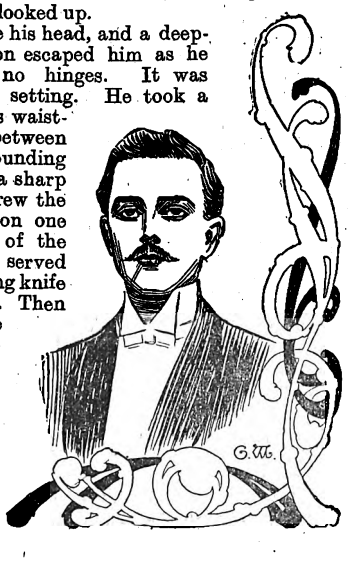
As he spoke, he lifted a square boulder from a hole in the ground—then another, and another, till a dark chasm opened at his very feet. Without a moment's hesitation he let his feet slip down this abyss. His faith in the veracity of his fathers left nothing to be desired.

A drop of ten feet brought him to the bottom, and he instantly kindled a small lantern which he had brought for that purpose. A narrow tunnel or cutting ran through the cliff and away from the sea. It was very shallow and he had to stoop to traverse it. The air, too, was fœtid, and once or twice he was almost overpowered. But he took a pull at the flask in his pocket, and, saturating a handkerchief with the spirit, he tied it over his mouth and nostrils.

On he went through the heart of the great cliff, till he stood under the town itself. The houses of the inhabitants were above him, and a grim smile crossed his dark face as he thought of them, asleep in their beds, and wondered as to what they would think could they but see him, the prosperous landowner, torn and bleeding, deep down beneath their very feet. Still on he toiled, holding his dark lantern high against the roof of the tunnel, till a great square hole opened above his head and he knew that his journey was now almost accomplished.

Extinguishing the light of his lantern, he returned it to his pocket and felt round the great hole above him for what he knew should be there. Yes, there it was—a roughly-constructed ladder of iron piping set in the wall of the well. Lifting himself up, he set his foot on the first rung. It stood his weight, and he began to mount. The rungs were far apart, and he counted them as he ascended. Eighty-two ! The ladder ended and he looked up.

A trap-door was above his head, and a deep-drawn sigh of satisfaction escaped him as he saw it. There were no hinges. It was simply dropped into its setting. He took a long, keen knife from his waist-belt, and thrust it up between the trap and the surrounding woodwork. There was a sharp rasping sound, and he drew the knife along the crack on one side of the trap. Two of the three remaining sides he served in a similar manner, his long knife rasping sharply as it went. Then he put one hand to the trap and pushed vigorously. It yielded, and, gripping the floor into which it had been set, he lifted himself up, taking care that the displaced trap should make no noise.



One violent effort, and he stood upon his feet.

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It was dark, terribly dark. Yet he knew well where he was. He was standing at the foot of the stairs in the hall of Mrs. Rutherford's house—the house of the smugglers, which he had let to Rex Rutherford at so ridiculously low a rental. The hall had been covered with stout linoleum at his own expense before the Rutherfords had taken possession of the house, and through this his long, keen knife had cut its way.

* * * * * * *

Lucilla Merton awoke with a start. A vague premonition of impending disaster caused her to sit upright in bed. The room was in darkness. No sound was to be heard save the tumult of the storm without. The household were asleep, and all was silent and still.

Yet something had seemed to rouse her from sleep and warn her of coming danger. What was that? She caught her breath and listened. A sharp, scraping, rasping sound in the hall below.

For a moment she hesitated, debating as to what she should do. The noise might be nothing, and she was loth to arouse Rex for fear this should be the case. He had a horror of the unduly-timid, ultra-nervous, hysterical sort of woman, and Lucilla had never been guilty of cowardice in her life.

Slipping noiselessly to the floor, she first lit the gas-jet in her room and then attired herself in dressing-gown and slippers. She would go quietly down to the hall and see if anything were amiss. She was not afraid of the dark, so took no light, and went softly down the winding stairs to the hall below. She heard no one stirring as she descended.

But someone was waiting for her—waiting in the dense darkness that hid her from view.

David Snow was standing by the hole in the floor, his foot on the lowermost stair. His quick ear had caught the sound of slippered feet on the stairs above. The footfall was a woman's—of that he was sure. What should he do? It might be Lucilla. If so, he must not harm her for his son's sake. Had she heard him? He frowned angrily as he saw all his plans thus complicated. Ten short minutes and he would have been in Rex Rutherford's room. And another knife, longer and keener than the one he had as yet used, would have descended over his victim's heart, and thus the murder of Samuel Snow would have been avenged.

Even now he must do it. But he must dispose of the girl first.

Nearer and nearer she came. He put out his arms. One step more, and she would have gone headlong into that yawning abyss. But his right arm was about her waist, his left hand pressed tightly over her mouth. To struggle in so firm a grip was futile.

With scarcely a sound he carried her along the hall, and, still with one hand upon her mouth, laid her upon the floor. Then he searched through his pockets and produced some cord which he had brought in case of emergency.

The girl was struggling violently, but he put all his weight upon her and she sank back exhausted. Then, in a flash, he slipped the handkerchief from his own mouth and bound it tightly round hers. Next came the two arms, which were even now striking at him in a frantic, desperate struggle for freedom. Close under the elbows he bound them, passing the cord round her slim waist. Lastly he bound the two ankles tightly together, winding the ends of the cord round the base of a great old-fashioned umbrella-stand that was screwed to the wall, so that she could not rise or even crawl across the floor.

All this was done in absolute darkness, and Lucilla knew nothing concerning her assailant.

In a vague sort of way, she attributed the presence of the unknown to motives of robbery. And she could give no warning to her lover! The thought maddened her, and she made one more desperate fight for liberty. The handkerchief slipped from her mouth. A cry was on her lips. But its utterance was checked almost instantly, and the handkerchief was drawn with painful tightness about the bloodless lips.

But that half-uttered cry had not passed unheard. The sound of a door opening in a room above caught the ear of David Snow. A few moments' breathless suspense and he heard another foot upon the stair. It was a man's this time, and the light of a candle flickered above his head. What should he do?

Reviling his ill-luck, he slipped his feet down upon the topmost rung of the pipe ladder in the well. Down, down he went, rung after rung, till he was out of reach of that approaching light.

Then he stopped and peered upwards to the mouth of the well, waiting, waiting, for what?

Rex Rutherford was turning the last bend in the stairs. In an instant his eye lit on the figure of Lucilla, bound and gagged, in the hall below.

With a cry of horror and alarm, he plunged forward.

Lucilla strove wildly to cry to him to stop ere it was too late.

Down, down he came, the abyss he did not see yawning at his very feet.

Lucilla's blood froze with horror, but she was powerless. One step—a cry—and Rex Rutherford went hurtling down the gaping well into the smugglers' tunnel.

But he did not go alone. He who openly defies the mandate of God and metes out vengeance to whom he will is in danger of a similar judgment.

Cold and grey dawned the morning. And when at last poor Lucilla Merton was found and rescued, the chilly horror of the long, dark silence that had preceded the dawn had bereft her of consciousness. But grief and misery do not long remain in abeyance. Strong, rough-mannered men shrank back in horror at the story she had to tell. Slowly they descended the yawning hole in the floor of the hall. It seemed an age ere they reappeared; and when they came they led her away, that she might not see their ghastly burdens. But later she slipped upstairs and entered the darkened room that Rex had left but a few short hours before. There he lay, his face so pale in its last, long sleep, yet with a smile upon it, as though a glimpse of futurity had been vouchsafed him ere he died. Mrs. Rutherford was sitting by the bed, her eyes swimming with tears. But at sight of Lucilla she rose, and drew the girl's head down upon her shoulder.

"My poor child!" she whispered brokenly. "We have naught in all the world now but each other."

Lucilla's lip quivered.

"God's will be done!" she murmured. "But it is so hard—so very, very hard, for—I—loved him so!"

So they comforted each other, there in the presence of the dead, whom both had loved.

And afterwards? Ah, that rests with the future! Sydney Snow, frank, kindly, generous to a degree, had also passed through the dark waters of tribulation. His father's purpose came home to him in a flash, and the shock sent him staggering to his room like a drunken man. But the years are passing, and time is patching up the wound it can never quite heal. Lucilla still calls him her friend, for her intimacy with him is not diminished because of his father's sin. The sins of the fathers have been visited upon the children. All the old hatred is dead. And who knows? It is better to love than to hate.

Walter J. Mowbray.

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That Obstinate Juror. . .

Telling how he Scored in the End.

A somewhat humble cottage in Canada it was, but picturesque, with odd little porches and with the spray of purple clematis clinging about them, where the butterflies all day long loved to unfurl their silken wings. In the little garden tall spires of scarlet hollyhocks stood up in brave ranks, and the grass was bordered thick with violets in the Springtime.

Mrs. Gordon felt very happy on this sunny June afternoon. It was the anniversary of her wedding day, and memory went back to that bright epoch in her life. She saw herself—a slim girl in her white dress—standing up before the altar, uttering with a very quick-beating heart the vows that made her John Gordon's wife.

"They always speak of happy brides," she thought, "but what was that happiness to what I feel now that I have tested and tried his love for six years? Dear John! He was my ideal then; now I know him to be the truest and best—a heart for mine to lean and rest upon.

And the little woman went about her task of gathering flowers to decorate her rooms for the day with infinite content.

She was not going to celebrate it by inviting anyone. Oh, no! It would be much happier for them to be alone with the little ones, to talk over old times, to sing the old songs, to recall the dreary days before they had met—were not all days alike dreary before that sweet time? To build castles for the future, to thank God at last for His infinite mercy, and beg His blessing on the days to come.

So little Mrs. Gordon, a very pretty woman—indeed, more lovely, John thought, than the slim girl who stood by him that day at the altar—danced about the house like a child, as she made it look as gay as possible for the festive occasion.

Aunt Zeph, who rejoiced in the festive name of Zephyrina, looked in, with an excessively gay turban on her woolly head. She had nursed Mrs. Gordon as a child, and felt like one of the family.

"Dat's a splendenferos flower-show, Miss Ju," she said, showing her white teeth; "but what I wants to talk to you 'bout is dem dar chicken. Did I understand you to say you wanted dem dar chicken boiled?"

"Well, won't that be nice?" asked Mrs. Gordon, absently regarding the damask roses she held in her hand.

"What, libed under my cookin' so long, Miss Ju, and talk o' boiling little young chickens—innercent little babies like dem!"

"All right, just as you like."

"Roasting is the properest manner o' cookin' tender young chickens, Miss Ju—and 'pears like you never would take any weight an' 'sponsibility. Here I's bin a strivin' dis six years to put dat ar gumption inter you—which is becomin' to your new sphere of action—an' now you talk of boiling. Go away."

"Well, you know, Aunt Zeph, I never shall learn while you rule—and no one can beat you."

"Humph! I reckon not. Dem chickens will be roasted—I know what Marse John likes."

"I believe it was your roasted chickens that captivated him," laughed Mrs. Gordon; "he knew if he married me he would secure you, and he couldn't do that in any other way."

Aunt Zeph looked very knowing, but a broad smile illumined her face.

"'Spec' he wasn't blind to the adwantages of de persition," she said. "Takin' you and me together, Miss Ju—we'se hard to beat."

And then, with a self-satisfied laugh, she left the room to superintend the cooking of the chickens.

Mrs. Gordon looked at the clock—her husband was late.

"And he said he'd be early this afternoon, so that we could take a long, lingering walk—a lover's walk," she said, with a little pout of the fresh red lips; "but, then, it's the anniversary of Mr. Ridgewell, too—the manager of the bank; perhaps there is some extra work, and John is always so obliging. They have been married twenty-five years. I wonder if we shall love each other after such a long time as well as now. But why not better?—and then Lil will be a woman and married perhaps, and little Max will have gone out into the world to fight his own battles—both my little nestlings flown. Oh, I can't bear to think of it! Why, there's John!"

Yes, John was coming down the garden-walk, and she sprang out to meet him. But before she reached him she noticed a troubled look on his face.

"You have not got a holiday face on," she said. "Now you must look exactly as happy as you did six years ago when you came for me."

"Must I?" with an effort at a smile.

"Something has happened, John," she said, nestling up to him, and putting her hands on his arm.

"Yes, my darling; the safe was opened last night and the bank robbed of ten thousand pounds."

"Oh, John, how dreadful! But don't let that spoil our evening. We can't help it."

"No, but——"

"But what? Have I not broken you yet, in all these six years, of stopping in the middle of a sentence?"

"I was going to say that—— How can I tell you, dear, you look so happy?"

"I shall be miserable now till you tell me."

"Well, you know there are two keys to the safe. I have one—Mr. Ridgewell the other."

"Yes."

"The natural inference is that one of those keys must have been used."

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"Well?" exclaimed the little wife, still blind to the drift of the thing.

"Of course, no one believes Mr. Ridgewell robbed his own bank, so, you see, the inference will be——"

The soft bloom paled on Mrs. Gordon's cheek, and she clasped her husband's arm as if she were afraid of falling.

"It can't be—that they suspect you?"

"I think so," faltered John Gordon, with some bitterness. "I fancied men looked askance at me as I came home. Mr. Ridgewell said, pointedly, before them all:

"'There are two keys. I suppose no one suspects me of the robbery?' and then there was a storm of negatives. I said, 'I have nothing to go on but my good name. I hope no one believes I am a thief?' And, oh, Juliet, I shall never suffer more, not even if it comes to going to prison, than I did during that dreadful moment while I waited for someone to speak up for me! There was a silence, and then someone said, 'It looks very black.' I almost expected to be arrested on the spot."

"Oh, John, I cannot bear it—on our wedding day, too," sobbed his wife.

"Yes, and it is *his* wedding-day also. I saw that they were making great preparations as I came past."

"You do not suspect him?"

"Certainly not; it is a mystery; it might have been opened with a false key."

Little Lil came in, splendid in blue ribbons and embroidery.

"Mamma, mamma!" she cried, "must Max catch a bee to get his honeycomb, and does he wear his honeycomb on his head, mamma?"

"No, no! Tell him not to touch a bee. It will sting him!" exclaimed Mrs. Gordon.

John had gone on to the flowery porch, and sat down with a glance at the little paradise where trouble and sorrow had never yet entered.

As he looked he saw it entering now. Through the little white gate came the village constable, Phil Weatherby, in a very reluctant manner.

He came towards the little vine-wreathed porch deprecatingly. He was a good friend, and never hated his business as he hated it at this moment.

He could not speak.

"Am I sent for?" asked John; and at the words his wife sprang to his side with a cry.

Weatherby touched his helmet to the lady.

"It's the worst job I ever did," he said. "I'd rather anyone would knock me down; but the plain fact is that you're accused of the Westport Bank robbery, and I've got to arrost you."

"All right, Weatherby; I know you're a friend," said John calmly.

His wife was sobbing and clinging to him.

"Don't, my love, don't!" he whispered. "You believe in God. Try to have faith that He will bring out my innocence."

Aunt Zeph now appeared with an important air.

"Dem ar chickens is jes' done to a turn, and dar's no sense in waitin' another minute, or dey'll spile."

"Oh, John, come and eat something! You have been gone all day."

John looked at the constable.

"Come," he said, "you can keep me in sight."

"There's no objection," said Weatherby, looking as if he would be glad to escape through a knot-hole.

"Won't you take something with us?" faltered Mrs. Gordon.

"'Twould choke me to death!" exclaimed the rough man, whose heart was in the right place

No one ate anything. John had merely agreed to go through the form for the sake of his wife, and to put off the evil moment of his leaving her; but, like all evil moments, it came at last.

The constable felt an uncomfortable dimness in his eyes when, after a close embrace, John Gordon put his half-fainting wife down on a sofa and turned to go with him.

"The law's a cruel thing," he said.

"Yes—and blind!" answered John Gordon, bitterly; "for a man's whole life counts for nothing."

* * * *

It was noon on the first of July—a hot, sultry noon, in the little bare, white-washed room to which the jury had withdrawn to settle the verdict. The men looked at one another as they came in.

"It's only a form," said one. "I reckon we're all of one mind. It wouldn't have looked well not to have come out at all."

"Yes, 'twon't take long," said another. "Let's take a ballot."

"Hullo," said the spokesman of the party, John Sawyer, a tall, lank, patent-medicine man, "here's a go. Well, Mr. Barton, ef you kin say 'not guilty' in the face of all that evidence, then the English language ain't got no meanin' for you."

Frank Barton smiled quietly. He was the only gentleman of the party, and was regarded with a little envy accordingly. He was also engaged to Ethel Ridgewell, the bank manager's only daughter. Still, on the jury he only counted one, and his vote was no better than another.

"Would you like me jest to give you a sighnopsis of them there argyments?" said Sawyer, edging up to the recalcitrant juror. "Jest to freshen you up a bit?"

"No," answered Frank coolly. "I heard them."

"An' warn't convinced? Phew!"

"I don't think Gordon's guilty."

"Why?"

"Oh, I can't say why, but I don't."

The men looked at each other. One began to whistle. Another took out a knife and a piece of wood, and commenced making a boat for his little boy.

Sawyer began scribbling on a piece of paper. He looked very gloomy.

"It's a boilin' day," he muttered.

"Yes, werry 'ot I calls it," said one, an Englishman working in the mills.

"I mean to say that at my establishment this is the day for boilin' the wonderful compound that I call the 'Life Prolonger,' and one of my apprentices has a conviction that morphine and soda is identical. If there's wholesale murder done in Westport, Mr. Barton, who's to answer fur it?"

Frank didn't answer. He was staring out of the little window where there was a glimpse of green fields and a bowery bit of woods in the distance. The room was like an oven, the black flies crawled languidly on the ceiling.

"Let's try it again," said one desperately.

Same result—one "not guilty" among all the rest.

"By Jove!" cried Sawyer in dismay. "I counted on bein' home at that boilin'."

"Have you got any reasons for standing out?" asked one. "It isn't nature to do things without a reason."

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"Well, I don't know as I have what you'd consider a reason," answered Frank, "but I have convictions. I think the man's innocent, and I cannot go against my convictions, you know."

The long, hot afternoon wore away. A soft breeze began to steal in at the little window. The hearts of the tired jurymen began to turn fondly to thoughts of home. It was more than human nature could endure to see that obstinate, unreasonable fellow sitting serenely by the window, and smoking a cigarette with such a placid expression. They were all getting angry.

"Look here, this is a downright imposition!" cried one. "Keepin' us all because you haven't the brains to take in evidence."

Frank's smile of superiority was maddening.

"A jury is generally selected for want of brains," he said. "How else could they get men who didn't have any opinion?"

Another silence, and then Sawyer said:

"I expect that Life Prolonger is drawed off now. Five hundred bottles, and who knows what mistakes them 'prentices has made; but I could still set things right if I could get home to-night. Of all obstinate critters, *you* take the cake!"

Silence for another hour, and then supper was served and they were locked in.

"Now, look here, you've got to hear that evidence agin," shouted Sawyer. "I can't sleep, and so I'll deliver the charge. If you don't like it, help yourself."

This was greeted with applause, and then Sawyer mounted the table and gave the whole case at length.

Frank resigned himself.

"Almost persuaded, eh?" asked one, when the agony was over. "Let's take another ballot."

Frank was very tired. The hot room, the uncongenial company were telling on him, and he might be roving along fragrant paths with Ethel. The moonlight was going all to waste, for they were not together.

Still he wrote "Not guilty" as before, and heard several smothered imprecations.

"Most audacious!" cried the Englishman.

"If you would give the least reason for your doubts," said another.

"Well, gentlemen," answered Frank, candidly, "it seems to me a man's good character might be a just reason for doubt; but I don't mind telling you one thing more."

"All right!" cried several.

"I happened to be passing Gordon's cottage the evening before the robbery. The windows and doors were open, and I could see the little family. They were at prayers. Mrs. Gordon sat with a pretty little yellow-haired lassie at her side. He held his boy on his knee. He has a fine, sonorous voice, and it was a still summer night. He was reading from the Bible, and as I passed I heard these words, 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'"

Frank paused. There was a silence in the company.

"I think a man who contemplated robbing a bank that night would not have read those words. Whenever I am tempted to think him guilty that picture of the family at worship rises before me. I believe he is a good man. I think him incapable of this crime, and I shall stand by my convictions."

There was a firmness about the young man's tone that gave the rest of the jurors a hopeless feeling. Day dawned and wore away again.

"They'll have to have a new trial," sighed the quack doctor, "and the sooner the better."

At night, when the food was brought, Frank found there was a basket of fruit for him, smuggled in by some special favour. His heart beat faster, for he knew it was from Ethel. There was a little note between the folds of the napkin which he managed to read while the others were dozing.

"My Own Darling Frank,—*I did not know you could be so obstinate. You make me afraid! I hear you are standing out against all the others. Don't you think it's a little conceited? Papa seems very angry about it, and says hard things. Oh, I hope this may not make him more unfriendly than he has been! He acts as if you were giving him a personal insult. But, my own Frank, I shall never let anything come between us, and I am glad—glad you will not act against your conscience. If you believe Gordon is innocent, stick to it, and believe that I will stand by you for ever—against all the world.*—"Ethel Ridgewell."

Ethel came out into the hall, when a rough-looking man addressed her.

Frank read this note over several times, and it acted like a cordial to him, in spite of the uneasy feeling it gave him to hear that Ethel's father was taking his position as a personal affront.

He was worn out with the discomforts of the time, but he took a new resolve that moment. Never would he have a voice in condemning an innocent man. He fell into a miserable sleep after that resolution.

* * *

There was a gay party in the Ridgewell's mansion that night. It was Ethel's birthday; albeit she had never felt less like rejoicing that she had been born. Somehow the atmosphere had felt heavy all day.

In the morning she had seen poor little Mrs. Gordon go by, looking pale and haggard, and it gave her a pang. Then when she had mentioned it to her

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father, he had stormed at her in an unusual manner, and had made some very disagreeable remarks about Frank, that had brought the tears to her eyes.

She hated to have any gaiety while her lover was shut up in those dismal precincts; but she was forced to superintend everything, for her mother was an invalid.

She could not help looking very pretty as she stood in the drawing-room to receive the guests. She wore a cream-hued brocade and pearls, and looked very charming with her blue forget-me-not eyes, and the soft flush on her cheek.

But her heart was far away from the scene, although she played her part very well. She was in reality with her lover in the dreary, whitewashed room, trying to realise all his discomforts.

At last the supper came, and as the gay couples filed into the dining-room, Ethel missed her father.

Her mother, who could scarcely endure the slightest extra exertion, had sought an ante-room for a few moments' repose.

A loud knock at the door startled her. Some very late and fashionable party, perhaps. She went to receive them, but no one entered. They seemed to be having words with John in the hall.

Ethel looked out.

"What is the matter?" she said.

A rough-looking man stepped forward.

"Sorry to inconvenience you, miss, but business is business."

"Well, what's your business?" she asked, with a fast-beating heart.

"It's with your father," answered the man.

"I was just going to look for him," said Ethel, "and if you will wait——"

"Oh, bless yer 'art, we've got this 'ere job; we must put it through!" cried his companion. "You know if he suspects he might run away."

Ethel stared at them in utter bewilderment, which the first speaker seemed to understand.

"Sorry to interrupt jollity, as I goes in fer it myself when I gits a chance. 'Now's the time,' I says to Jim, as the folks are at their grub, and we can do our little job without kicking up a row."

"But what is it?" cried Ethel, thoroughly alarmed.

"A little writ of arrest."

"For what?"

"A wery 'eavy defalcation, as they calls it"

Like an electric flash the truth was revealed to the terrified girl. She tottered back, and would have fallen but for the servant's help.

"Where is papa?" she faltered.

"I seen him go inter the library," said John; "but I wasn't going to disturb him for them."

"We'll have to disturb him now," said one of the men.

"I'll show you the way," cried the young girl, regaining her composure.

They followed her along the hall till she stopped at a certain door.

She hesitated a moment, her heart was beating so fast.

A man stepped before her and softly opened the door, as if to take the inmate unawares. Mr. Ridgewell did not seem to hear them. He did not turn his head. He sat in a great luxurious chair, and seemed to be leaning back in a comfortable posture.

"Poor papa! He is asleep—he little knows," thought Ethel, with a sob.

"Takin' a snooze," said one of the men to the other. "Sorry we have to break his little nap."

"Papa!" cried the daughter, going up to him and gently touching him on the shoulder.

He did not stir. He would not have stirred if the Tsar of all the Russias had been waiting to give him audience.

"Papa!" cried Ethel, grasping his arm.

"It isn't any use, miss. He's gone where there can't be no writs served. Look here." And the man pointed to a dark spot on the carpet, and a tiny crimson stream that stained the dead man's clothes.

The pistol had dropped from his cold hand, and on the desk near lay a sheet of paper on which he had commenced to write:

"My Dear Wife and Child,—*I am a coward, I cannot face ruin. I have been a victim to a mad speculation. Forgive me, if you can. Have Gordon freed. I am the criminal—my key opened the safe. I dreamt I could stave off the end, but it is in vain. May God forgive me for letting him suffer. Tell Frank I honour him now for his obstinacy. My Ethel, he will make you a good husband, for he is firm, not weak and unsteady, like your poor father. My darlings, do not revile my memory—do not——*"

Here the pen had fallen. Here the overcharged heart had overcome all control—and the end arrived.

And soon, like a flash of lightning, the news went forth. The jurors, like a set of glad schoolboys, thronged about their obstinate companion.

"If I'm ever up on any charge, may my jury be made up of men like you!" cried one.

"Allow me to send you a dozen bottles of the Life Prolonger," exclaimed Sawyer; "for I'm sure you'll see its merits, and stand up for it according to your convictions."

Frank Barton laughed, and left them as soon as possible. He longed to be with the poor girl whom he knew must be overwhelmed with grief.

John Gordon, in the meantime, was taken in a sort of triumphal procession to his home. Aunt Zeph did her best with a feast that night, but it was scarcely appreciated. The joy was as bad for their appetites as pain.

* * * * *

When Frank Barton clasped his beloved to his heart once more, he told her of another home to which he could take her at once.

"Oh, Frank, it would be too soon after——" and the girl's voice was choked with sobs. "And there is mamma."

"Mamma will come too," he whispered. "You must yield, for, you know, I am 'an obstinate man.'"

Helen W. Pierson.

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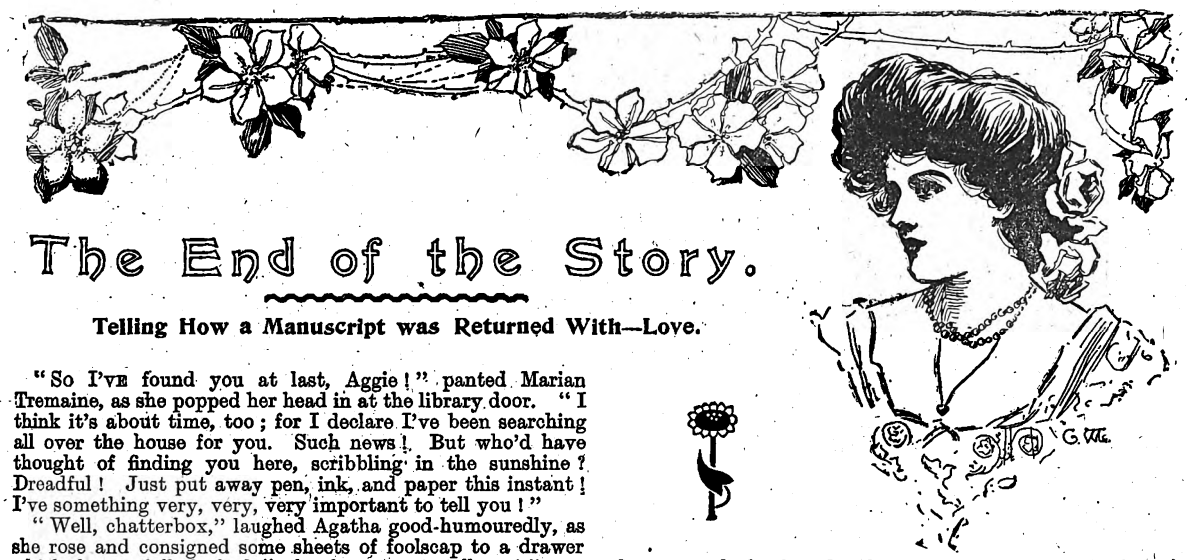

The End of the Story.

Telling How a Manuscript was Returned With—Love.

"So I've found you at last, Aggie!" panted Marian Tremaine, as she popped her head in at the library door. "I think it's about time, too; for I declare I've been searching all over the house for you. Such news! But who'd have thought of finding you here, scribbling in the sunshine? Dreadful! Just put away pen, ink, and paper this instant! I've something very, very, very important to tell you!"

"Well, chatterbox," laughed Agatha good-humouredly, as she rose and consigned some sheets of foolscap to a drawer which she carefully locked, "what have you to tell me?"

"Guess who is coming here to-day."

"An utter impossibility! I am the worst guesser in the world."

"Ah, you've got that old tale of yours running in your head, Now, confess! Aren't you thinking more about that just now than of what I am saying?"

"I really believe I am, dear," confessed the elder sister honestly, amused by Marian's acumen. "You see I was so enraptured with my heroine that I commenced writing my story before I had thoroughly thought out the plot, or even developed a hero; therefore I cannot prevent my unruly thoughts running on my work, although it is in the drawer, and out of sight. But, still, I'll try and forget it for the time being, dear, and be particularly attentive. What is your news?"

"Do you remember the name of Horace Rumsey?"

"No," after a few moments' thought; "I do not."

"Sure?"

"Nearly so. Whom does it belong to?"

"Why, you ridiculous old quill-driver!" tittered the other, "don't you remember that papa referred last Sunday afternoon to a young editor—a friend of his—of that name, whom he had, when last up in London, prevailed upon to spend his holidays here with us at Hazeldean?"

"I fancy I have some slight recollection of papa's remark," answered Agatha, with more interest than she had previously evinced; "but what of him?"

"He has just sent a telegram to say that he will be at Mortley Station at three to-day, so papa is going to drive over and bring him back. If you want to be a presentable young lady genius, you had better go upstairs to change your dress, and wash those nasty, inky fingers of yours in time for lunch."

"I will go at once. I shall not have too much time."

"Do."

Agatha was about to quit the library when her sister added:

"And, I say, Aggie——"

"Well?" said the elder girl, stopping short in the doorway.

"Don't forget to 'set your eye in a fine frenzy rolling,'" responded Marian with a mischievous laugh, which the elder sister echoed as she hurried upstairs.

The Agatha Tremaine who greeted Horace Rumsey, the young editor of the famous magazine with a popular title, and holding out a tiny hand, in a few well-chosen words, bade him welcome to Hazeldean, was, to outward appearances, a far different personage from her whom Marian had discovered earlier in the day, "scribbling in the sunshine."

There was not one spot of ink now upon those long, tapering fingers, and the broad, white brow, above which the rich brown tresses clustered in a crown befitting so queenly a woman, was no longer contracted in the pensiveness of thought. The smile which wreathed the bud-like mouth lent its sunshine to the entire expressive countenance, lighting up every feature with a quiet glory, as an aureole does the face of a pictured saint.

Horace, as he pressed the tips of her extended fingers between his own, and, bowing low, murmured a few words of thanks in reply to her cordial greeting, thought that he had never before, during his chequered career, encountered one so beautiful. Even the loveliness of the heroines of his imagination (for he had written romances) paled and faded away into nothingness as his eyes wandered to the pure face of this fair young English lady.

Agatha had just passed her twentieth year, and looked neither more nor less. Her figure was symmetrically perfect, her features were regular and exquisitely cut by Nature's master hand; she was, in brief, a woman whose charms of form and feature alone won the admiration of all who met her.

When we add that, besides her outward graces, Miss Tremaine possessed a highly-cultured mind, and the genius of rare and priceless abilities, it may be readily conceived how great an interest a thoughtful student of life like Horace Rumsey took in the discourse of his new acquaintance.

He thought her beautiful, accomplished, fairest of all women he had ever met, and his eyes expressed even more homage than his tongue paid her.

Colonel Tremaine, from his seat at the head of the table, narrowly watched his young visitor's face, and read therein how much the editor was fascinated by Agatha's beauty.

The old gentleman was very partial to Horace, although he saw him but seldom; and for some years had watched with much interest his career in the world of letters, in which his brilliant intellectual qualities had won him an exalted position.

Agatha's father would not, perhaps, have been sorry to see his darling allied to the young editor, whose tastes were so much in sympathy with her own.

"I wonder," thought Colonel Tremaine, as with an amused smile he overheard scraps of an earnest conversation between the two young people on a literary topic, which seemed so all-absorbing to them that surroundings were forgotten in their enthusiasm, "whether this first meeting will lead to anything further? Aggie is heart-whole, and very possibly young Rumsey's heart is in the same condition; for, busy men such as he have but little time for love-making, except when they take a holiday, like his present one. What if they both go falling in love, and eventually make a match of it?"

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"Ah, if they should! Stranger things have happened; haven't they, dear Colonel Tremaine?"

Marion eagerly questioned Agatha when they retired together that night.

"Well, how do you like him, Aggie? Does he realise your conception of an editor who decides the destinies of thousands of manuscripts?"

"He is," replied Agatha, delivering her decision with something of the gravity of a judge summing-up on a very important case, "the most gentlemanly and well-informed person I have yet had the pleasure of conversing with.

"He has evidently read much and studied more. Men and manners have long been subjected to his careful analysis, and his touches of description are so happy that he succeeds in placing before you in a few words a finished picture of persons he has met, whom you instantly seem to recognise and welcome by virtue of their striking likeness to others whom we rub shoulders with every day. He is truly an artist in speech, has a bright and happy fancy, is full of a sparkling humour; and yet is also a great and grand thinker. I am sure he must be a noble and good man, for I do not believe that one with a bad heart could talk in the exalted strain which he employs."

"Why, Aggie," cried Marian, who had listened in amazement; "how enthusiastically you speak, and how flushed your face is! Surely you are yourself infected with a little of our friend's grandeur of thought! Why don't you make him the prototype of some character in that story of yours?"

The half-bantering words struck on Agatha's ears like an inspiration.

"I will," she exclaimed with sparkling eyes, "Horace Rumsey shall be my hero!"

The succeeding week was a very busy one with Agatha Tremaine. She worked diligently at her story, and, true to her sudden resolution, word-painted a most faithful portrait of Horace in the fiction she was weaving, unconsciously investing the ideal with those splendid qualities which she daily discovered in the fine original. She felt strangely infatuated with her hero; and somehow he never seemed to her to be so perfect on paper as he was in reality; the feeling haunted her that she had left out of the picture some grand, distinguishing trait of the pictured.

Strangely enough all this time the girl shunned the presence of the real Horace instinctively. Some newly-awakened feeling within her made her grow cold and distant towards the young editor; some passion—was it intense liking or intense aversion?—but, whatever it was, one which no other man before had ever kindled in her breast, now dominated her.

She feared to meet the glance of his frank, searching eyes now; while the *tête-à-tête* conversation which had proved so delightful on the first day of their meeting seemed a terrible ordeal, to go through which again she would need Amazonian strength of will.

The library being a place much favoured by Horace Rumsey, who with almost boyish delight explored the forest of volumes of which Hazeldean boasted, revelling in their treasures of thought—some familiar to him, others seen for the first time, Agatha sought Linley Wood (about half a mile distant from Hazeldean), where, in the solitude of the summer mornings, she scribbled away at her story. The sheets of foolscap she filled assumed abnormal dimensions, and the story rapidly neared completion.

It was very delightful to sit here on a camp-stool beneath the green-garbed monarchs of the wood, whose topmost branches intertwined and made a delicious canopy overhead, shielding from the glare of the warrior sun, whose fiery shield threw glorious rays all around her as she wrote. The hum of the drowsy bees, the low ripple of little woodland rills, unceasingly flowing onward, the songs, varied as the emotions of man, of the birds in the trees around, all conduced to a dreamy languor and ecstatic sense of peace and quiet, greatly in keeping with the girl's thoughtful, poetic nature.

Agatha loved this wood—she loved its very solitude; for here her thoughts had free vent, they ebbed and flowed with the spontaneity of the rills' ripplings, the birds' song.

And all the time she wrote her hero's face was before her; the earnest, dark-grey eyes, the black, curly hair heaped in becoming untidiness on a head that might have surmounted the form of a hero of old, the finely-cut, pale features, the genius that shone out of the eyes and through that noble face, these were ever—ever before her now.

Sometimes she would lay her work down to wonder why Horace Rumsey's face so haunted her; why he, above all other men she had met, should have mastered, unknown even to herself, her thoughts.

Once, while pursuing this train of reflection, the thought came into her mind:

"Ah, well, he will be going soon."

Why was it, then, that a sudden pang shot through her heart, as though the thought had been a serpent, and had stung her? It was unaccountable—this feeling she had never felt before—this interest in one who a week ago was a stranger to her.

And yet, constantly as she thought of him, whenever she met Horace now she treated him as austerely and coldly as if he had done her an injury rather than unconsciously sat as the hero in her story.

At last the tale was all but finished. It was rather long, having already, in its rough state, filled some eighty pages of foolscap, and Agatha decided that one more morning in the wood would suffice to end it.

Several things, however, prevented this consummation for a few days.

An aunt and two girl cousins of hers came to visit the Tremaines, and Agatha had to devote her scribbling-time to them, until somebody else (in the shape of Horace Rumsey, whom our heroine thought unnecessarily attentive to Edith, the elder of her cousins), very obligingly took the responsibility off her hands.

It was very strange, but Agatha, when once more she resumed her seat on the little camp stool, and produced her writing materials, couldn't, for the life of her, proceed with that story.

She got wondering where Mr. Rumsey and Edith went, and what they did when they made excursions through the surrounding country together; not that that was anything to her—of course not, but she *did* somehow feel the want of the homage the young editor had formerly paid her, and which she fancied had strangely decreased since the arrival of Aunt Thrale and Agatha's cousins at Hazeldean.

Was it the pathos of the story she was longing to continue and could not, or the wind (there was a brisk wind running through the wood just then) that made a tear drop from her eyes and fall on the sheet of paper on her lap?

She looked down; the pearly drop lay right over the scribbled word "Horace!"

"You hateful thing!" she cried, all her wrath outpouring then, as she threw the paper from her on to the heap of manuscripts lying beside her. "I will write no more! I wish I had never started to write you! I wish I had never given you a hero! I wish I had never—never—never seen——"

She broke off abruptly, started to her feet, and rushed from the spot as if to get out of sight of the result of her labours. All the pride of her nature was up in arms to combat some unknown power that swayed her; her eyes were full of tears, her will entirely vanquished for the time being by the weight of some wondrous feeling of sad pain.

Why was it that her eyes were so dim and her heart was pulsating so wildly? Was it because Horace Rumsey was attentive to her cousin and not to her?

"What was he to her?" Agatha asked herself, "that she should weep because of his coldness—that her heart-throbs should attest how keenly she felt the loss of his homage? Nothing!" she decided after a long period of introspection, and she honestly believed it then.

She dried her tears, and had proceeded some distance in a homeward direction, when she bethought herself of her neglected, discarded story.

"What a shame!" she cried, stopping, and feeling very mean for giving way to that sudden outburst of passion. "How wrong of me to treat my poor tale so harshly! I'll

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go back and collect the scattered sheets, and to-morrow shall see finished that which my stupidity caused me to leave untouched to-day."

With that she retraced her steps. She knew every inch of the way through the wood thoroughly. She had rambled through it in the days of her childhood, and it had been a favourite haunt of hers ever since.

She soon found the spot where she had been sitting; but, alas! camp-stool and manuscript had all vanished as effectually as if the fairies of the wood had commanded their disappearance.

With the exception of Agatha, who was unusually quiet, even for her, the party assembled in the drawing-room of Hazeldean that evening was a very merry one.

Horace Rumsey seemed to be in excellent spirits. He told them quaint stories of editordom, of the queer letters he got from some of his would-be contributors, and of the young lady who sent him stories written on both sides of the paper, and across as well, provoking much laughter by the humour of his recitals.

Ever and anon he would look furtively in Agatha's direction; but she, with her eyes fixed moodily on the fire, avoided his gaze.

At length, however, he awoke her interest.

"I think the strangest event of all in my eventful career," said the editor, "occurred to-day. I suppose you don't any of you happen to be the possessor of a camp-stool and a fountain-pen."

Agatha's face grew flushed as the sky beneath an autumn sunset, and her head bent lower into the shadow as she heard. Horace continued:

"You see I was botanising in Linley Wood, where I chanced to stumble upon these articles. I also found some manuscript sheets of an unfinished tale on the sward. Thinking somebody less honest than I might come along and appropriate the tale and the other things before their owner returned, and being in a hurry to get back myself, I brought them all here, and if the owner is to be found I will most gladly return them. Being interested in things literary, my curiosity impelled me to take the liberty of reading it.

"I did not consider that I was violating any code of honour in so doing, a tale being very different from a letter or any manuscript of a private character. It is, I think, one of the most charming love-stories I have ever perused, being natural and fresh in its style—so different from the many shallow, tinselled, evanescent fictions which flood the literary market of to-day.

"It is written in a lady's hand, and the authoress, I am convinced, drew her characters from life. The earlier part of the work is the weakest, for therein the writer is apparently painting her love-scenes and the emotions of her heroine with difficulty; but later on in the tale she seems to gain power, and—even as though she had rested from her labours for a while, and in the interim fallen in love herself—to define her own emotions unwittingly, investing the love episodes with more lovely touches than any other part of the work."

"What is the matter, dear?" asked Marian, who sat beside Agatha, and heard her sigh deeply at this juncture.

"Nothing; I was only thinking."

"Strange to say," resumed the young editor, "I recognise the originals of the two principal characters in the story. The heroine, Miss Tremaine," turning to Agatha, and noting with surprise her heightened colour and excited look, "is, differing only in a few minor particulars, a very fair picture of yourself; the hero, were he but shorn of his superfluity of virtues, would be my unworthy self—in fact, my Christian name and that of the hero are identical. Now, I wonder——"

He paused, amazed, as Agatha, with a sharp cry, as though stricken with some sudden pain, rose, and hastily quitted the room.

The next morning when Horace Rumsey encountered Agatha Tremaine, the young man said:

"Pardon my boldness, Miss Tremaine, but your behaviour last night raised suspicions in my breast which your reply will dispel or confirm. Is this manuscript"—holding out a neatly-wrappered package, "your property, and also this pen?"

Agatha, with the one word "Yes," took the proffered articles from his hands.

"I fancied they were," said Horace. "And now, Miss Tremaine, I have one more duty to do, which is to—to bid you good-bye and to thank you for"—her face was averted from his gaze, for she would not let him see that her eyes were full of tears—"to thank you for your kindness—your great kindness to me during my holiday, which has been, without exception, the happiest I have ever passed during all my life."

She did not take his outstretched hand; she did not look into his earnest eyes. Her face was turned aside still, and she was conscious of a pain at her heart that was crushing—awful in its intensity. Never had she realised till then that to lose this one man's face from Hazeldean now meant losing the very light and sun of her existence. She felt she would fain have bade him stay—she knew not why, except that his compliance would make her inexpressibly happy, but she dared not put into words that which was in her thoughts.

Instead she attempted to answer him.

"I am glad to hear you were so comfortable, Mr. Rumsey," she faltered. "Good——"

But she got no further. Fresh tears gushed from her eyes, grief choked her utterance; and it was when she found herself in Horace Rumsey's arms, her flushed, tear-bedewed cheek drawn close to his broad, strong breast, and his lips many times pressing hers, that she read aright the secret which had been locked in her soul, and which she had never before understood. She loved him!

And he (who had loved *her* from the first day they met) had not dared to breathe a syllable of his passion to the woman he had deemed haughty, cold, and a stranger to any kinder feeling for him. Now, however, he learnt from her own sweet, shy lips that his wildest dreams were realised; that she did really and truly love her hero as fondly as ever woman loved man before.

"We have much to thank that story of yours for, darling," Horace said later, as, after having seen Colonel Tremaine, and formally solicited his eldest daughter's hand (with a very favourable result, if one might presume to judge by the young editor's proud, triumphant expression), the lovers sat together in the garden discussing their future; "for it was from that that I first learnt that Horace Rumsey was not altogether a nobody in your eyes. It is a charming tale, as I before said, but it is still incomplete. How will you finish it? Shall your hero and heroine (who so resemble us) end their imaginary courtship as we shall ours—in reality?"

"How shall we end ours, Horace?" asked Agatha archly.

"In matrimony, my darling!"

Two love stories—the real and the ideal—ended in that way.

John Adbury.

Edith: "If Jack Barlow were to propose to me I wouldn't know whether to say yes or no." Maud: "Well, don't worry, dear, I accepted him last night."

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THE FRESH AIR FUND.

What it Is. Why it was Started. What it has Done. What it will Do.

For grown up men and women great poverty is a misfortune, but for little children it is a tragedy, a sin against civilisation. They live in an atmosphere necessarily vicious. From the bright things of the world that stimulate great ideals they are barred.

There are no primrose springs, no wild rose summers, no autumns amongst the shocks of corn for the little prisoners in the slums.

If you had seen these little people on a torrid August day when the brick and stone are baking, and the foul air of the alley lies like a fog undisturbed by a breeze; if you had seen them on such a day nursing a withered flower, or feebly playing with old tins and bits of wood in the dried mud of the gutter, you would feel a sudden pity pulling at your heart strings.

The Fresh Air Fund is an organisation which has been founded to take these little prisoners of the towns out into the clean, wholesome countryside for at least one day in the year. It has been described as the cheapest charity, and this it certainly is for two reasons:—

1. The F.A.F. devotes the whole of the moneys subscribed to the purpose for which their donors intend them. There are no deductions for rent or salaries or postage, or the thousand and one expenses which make so big a hole in many other excellent charities. The whole of the expenses are paid by Messrs. C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., and by the Ragged School Union, which places its great organisation at the disposal of the Fund.

2. There is no charity in the case of which so little buys so much. Ninepence pays for a day's delight for a child. Eight pounds two shillings provides all that is necessary for the enjoyment of a complete party of two hundred children, with the needful complement of attendants.

As a broad rule, threepence pays for a child's fare, and sixpence more buys it enough food for two good meals.

Every penny subscribed is spent on those two wonder-workers—food and fares.

There are no distinctions of creed. Need and the improbability of any other holiday are the only qualifications.

The excursion parties of the F.A.F. consist for the most part of from 600 to 1,000 children, and three adults are allowed to every 100 of the little ones. This brings the total cost of the party of 600 up to £24 6s., but if anyone forwards a cheque for £8 2s., this being a sufficient sum to pay for 200 children, the day is known by any name the donor cares to select.

The F.A.F. may be judged by its works. During the past twelve years it has given one million and fifty thousand poor children a day amongst the woods and valleys, and the seaside. That is indeed an undertaking to be proud of.

It was started in *Pearson's Weekly*, and is now assisted by other publications issued from the same offices, and by the Daily Express, St. James's Gazette, Birmingham Gazette, and the North Mail.

With the aid of the practical advice of Mr. John Kirk, Secretary of the Ragged School Union, and the assistance of his Council, it succeeded the first year in giving a day's outing to 24,000 London children.

This wasn't half a bad start, and after one year more of work in London it was found possible to extend the scheme of operations to other large towns. First, 5,000 children were given a day in Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, and Birmingham, and then the scheme was extended, until it now includes the thirty-three biggest towns in the kingdom, and the two large districts known as the Rhondda and the Potteries. The towns are:

Aberdeen, Belfast, Blackburn, Birmingham, Bristol, Bradford, Bolton, Cardiff, Dublin, Derby, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Gateshead, Hull, Halifax, London, Leeds, Liverpool, Leicester, Manchester, Nottingham, Newcastle, Norwich, Oldham, Portsmouth, Preston, Plymouth, Sheffield, Sunderland, Southampton, Swansea, Wolverhampton.

In each of these places the excursions are arranged and looked after by a local committee of well-known ladies and gentlemen formed for that purpose.

Such has been the work of the F.A.F. in the past. As to the future it is in your hands. It is not a conspicuous charity; there are no great buildings to advertise what it is about. But all the same there is no more worthy charity in Great Britain. Quietly and steadily it does its work in the slums of the great cities.

There is no long list of expenses, no highly paid secretaries and organisers, no drain for printing and correspondence. Every penny subscribed goes to the children in food and fares; every penny not thus expended is supplied by the promoters, Messrs. C. Arthur Pearson Ltd. and the Ragged School Union.

Subscriptions should be sent to the Hon. Sec., F.A.F., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly* as soon as possible.

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Unsolved Love Problems.

No. XII.—THE TEST OF RUTH LAWSON.

A prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

Mr. Samuel Lawson, contractor and millionaire, but generally called "Old Sam," sat in his sparsely furnished office. He had finished his day's work, but the frown on his heavy but not unpleasing face showed that his mind was still occupied by some knotty problem.

"It worries me more than business that would bring me in a cool thousand," he muttered as he passed his hand over his brow and gave vent to a noisy sigh, "by Jingo, I'll have it out with him at once."

Even as he spoke a tall, slight, young man entered the room. He was strikingly handsome, with aquiline features, and a somewhat haughty carriage, which was modified directly he spoke by a natural courtesy that showed itself in his every word and action. He held a bundle of papers in his hand, and said:

"About this Nigeria business, what do you wish me to reply?"

"Oh, to-morrow will do for that," said Old Sam. "Knock off work now—I want to speak to you on a private matter."

The secretary seated himself, and awaited the old man's next words. After a silence he spoke.

"We've done pretty well this year, eh?"

"Very well!" he replied in some surprise.

"Touched the million again, eh?"

"Just passed it, Mr. Lawson."

The contractor chuckled, and again lapsed into silence. Cecil Lane-Fox awaited the outcome of this unusual beginning with some interest. Work had hitherto been the only subject on which they had conferred. What could he be going to say?"

"And my little girl will get it all. Not so bad for one girl, eh?"

Cecil answered in a matter-of-fact tone:

"She will be quite one of the richest heiresses in England."

The old man shot a penetrating glance at him from small eyes that were unexpectedly keen.

"It will be a lucky man who gets her."

Cecil assented, but was genuinely astonished when the speaker turned on him and asked suddenly:

"What do *you* think of her?"

A vision of Ruth Lawson, sallow, silent, insignificant, and dressed in execrable taste, rose before him, but he showed no sign of embarrassment as he replied:

"I think Miss Lawson is a young lady who thoroughly deserves her good fortune."

"That she does!" cried her father emphatically. "A better girl than my Ruth never stepped—not so handsome, perhaps, as her mother, but one as pays for dressing."

Cecil repressed a shudder at the "dressing" as understood by Old Sam, and with a vivid remembrance of the florid portrait of an unmistakably Jewish lady that had been proudly pointed out to him in the contractor's ornate dining-room as "My late wife," thanked Heaven that he was not called upon to express an opinion upon *her* good looks.

His employer spoke again:

"Look here, Mr. Lane-Fox, beating about the bush don't suit me, what I have to say is this—you are poor—you needn't look so 'aughty, you must be terribly poor before you'd 'a' consented to come and work under me—you are poor, but you've got good looks and a duke for your uncle. My girl is rich—rich enough to buy up your uncle, and she favours you (not that she says so, mind you, but I love her and I know. Now, what do you say to marrying her, my boy?"

Cecil was thoroughly astonished. The few times he had been to the contractor's house, he had hardly noticed his young hostess, though he had always treated her with the kindness and courtesy due to a woman, and he had not the faintest idea that she regarded him as more than part of the furniture of her father's office. His first impulse was to reply:

"Thank Heaven, I'm not so poor as that!"

But he restrained himself.

That very morning he had received a most unhappy letter from his mother. On his father's death they had discovered that the solicitor to whom the care of the estate had been confided had made away with all their money. It was then that, finding themselves almost penniless, Cecil had put his shoulder to the wheel, and endeavoured to make enough to keep his mother and younger brother till they could sell their estate and readjust their lives. Now he learnt that the money that should have gone to pay off an old mortgage had also stopped short at the solicitor's pocket, and the mortgagee was about to foreclose. It flashed on him what Ruth Lawson's money would mean—the mortgage paid off, the property improved, his mother comfortable and happy for her life, his promising young brother sent to Harrow, and he himself restored to his proper place in time to contest the seat at the next general election.

Mr. Lawson continued:

"Turn it over in your mind. It's an offer most young men would jump at, but it's an offer I wouldn't make to everyone. I like you, you're the real sort, and my Ruth likes you, and by Jove, I've bought her everything she set her heart on since she was a baby—so high—and I'm not going to let her get paler and thinner, eating her heart out, for want of a little plain speaking."

Cecil was still silent—could he do it? The advantages to everyone were plain, the disadvantages would only affect himself. Besides, why shouldn't he love her? He knew nothing of her, under her plain exterior she might possess noble qualities of heart and mind, at least she had never said anything that jarred on him, and as to her dress—well, she dressed at present to please her father, perhaps in future she would do it to please him, and anyhow, with a good dressmaker one could not go far wrong. Heaps of men married for money with far less provocation, why should not he? He would accept the old man's offer, determined that if it were possible that he would find reason to love the girl, but if that were not possible to treat her with every tenderness and attention, never ceasing to be grateful for what she had done for him. His was not the nature that could alone find

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happiness in love; ambition stood for much to him. The old man's tone, the terms he had used, all grated on him, but he had schooled himself to that long ago, and had ceased to let his employer's views or ways of expressing himself have any effect on his own mind or temper. Cecil was a man of character admirably suited to the career he had planned for himself years ago, namely, politics. Therefore he at last replied with dignity:

"I thank you for your very kind and flattering offer, and I shall be pleased to call on Miss Lawson to learn whether she is willing to accept me as a husband."

Old Sam heaved a sigh of relief. He had intended to impress upon the penniless young man the great advantages that would accrue to him by this marriage, but he found instead he was only delighted that Cecil had accepted.

"Thank you!" he cried fervently, wringing his hand. "Come to dinner to-morrow night, and fix it up with my girl afterwards."

Cecil accepted the invitation rather stiffly.

That evening Ruth was surprised at her father's jovial mood, but still more astonished was she at what he said to her in the library (so-called) after dinner.

"Ruth, my girl, would you like to get married?"

Ruth's pale face flushed all over as she replied shrinking: "Oh, no, father, why should I?"

He looked at her for a moment, and then laughed.

"Now, I warrant you think I'm going to propose young Moss, or Dan Lewison—proper enough young men, too—but not your sort, eh?"

He seemed almost to be enjoying her confusion.

"What would you say, now, to that young aristocrat, Cecil Lane-Fox?" His tone was triumphant.

"Mr. Lane-Fox?" she stammered, going as pale as she had before been red. "Did he—did he——"

"No, he didn't exactly," replied her father. "I saw how it was with you, and I've never yet seen you want anything that I didn't try to get for you, so I just suggested, you know, and he is coming to-morrow evening to ask you himself."

"Oh, father," she murmured, white to the lips, "did he say that he loved me?"

"I can't say that he did," replied her father ruefully, "but then I didn't think to ask him. I put it to him as a business proposition, and he accepted."

Now Ruth appeared in a new light, with her eyes blazing; she said bitterly:

"You bought him as you would have bought me a diamond necklace, I suppose."

"Why, Ruth, girl!" cried her father, looking at her in astonishment. "What's come over you? I thought you'd be so pleased and happy."

In Ruth's gentle nature, resentment had no fast hold. Whatever her father had done, it was from love for her, so, kissing him, she said:

"You are a dear, kind father, and no one will ever love me as you do," and then she fled from the room.

Poor Ruth probed her wound to its depth.

"Have I worn my heart on my sleeve so openly?" And then as she remembered the many evenings when she had (so adroitly, as she thought) led the conversation to the subject of the young secretary, she confessed to herself that she ought to have known that her father, who owed his success to his ability to guess what people were trying to conceal, would soon penetrate that secret she had thought so safely hidden at the bottom of her heart.

Never for one moment did she imagine that Cecil loved her. Did she blame him that he was willing to sell himself? No, "the king could do no wrong." She knew he would bring to the marriage more than enough to equalise her one advantage of money.

Would he through her deep and tender love learn to love her also? Or would the strain become intolerable?

Should she aim at this dazzling happiness knowing that if she failed it would be the direst misery?

What answer should she give him on the morrow?

L. Hughes.

A Golden Guinea Offered.

Would you like to win a guinea in a most simple way? No doubt you would, and you have your opportunity to do so now.

This is the way by which you can try to make yourself one guinea the richer. On the previous page appears a story, entitled "The Test of Ruth Lawson." Read the story, and you will find that at its conclusion the lady in the piece is confronted with a problem which she finds very difficult to solve.

Imagine yourself in her shoes. What would *you* do? What course do you think Ruth Lawson should decide upon?

I offer a prize of one guinea to the reader who sends me what I consider to be the most sensible advice to her under the circumstances.

Replies must not exceed one hundred words, and should be written on one side of the paper only.

My decision as to the winner will be final. Envelopes should be addressed to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.," with "Twelfth Love Problem" marked in the top left-hand corner.

All replies must reach these offices by first post Friday morning, May 6th. None arriving after this time will be considered.

A Love Problem and a Parallel Case.

"E. M." writes me as follows:

"Dear Sir,—*Your Unsolved Love Problem, 'Brian Cresswell's Choice,' particularly appeals to me by reason of its being so like my own case some years ago. In my case, however, my wife was then a nurse (and not a ward) of the scoundrel who wanted to marry her, and who persuaded me to become his patient when there was nothing the matter with me, and who told me I should never get away from him alive, unless I resigned all thoughts of winning his young nurse. Other doctors have since told me that it was a wonder that both of us ever got away from him alive, for not long afterwards he was proved to be insane, and was sent to an asylum where he is likely to remain for the rest of his days.*"

I am glad to hear that "E. M." got out of his dilemma successfully, and that he and the bride he had such a difficulty to win are perfectly happy. Perhaps some of my other readers may have also found that the course of true love does not run smoothly. If so, I should be glad to hear of their experiences, for I have always a ready ear for the personal stories of my subscribers.

An Appeal for the Little Ones.

Perhaps you do not know the history of the Fresh Air Fund, of the good it is striving successfully to do, of the manner in which thousands of poor little slum-bred children are being afforded a day of heavenly bliss. If you do not, turn to page 556, and read what thereon is written. It cannot fail to interest you; it cannot fail to touch your heart.

Your Editor.

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YOU CAN START THIS SPLENDID SERIAL TO-DAY.

A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

Mr. Theodore Racksole, American multi-millionaire, arrives at the Grand Babylon Hotel, and in consequence of an altercation with Jules, the all-important head waiter, he purchases the hotel for £400,000, with the intention of dismissing Jules from the staff.

Reginald Dimmock, English companion to Prince Aribert of Posen, dines the same evening with Racksole, who suspects that there is some sort of secret understanding between the young equerry and Jules.

The millionaire that night retires to bed very late, and is greatly surprised to see the waiter emerge from a room which he believes to be occupied by his daughter Nella.

Investigating the matter, Racksole finds that Dimmock is inhabiting the rooms, he having volunteered to change apartments with Nella, as a window of those she had intended to occupy had been broken by a stone flung from the outside. The millionaire accepts the explanation, although the circumstances of the case worry him considerably.

The next morning he learns that Miss Spencer, the bureau clerk, has left the hotel during the night, without giving any warning whatsoever.

Racksole dismisses Jules the first thing in the morning, forbidding him to enter the hotel again. Prince Aribert of Posen arrives, and Nella recognises him as a gentleman she has met in Paris as "Count Steenbock."

Dimmock is seen to drop dead in the quadrangle of the hotel. The cause of death is mysterious. More mysterious still is the way in which Dimmock's dead body disappears during the night—a coincidence being that Racksole discovers Jules in the hotel precincts.

The affair is kept very quiet, and does not leak out into the newspapers.

Prince Aribert is in great grief, and tells Nella that he has been informed that his nephew, Prince Eugen, the hereditary Grand Duke of Posen, who is almost of an age with himself, has disappeared in Ostend or the neighbourhood. Aribert imagines that Eugen is the victim of a plot, and decides to return to the Continent at once.

On the morning following the Prince's departure, Miss Spencer comes to the Grand Babylon disguised as the Baroness Zerlinski. Nella, suspicious of the woman's manner, watches her, and sees her take a note out of a cream puff that is served to her at lunch.

Suddenly the identity of the Baroness as Miss Spencer strikes Nella. Discovering that she has set out for Ostend, Nella decides to follow her, and tracks her to a house in that town. Boldly confronting Miss Spencer with a revolver, she learns various important facts about the Dimmock mystery; but by a trick, Miss Spencer eventually bests Nella.

The latter faints, and, awakening, finds herself on board a yacht.

Jules, otherwise Mr. Tom Jackson, is approaching her.

The erstwhile waiter tells Nella that he has her in his power, but that he will release her if she consents to marry him.

Nella boldly refuses, and suddenly a figure springs out of a dinghy a few feet away and knocks Jules down. It is Prince Aribert!

A Mr. Sampson Levi, stockbroker, seeks an interview with Theodore Racksole at the Grand Babylon. The two men are attracted to one another, and exchange confidences. Racksole tells the stockbroker of the occurrences at the hotel, and Mr. Sampson Levi explains how he had an appointment with Prince Eugen in order to arrange the terms of a State loan. The Prince was wishing to marry Princess Anna of Eckstein-Schwartzburg, but could not do so until he had paid off his debts, amounting to one million pounds.

The disappearance of the Prince had complicated matters considerably, for the day had arrived when the money was to be paid over. If Prince Eugen did not appear he could not have the money.

Suddenly an idea strikes Racksole. Another pauper prince might be wishing to marry Princess Anna, and therefore it would be to his interests to stop the loan. Hence, perhaps, the solution to the disappearance of Prince Eugen.

That night Racksole discovers Rocco engaged in a mysterious operation in the State bathroom on—the body of Reginald Dimmock!

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THIS WEEK'S INSTALMENT.

FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.
Rocco Answers Some Questions.

Rocco turned round with the swiftness of a startled tiger, and gave Theodore Racksole one long, piercing glance.

"*You!*" said Rocco, with as pure an Anglo-Saxon accent and intonation as Racksole himself could have accomplished.

The most extraordinary thing about the situation was that at this juncture Theodore Racksole did not know what to say. He was so dumfounded by the affair, and especially by Rocco's absolute and sublime calm, that both speech and thought failed him.

"I give in," said Rocco. "From the moment you entered this hotel I was afraid of you. I told Jules I was afraid of you. I knew there would be trouble with a man of your kidney, and I was right; confound it! I tell you I give in. I know when I'm beaten. I've got no revolver and no weapon of any kind. I surrender. Do what you like."

And with that Rocco sat down on a chair. It was magnificently done. Only a truly great man could have done it. Rocco actually kept his dignity.

For answer, Racksole walked slowly into the vast apartment, seized a chair, and, dragging it up to Rocco's chair, sat down opposite to him. Thus they faced each other, their knees almost touching, both in evening dress. On Rocco's right hand was the bed, with the body of Reginald Dimmock. On Racksole's right hand, and a little behind him, was the marble washstand, still littered with Rocco's implements. The electric light shone on Rocco's left cheek, leaving the other side of his face in shadow. Racksole tapped him on the knee twice.

"So you're another Englishman masquerading as a foreigner in my hotel," Racksole remarked, by way of commencing the interrogation.

"I'm not," answered Rocco quietly. "I'm a citizen of the United States."

"The dickens you are!" Racksole exclaimed.

"Yes, I was born at West Orange, New Jersey State. I call myself an Italian because it was in Italy that I first made a name as a *chef*—at Rome. It is better for a great *chef* like me to be a foreigner. Imagine a great *chef* named Elihu P. Rucker. You can't imagine it, Mr. Racksole. I defy you to imagine it. I changed my nationality for the same reason that my friend and colleague, Jules, otherwise Mr. Jackson, changed his."

"So Jules is your friend and colleague, is he?"

"He was, but from this moment he is no longer. I began to disapprove of his methods no less than a week ago, and my disapproval will now take an active form."

"Will it?" said Racksole. "I calculate it just won't, Mr. Elihu P. Rucker, citizen of the United States. Before you are very much older you'll be in the kind hands of the police, and your activities, in no matter what direction, will come to an abrupt conclusion."

"It is possible," sighed Rocco.

"In the meantime, I'll ask you one or two questions for my own private satisfaction. You've acknowledged that the game is up, and so you may as well answer them with as much candour as you feel yourself capable of. See?"

"I see," replied Rocco calmly, "but I guess I can't answer all questions. I'll do what I can."

"Well," said Racksole, clearing his throat, "what's the scheme all about? Tell me in a word."

"Not in a thousand words. It isn't my secret, you know."

"Why was poor little Dimmock poisoned?" The millionaire's voice softened as he looked for an instant at the remains of the unfortunate young man.

"I don't know," said Rocco. "I don't mind informing you that I objected to that part of the business. I wasn't made aware of it till after it was done, and then I tell you it got my dander up considerable."

"You mean to say you don't know why Dimmock was done to death?"

"I mean to say I couldn't see the sense of it. Of course he—er—died, because he sort of cried off the scheme, having previously taken a share in it. I don't mind saying that much, because you probably guessed if for yourself. But I solemnly state that I have a conscientious objection to murder."

"Then it was murder?"

"It was a kind of murder," Rocco admitted.

"Who did it?"

"Unfair question," said Rocco.

"Who else is in this precious scheme besides Jules and yourself?"

"Don't know, on my honour."

"Well, then, tell me this. What have you been doing to Dimmock's body?"

"How long were you in that bath-room?" Rocco parried, with sublime impudence.

"Don't question me, Mr. Rucker," said Theodore Racksole. "I feel very much inclined to break your back across my knee. Therefore I advise you not to irritate me. What have you been doing to Dimmock's body?"

"I've been embalming it."

"Em—balming it."

"Certainly; Richardson's system of arterial fluid injection, as improved by myself. You weren't aware that I included the art of embalming among my accomplishments. Nevertheless, it is so."

"But why?" asked Racksole, more mystified than ever. "Why should you trouble to embalm the poor chap?"

"Can't you see? Doesn't it strike you? That body has to be taken care of. It contains, or, rather, it did contain, very serious evidence against some person or persons unknown to the police. It may be necessary to move it about from place to place. A body can't be hidden for long; it betrays itself. One couldn't throw it into the Thames, for it would have been found inside twelve hours. One couldn't bury it—it wasn't safe. The only thing was to keep it handy and movable, ready for emergencies. I needn't inform you that, without embalming, you can't keep a dead body handy and movable for more than four or five days. It's the kind of thing that won't keep. And so it was suggested that I should embalm it, and I did. Mind you, I still objected to the murder, but I couldn't go back on a colleague, you understand. You do understand that, don't you? Well, here you are, and here it is, and that's all."

Rocco leant back in his chair as though he had said everything that ought to be said. He closed his eyes to indicate that so far as he was concerned the conversation was also closed. Theodore Racksole stood up.

"I hope," said Rocco, suddenly opening his eyes, "I hope you'll call in the police without any delay. It's getting late, and I don't like going without my night's rest."

"Where do you suppose you'll get your night's rest?" Racksole asked.

"In the cells, of course. Haven't I told you I know when I'm beaten. I'm not so blind as not to be able to see that there's at any rate a *prima facie* case against me. I expect I shall get off with a year or two's imprisonment as accessory after the fact—I think that's what they call it. Anyhow, I shall be in a position to prove that I am not implicated in the murder of this unfortunate nincompoop." He pointed, with a strange, scornful gesture of his elbow, to the bed. "And now, shall we go? Everyone is asleep, but there will be a policeman within call of the watchman in the portico. I am at your service. Let us go down together, Mr. Racksole. I give you my word to go quietly."

"Stay a moment," said Theodore Racksole curtly; "there is no hurry. It won't do you any harm to forego another hour's sleep, especially as you will have no work to do to-morrow. I have one or two more questions to put to you."

"Well?" Rocco murmured, with an air of tired resignation, as if to say, "What must be must be."

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"Where has Dimmock's body been during the last three or four days, since he —died?"

"Oh!" answered Rocco, apparently surprised at the simplicity of the question. "It's been in my room, and one night it was on the roof; once it went out of the hotel as luggage, but it came back the next day as a case of Demerara sugar. I forget where else it has been, but it's been kept perfectly safe and treated with every consideration."

"And who contrived all these manœuvres?" asked Racksole as calmly as he could.

"I did. That is to say, I invented them and I saw that they were carried out. You see, the suspicions of your police obliged me to be particularly spry."

"And who carried them out?"

"Ah! that would be telling tales. But I don't mind assuring you that my accomplices were innocent accomplices. It is absurdly easy for a man like me to impose on underlings — absurdly easy."

"What did you intend to do with the body ultimately?"

Racksole pursued his inquiry with immovable countenance.

"Who knows?" said Rocco, twisting his beautiful moustache. "That would have depended on several things—on your police, for instance. But probably in the end we should have restored this mortal clay"—again he jerked his elbow—"to the man's sorrowing relatives."

"Do you know who the relatives are?"

"Certainly. Don't you? If you don't I need only hint that Dimmock had a Prince for his father."

"It seems to me," said Racksole, with cold sarcasm, "that you behaved rather clumsily in choosing this bedroom as the scene of your operations."

"Not at all," said Rocco. "There was no other apartment so suitable in the whole hotel. Who would have guessed that anything was going on here? It was the very place for me."

"I guessed," said Racksole succinctly.

"Yes, you guessed, Mr. Racksole. But I had not counted on you. You are the only smart man in the business. You are an American citizen, and I hadn't reckoned to have to deal with that class of person."

"Apparently I frightened you this afternoon?"

"Not in the least."

"You were not afraid of a search?"

"I knew that no search was intended. I knew that you were trying to frighten me. You must really credit me with a little sagacity and insight, Mr. Racksole. Immediately you began to talk to me in the kitchen this afternoon I felt you were on the track. But I was not frightened. I merely decided that there was no time to be lost—that I must act quickly. I did act quickly, but, it seems, not quickly enough. I grant that your rapidity exceeded mine. Let us go downstairs, I beg."

Rocco rose and moved towards the door. With an instinctive action Racksole rushed forward and seized him by the shoulder.

"No tricks!" said Racksole. "You're in my custody, and don't forget it."

Rocco turned on his employer a look of gentle, dignified scorn.

"Have I not informed you," he said, "that I have the intention of going quietly?"

Racksole felt almost ashamed for the moment. It flashed across him that a man can be great, even in crime.

"What an ineffable fool you were," said Racksole, stopping him at the threshold, "with your talents, your unique talents, to get yourself mixed up in an affair of this kind. You are ruined. And, by Jove! you were a great man in your own line."

"Mr. Racksole," said Rocco very quickly, "that is the truest word you have spoken this night. I was a great man in my own line. And I am an ineffable fool. Alas!" He brought his long arms to his sides with a thud.

"Why did you do it?"

"I was fascinated—fascinated by Jules. He, too, is a great man. We had great opportunities, here in the Grand Babylon. It was a great game. It was worth the candle. The prizes were enormous. You would admit these things yourself if you knew the facts. Perhaps some day you will know them, for you are a fairly clever person at getting to the root of a matter. Yes, I was blinded, hypnotised."

"And now you are ruined."

"Not ruined, not ruined. Afterwards, in a few years, I shall come up again. A man of genius like me is never ruined till he is dead. Genius is always forgiven. Suppose I am sent to prison. When I emerge I shall be no gaol-bird. I shall be Rocco—the great Rocco. And half the hotels in Europe will invite me to join them."

With the swiftness of lightning Rocco shut the iron screen. Theodore Racksole was a prisoner!

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"Let me tell you, as man to man, that you have achieved your own degradation. There is no excuse."

"I know it," said Rocco. "Let us go."

Racksole was distinctly and notably impressed by this man—by this master spirit to whom he was to have paid a salary at the rate of three thousand pounds a year. He even felt very sorry for him. And so, side by side, the captor and the captured, they passed into the vast deserted corridor of the hotel. Rocco stopped at the grating of the first lift.

"It will be locked," said Racksole. "We must use the stairs to-night."

"But I have a key. I always carry one," said Rocco, and he pulled one out of his pocket, and, unfastening the iron screen, pushed it open. Racksole smiled at his readiness and aplomb.

"After you," said Rocco, bowing in his finest manner, and Racksole stepped into the lift.

With the swiftness of lightning Rocco pushed forward the iron screen, which locked itself automatically. Theodore Racksole was hopelessly a prisoner within the lift, while Rocco stood free in the corridor.

"Good-bye, Mr. Racksole," he remarked suavely, bowing again, lower than before. "Good-bye; I hate to take a mean advantage of you in this fashion, but really you must allow that you have been very simple. You are a clever man, as I have already said, up to a certain point. It is past that point that my own cleverness comes in. Again, good-bye. After all, I shall have no rest to-night, but perhaps even that will be better than sleeping in a police cell. If you make a great noise you may wake someone and ultimately get released from this lift. But I advise you to compose yourself, and wait till morning. It will be more dignified. For the third time, good-bye."

And with that Rocco, without hastening, walked down the corridor and so out of sight.

Racksole said never a word. He was too disgusted with himself to speak. He clenched his fists, and put his teeth together, and held his breath. In the silence he could hear the dwindling sound of Rocco's footsteps on the thick carpet.

It was the greatest blow of Racksole's life.

The next morning the high-born guests of the Grand Babylon were aroused by a rumour that by some accident the millionaire proprietor of the hotel had remained all night locked up in the lift. It was also stated that Rocco had quarrelled with his new master and incontinently left the place. A duchess said that Rocco's departure would mean the ruin of the hotel, whereupon her husband advised her not to talk nonsense.

As for Racksole, he sent a message for the detective in charge of the Dimmock affair, and bravely told him the happenings of the previous night. The narration was a decided ordeal to a man of Racksole's temperament.

"A strange story!" commented Detective Marshall, and he could not avoid a smile. "The climax was unfortunate, but you have certainly got some valuable facts."

Racksole said nothing.

"I myself have a clue," added the detective. "When your message arrived I was just coming up to see you. I want you to accompany me to a certain spot not far from here. Will you come, now, at once?"

"With pleasure," said Racksole.

At that moment a page entered with a telegram. Racksole opened it and read: "Please come instantly. Nella. Hotel Wellington, Ostend."

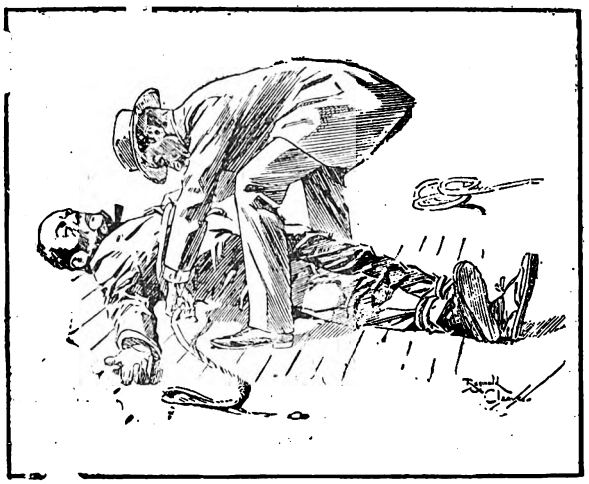
He looked at his watch.

"I can't come," he said to the detective. "I'm going to Ostend."

"But, really, Mr. Racksole," protested the detective. "My business is urgent."

"So's mine," said Racksole.

In ten minutes he was on his way to Victoria Station.



The Prince made Jules secure.

FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

End of the Yacht Adventure.

We must now return to Nella Racksole and Prince Aribert of Posen on board the yacht without a name. The Prince's first business was to make Jules, otherwise Mr. Tom Jackson, perfectly secure by means of several pieces of rope. Although Mr. Jackson had been stunned into a complete unconsciousness, and there was a contused wound under his ear, no one could say how soon he might not come to himself and get very violent. So the Prince, having tied his arms and legs, made him fast to a stanchion.

"I hope he won't die," said Nella.

"The Mr. Jacksons of this world," said Prince Aribert sententiously, "never die till they are hanged. By-the-way, I wonder how it is that no one has interfered with us. Perhaps they are discreetly afraid of my revolver—of your revolver, I mean."

Both he and Nella glanced up at the imperturbable steersman, who kept the yacht's head straight out to sea. By this time they were about two miles from the Belgian shore.

Addressing him in French, the Prince ordered the sailor to put the yacht about, and make again for Ostend Harbour. but the fellow took no notice whatever of the summons. The Prince raised the revolver, with the idea of frightening the steersman, and then the man began to talk rapidly in a mixture of French and Flemish. He said that he had received Jules' strict orders not to interfere in any way, no matter what might happen on the deck of the yacht. He was the captain of the yacht, and he had to make for a certain English port, the name of which he could not divulge: he was to keep the vessel at full steam ahead under any and all circumstances. He seemed to be a very big, a very strong, and a very determined man, and the Prince was at a loss what course of action to pursue. He asked several more questions, but the only effect of them was to render the man taciturn and ill-humoured. In vain Prince Aribert explained that Miss Nella Racksole, daughter of millionaire Racksole, had been abducted by Mr. Tom Jackson; in vain he flourished the revolver threateningly; the surly, but courageous, captain said merely that that had nothing to do with him; he had instructions, and he should carry them out. He sarcastically begged to remind his interlocutor that he was the captain of the yacht.

"It won't do to shoot him, I suppose," said the Prince to Nella. "I might bore a hole into his leg, or something of that kind."

"It's rather risky, and rather hard on the poor captain, with his extraordinary sense of duty," said Nella. "And, besides, the whole crew might turn on us. No, we must think of something else."

"I wonder where the crew is?" said the Prince.

Just then Mr. Jackson, prone and bound on the deck,

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showed signs of recovering from his swoon. His eyes opened, and he gazed vacantly around. At length he caught sight of the Prince, who approached him with the revolver well in view.

"It's you, is it?" he murmured faintly. "What are you doing on board? Who's tied me up like this?"

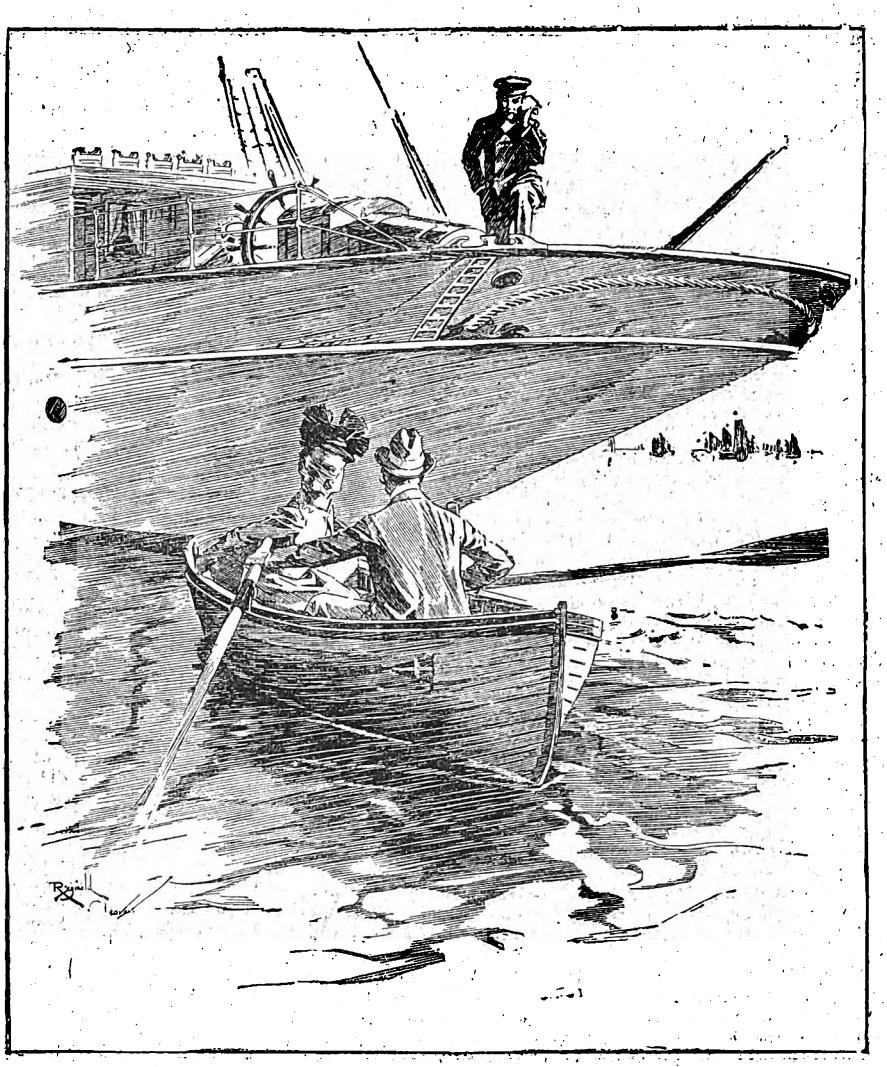
"See here!" replied the Prince, "I don't want to have any arguments, but this yacht must return to Ostend at once, where you will be given up to the authorities."

"Really!" snarled Mr. Tom Jackson. "Shall I!" Then he called out in French to the man in the wheel, "Hi, André! let these two be put off in the dinghy."

It was a peculiar situation. Certain of nothing but the possession of Nella's revolver, the Prince scarcely knew whether to carry the argument further, and with stronger measures, or to accept the situation with as much dignity as the circumstances would permit.

"Let us take the dinghy," said Nella; "we can row ashore in an hour."

He felt that she was right. To leave the yacht in such a manner seemed somewhat ignominious, and it certainly involved the escape of that profound villain, Mr. Thomas Jackson. But what else could be done? The Prince and Nella constituted one party on the vessel; they knew their own strength, but they did not know the strength of their opponents. They held the hostile ringleader bound and captive, but this man had proved himself capable of giving orders, and even to gag him would not help them if the captain of the yacht persisted in his obstinate course. Moreover, there was a distinct objection to promiscuous shooting; the Prince felt that; there was no knowing how promiscuous shooting might end.



As the dinghy receded, a figure appeared on the stern of the yacht. It was Mr. Thomas Jackson, free once more.

"We will take the dinghy," said the Prince quickly, to the captain.

A bell rang below, and a sailor and the negro boy appeared on deck. The pulsations of the screw grew less rapid. The yacht stopped. The dinghy was lowered. As the Prince and Nella prepared to descend into the little cockboat Mr. Tom Jackson addressed Nella, all bound as he lay.

"Good-bye," he said, "I shall see you again, never fear."

In another moment they were in the dinghy, and the dinghy was adrift. The yacht's screw churned the water, and the beautiful vessel slipped away from them. As it receded a figure appeared at the stern. It was Mr. Thomas Jackson. He had been released by his minions. He held a white handkerchief to his ear, and offered a calm, enigmatic smile to the two forlorn but victorious occupants of the dinghy. Jules had been defeated for once in his life; or perhaps it would be more just to say that he had been out-manœuvred. Men like Jules are incapable of being defeated. It was characteristic of his luck that now, in the very hour when he had been caught red-handed in a serious crime against society, he should be effecting a leisurely escape—an escape which left no clue behind.

The sea was utterly calm and blue in the morning sun. The dinghy rocked itself lazily in the swell of the yacht's departure. As the mist cleared away the outline of the shore became more distinct, and it appeared as if Ostend was distant scarcely a cable's length. The white dome of the great Kursaal glittered in the pale turquoise sky, and the smoke of steamers in the harbour could be plainly distinguished. In the offing was a crowd of brown-sailed fishing luggers returning with the night's catch. The many-hued bathing-vans could be counted on the distant beach. Everything seemed perfectly normal. It was difficult for either Nella or her companion to realise that anything extraordinary had happened within the last hour. Yet there was the yacht, not a mile off, to prove to them that something very extraordinary had, in fact, happened. The yacht was no

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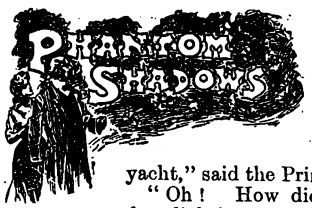

vision, nor was that sinister, watching figure at its stern a vision, either.

"I suppose Jules was too surprised and too feeble to inquire how I came to be on board his yacht," said the Prince, taking the oars.

"Oh! How did you?" asked Nella, her face lighting up. "Really, I had almost forgotten that part of the affair."

"I must begin at the beginning, and it will take some time," answered the Prince. "Had we not better postpone the recital till we get ashore?"

"I will row and you shall talk," said Nella. "I want to know now."

He smiled happily at her, but gently declined to yield up the oars.

"Is it not sufficient that I am here?" he said.

"It is sufficient, yes," she replied; "but I want to know."

With a long, easy stroke he was pulling the dinghy shorewards. She sat in the stern-sheets.

"There is no rudder," he remarked, "so you must direct me. Keep the boat's head on the lighthouse. The tide seems to be running in strongly; that will help us. The people on shore will think that we have only been for a little early morning excursion."

"Will you kindly tell me how it came about that you were able to save my life, Prince?" she said.

"Save your life, Miss Racksole? I didn't save your life; I merely knocked a man down."

"You saved my life," she repeated. "That villain would have stopped at nothing. I saw it in his eye."

"Then you were a brave woman, for you showed no fear of death." His admiring gaze rested full on her. For a moment the oars ceased to move.

She gave a gesture of impatience.

"It happened that I saw you last night in your carriage," he said. "The fact is, I had not had the audacity to go to Berlin with my story. I stopped in Ostend to see whether I could do a little detective work on my own account. It was a piece of good luck that I saw you. I followed the carriage as quickly as I could, and I just caught a glimpse of you as you entered that awful house. I knew that Jules had something to do with that house. I guessed what you were doing. I was afraid for you. Fortunately I had surveyed the house pretty thoroughly. There is an entrance to it at the back, from a narrow lane. I made my way there. I got into the yard at the back, and I stood under the window of the room where you had the interview with Miss Spencer. I heard everything that was said. It was a courageous enterprise on your part to follow Miss Spencer from the Grand Babylon to Ostend. Well, I dared not force an entrance, lest I might precipitate matters too suddenly, and involve both of us in a difficulty. I merely kept watch. Ah, Miss Racksole! you were magnificent with Miss Spencer; as I say, I could hear every word, for the window was slightly open. I felt that you needed no assistance from me. And then she cheated you with a trick, and the revolver came flying through the window. I picked it up; I thought it would probably be useful. There was a silence. I did not guess at first that you had fainted. I thought that you had escaped. When I found out the truth it was too late for me to intervene. There were two men, both desperate, besides Miss Spencer——"

"Who was the other man?" asked Nella.

"I do not know. It was dark. They drove away with you to the harbour. Again I followed. I saw them carry you on board. Before the yacht weighed anchor I managed to climb unobserved into the dinghy. I lay down full length in it, and no one suspected that I was there. I think you know the rest."

"Was the yacht all ready for sea?"

"The yacht was all ready for sea. The captain fellow was on the bridge, and steam was up."

"Then they expected me! How could that be?"

"They expected someone. I do not think they expected you."

"Did the second man go on board?"

"He helped to carry you along the gangway, but he came back again to the carriage. He was the driver."

"And no one else saw the business?"

"The quay was deserted. You see, the last steamer had arrived for the night."

There was a brief silence, and then Nella ejaculated, under her breath, "Truly, it is a wonderful world!"

And it was a wonderful world for them, though scarcely, perhaps, in the sense which Nella Racksole had intended. They had but just emerged from a highly-disconcerting experience. Among other minor inconveniences, they had had no breakfast. They were out in the sea in a tiny boat. Neither of them knew what the day might bring forth. The man, at least, had the most serious anxieties for the safety of his Royal nephew. And yet—and yet—neither of them wished that that voyage of the little boat on the summer tide should come to an end. Each, perhaps unconsciously, had a vague desire that it might last for ever, he lazily pulling, she directing his course at intervals by a movement of her distractingly pretty head. How was this condition of affairs to be explained? Well, they were both young; they both had superb health, and all the ardour of youth; and—they were together. The boat was very small indeed; her face was scarcely a yard from his. She, in his eyes, surrounded by the glamour of beauty and vast wealth; he, in her eyes, surrounded by the glamour of masculine intrepidity and the brilliance of a throne.

But all voyages come to an end, either at the shore or at the bottom of the sea, and at length the dinghy passed between the stone jetties of the harbour. The Prince rowed to the nearest steps, tied up the boat, and they landed. It was six o'clock in the morning, and a day of gorgeous sunlight had opened. Few people were about at that early hour.

"And now, what next?" said the Prince. "I must take you to a hotel."

"I am in your hands," she acquiesced, with a smile which sent the blood racing through his veins. He perceived now that she was tired and overcome, suffering from a sudden and natural reaction.

At the Hotel Wellington the Prince told the sleepy doorkeeper that they had come by the early train from Bruges, and wanted breakfast at once. It was absurdly early, but a common English sovereign will work wonders in any Belgian hotel, and in a very brief time Nella and the Prince were breakfasting on the verandah of the hotel upon chocolate that had been specially and hastily brewed for them.

"I never tasted such excellent chocolate," exclaimed the Prince.

The statement was wildly untrue, for the Hotel Wellington is not celebrated for its chocolate. Nevertheless, Nella replied enthusiastically, "Nor I." Then there was a silence, and Nella, feeling possibly that she had been too ecstatic, remarked in a very matter-of-fact tone: "I must telegraph to papa instantly."

Thus it was that Theodore Racksole received the telegram which drew him away from Detective Marshall.

SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Woman with the Red Hat.

"There is one thing, Prince, that we have just got to settle straight off," said Theodore Racksole.

They were all three seated—Racksole, his daughter, and Prince Aribert—round a dinner-table in a private room at the Hotel Wellington. Racksole had duly arrived by the afternoon boat, and had been met on the quay by the other two. They had dined early, and Racksole had heard the full story of the adventures by sea and land of Nella and the Prince. As to his own adventure of the previous night

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he said very little, merely explaining, with as little detail as possible, that Dimmock's body had come to light.

"What is that?" asked the Prince, in answer to Racksole's remark.

"We have got to settle whether we shall tell the police at once all that has occurred, or whether we shall proceed on our own responsibility. There can be no doubt as to which course we ought to pursue. Every consideration of prudence points to the advisability of taking the police into our confidence, and leaving the matter entirely in their hands."

"Oh, papa!" Nella burst out in her pouting, impulsive way. "You surely can't think of such a thing. Why, the fun has only just begun."

"Do you call last night fun?" questioned Racksole, gazing at her solemnly.

"Yes, I do," she said promptly. "Now."

"Well, I don't," was the millionaire's laconic response; but perhaps he was thinking of his own situation in the lift.

"Do you not think we might investigate a little further," said the Prince judiciously, as he cracked a walnut, "just a little further—and then, if we fail to accomplish anything, there would still be ample opportunity to consult the police?"

"How do you suggest we should begin?" asked Racksole.

"Well, there is the house which Miss Racksole so intrepidly entered last evening"—he gave her the homage of an admiring glance; "you and I, Mr. Racksole, might examine that abode in detail."

"To-night?"

"Certainly. We might do something."

"We might do too much."

"For example."

"We might shoot someone, or get ourselves mistaken for burglars. If we outstepped the law, it would be no excuse for us that we had been acting in a good cause."

"True," said the Prince. "Nevertheless——" He stopped.

"Nevertheless you have a distaste for bringing the police into the business. You want the hunt all to yourself. You are on fire with the ardour of the chase. Is not that it? Accept the advice of an older man, Prince, and sleep on this affair. I have little fancy for nocturnal escapades two nights together. As for you, Nella, off with you to bed. The Prince and I will have a yarn over such fluids as can be obtained in this hole."

"Papa," she said, "you are perfectly horrid to-night."

"Perhaps I am," he said. "Decidedly I am very cross with you for coming over here all alone. It was monstrous. If I didn't happen to be the most foolish of parents—There! Good-night. It's nine o'clock. The Prince, I am sure, will excuse you."

If Nella had not really been very tired Prince Aribert might have been the witness of a good-natured but stubborn conflict between the millionaire and his spirited offspring. As it was, Nella departed with surprising docility, and the two men were left alone.

"Now," said Racksole suddenly, changing his tone, "I fancy that after all I'm your man for a little amateur investigation to-night. And, if I must speak the exact truth, I think that to sleep on this affair would be about the very worst thing we could do. But I was anxious to keep Nella out of harm's way, at any rate till to-morrow. She is a very difficult creature to manage, Prince, and I may warn you," he laughed grimly, "that if we do succeed in doing anything to-night we shall catch it from her ladyship in the morning. Are you ready to take that risk?"

"I am," the Prince smiled. "But Miss Racksole is a young lady of quite remarkable nerve."

"She is," said Racksole drily. "I wish sometimes she had less."

"I have the highest admiration for Miss Racksole," said the Prince, and he looked Miss Racksole's father full in the face.

"You honour us, Prince," Racksole observed. "Let us come to business. Am I right in assuming that you have a reason for keeping the police out of this business, if it can possibly be done?"

"Yes," said the Prince, and his brow clouded. "I am very much afraid that my poor nephew has involved himself in some scrape that he would wish not to be divulged."

"Then you don't believe he is the victim of foul play?"

"No! Mr. Racksole, we speak in confidence—is it not so? Some years ago my foolish nephew had an affair—an affair with a feminine star of the Berlin stage. For anything I know, the lady may have been the very pattern of her sex, but where a reigning Prince is concerned scandal cannot be avoided in such a matter. I had thought that the affair was quite at an end, since my nephew's betrothal to Princess Anna is shortly to be announced. But yesterday I saw the lady to whom I have referred driving on the Digue. The coincidence of her presence here with my nephew's disappearance is too extraordinary to be disregarded."

(Another long instalment next week.)

"Come out, you villain!" Theodore Racksole cried, in low, almost vicious tones. He dragged up the cowering figure. It was his daughter Nella! This dramatic episode is described in a future instalment of "Phantom Shadows."

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Symbolical!

Molly: "What flower is that Lord Brokeleigh always wears in his buttonhole?" Dolly: "Marigold."

A Guaranteed Preventive.

Wife (finding a grey hair): "I do so hate to grow old." Husband: "You can avoid that, my dear." Wife: "How?" Husband: "Dye young."

An Awful Tragedy.

The Groom: "I can't see that cheque your father placed among the wedding presents." The Bride: "Papa is so absent-minded. He lit his cigar with it."

The Retort Gallant.

She "Why do you toy so nervously with that fan? Are you afraid of it?" He (gallantly): "I'm afraid of anything that could produce a coolness between us."

Why She Thought.

Cora: "You have a fine sense of the ridiculous." Dick (rather flattered): "Why do you think so?" Cora: "I noticed you smiling at yourself in the mirror."

It Would be Useless.

Clara (after a tiff): "I presume you would like your ring back?" George: "Never mind; keep it. No other girl I know could use that ring unless she wore it on her thumb."

Worse and Worse.

Ethel: "That detestable Mrs. Brown said that I looked thirty." Maud: "How perfectly absurd!" Ethel (elated): "Frankly, now, how old do you really think I look?" Maud: "About forty."

She Knew the Feeling.

Gracie: "See, dear, a diamond! I don't believe any other girl was ever half so happy over an engagement ring!" Madge: "Pooh, darling! I was just as foolish when Bob gave that same ring to me."

A Terrible Punishment.

Fannie: "That hideous old Mr. Jones had the impudence to propose to me." Jennie: "You refused him, of course?" Fannie: "No, I did not. Just to punish him I accepted his offer, he's worth half a million."

Business Before Pleasure.

Cissie: "Going into the drawing-room, Jack? Ethel's in there with Mr. Spooner, and you promised to have a game with me. How long will you be?" Jack: "Only until I get my sixpence to go out, Cissie!"

He Would Not be Selfish.

"It is only right that I should tell you," she said, "that father has lost all." "Not all," he exclaimed. "Yes, all," she asserted. "No," he said, firmly; "not all. You are still left to him. I could not be so cruel as to add to his misfortunes. Tell him—tell him from me that my generosity impels me to leave him what little lies in my power."

Misconstrued!

He (pleadingly): "Why can't we be married at once?" She (coyly): "Oh, I can't bear to leave father alone just now." He (earnestly): "But, my darling, he has had you such a long time." She (freezingly): "Sir!"

When the Light Went Out.

Miss Coygirl: "Jack Softleigh told me last night that I ought to accept him because he was willing to prove his love for me." Her Friend: "What did you say?" Miss Coygirl: "I said I couldn't see it in that light." Her Friend: "Then what did he say?" Miss Coygirl: "Nothing. He just turned the light out."

A Comforting Explanation.

Dashaway: "You say your sister will be down in a minute, Willie? That's good news. I thought perhaps that she wanted to be excused as she did the other day." Willie: "Not this time. I played a trick on her." Dashaway: "What did you do?" "I said you were another fellow!" exclaimed Willie, triumphantly.

She Was Alarmed.

She (gently): "I am afraid I do not love you enough to be your wife, but I shall always be your friend, and sincerely wish for your happiness." He (moodily): "I know what I'll do." She (anxiously): "You surely will not do yourself an injury?" He (calmly): "No, I will find happiness. I will marry someone else." She: "Goodness gracious! Give me another day to consider, dear."

Very Handy.

Dobson: "I tell you what, there's nothing like a bicycle for a man with a nervous, irritable disposition. My wife says I'm a much more agreeable man than I was before I got a machine." Jenkins: "Why's that—because it takes you outdoors so much?" Dobson: "Not only that, but whenever I feel like blowing somebody up, I go down and blow up my tyres, and then I feel better."

Changed His Tone.

George Hard-Up: "We shall have to be very economical this year, Mary." Mrs. H. (enthusiastically): "Yes. I intend making my own hats, bonnets, and dresses and——" George (in rapture): "Mary, you are a prize! Yes; a perfect treasure!" Mary (continuing): "And your shirts and collars and cuffs." George (in abject terror): "Mary, I wasn't really in earnest. We shall not have to be so economical as all that!"

A Born Diplomatist.

Charley was caught napping. A pair of soft, little hands covered his eyes, and a sweet voice commanded: "Guess who it is." Nothing very dreadful for Charley in this, you think; but, then, you don't know that Charley was engaged to two girls, and, for the life of him, couldn't decide which voice it was, which made it a very embarrassing position for Charley. A wrong guess would lead to complications awful to think of. But a happy thought inspired Charley, and he announced: "It's the dearest, sweetest little girl in the world." "Oh, you lovely boy!" gurgled the satisfied one, as she removed her hands. And now Charley thinks of applying for a foreign ministry, feeling that his talents would be wasted in any other than a diplomatic field.

Poor Jollyboy.

"Maria," said Mr. Jollyboy, very solemnly, thinking to take a rise out of the wife of his bosom, "I heard of a dreadful operation which was undergone by a girl. She seemed in danger of losing her sight, and the clever ophthalmic surgeon who operated on her found——" "Yes," breathlessly interposed Mrs. Jollyboy, "found what?" "That the poor girl had a young man in her eye," rejoined her hubby, with a chuckle. Silence reigned supreme for the space of five minutes, at the end of which time Mrs. Jollyboy said quietly: "Well, of course, it would all depend on what kind of young man it was, as there are many men she would have been able to see through," and with a serene smile Mrs. Jollyboy resumed her knitting, leaving the enemy completely routed

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WRONGLY JUDGED.

Relating How Margaret Ainsworth Made a Great Mistake, and the Manner in which she was Forgiven.

"AND you really mean it?"

"I certainly do."

"Well," he proceeded coolly, "you must let me tell you that I think you are making a very great mistake. Our tastes are congenial, I am rich enough for all practical purposes, and besides"—with a totally different tone of voice—"you will not be likely to find another man who loves you to the absurd degree that I do."

"Don't! We had better drop the subject, don't you think? I must go up to the hotel and meet a friend who is coming to-day."

"You are not going just now," the man asseverated decidedly. "If you are really going to refuse me, and my natural conceit makes it very difficult for me to comprehend that fact—you at least owe me the reason for the refusal. Why won't you marry me, dear?"

"Because I don't wish to do so. It seems hard for you to realise the fact that there may possibly be one woman in the world who has not succumbed to your charms."

"That is a very disagreeable tone, and I hardly believe that I am so egotistical as to merit such a vigorous snubbing." He was lounging on the beach by her side, and he suddenly turned so as to look straight into her eyes. His voice sounded harsh when he spoke again. "You have not yet given me the reason for my rejection. I don't believe that you can truthfully tell me you do not care for me at all."

"That will do. You are quite at liberty to believe whatever you wish; but I assure you that I can think of no inducement great enough to persuade me to marry you. Good morning."

"Wait." His hand was on her arm, and he looked at her with determination. "I shall keep you—forcibly if I must—but keep you I shall until you answer my question. Don't you know that I am entitled to that much, at least? Why will you not marry me?"

"Because I thoroughly despise you," she returned coldly. "Is that being explicit enough? You must pardon the rudeness as you insisted upon an answer."

"Why do you despise me?"

She looked at him disdainfully, but vouchsafed no remark. He caught her look and flushed hotly.

"You shall tell me exactly what you mean; even *you* dare not treat me so!"

"Well, you see," the woman said slowly, with a flash of unmistakable triumph in her eyes, "I know Phœbe Allison very intimately."

"Well?"

"I think that is quite sufficient for me to say. Or do you have so many such flirtations that your memory proves treacherous?"

"I have had no sort of flirtation, either with Miss Allison or with anyone else. I have been waiting all my life for one woman, who turns out to have no heart and no conscience."

"How dare you speak so to me!"

"Have I spoken as harshly to you as you have to me? Or do you imagine that I shall allow you a monopoly of that sort of thing? Do you consider it womanly to be as friendly and as lovable as you were all summer up to the last few days—to really lead me to expect a different answer from the one you have given me—and then to treat me as you are doing now?"

"Well, you see, the truth is that until last week I never imagined you to be the person you are; it was only when you spoke of being at Edgewater two seasons ago that I knew you were the man who broke Phœbe's heart and acted such a despicable part."

"Margaret, how dare you say such things? I met Miss Allison that summer, of course, but it was the merest acquaintance. After all this time don't you know me better than to bring such an accusation against me?"

"I have known Phœbe years where I have known you but months, and Phœbe"—with slow deliberation—"is quite incapable of telling me an untruth or distorting facts."

"The obvious inference being——"

"You can draw it for yourself. Why will you persist in keeping me here? It is neither gentlemanly nor courteous."

"My list of sins is already so long that a few more can hardly make any difference in your eyes. I am beginning to get some light on the subject at last, and I intend to have some more information before I release you. You can console yourself with the thought that this is the last time in all probability that I shall ever seek your society." He looked at her keenly a moment, but Margaret Ainsworth was gazing out across the ocean and refused to meet his glance. "As you seem to have been Miss Allison's confidante, suppose you tell me of what crime I stand accused."

"You did not monopolise her time, pay her every attention, make love to her, and then, after you had returned to London, write her that of course she was only having a little summer flirtation just as you were; that you understood she was not in earnest and that you had not been?"

The man looked at her with an anger in his eyes that he did not try to conceal.

"You are quite right. I did not do any of those things." Suddenly his indignation broke bounds. "I wonder how you dare to say such things to me? I certainly am fortunate

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to have escaped being accepted by you. I thank you very heartily for that. Life with a woman devoid of trust and faith would be nothing but Purgatory. One thing more and then I will not detain you longer. Give me Miss Allison's address. I intend to get to the bottom of this matter; then, when you know the truth, perhaps you will have womanliness enough to apologise for the gratuitous insults that you have given the man who said he loved you."

Margaret Ainsworth rose slowly to her feet.

"It will be an easy matter to give you Phœbe's address—much easier than you think—she is the friend I am expecting at the hotel. You did not dream of that, did you, when you indulged in your heroics?"

"You are making the list of apologies due to me very long." He sprang to his feet and stood beside her. "If Miss Allison is at the hotel we will go there now."

"Come, if you dare! Do not think she will shield you, or do you suppose that she has missed her train?"

"You are likely very soon to find out what I think, so it is hardly necessary for me to tell you."

The path was narrow, and Margaret swept on ahead of him. Duncan made no effort to keep abreast of her. They went on in silence. Suddenly there was a rush in front of them, and a slight feminine form precipitated itself into Margaret's arms.

"I simply couldn't wait any longer. I had to start out and hunt you up. Oh, Margaret, I've got such hosts to tell you! See." She held up her hand, on which gleamed an engagement-ring. "I'm ever so happy, Madge! I wonder how I ever imagined that I was in love two years ago."

Margaret threw her arm round her friend, and turned so as to face Duncan where he had halted in the path behind them.

"This is someone you know, Phœbe; an introduction will hardly be necessary, will it?"

Miss Allison looked uncertain for a moment, then held out her hand with frank cordiality.

"Just at first I didn't recognise you, Mr. Duncan, but I very glad to see you again."

Duncan smiled grimly as he glanced at Miss Ainsworth. That young woman was perplexed and annoyed. What did Phœbe mean?

"I thought," she commenced desperately, knowing that she must bring matters to a crisis, "that you did not entertain a very high opinion of Mr. Duncan, that——"

And there she stopped, hopelessly bewildered by the genuine astonishment which she saw in Phœbe's Allison's eyes.

"I always liked Mr. Duncan, but we were never very well acquainted. I don't understand"—then catching the look on Margaret's face she broke off—"Margaret, ou must be thinking of Fred Dunton." Phœbe flushed warmly as she pronounced the name. "You have certainly got Mr. Duncan and Mr. Dunton mixed up. If I were Mr. Duncan I should not forgive you for that. Will you be at the hotel soon? I must go and get off my travelling dress before lunch. Come up to my room, won't you?" And Phœbe darted off.

Margaret started to follow her, but Duncan barred her path.

"Have you nothing to say? I am ready to listen to any apology that you have to offer."

"I beg your pardon, of course. Now please let me go."

"A moment please. Do you retract all your charges regarding Miss Allison?"

"Of course." She hesitated an instant, then added with a palpable effort, "I am very sorry that I misjudged you."

Duncan stood before her, immovable and stern.

"Your words came readily enough when you wished to convict me of a dastardly act. You seem to have very few with which to make amends."

"What do you wish me to say more than I have?"

"I can hardly tell you that."

She looked at him distantly for an instant, then some sudden thought flushed her cheeks a burning scarlet.

Duncan smiled a little bitterly but made no movement to speak.

It seemed to Margaret Ainsworth that she was living centuries in those few seconds. Why was he so merciless? Why didn't he help her if—if he really cared? But then she supposed he was too angry to care any more for her as he had. Couldn't he see that it was all a wretched mistake and that she had suffered from it as much as he?

The silence grew unbearable. Duncan would not break it. Margaret felt that she could not—still almost anything was better than the present situation.

"Is it worth while for me to attempt anything? You may possibly remember saying that you were thankful I had said 'No.' Since you feel that way it is of no use for me to offer any explanations."

"That is for you decide, of course," he returned in a perfectly emotionless voice. "If you think you have satisfied your conscience and made honourable amends I have nothing to urge."

"Then do not keep me here—let me pass."

"With pleasure."

Duncan stepped aside and Margaret walked by—but only a few steps. She wheeled quickly and held out both hands.

"You do not mean to forgive and forget?" she asked questioningly.

"What am I to forget?"

"If—if—if—you would forget that I had said 'No,' and——"

Duncan's arms were round her and his eyes and lips were telling her that everything was all right between them. In her great relief she felt her anger rising against him once more.

"Why didn't you help me, Dick? You were positively cruel. You almost made me ask you to marry me."

Duncan laughed teasingly.

"I owed you something, dear, but that was not the real reason. You were sure enough of my love. There was no question about that in your heart—but there was a great question in my mind as to whether you cared more for your pride than you did for me. I wanted to have that matter settled for ever."

"And you are satisfied?"

"Perfectly," replied Duncan, with a look of supreme content.

Mabel C. Jones.

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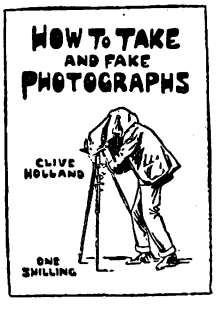

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THEIR ELOPEMENT.

Telling How it was Frustrated, Happily For All Concerned.

THE light was turned down in Rev. Mr. Hadley's study, and the man himself sat before the fire at one end of the room, but partly conscious, however, of the rollicking flames, for he was thinking over the line of his next sermon. A rap sounded at the study door. He had not heard the outer door open, and knew nothing of his caller until the knock came, and he turned to see a man standing in the doorway. He did not recognise him at first, but as he went towards him, turning up the lamp, he reached out his hand with the words:

"Ah, Thomas—good evening."

The man after the first greeting did not take the seat to which the minister invited him, but stood awkwardly fumbling with his hat. He wore a coarse suit and looked as if he did not feel at home in his present surroundings. Mr. Hadley saw his evident discomfort, and after waiting a moment for him to make known his errand, said kindly:

"Well, Thomas, what can I do for you?"

At this the other found his voice. "I—at first I didn't mean to say anything about it," he began, "and then—I thought you'd ought to know."

"What is it?" asked Mr. Hadley.

"It's—it's Miss Bess, sir."

"My daughter?"—in surprise.

"Yes—yes, sir," stammered the visitor. "She's planning to run off—elope, that is."

"What do you mean, man? Are you speaking of my daughter Elizabeth?" asked Mr. Hadley sternly.

"Yes, sir, and Ben Wilson. Him and her are planning to run off together."

The older man stood as if stunned; then rousing himself, he said slowly:

"I don't understand."

"Well, you see, it's like this," resumed the other. "I was going over to Brantwood this afternoon, and I took a short cut through the woods that's off to the left o' the bridge, you know, and all of a sudden I heard somebody talking. I hadn't made no noise, and so they didn't know anybody was near 'em, but what I heard 'em say made me stop and listen for more. I ain't given to listening to what's none o' my business, Mr. Hadley; but I thought at first that somebody was planning a robbery, and then—I soon see it wasn't no robbery after all, but an elopement, and I looked through the trees and see 'twas Ben Wilson and Miss Bess."

"Are—are you positive, Thomas, positive it was an elopement they were planning?" Mr. Hadley put the question calmly, but his face was white and drawn.

"Certain, sir, or I wouldn't have told you. It's to-night."

"To-night?"—with a start. "Are you sure they said to-night?"

"Yes, sir, at ten o'clock, and there ain't much time to lose if you want to catch 'em."

Mr. Hadley looked at the clock. It was nearly half-past nine. "Elizabeth went to her room an hour ago," he mused; "she said she had a headache."

"Very likely," nodded the other.

"Doubtless we had better start at once. I thank you, Thomas. Perhaps you will direct me to the place you speak of."

There was an appeal in the older man's words to which the other responded promptly.

"Pleased to go with you, sir. You'd better put on your overcoat," he said a moment later, when they reached the outer door; "these evenings is gittin' chilly."

Mr. Hadley paused to take a coat which was hanging in the hall, and the two went down the steps in silence. Little, indeed, was said during their half-mile walk. Thomas in a vague way felt the incongruity of his position, while the other was busy with his own thoughts. His little Elizabeth! Could it be possible that it was of her this man had spoken?

"My poor, motherless child," Mr. Hadley's thoughts ran; "how have I been remiss in my duty? Would that your mother had lived, she might have saved you from this folly. Would you, indeed, leave your father's house and go away with that—that boy? Ah, a little of the wisdom of the serpent is sometimes best. It may be—if I had not forbidden him to come to the house—forbidden fruit is always sweetest—I have erred, no doubt, and because I did not fancy the young man—it may be I have blamed him for the misdeeds of his father. It may be if I had taken pains to become better acquainted with him, I should have found him other than I judged him, might have seen him with Elizabeth's eyes, as it were. But now—is it too late to help the matter?"

Henry Hadley had married somewhat late in life, and a few years later his wife had died, leaving him a year-old daughter. But the child with her flying, yellow hair and dancing, dark eyes he had never quite understood, and during the sixteen years since his wife's death, he had watched her growing up before him, fair to look upon, no doubt, but, as he told himself, Elizabeth's child would have looked fair to him in any case, and having her mother's name, must she not develop something of her mother's character?

She had usually been ready enough to obey him, save for a momentary pout or flash of self-will, after which her subdued penitence was a charming thing to see. He had never dreamt her capable of deceit, and when to-night she had gone early to her room, he did not for a moment doubt she had the headache of which she spoke, yet when this man—this comparative stranger—had come to him with his strange story, he had

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not thought of questioning his truthfulness, had not given his daughter so much as the benefit of a doubt, had not even gone to her room to ascertain whether or not she had deceived him. For a moment the father blamed himself, yet he did not falter in the way he was going. He felt—something assured him—that the man spoke the truth, and coming soon to where a horse was harnessed to a light cart, it did not in the least surprise him.

Thomas grasped the minister's arm. "That's his horse," he said in a whisper.

"Hush," the other returned. "Let me go on alone."

A few steps and he came in sight of two figures dimly outlined; they were going towards the waiting carriage. There was a low murmur of voices and then one more distinct. "My daughter," it said.

The two figures paused suddenly as if rooted to the ground, and there was a dead silence.

"Elizabeth—Benjamin—come back to the house and be married; then you can go away if you wish."

The minister spoke firmly, there was no trace of anger in his voice; yet had a thunderbolt fallen from Heaven, the two young people could not have been more terrified. The girl grasped her companion's arm.

"Ben—oh, Ben, what shall we do?" she sobbed.

Ben himself, however, was equally at a loss.

"Come, my children; it grieves me that you should go away to have the marriage service performed when I can do it for you. You have a carriage, Benjamin; kindly take Elizabeth back to the house; you will find the door unlocked, and I will be there soon."

The young man hesitated, while Bess, with a hysterical laugh, said:

"We might as well go back."

They entered the carriage, turned in the direction of the vicarage, and had gone on for several moments in silence before it occurred to either of them that Mr. Hadley was walking, and the thought of the man, no longer young, trudging over the half mile of dark roadway while they rode, gave them a curious feeling; besides, how did he know that they would not go on to Brantwood as they had planned?

As Mr. Hadley and Thomas parted a little way from the house of the former, the clergyman reached out his hand.

"Good-night, Thomas," he said, with his air of simple dignity. "I shall not forget what you have done for my daughter and myself. For the present, I can only say that I thank you."

When he re-entered his study where the two young people were awaiting him, the fire had died down. He went towards the fireplace and put some fresh sticks of wood upon the coals, remarking as he did so:

"If I had known we were to have a wedding here this evening, I would have tried to have the room brightened up a bit."

Bess' pink cheeks grew carmine in the firelight and she looked up at her father questioningly, while Ben moved uneasily. Mr. Hadley sat down and covered his eyes with his hand for a moment, while the old clock in the hall ticked with painful distinctness—that and the crackling fire were the only sounds. Presently the clergyman looked up, and putting on his spectacles began:

"Other things aside, I presume you would as lief have me perform the marriage service as Mr. Robbins, of Brantwood?"

Bess and Ben exchanged a startled glance, but the latter found voice to answer:

"Certainly, sir."

"Therefore we may as well proceed. I—I suppose you have your marriage license?"—looking over his spectacles at the prospective bridegroom.

The young man glanced over at Bess, and then, with a feeling of foolishness quite evident in his looks, stammered:

"I—we—of course—that is—not yet!"

"Do I understand that you have not procured a license?"

"I have not—yet."

"How old are you, Benjamin?"

"Nineteen," answered the unfortunate owner of these years.

Mr. Hadley nodded gravely.

"Is it asking too much to request you to wait till to-morrow? We can probably arrange matters by that time."

The clergyman looked from one to the other over his spectacles, while Bess looked appealingly over at Benjamin. As for the young man, he just then felt no need of the bright wood fire; he was quite warm enough and equally uncomfortable; but, meeting the girl's glance, he asked:

"What do you say, Bess?"

"We'd better wait, I suppose," she answered slowly.

Another silence followed, broken at length by Mr. Hadley.

"My children," he hesitated, "it grieves me that you should have so little confidence in me. It grieves me that I should have fallen so far short of my duty as to make that confidence impossible.

"Elizabeth, you have chosen this man, and if your heart's love has gone out to him, God forbid that I should come between you. And my—my son, the love of a pure woman is a thing of which a man may well be proud. It is a thing not to be taken lightly, and when that love is returned by the man to whom it is given, marriage—which is, as it should be, a sacrament—gives to it a dignity which, alas, too many fail to comprehend. It is not for a day, a year, but for life. No greater blessing can come to you than such a love as I am constrained to believe Elizabeth has for you, and that you reciprocate her feeling, I, too, am bound to believe. Such a love her mother brought to me."

Mr. Hadley was silent for a little while, while Bess and Ben sat vaguely uncomfortable; they did not look at each other, and the bright colour had gone from the girl's cheeks.

"The years have gone so quickly," he went on again. "I had not realised that my little daughter was a woman, with a woman's heart and feeling. And yet, if your lives are spared, there are many years before you ere you reach middle life."

For some time longer he continued speaking, while the two before him listened in silence. When the young man rose to go, he looked from the girl to her father hesitatingly, and at length said somewhat clumsily:

"If—if you'd rather put it off, Bess—perhaps you'd rather—arrange things, you know."

The girl seemed to understand, for she replied:

"We might wait—a week."

"Good-night," said Mr. Hadley. He did not offer to go to the door with the young man, but with a bow, including both him and Bess, left the girl to see him out. Their adieux were brief, for a moment later she came back to her father. She stood a moment in silence, then with a burst of tears sank down beside him.

"Forgive me," she sobbed. "I didn't know how—how good you are."

"God knows your happiness is dearer to me than my own," the clergyman returned gently, adding: "It would have grieved your dear mother to have had you married elsewhere than in your own home."

Later, when they parted for the night, father and daughter understood each other as never before.

Ben came round the next day, looking rather foolish, it must be confessed; of this, however, Mr. Hadley did not seem to be aware, but greeted him in a friendly manner, and after conversing for a few minutes on impersonal subjects, invited him to call often, that they might become better acquainted, and went to call his daughter. He told her to make such preparations for the wedding as she thought best; really he understood such matters so little himself.

"We have decided to put it off till next month," Bess told him a day or two later.

"Indeed. You are sure it is your own wish, Elizabeth?"

"Yes," she answered, and gave him a glance which might have meant one of several different things.

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For a while Ben called every day, then two or three days passed when he did not come in.

"I—I hope I do not keep him away," Mr. Hadley remarked, looking anxiously at his daughter.

"Not at all," she answered; "he comes once a week."

At this the father regarded his daughter with a glance as doubtful in meaning as hers had been a little before.

One evening, as father and daughter sat together in his study, he asked after a pause:

"By the way, Elizabeth, when is that wedding coming off?"

The girl's face flushed, paled, and flushed again before she answered:

"I think it isn't coming off."

"My dear, do you mean——"

But the girl's arms were round his neck.

"Shall you be dreadfully disappointed if you never have a chance to marry us at all?" she asked.

The man pushed the girl gently back where he could see her face. "Elizabeth," he said, "is it so?"

"Yes, it is so," she returned. "We find that—I don't want him, and he doesn't want me—so we've given it up; wouldn't you?"

"Are you sure you have ceased to care for him?"

"Dear me, yes. Do you know—I was really tired of the sight of him when he came so often. I don't think I ever cared much; I only thought I did, just because you didn't want him to come here, I suppose?"

"If that is so, then you are not sorry that I interrupted your plan?"

"Sorry!" The girl laughed and then grew suddenly sober. "Papa," she said, "if you hadn't, I'm sure I should have regretted it all my life."

When a few years later Mr. Hadley performed the marriage service at his daughter's wedding, the groom was a man of a very different type from Benjamin Wilson, and as for that person, he was married the year before that.

Edwin Matthews.

"Shall you marry him, Alice?"

"It's manners to wait to be asked," returned Alice.

"Hasn't he asked you?" persisted Will Cable.

"That would be telling," Alice Marsh replied.

Then she laughed up at the young giant leaning over the back of a high chair, and regarding her with a look at once quizzical and puzzled. He was just as gentle, as retiring, as shy as ever. And yet the world had great things to say of his wisdom, his indomitable pluck in the face of distressing obstacles, the lofty scientific value of his researches and discoveries. He had been interviewed and lauded. The critics were unanimous in his praise. And here he was—just the same delightful fellow of five years before.

Carriage wheels had stopped before the door. They could hear the servant crossing the hall. "Mr. Reginald Raymon," announced the man.

Mr. Raymon, bland and placid, round-faced, round-eyed, hat in hand and monocle in oye, made his appearance.

He had come to take her to the theatre. He intended to lay his heart and his vast fortune at her feet that very evening.

Later they were driving slowly homeward through the silence, the crispness, the blueness of a perfect February night.

His arm slipped confidently round her waist.

"The gods could give me nothing—unless you were theirs to give."

"Ah!" she said softly. She moved a little until she was free from his arm. "You—you are quite sure——"

That was just where Raymon's bad quarter of an hour began.

"Sure? Indeed, yes. I have not spoken hastily. I have given the matter—a weighty one, as you will admit—due consideration." He adjusted his monocle. He wished the coachman would drive more slowly. "I recollect what I owe to my family, to my position, to—if I may say so—to myself."

"Yes," sighed a tender voice. "Oh—yes."

"And I have made up my mind that you are the only woman I shall marry—you!"

He could feel again the tremor of the slender shape near. He put out a fat little hand. His touch was not tentative by any means. It was determined. There was no false modesty about Raymon. In the gloom of the carriage he almost forgot the charm, the beauty, the power of the girl. All these were engulfed in his own superb condescension—a condescension of which she was aware. Her choking voice when she spoke proved that.

"And I have decided it is you—you whom I have chosen for—my wife!"

"You have"—how overwhelmed she was—"not spoken rashly?"

"My mind is irrevocably made up!"

"You are sure you will not regret——"

He cut short the faltering voice. "Your timidity is uncalled for, dear. I never change my mind. When shall it be?"

The carriage door swung back. Raymon walked with Miss Marsh up the steps.

"Don't come in!" she intreated sweetly. "I have an engagement. And—I'm very sorry, you know—and very grateful for the honour, of course, but I couldn't care for you—that way. Thank you—ever so much."

Then, her cheeks scarlet, her lips apart, and breathing hard, she was in the library—was facing a man who had risen from his low chair in the light of the dying fire.

"Well?" he questioned hoarsely. He came slowly towards her. "Well? He proposed to-night. I knew he would. Get it over, for Heaven's sake! When is it to be? When are you to give yourself to any man's arms?"

She went straight towards him. Her colour had suddenly gone. She was as white as the roses she carried. And her cheeks were wet and shining in the firelight.

"Whenever you will take me!" she said.

Kate M. Cleary.

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LOST AND WON.

Relating How Eva Carleton Lost a Race but Won a Heart.

THEY walk together, ride together, play lawn-tennis together, often as not dine together, and dance together; in fact, they are "good friends."

Yet the world throws many barbed shafts at them, questioning the perfect friendliness in which they have enveloped themselves as with a cloak. It is contrary to the world's sophistry that a man and woman fashioned in youth and beauty should live in daily and hourly intercourse with each other without some deeper, more tender sentiment being born of such companionship. This infatuated couple call it good fellowship. They do not heed the arrows of the world's cynicism.

An old mother, infirm, almost bedridden, and a lover, who is also her cousin, in Australia constitute the girl's domestic ties.

The man is alone in the world. A babe struggling lustily with his nurses, a boy measuring his will against his masters', a man running counter opinions, and adopting heretical doctrines in direct opposition to the world's cherished creed and code of laws. This is Ben Scarlett, late Captain of the 71st Lancers.

Eva Carleton lends a ready ear to his tales. She is engaged to be married, but the engagement does not prey heavily on her mind. She seldom hears from him, and never writes herself. So there are no obstacles in the way of the friendship which commenced three summers ago. They are leaning now upon the stone balustrade of the terrace, as goodly a couple as were ever created.

A young moon is shining in her pale innocence above their heads, looking down upon them from a bed of daffodil sky.

"It is going to be a lovely night," observes Captain Scarlett, blowing a cloud of smoke from between his lips. "Pity you do not smoke, Eva; it is the one pleasant thing we cannot enjoy in common."

"A pity you don't relinquish the pleasure then," the girl says, laughing. "I gave up needlework because you declared that it fretted you to see me indulging such a namby-pamby taste."

"You used to prick your fingers," is his laconic observation.

"Smoking makes your teeth black," she retorts quickly.

"What's the odds as long as you are happy? I am quite contented with the knowledge that my teeth are whiter than most people's."

The girl looks steadily at him. It is a glance perfectly innocent of coquetry; she is not to blame that her eyes are large and clear.

"Ben, are you conceited?" she asks, in a frank tone.

"Nothing so womanish," he replies, holding the cigar between his teeth while he speaks.

"It is hardly fair of you to sneer at my sex—hardly friendly, is it, Ben?" a touch of hurt pride jarring in her voice.

"Heavens! no, it is not!" Captain Scarlett admits warmly. "You cannot help your weakness any more than I can help my strength. Why did not the Fates ordain that you should be a man, Eva? Your firm will, courage, plucky principle, each and all are deserving of a better shrine than that of a woman's weakly body. I wish you had been a man, Eva."

The girl does not answer for a moment; and there falls a silence of human speech while summer sounds—the tinkling of a carter's bells, the lowing of cattle, the drowsy twittering of the feathered multitudes of songsters—follow quickly on each other.

At last a few words drop heavily on the human silence.

"We have been very happy as we are. My friendship has not failed to satisfy you because I am a woman, or at least you have given me no cause for believing so hitherto."

"I have not—I will not."

When they speak again it is in an entirely different strain.

"You should tell Berry to carefully uproot the weeds which I observed among the strawberry-beds; they are multiplying fast."

"I will remember."

"And now I must be off. I am dining at the Reddingleys'." Shall I meet you there?" he added, as an after-thought.

"No; they have not asked me to-night," she tells him in a slow, laboured fashion.

"No? Well, good-bye, then!"

And away he swings down the flight of stone steps. Arrived there he looks up. Eva is standing exactly as he left her, with her elbows resting on the balustrade; his eyes meet her downbent ones. There is a curiously soft expression in them—an expression strangely unfamiliar to Ben Scarlett; it must be the effect of the pale young moonlight.

"Remember, to-morrow—at ten sharp," he calls out, and before she can nod back in reply he is gone.

* * * * *

At ten sharp Miss Carleton is standing in the old-fashioned oak hall waiting for her horse to be brought round from the stables. At half-past ten she is cantering across country with Ben Scarlett, and a straggling groom in the rear.

"What did you do at the Reddingleys' last night?" Eva asks, breaking a long spell of silence.

"Ate a good dinner, drank plenty of dry champagne, discussed peaches and politics; then adjourned to the drawing-room, here I listened to indifferent music, talked and—and"—hestitating—"that is all."

"No, it is not," laughs the girl, flicking the mare's neck idly with the reins.

Ben Scarlett looks round sharply at her.

"Eh?"

"You forgot to wind up with your usual adjective," she reminded him.

"An omission on my part; but as it happens, I was not

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bored last night." Then, perhaps thinking that he has said enough, he sets off at a brisk canter.

The tower clock is striking twelve when they turn into the dusty high-road.

"Beastly clock! I will be bound that it is wrong," Captain Scarlett remarks. "It made me half an hour late for dinner last night."

"And so you owe it a grduge?" Eva says, with a strange questioning look.

Ben Scarlett does not answer. There is something amiss with the bridle of his smart, tall roan. He dismounts to attend to it.

"Here comes the Reddingleys' carriage," the girl informs him. "I always recognise it some distance off, on account of the coachman's brilliant red hair."

"Eh? Really!" laughs Ben, swinging himself up in his saddle again. "Yes, it is their carriage. 'Talk of an angel,' you know the rest."

The "angel" on this occasion is leaning back against the cushions of the carriage in solitary languor. A shot-blue silk sunshade protects the exquisite fairness of her face from the sun's inquisitive golden gaze. She moves it slightly to one side, perhaps to give better point to the sweeping bow with which she favours Ben.

"How—d'ye do, Captain Scarlett?" murmurs the sweet, drawling voice, and away rolls the carriage, leaving a cloud of dust behind it.

"Who—is—she?" inquires Eva.

"A Miss Barron. Cousin of the Reddingleys'. Met her there last night," Ben jerks out in short sentences.

Miss Carleton wastes no more words; she canters the mare the whole way home.

Arrived at the gate she holds out her hand to the Captain.

"*Au revoir*, Ben; you will come round this afternoon?"

"I think not—the fact is, I have promised the Reddingleys to turn in there for tennis."

"Oh, very well!" with studied indifference. "I shall take the mare round to the stable now. Don't let me detain you. Good-bye!"

* * * * *

A slight young figure, clothed in a brown-holland gown, with a bunch of purple heartsease pinned just under a very round, very white chin. This is the first human thing that Captain Scarlett's black eyes rest upon as he turns in at the wicket-gate leading from the fields to Miss Carleton's ancestral halls.

Now, Captain Scarlett's conscience smites him, in that he has not paid the girl even a flying visit for a week or more.

How will she receive him?"

He is not left long in doubt, for Eva holds out her hand as usual; and a moment later they are discussing the relative merits of the new litter of fox-terrier pups as though their intercourse had been unbroken.

"How is the mare?" inquires Captain Scarlett hastily, when the subject of the fox-terriers is getting somewhat threadbare.

"Lively."

"Have you ridden her lately?"

"Every morning."

It is not easy to carry on a conversation when one receives only monosyllabic replies. Ben desists; the effort is too stupendous. He falls to staring at Eva in silence, watching the sun play hide-and-seek in the gold of her hair. Pretty hair—pretty head, bright, burnished, sleek—the sort of head fitted to find a resting-place on some man's honest heart.

"I do not mind being stared at in reason; but that sort of thing can become an agony when too prolonged. Let me direct your attention to some other object."

The black eyes never flinched.

"Since when have you grown averse to being looked at?" inquires the owner of the offending orbs.

"Since you have grown so pertinacious," replies Eva with grave lips, but a smile sunning itself in her eyes.

"Remember, I have not seen you for a week," Ben says; and the next minute he repents him of the speech.

Miss Carleton regards him with an air of cold astonishment.

"Whose fault is that?"

"Mine; and I am prepared to state that I do not regret my voluntary absence. You have become all the lovelier in my eyes for the comparison with other women. Now, let us change the subject, as it seems to vex you."

"Come indoors; it is cooler there. I believe the sun is affecting your brain," Eva says pityingly.

Ben smiles provokingly.

"Thanks—no; I prefer remaining out here. With your permission, I will light up," producing a cigar from the region of his pocket. "Coming for a ride this afternoon, Eva?"

"Yes."

"How mighty stiff and cool you are, child?"

"Am I?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Nothing!"—feebly.

Ben does not make another attempt to reinstate himself in her confidence, and, betaking himself off presently, leaves Miss Carleton to solitary meditation.

* * * * *

"Ben, have you ever contemplated the possibility of falling in love?"

This question is a distinct breaking through of the laws and habits of speech which have been set up between them.

Ben feels it to be so, and favours the girl with a long, cool gaze of astonishment. His answer, when it comes, is evasive.

"With whom?"

"Must I single out some person? Then I will choose. That cousin of the Reddingleys—Miss Barron."

The afternoon has been passed in silence. Alternately they have trotted and cantered beside one another, but spoken hardly once. This outburst on Eva's part is as unexpected as it is unwelcome to Captain Scarlett. He does not take any pains to conceal this.

"Heavens, Eva! what goose-chase have you started now? Why choose Miss Barron of all persons?"

"I could think of no likelier person;" then, with an awkward forced laugh: "You would not have me substitute myself."

"It would be less improbable," dryly from Ben.

"Nonsense! We are only friends. It is rather late in the day to begin to fall in love with each other," laughing.

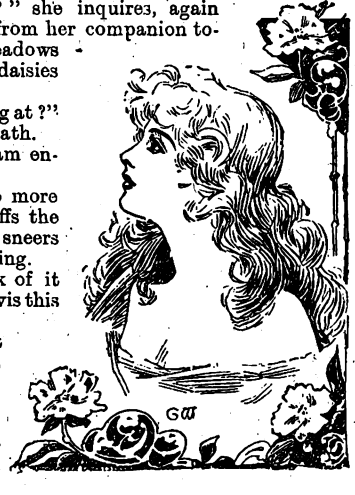
"Friends be hanged!" ejaculates Ben fervently.

It is a full minute before Miss Carleton recovers her breath after this sudden *douche* from her impetuous companion.

"Well, as you will not become interested in your future prospects, let us discuss mine."

"By all means," assents Ben.

"Have you ever contemplated the possibility of my being married?" she inquires, again turning her face away from her companion towards the fair green meadows with their harvest of daisies and buttercups.



"What are you driving at?" exclaims Ben in open wrath.

"You know that I am engaged?"

"Yes; and think no more of it than you do," scoffs the Captain, and when he sneers he looks almost forbidding.

"But we must think of it now. I heard from Davis this morning."

"Did you? You must send him about his business."

"After five years?"

"Look here, Eva," facing round upon her with a steadiness of resolve difficult to com-

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bat, "you do not love the man, and never have; you should not have permitted yourself to become engaged to him; luckily, it is never too late to mend the folly of our ways."

"Yes, it is. What reason could I give him for my broken faith?" pants the girl in excessive agitation.

"Why should you give him one at all?"

"Oh, Ben, is that how you would choose to be treated?" exclaims Eva reproachfully.

Captain Scarlett straightens his shoulders with an air of mighty superiority.

"How proud you are, Ben!"

And so the conversation ends.

"Come, let us race each other home," she cries presently. "If I win you shall present me with a pair of new stirrups. If I lose you shall become the happy possessor of the smallest and sweetest of the fox-terrier pups. Agreed? Then—one, two, three, and aw—ay—whoop! Halloa!"

The mare darts past the roan like a winged bird.

"A—race—by—road!" shouts Ben, after the girl.

But she never turns her head. Straight as a die, she gallops on for the length of a mile, then swerving suddenly, leaps a gate, and so turns on to the pasturage.

Scarlett follows, not too closely, for he wishes Eva to win her stirrups.

"Do you think Bonny will take that wall?" Eva calls out, pointing with her whip to the object in question.

"Better not try," returns Ben.

Disaster sometimes overtakes the wilful woman; it overtakes her this time in the midst of youth, beauty, and garish day.

When Ben Scarlett clears the wall he finds Eva and the mare huddled together on the green meadow-grass, among the buttercups and daisies. The mare's head is resting heavily on the breast of her mistress' blue habit, while Eva's head has found a harder, more hurtful resting-place.

It is Ben's wont to be cool and calm in the face of danger. He maintains his equanimity now. The first thing to be done is to relieve Eva from the pressure of the mare. This is not a simple task; but in less than five minutes Ben Scarlett has accomplished it.

Eva's head now rests upon the breast of his rough tweed coat; he strokes it tenderly with one big brown hand, the pretty shining head he was foolish enough to have romanced over that morning. The few hours which have since elapsed have not cured him of the folly.

"Poor little Eva—dear little woman!"

At this unfamiliar mode of address the great blue eyes open and gaze around in pitiful bewilderment.

"Where am I? What has happened?" and then lifting her voice in a sudden cry, she calls out: "Bonny, oh, tell me—she is not hurt!"

"I believe not; she is only too frightened to stir just at present," Ben answers gravely; "but you, Eva—forgive me if I am more interested in your injuries than Bonny's?"

A wave of scarlet rushes headlong into the girl's face as she listens to the exquisite tenderness of his voice.

"In me, Ben?" she repeats, moving her soft cheek uneasily against his rough coat.

"Yes, in you, my darling—my——"

But with a sudden movement she lays her hand upon his lips.

It is evident that whatever injuries she has sustained they are bodily, for she is in full possession of her senses.

"Do you think you can move, Eva? Are you in pain?"

"No—o," she answers slowly; "I feel no pain; but I am afraid to stir lest I might. There's a confession of cowardice for you!" laughing rather hysterically.

"You must try to be brave, Eva, for my sake," he adds, with a shade of red appearing through the bronze on his face.

For his sake! Why should he have said that?

And yet the suggestion has a marvellous effect, for the girl struggles out of his arms, and a minute later is standing before him, upright, tall, and beautiful.

"Ben, I have lost my stirrups!" with another attempt at a laugh.

"And I have lost something more valuable to me," observes Ben oracularly. "I wonder whether you would prize it if I offered it to you!"

"Offer what you have not got!" raising her brows in a feigned astonishment.

"Nay; because I have already bestowed it on you. Will you keep it, Eva?"

The girl's quick perception is not at fault. She understands; but for answer veils her face with her trembling fingers, and bursts into a passion of tears, while, unheeded, Bonny whinnies for assistance.

* * * * *

After all, nobody is invulnerable in this world, and Ben Scarlett was not destined to prove a brilliant exception.

He succumbs to Cupid's mesmeric influence, and Eva, being the weaker vessel, yields even more entirely, for she flings pride and her plighted troth to the four winds of Heaven, and marries the man who won her heart even while she fondly cherished the belief that they were only *good friends.*

J. Cameron.

Mrs. Hayseed: "Where did you learn that new piece?" Daughter: "It isn't a new piece. The piano has been tuned."

Miss Gossippe: "Do you pay much attention to what your husband says?" Mrs. Jealous: "Not unless he talks in his sleep."

Angry Wife (after a quarrel): "Seems to me we've been married about a hundred years. I can't even remember when or where we first met." Husband (emphatically): "I can. It was at a dinner-party, and there were thirteen at table."

"You are worth your weight in gold to me, darling!" he murmured. "Then do go home early, Percy, dear," she replied wearily. "I've lost ten pounds since we became engaged, just sitting up late with you. We can't afford such extravagance."

"So you are having your house re-decorated, Mr. Hawkins?" "Yes, the workmen began last week." "Are you making radical changes?" "Yes—very." "What is to be the main feature of the new house?" "You—if you'll consent!"

Jack: "I have a chance to marry a poor girl whom I love, or a rich woman whom I do not love. What would you advise?" George: "Love is the salt of life, my friend. Without it, all else is naught. Love, pure love, makes poverty wealth, pain a joy, earth a Heaven." Jack: "Enough. I will marry the poor girl whom I love." George: "Bravely spoken. By-the-way, would you—er—mind introducing me to the rich woman whom you do not love?"

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Rejected—No Reason.

"JARO" is in an unpleasant position. He has been "keeping company" with a girl for three years. They had a little quarrel, and parted, but made it up and met again. During the parting, the girl's father was taken ill, and this served as an excuse for her not to meet him so frequently. Latterly, he was asked to cease correspondence with her until she asked him to resume. The next step was taken by her sister, who wrote asking him to cease correspondence altogether, as the girl is now keeping company with another young man, with the full consent of her parents. This young man is in a better position than "JARO," but my correspondent feels that he has been spurned in a most unjust manner, as he has done nothing wrong to deserve it.

* * * * *

I should write to the girl herself, or call and see her, asking whether it is by her own wish that you have been asked to cease relations with her. If so, then, of course, as there was no engagement, you must consider the affair at an end. I should not, however, accept the rejection at any other hands than her own. It seems clear that the quarrel you had, though it was made up, left an unpleasant feeling behind, and that she has ceased to care for you as a result,

A Queer Question.

SOME of my correspondents will forgive me if I tell them that they make me smile. "W. A." writes: "Can you inform me through your column of the etiquette regarding kissing? I am in the habit of visiting my *fiancée* at her home, and should be glad to know the correct number of times that I should kiss her."

* * * * *

What a question! As if, "W. A.," there were anything "correct" with regard to kissing. And as if any lover fixed the number of kisses by rules of etiquette! What I should say would be, don't kiss her more than a dozen times when there are a large number of people present, as they would wonder how many times you kissed her in private, and you should never let people wonder. As a matter of fact, it is not strictly correct to kiss your sweetheart at all in the presence of others, save when greeting and parting, as that is a thing to be done privately. As to the number of times you might kiss her in private I should say not more than ten thousand. You would not like her rosebud lips to be worn out, I am sure.

The Lover Who is Laughed At.

"I AM a very serious young man," writes "FIDO," "but my young lady always treats me as a huge joke. She laughs at the way I pronounce words, and never understands my thoughts when I express them. She does not see that this treatment makes me very unhappy. If, however, I show that I am annoyed she only laughs all the more. What ought I to do?"

If you are going to marry this young lady, I see that you have a lot of unhappiness in store unless you seriously cultivate a sense of humour. Perhaps it is not born in you, but you should try to acquire it. Try reading light books and papers, and drop that serious manner. Many men are very serious in their heart of hearts, but are most merry dogs in the society of others. The man that wears his seriousness openly has always been a laughing stock, especially with the fair sex.

Friendship With a Senior.

"I HAVE a great friendship," writes "NINETEEN," "with a lady ten years older than myself. At the same time, I do not feel that I love her. She always makes me see the best side of life, and I can tell her things which I would not confide to many others. Is this the kind of woman who would make a good wife for me? Are our ages too different?"

* * * * *

Yes, your ages are not suitable. It is quite natural for a youth to be attracted by a woman very much older than himself, but that is not the kind of attraction which we call love, or which makes for happy marriages. Keep her friendship as long as you can, but the girl for you to marry should be nearer your own age. Besides, I don't suppose for a moment your friend would hear of a proposal from you. Few women of thirty or thereabouts would allow themselves to look ridiculous by marrying so young a man as yourself.

Naming the Day.

"BETROTHED" writes: "My lover presses me to name the day for our wedding, which he wishes to be very soon. I don't like to tell him, but my parents are by no means well-to-do, and the cost of a wedding would be a great drain on my father's pocket. In another year, it may be better, but it would be most difficult at present. At the same time, I do not wish my lover to know that this is so, as my father would lose reputation if it were known that he is pressed for money. I should like your advice."

* * * * *

It is certainly an awkward position. Still, it is a sacred right of the girl and her parents to fix the date of a ceremony, and it is always understood that a man waits on the convenience of the girl's parents in the matter. You need not tell your lover the reason why the wedding cannot take place just yet. Just tell him that it is not convenient, for family reasons. If you cannot tell him this yourself, ask your father or your mother to convey it to him, as then he will have to abide by their decision.

A Stormy Sweetheart.

"MY lover," writes "M. R.," "is always telling me he loves me, and seems very devoted to me, but he has a most fearful temper, and if the least thing upsets him, he calls me some fearful names, and then his language is the reverse of nice. Do you think he can really be so fond of me as he professes? It worries me very much."

* * * * *

Perhaps, "M. R.," it is only his little way. After all, it is often better to have a sweetheart whose temper is short, and soon over, than one whose annoyance spreads over weeks, months, and perhaps years. He certainly ought not to use the language he does, but that is not such an important matter as the character which underlies it. If you really love him, and he loves you, you should condone his little outbursts, and hope that in time he will get over them.

Cynthia

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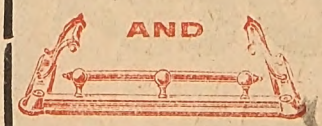

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SHORT STORIES

No. 801. Week Ending May 7, 1904. Price One Penny.

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(An Exciting Incident from "The Scheming of Basil Thornton." See inside.)

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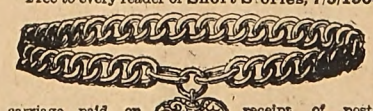

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BODLEIAN 4 MAY 1904

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SHORT STORIES

No. 801.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending May 7th, 1904.

The Wife of Dudley Holland.

Telling the Terrible Story of Her Married Life.

DUDLEY HOLLAND was my chum at Oxford. Neither of us had a brother of our own, and I think two brothers were never dearer to each other than we were.

Two years after we graduated I was in town, partly for pleasure, partly on business, when I received a letter from Dudley, telling me that he had fallen in love.

His letter was full of adjectives and exclamation points. There never before was a woman so enchanting as this Edith Champney. She was transcendently beautiful, but that was her least charm. But there was one drawback. She was cold. Ice was not so hopeless, for ice melts under a warm sun, and it seemed that all the sunshine of adulation and adoration that surrounded Miss Champney could not melt her. He could not tell whether he had been able to produce the slightest impression on her. She listened to him very sweetly, but she listened just as patiently the ensuing five minutes to his next neighbour. There was a strange mystery in her bearing, and he meant to fathom it.

It was three weeks before I heard from him again. This is what he wrote:

I have solved the mystery, Ralph, and I love her more than ever. She is so cold to all because she fears to love anyone, or let anyone love her. Her mother was insane for many years before her death; died, in fact, in a lunatic asylum. Edith fears that she may inherit this malady; and is conscientiously resolved for that reason against marriage. I believe now that she could love me; nay, that she is already beginning to. She must! She shall! I will reason her out of her scruples. I believe I should marry her if I knew she would be mad in a year.

She must be my wife. I long for you to see her, Ralph. I know you will understand my heart's desire.

There was a page or two more of rhapsody about her charms, but I scarcely read it, so excited was I over the portion which I have quoted.

"Thinks he would marry her if he knew she would be insane in a year!" I muttered. "Why, he is as mad as a March hare himself! I must go to him."

I did not answer his letter. I thought any opposition of that kind would only strengthen his purpose; and I trusted to be with him in time to prevent any serious entanglement. I made all possible haste in settling up my affairs, and in two weeks I was in Bath. I went straight to his lodgings and found him putting the last touches to his toilet, for, like most men, young, rich, and idle, he dressed with almost as much care and taste as a woman.

It was just dusk when I opened his door. He came towards me with extended hands.

"Just in time, Ralph!" he cried joyously. "You shall go with me to see her to-night. I have over-ruled all her scruples. She loves me! We are engaged, and next month we shall be married. The day is fixed."

My heart failed me. I was too late, after all. I listened to him in sad silence. At length he noticed my manner.

"You don't like it, Ralph? I am sorry; but you will change your mind when you have seen her. She is the noblest, truest, tenderest woman—and she loves me so! She never allowed herself to think of marriage before; and I hold her first love, the full, passionate overflowing of her rich nature—the fountain sealed so long. Come, I am impatient till you see her!"

I went out with him, and he hurried me along the streets. We were always so—I, cool, patient, slow; he, quick, impulsive, passionate, hurrying me onward. Soon we stopped before a noble mansion. Dudley spoke to the servant who admitted us with the familiar air of a frequent visitor. He conducted me upstairs himself, and threw open the drawing-room door.

At one end of the room, between two long windows, stood a harp, and, beside it, Miss Champney. A chandelier near her was fully lighted, and, standing for an instant in comparative darkness at the door by which we entered, while my friend went forward to speak to her, I had space and opportunity to see what manner of woman she was.

Dudley had not overstated her attractions. Of lofty, commanding figure, her proportions were perfect. Her carriage was stately, as would have befitted the descendant of a line of princes. Her face was more nobly beautiful than any countenance I have ever seen. There was no trace of colour in it save in the lips, and they were bright as a scarlet geranium flower. But no colour could have rivalled the clear, grand whiteness of her complexion—marble, with the warm, palpitating softness of life. Her eyes were large, black, and languid, with a peculiar expression of passionate melancholy.

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She started forward when she saw my friend. Her eyes kindled. A sudden flush stained the clear whiteness of her cheek. She murmured a word or two of which I only caught the fond, caressing intonation of her voice. I forgave him for loving her; for the mad risk he was running. She was a woman worth living or dying for. Had I seen her before she was his, I believe, with my slow, persistent, intense nature, I should have loved her better and longer than he could.

Instantly, almost, he led her forward to speak to me. She welcomed me with graceful cordiality as his friend. We passed a pleasant evening—one which I can never forget. Before it was over she sang to us. Her snowy fingers flashed like a flock of white birds across the strings of the harp. Her voice was full and rich, and very sweet, but sad with a passionate, inexpressible longing, like the cry of a struggling soul. It thrilled me to pain.

"What do you think of her?" Dudley asked me, walking home beside me in the moonlight.

"I understand all you wrote me now," I said, meeting his eyes. "I tell you honestly that I hurried here in the hope of preventing this; but now that I have seen her, I cannot wonder that you had no power or will to struggle against your love. God grant that it may bring you only happiness! It seems as if she were a creature too noble for a destiny of suffering."

* * * * *

The next month, as had been planned, they were married.

When they had returned home, she went upstairs to change her bridal dress.

Half an hour afterwards, Dudley Holland went to seek his bride.

"She must be ready now," he said to me, as he went out; "perhaps she is waiting for me."

I don't think it was two minutes before I heard a shriek—a wild, maniacal shriek—which seemed to freeze the blood in my veins with icy terror. I stepped into the hall, and saw a white figure flying down the stairs—Edith, in her bridal robes still, except that her veil had been torn off, and her long, black hair, with an orange blossom still clinging to it here and there, was floating in heavy, dishevelled masses about her shoulders. Down she came, holding in her hand a dagger, its point stained with blood. Swifter than lightning she flashed by me into the empty drawing-room.

Sweeping her hand across the strings of her harp, till all its chords clashed together in one wild shriek of discord, she stood there, waving the dagger above her head, like some beautiful fiend, torn with madness.

Slowly, as one stricken in an unguarded hour with some terrible blow, her bridegroom came after her. From a wound in his shoulder the blood was oozing out. His eyes were set in a stony gaze of horror.

"Has she hurt you?" I cried, confronting him.

"Not much, I think. But, Ralph, it has come—all you feared. She is mad!"

His voice sank, as he spoke, into a husky, sepulchral whisper. He went into the drawing-room, I following him. He would have gone towards her—I believe he loved her so in that hour, he would rather have met his death at her hand, than live to have this awful chasm—this unbridged gulf of madness—between his heart and hers. She looked at him now with that curious gaze of cunning and defiance which everyone has seen who knows much of the insane.

"Keep away," she cried warningly, flashing the dagger before her—"you had better. I sha'n't kill you, for you don't fear that; but if you come one step nearer, I will let this pretty, shining toy lap the blood out of my heart."

There was a terrible earnestness in her eyes and we both stood still before her.

At this moment her father appeared on the scene. He comprehended all in an instant. His face turned white to his lips with an awful pallor. The cold sweat-drops of a deathly agony stood upon his forehead.

"Oh, Heaven!" he cried, "has it come so soon? I saw her mother look like that. Dudley, I warned you. You rushed upon your fate!"

"I believe I should have married her had I known this, even. At least she is my wife. I know that she has loved me!"

With that white pallor on his face, that look of anguish in his eyes, Richard Champney turned towards his child.

"Give me that dagger, Edith," he said in a tone of stern command, walking up to her suddenly. With a child-like instinct of obedience she put it into his hand. Then, as if repenting what she had done, she sprang wildly forward to seize it again.

He threw it quickly behind him, and caught her firmly in his arms as she came on. I took up the weapon and broke it, and threw the pieces out of the window. Still holding her, her father contrived to extract a key from his pocket, and threw it towards me.

"In my room—one over this—you will find, in the third drawer, a strait waistcoat. It was the one her mother wore. Bring it."

In five minutes more, with my help, he had put it on her, and it was out of her power to do any more mischief to herself or others.

Then I sent a servant for the family physician, and went myself for a surgeon. While the physician was alone with Richard Champney and his hapless child, the surgeon dressed the bridegroom's wound. It was a flesh-wound and not dangerous. But what a wedding-day! What a consummation to the blissful dreams of so many hopeful weeks!

Soon the doctor came out. Dudley looked at him in mute, helpless anguish, his lips refusing to frame the question he longed to ask. I asked it for him.

"Do you think there is any hope?"

"I do not like to pronounce so soon," he answered, with a kind reluctance to speak the bitter truth.

"It would be better," I said earnestly, "to tell him the very worst now, than to torture him with suspense, if there is no hope of her recovery."

He considered for a moment before he spoke again. "I believe you are right, and I will tell you exactly what I think. Where insanity comes on, as hers has, without any illness, or any apparent cause, so suddenly and so violently, especially where there was a suspicion that it might be hereditary, I have never known it to be cured."

* * * * *

I will not dwell on the next scenes of this terrible tragedy. Both Edith's father and her husband longed, if they could, to keep her at home, where they could care for and watch over her. For a while they thought this would be possible. After the doctor's visit her strait jacket was removed. She seemed calmer, and made no more attempts to injure anyone. They thought her madness was going to take a harmless turn—gentle and pitiful as poor Ophelia's.

She did not recognise either her husband or her father; but she seemed to like them both, and called them by a dozen fantastic titles.

It went on thus for a time, until the furious, malignant stage of her malady came on again. She would fly at whoever was in charge of her, and try to tear them with teeth and nails. She would beat her own beautiful head against the walls of her rooms, or gnash her teeth against her lips till the blood burst from them. At length it was determined to take her to an asylum. She could be restrained there, they thought, by those who understood such cases, more gently, more mercifully.

It was a summer's afternoon when they drove out with her in a closed carriage. It was in one of her intervals of comparative mildness, and the thought that she was going to see the friend who was in need of her made her content to drive readily enough. In the superintending physician she seemed to think she had found the one for whom she sought; and she parted with her father and husband without a regret.

"If life did not stretch out before me," Dudley Holland cried wretchedly, "so bitterly long—if only I could die! But to live on, for God only knows how many weary years—and to think of her suffering there, her helpless soul beating its struggling wings against the bars, crying out, in vain

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anguish, for a deliverance that never comes—to know that she is my own wife who loves me; and yet I can never hear her say so, or kiss her lips, or hold her close to the heart that worships her. Oh, Heaven, perhaps it would be a mercy if I could go mad too!"

What a fate it was to overtake a man just on the threshold of life, only twenty-five—a man with so many goodly gifts, wealth, talent, manly form, and handsome face.

* * * * *

Ten years passed in utter hopelessness. Richard Champney had grown weary of his life's sad burden, and laid it down. The heart so long and sorely tried had throbbed with the last pang of mortal anguish, and with the dead smile frozen upon his mouth, and a look of peace upon his face, they buried him by his dead wife's side.

But no such merciful release had come to the beautiful creature who was wearing away her life among the motley crowd of raving, jeering maniacs; or to the husband who waited without the bars in lonely, pining sorrow.

"Come one step nearer," she cried, "and I will plunge this dagger in my heart!"

On the tenth anniversary of that ill-omened wedding-day he came and intreated me to drive with him to Sagham. I put aside all other affairs for the time and went with him.

"How is she to-day?" he asked the superintendent anxiously.

"You will see her in her room. She is as mad as ever, but quieter. She is not so strong, I think. The warm weather, which has come so suddenly, overcomes her. She is always gentlest when she does not feel very well."

"Do you think she can possibly ever get well?"

It was I who asked this question. Dudley had asked it too many times, and received the same sad, hopeless "No!" It came again now.

"Well, no, I see no hope of it. Better at times she may be; and perhaps—I have seen such things in such cases sometimes—before her death there may be a lucid interval. But it will never be, I feel certain, until she is very near her end. Sometimes the torch of reason burns up again with the old brightness when life is expiring. It may be so in her case. It is but the shadow of a hope; but it is all I can give you."

We went together to her room. Dudley had brought her his customary offering—a basket of flowers, exquisitely arranged. She sat in a low chair, swaying herself to and fro. She was dressed in white, as when I had seen her first, for that was one of her old fancies which she retained. It seemed to me that she had grown no older during the ten years since she had been there. She was thinner and paler, but her aspect was still that of the beautiful girl, standing just on the threshold of womanhood. Her husband went across the room, and, kneeling beside her, set the basket of flowers in her lap.

"See what I have brought you, darling," he said, as tenderly as one would speak to a petted child.

She looked up then, and her great black eyes rested on his face without the faintest glimmer of recognition. She smiled, with the old, rare sweetness of expression, however, and passed her fingers caressingly over the flowers in her lap.

"They are very lovely," she said. "You were very kind to bring them. I had a lover once, and he used to bring me flowers every day."

"Did he look like me?" Dudley asked, in tones husky with emotion, and I could see the sudden hope that looked eagerly out of his eyes.

She smiled again—this time a sort of quizzical, mischievous smile. Then she shook her head.

"Like you? Oh, no! He was a son of the morning, all joy, and radiance, and delight. He always brought the sunshine in with him. But you—you look like the knight of the sorrowful countenance. Do you come here because it is such a merry house? They laugh here, night and day. Sometimes I hear them at midnight. The laughs sound ghostly then, as they gurgle along the corridors. Oh, it's a merry house! Should you like to live here?"

Dudley turned away—he could not bear it. She began to sing then, to a sort of tuneful rhapsody, with all the old passionate sweetness in her voice, a melody of wild, unconnected words.

We stayed with her till towards nightfall. Then we bade her good-bye. She took a rose from among her flowers, and gave it to Dudley.

"That is for you, sorrowful knight," she said. "Keep it to remember this merry house. And this for you," and she gave me a sprig of heliotrope.

We drove home in the late afternoon. For a long time Dudley did not speak. I was driving, and he held the rose

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she had given him, tenderly between his fingers. At length he said, looking round at me, with quivering lips and eyes dark with unspoken pain:

"I cannot bear it, Ralph. It kills me to see her, and to feel that I am as utterly shut out from her heart, her life, her knowledge, as if she were dead. I loved her too well."

* * * * *

My house was the only one at which Dudley ever visited. It was not very lively, for I lived alone with my mother and one middle-aged serving woman. But it was always cheerful, and he was sure of a kindly welcome. I think he regarded my mother, sweet saintly soul that she was, with something of the same tenderness which I felt for her myself, and it was most warmly returned. His sufferings and the life of loneliness to which he was doomed moved her profoundest sympathies. She always talked to him as to a son, and I think he showed her the depth of his heart, as he could not have shown it even to me.

I went home one night—it was late in the autumn succeeding our birthday visit to Edith, and my mother met me with the air of one who has something to communicate.

"Not now," she said, with a smile, meeting my look of interrogation. "I see you have guessed that I have something to tell you; but we will wait till after tea, and then we shall have a whole evening to talk it over."

"What is the 'it' we are to talk over, mother?" I asked, when I had drawn on my slippers, and established myself in my own especial chair for the evening.

"I received a letter to-day from your Cousin Fanny. Her Aunt Windsor is dead, and she is without a home."

"Luckily she has plenty of money to procure one with," I said, not very sympathisingly, I am afraid.

"Yes, but I think, though she does not say so, that she would like to come here. She speaks sadly of the unpleasantness of going to live among strangers. I confess that I should like to have her with us."

I thought the matter over for a moment before I answered. Fanny Carpenter was the only child of my mother's sister. Her father, on his death-bed, much to my mother's regret, had confided Fanny to the care of his own sister, Mrs. Windsor, the lady of whose death we had just been informed. I knew well enough what my mother's wishes were. She longed for Fanny to come and be to her in place of the daughter she had always coveted. I knew they would be company for each other during the long days when I was away; and I was not churlish enough to have no consideration for Fanny's preference for living with her own kith and kin rather than seeking a new home among strangers. Everything was in favour of her coming, except the one selfish feeling I had that I dreaded change of any sort in our quiet, comfortable life, and that I hated the trouble of making myself agreeable to a young lady. At length I said, with a sigh of melancholy:

"I know you are right, mother. She ought to come. I should not feel happy or satisfied without asking her; still, I must say, it's a bore. She'll want me to take her here and there. There'll be an end to all such quiet, lazy nights as this."

She smiled archly.

"That will be good for you. That is one reason I want her to come. You would grow presently, if you went on in this way, with me to indulge you, into a real, selfish, one-sided old bachelor. It will be the very best thing in the world for you—good discipline."

"My Discipline!" I persisted in talking of my Cousin Fanny by that title. I had not seen her for five years. She had visited us at fifteen. She was a nice girl then—a merry, romping, teasing hoyden, who made me infinite trouble and afforded me plenty of fun. But the five years since she had passed in London, where she had been educated at a fashionable school; and I looked forward in dismay to the advent of a really fine lady.

The next day my mother wrote, inviting her to make her future home with us. By return of post the invitation was accepted, and the next fortnight was devoted to making preparations for her.

I went home one night and found that she had arrived. She was in the drawing-room, so Judith said, hurrying into the hall to tell me as I went upstairs. I would not encounter "My Discipline" till I had brushed off the dust of business. I went to my own room and refreshed my toilet a little.

Then I went down and saw, standing by the window, a small, slight, very youthful-looking girl, clad in deep mourning. She was not handsome, but there was something very winning in her face. It was a good face—sweet and pure, with pale, delicate colouring, small features, blue, innocent-looking eyes, and an expression which seemed to appeal for tenderness and protection. Full, light curls lying loose and shining about face and head, added to the extreme youthfulness of her appearance. She came forward to meet me, and put her hand in mine with a shy grace, and said, in a voice as cheery as the chirp of a little woodland bird:

"Here I am, Ralph; come here in search of home and friends. Please say I am welcome."

I could say it honestly, and I did. From that moment I took her into my heart.

She had been with us three months, when one night my mother said to me:

"Ralph, I could find it in my heart to be sorry Fanny came. I am afraid Dudley Holland is falling in love with her."

We were sitting alone over the fire in the library, I and my mother. Dudley had been spending the evening with us, and had gone away, and Fanny had gone to her own room. My mother's words startled me for a moment into vague alarm. Soon I collected myself.

"Impossible, mother!" I said resolutely. "Dudley loved Edith as I never knew man to love woman. He could not love another; above all, one so different as Fanny."

"In that very difference is the danger. He does not dream of loving Fanny. He would think himself it was impossible to love one so different from his first ideal; so he is drifting into it helplessly, without even making a struggle."

"Impossible!" I said again, resolutely.

"I hope you may be right, Ralph, but I feel sure that I am. Edith has been worse than dead to him for more than ten years. I know that he would reject with horror the thought of ever giving her place to another in his heart, but I am very sure that he is doing it, unconsciously, nevertheless."

"And Fanny?" I asked the question with an anxiety that was little short of pain.

"About that I cannot tell so well. She pities him from the depth of her womanly heart, and they say pity is akin to love; but I do not think the thought of loving him has ever entered her mind. She would shudder at it, if it should. She could never forget that he is still Edith's husband."

After that I watched Dudley Holland and my cousin closely when they were together. I could see that he was happier in her presence. The gloom which had been settling over him for years seemed to lift, as the mists roll away from the hill-top and valley when the sunlight pierces them. He seemed to like to talk with her; to exchange ideas about art and literature; sometimes about the graver problems of life and death and duty. Still I saw nothing to warrant my mother in her conclusions.

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I could fancy that if Dudley had been free, really free, Fanny was just the woman to heal all the wounds in his heart, and make the desert of his life blossom again with all the sweet roses of peace and love.

Just as I was leaving my office one night for home, a boy came in and inquired for me. I turned round, with my hat already on, and asked him his errand.

"Dr. Strong sent me, sir. I was to give this note into your own hands."

I took the piece of paper and read these words:

"DEAR SIR,—*Your friend Mr. Holland is very ill—it promises to be a severe case of small-pox. He feared that you would become alarmed at not having seen him for some time, and come to seek him. He begged me to bid you keep away from him, for he said he would rather die, even without seeing you, than that you should run the risk of your own life, and that of two others almost as dear to him as to you. He will be well nursed.*—

"CHARLES STRONG."

Dudley knelt beside her and put the flowers in her lap.

I went home with the note in my hand. Carrying it into the drawing-room, I read it to mother and Fanny. Then for the first time, I knew the secret of my cousin's heart. She did not faint. Weak-looking, delicate little creature as she was, there was a fibre of strength in her nature such as I had never dreamt of. I shall never see her face whiter when the coffin walls shut it in than it was at that moment. I can never describe that awful, ghastly pallor. Thrice she tried to speak before the words found utterance.

"Aunt Margaret, I want to go and take care of him; may I?"

"Child, do you think I could let you risk your life?"

"Life is not much, Auntie—my life. I have no one on earth to whom I am all the world—no such close, near tie, as would make it sinful for me to run great risks. Besides, I have been exposed before, since I was vaccinated, and I have really no fears. He is my friend; I cannot trust him to the care of a hired nurse. If he died, I should be haunted for ever by his voice crying for mercy, for comfort which there was none to give him. Permit me to go. Send me with your blessing if you can; but, with your consent or without it, go I must."

My mother put her kind arms round her and kissed her.

"Go to your room, darling," she said gently. "In a few moments I will tell you what you may do."

The poor child obeyed her. I think she was glad to be alone for a few moments. My mother looked at me, when she was gone, in blank consternation.

"I feared it," she said, "and now you can see it, too. Love will not go lightly with her. What can we do? I feel that we ought not to leave him alone. He has been too much like a son and brother in our household. If it were not for Fanny, I should go. If I could only persuade her to stay here and let me go in her stead!"

"I am the one to go," I said. "Dudley would do as much for me. He is my friend, and I will not fail him in his hour of need. But what if Fanny is resolute? I fear she will be. I never saw that look of steel in her eyes before."

"Then I should go, too. I could never trust her there alone; poor little stricken thing!"

It was Fanny, after all, who made all the arrangements. Her will, underneath her childish mask, was iron. She would take care of him—none but she. My mother was to remove, since she insisted on it, to the house, and superintend the domestics, who, in their panic, would need some recognised authority, but, unless the need were imminent, she was not to enter the sick-room. The same rule Fanny insisted, should apply to me. I was to spend my nights in the house, and to come there often during the day, but I was not to see Dudley unless he were given up to die, or her own strength failed her.

"It is my right," she said, with a look of solemn, heroic sweetness. "It is all that is left for me to do for him in this world, and I love him—I did not know it myself before—I love him so that to die for him, since I may not live for him, would be happiness."

She nursed him through that horrible illness, taking regular turns in her vigils with the nurse, a kind, willing, capable woman, whom Dr. Strong had provided. The doctor said that to the untiring care which watched over him he owed his life. Without it, he would have certainly succumbed.

As soon as it was safe to leave him—when his strength began to come back—Fanny came to my mother and me, as we sat together, with a look of immovable resolution in her face—a look which I had learnt to understand. She spoke in quiet, firm tones.

"He is better now, and I am going away. I cannot stay here now. I owe it to him, to myself, to you both, who have been so kind to me, to go away. Knowing what my heart holds for that man, I must never meet him again, now that he is able to do without me. He might, in time, say or feel something that would rest like a guilty burden on his soul for ever. I am not romantic. I have thought it all over, and this is my simple duty. I shall go back to Madame Chegary's, where I was at school. It was my home for three years, and Madame will gladly receive me again into her family."

We did not oppose her. Sad as the parting was for us, we knew that she was right. Oh, what measureless cause of thankfulness it was afterwards that she had been so noble through it all! The next day she went.

The first evening that Dudley was able to pass with us downstairs, he said:

"Dr. Strong says Miss Carpenter saved my life. Am I never to thank her? I was too ill to know what she was doing for me then."

My mother answered him. She never approved of mysteries which it was possible to avoid.

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"Fanny went away rather suddenly," she said. "She had indeed devoted herself to you, and she was in need of change. She is gone to Madame Chegary's. It was her old home, and she is going to spend a little while there again."

The next day two letters came to Dudley.

One was from the superintending physician of the asylum where his wife was.

He wrote as follows:

"Dear Sir,—*Having been made aware of the serious nature of your illness by your friends, I have refrained from writing to you, as I should otherwise have done, upon a subject of the deepest importance. The crisis to which I looked forward in Mrs. Holland's malady has arrived. Her bodily health is failing with fearful rapidity, but her mind is regaining its old clearness. She remembers the ties that bind her to you, and longs to see you. In order satisfactorily to account for your absence, it was necessary to inform her of your illness. She is impatient to go to you, and I should advise this step, as soon as you think it can be taken without fear of contagion for her, or risk to your own health. I inclose a letter from her.*"

Her letter I read afterwards, but I may not copy it here. It is too sacred. She could remember nothing since the moment she was pronounced his wife at the altar. Could it be, she asked him, that ten long, deadly, silent years had parted them since—years in which he must have felt her existence a burden instead of a blessing? And now they told her he was ill. *Might* she come to him? Had he any love left for her, after so much pain?

Oh, how full the letter was of passionate beseeching, of longing, overflowing love! It moved Dudley Holland's heart to the depths. Tears of thanksgiving rolled down his cheeks. He murmured an inaudible prayer. Then he cried, eagerly:

"Can you go for her, Ralph? Is it not safe? I must have her home—my Edith, my wife! Every hour she is not with me is so much wasted of what God sends to repay me for all these hopeless years. Perhaps she will live. If I can but save her alive—if I can but realise, after all this desolate blank, the old, fond dreams!"

My mother's eyes met mine. How thankful we both felt that Fanny was gone—poor Fanny! As usual, it was mother's clear judgment and kindly heart which came to our aid.

"Ralph shall go for her, to-morrow," she said, putting her soothing hand over his restless fingers. "This afternoon you shall be moved to our house. That will save her from any risk of infection. Besides, I must go home, and I want her where I can help you to nurse her; where I can have a little care of you both."

The plan relieved Dudley wonderfully. He said a little about the trouble it would be, and how wrong he was sure it was for him to consent; but his faint objections were overruled, and the plan was carried into execution.

The next morning I went for Edith. Singularly enough she recognised me and called me by name. Indeed, her recollection of everything up to the hour of her marriage was vivid and perfect. Beyond that she could not go.

She was evidently very feeble. She was in a state of extreme emaciation, and she could not walk without assistance, but her eyes were clear and her face serene. We took her in an easy-carriage, made almost like a bed with pillows and quilts. The superintending physician accompanied us, and helped me when we reached home to carry her upstairs. We laid her gently down in the room which was to be her own, and then sent Dudley in. I think neither of them could have borne any witness to their meeting, after all those bitter years of a living death.

When they had been together an hour he came out, his face radiant.

"She has dropped asleep now, doctor," he said to the waiting physician. "She was very tired. Will you go and look at her? She is better than I feared. It must be that there is hope. Love and happiness will restore her. She will be all to me that I ever dreamt."

I understood the look on the doctor's face. In his opinion there was no hope. For a few days, however, I was inclined to think with Dudley that she would yet recover. Under the spell of her happiness she seemed to revive so wonderfully. What is this man, I could not help asking myself as I watched them, that two women should love him with devotion so unutterable?

Her mind continued perfectly clear. She remembered all the days and hours of their love as vividly as did Dudley himself. She was profoundly happy.

At length she died. It was a summer sunset when she passed away—the eleventh anniversary of their marriage. They had been alone for several hours—hours full of sweet and tender communion, of such pledges as those make whose next meeting will be among the angels. At the very last it came suddenly. Raising herself in bed, she dropped her wasted arms round his neck and pressed her lips to his in a long, fervent kiss. "God bless you, my own!" she breathed, in a low, fond whisper; and then a faint, icy breath crossed his cheek—her last!

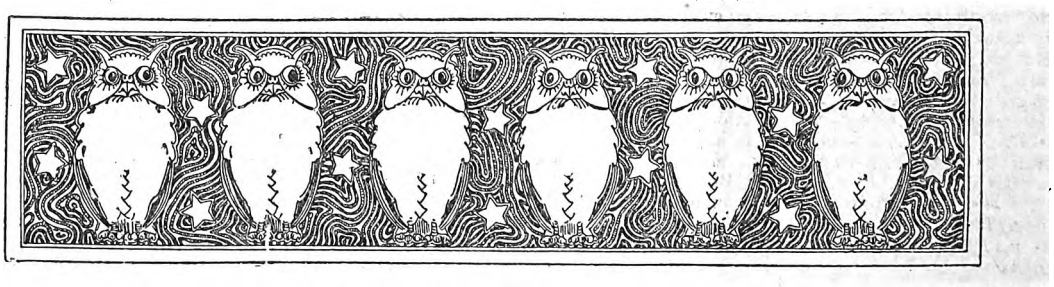
Dudley Holland mourned for her with a sorrow as deep as his love had been long and fervent. Yet, I know, he could think of her with a more resigned heart, at rest in the quiet land whither all our steps are tending, than he could in the years of her madness and misery.

She had been dead a year before he ever mentioned Fanny to me. Then, one day, he asked me, in direct words, if I thought she loved him. He had told Edith, he said, the whole story of their acquanitance, especially of the devotion with which she had nursed him through his terrible illness. Edith had read in it all the girl's heart; had begged him to marry her; had told him that she should be happier to know it, even in Heaven; to feel that his marriage with her had not blighted his whole life, condemned him to perpetual solitude. Did I think she was right?

I told him he must ask Fanny. It was all I could say. I had no right to betray her secret. The next day he went to town. When he came back he brought Fanny with him.

They are very happy. I do not think Dudley Holland does love, or can ever love, Fanny with the passion so fervent as that wild love of his youth, when he was willing to encounter all risks, however desperate, to cast the whole purpose and promise of his life at Edith Champney's feet. But she is very dear to him. She is his beloved as well as his honoured wife, and she is satisfied. I believe that to be allowed to care for his comfort, to minister to his happiness, is to her the crown and glory of life. May their days be long and their joys many!

Robert Harley.



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The Scheming of Basil Thornton.

Relating How a Will was Stolen and Recovered.

(Containing the incident depicted on the cover.)

Old Richard Mayne, the crusty bachelor who owned half Woodcote, lived frugally there in the country. A distant connection of his, Muriel James, a pretty girl of twenty, kept house for him.

She found it hard at times to put up with his temper and his overbearing manners.

Old Mayne had long decided that his wealth should go to one of his two nephews, Basil Thornton and Jack Summers.

About his money he had talked to them quite plainly. He would leave it, he told them, to the one who worked best, who showed that he would reach success, and be fit to have control of his wealth.

Basil Thornton was a shifty, underhanded man, in some business in the City. Very few people liked him. Jack Summers had passed his examinations for the Bar, and was now diligently sitting in chambers, still studying, moving Heaven and earth in his attempt to get briefs.

Jack was a handsome, popular fellow, and he was certain he would get on all right if he once got a start. He did not like his cousin Thornton, but Thornton simply hated him, because he was an obstacle.

Thornton, at the time when this story begins, seemed to be making a good deal of money. In an offhand way he would mention the amount of his income to friends, an amount at which they would be surprised, and congratulate him wonderingly.

While poor Summers was living as closely as he could possibly manage, going straight home to his lodgings every evening from his dingy chambers, Thornton's circumstances appeared to be such that he could afford to spend money royally.

Some of his friends whispered among themselves that he could not go on long in this way.

Muriel did not like Basil Thornton. He was cad enough to speak contemptuously of women even in a woman's presence, and, while he was not exactly rude to her during his visits to Woodcote, she thought his manner hateful.

By-the-way, Muriel thought that Jack Summers was one of the nicest fellows she had ever known.

But Basil Thornton flattered himself that he got on well with every woman whom he met. One day, after a very extravagant week (the contemplation of the expenses of which had given him a rueful face), he had a brilliant idea.

His debts were accumulating fast.

Now, Richard Mayne, his uncle, had always given it to be understood that his money would go either to Jack Summers or to himself.

But old men like Richard Mayne, who were in a position to please themselves without considering anybody, often changed their minds. What about that little girl who kept house for him—only a distant relation, it was true, but still old Mayne might change his mind in her favour.

Basil Thornton crossed the room, and looked at himself in the glass for a long time. When Basil thought of himself, which was fairly often, he always imagined that he had a striking face.

It may have been striking. It was certainly not a handsome face.

Muriel James was rather a decent little girl, too, reflected Basil. Of course, she was by no means up to his style, but, then, think of the risk that he removed by marrying her. It would be a perfectly brilliant stroke. She would jump at him, said Basil to himself. Why, perhaps old Mayne would set them up at once. His bills were becoming a nuisance.

Having settled all this in his mind, Basil Thornton spent more money than ever on the strength of these rose-coloured thoughts. Then one summer's morning he went down to Woodcote.

Richard Mayne, his uncle, had gone out in the dogcart to the village on some business in connection with his property, which was widely scattered.

He found Muriel alone.

"Good-morning, Miss James," he said. She returned his greeting coldly.

"Will my uncle be long, do you think?"

"I don't expect so. I'll tell him you are here directly he comes in." Her hand was on the door, but Basil said, "Don't go, Miss James. I'm not such an ogre as all that, am I? Besides, I want a talk with you."

Wondering, she came back into the room. She was prettier than he had thought, said Basil to himself. The next moment he had started the business of his errand with more earnestness than he had intended. In other words, he had tried to kiss her. But he started back, a stinging blow across his face.

"How dare you touch me, Mr. Thornton!" she cried.

"I want you to marry me," said Basil feebly, recovering his self-satisfaction a little.

Muriel's laugh sent the angry blood to his face again, and he flew into a violent temper. "I would never think of marrying a man like you."

"I know what it is." Basil Thornton almost screamed the words. "That conceited cousin of mine has been down here."

"I won't hear a word against Mr. Summers," said Muriel with quiet dignity.

"You will!" said Basil Thornton. Chancing to turn his head slightly, he had caught sight of old Richard Mayne, standing grim and sardonic in the doorway, watching the development of the high words that had drawn him up the stairs.

It was a fine chance to run his hated cousin down, to injure him with his uncle. Richard Mayne did not know that Basil had noticed him.

"If you knew the way he has been going on in London," said Basil. "He does no work from the beginning of the week to the end."

"It's not true," said Muriel, bravely defending him.

"It is true, though. He never will get any briefs. He just lazes through day after day. I tell you he's just hanging on the chance of—well, you know what chance."

"I don't believe it!" said Muriel. "Jack—Mr. Summers, works very hard."

"Good-morning, Basil," said old Mayne's grim voice from the doorway.

Muriel started, but Basil turned easily. "Good morning,

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sir," said he, as if he had just seen his uncle there for the first time.

Basil Thornton went away that evening from Woodcote on good terms with himself. By means of a lot of figures he had made his uncle think that his business was prospering greatly, and that he, Basil, had been working so hard and attentively at it that success in his business was certain. And he had persuaded old Mayne that Jack Summers was an idle fellow, good for nothing.

In fact, Richard Mayne had almost definitely decided to leave his money to Basil Thornton.

The next day, indeed, old Mayne drew up his will, which, with the exception of providing for Muriel, left everything to Basil Thornton.

Muriel was very unhappy, and tried repeatedly to change the determination of Richard Mayne.

"It's not true about Mr. Summers," she told him.

But Richard Mayne shook his old head.

"I don't know, my dear. But his cousin has worked up a business, and he tells me it's paying well. He's the man for me."

Muriel begged a few days of her uncle, and went to stay with some friends in London. In that time she learnt a good many things concerning Basil Thornton. But in spite of her sympathy with Jack Summers, she did not wish to be underhanded, and she said nothing to her uncle when she returned.

Soon afterwards old Mayne became seriously ill, and both his nephews came down to Woodcote. And Basil Thornton came to her smiling with triumph, and said scornfully: "I win the game, Miss Muriel."

Both the cousins stayed at Woodcote till their uncle was well enough to get up and be about. In the same room where he had offered her marriage that morning Basil Thornton said good-bye to Muriel. And now he honestly desired to marry her, and asked her for the second time. When she again refused, he became very angry.

"I gave you your answer then," replied Muriel. "I give you the same answer now. I shall never alter my mind about you. I have learnt all about you—I know you are a liar and a scoundrel!"

"What do you mean?" shouted Basil.

"You have poisoned Mr. Mayne's mind against your cousin; you have lied to him about your prosperity. You know that has all been lies—I have found out. You know that you are really in debt, and borrowing money on the strength of being Mr. Mayne's heir——"

"*Is this true?*" Once again old Mayne stood in the doorway, leaning against the side, weak from his illness. His voice was strong as ever. "Is this true, Basil?" he thundered.

Unable to equivocate in face of his uncle's stern look, Basil nodded sullenly. "Ah," said old Mayne. The excitement was too much for him, and he fell to the ground. Muriel rushed to his side.

"You have ruined me!" hissed Basil Thornton, and rushed from the room.

That night it was known that the master of Woodcote would not live. But, near to death as he was, and learning the truth about Basil, and how unfairly he had treated Jack Summers, he drew up another will in the latter's favour, of which only Muriel and another witness knew.

And Basil Thornton looked up at the shuttered room of death, and knew that he was ruined. Alone in her room, Muriel watched, dressed and sleepless, for the dawn.

There was a desperate chance for Basil. He guessed why old Mayne had sent for Muriel before he died.

If he could get into the dead man's room and steal that roughly drawn up will, the former one, the one in his favour, would stand!

There would be no chance of his disputing the hurriedly drawn will because there had not been time to send for a lawyer. Richard Mayne was too sharp and keen, even though death was at hand, to leave any loophole for mistake in his purpose.

He crept through the cold, unfriendly corridors, noiseless as a cat. It was long after midnight, and the dawn was not far off. A creaking stair terrified him; the silent room where the dead man lay, and which he reached at last, was greater terror still. He shaded the match so that he could not see the grim, silent figure on the bed. Once he could not help but see it, and then he fancied that the dead face was laughing at him.

He staggered back, and in that moment he saw the will on a little table by the dead man's side. It had been made out on ordinary large paper, and it was tied with red ribbon.

He groped for it with guilty hand; the match burnt his fingers as he stooped.

It was light when he retraced his trembling steps. He would go away at once and hide it in a safe place, then return as if nothing had happened. But his fumbling with the bolts of the door of the house reached the ears of Muriel James, who was watching, silent and sleepless, through the hours of the night.

She went to the window in time to see Basil just getting clear of the house. He had no hat, and she could just see there was something in his hand. What did it mean?

Bareheaded, too, she slipped quickly after him, and out into the keen morning air. The dew of the morning soaked through her thin shoes, she was tired with her sleeplessness; but a feeling that something was wrong, and that she must get to the bottom of it, kept her sharp and strong.

She was, in fact, gaining on him when he looked back over his shoulder and saw her. He began to run, and she ran too, gaining on him still more.

Looking back again, Basil Thornton saw how close she was. They passed a high wall, a dog within barked loudly at the sound of their steps; in desperation Thornton flung the thing in his hand high to the right over the wall. She would never be able to get it there, and he could come back afterwards for it. He could soon out-distance her, surely.

But Muriel did not attempt to follow him. She had seen the touch of red in the thing he had thrown over, and she had noticed as she flew past a little iron gate set in the bottom of the wall.

She went back. To her joy she found the little gate yield to her touch. It clanged as she shut it behind her. Immediately she was assailed and terrified by a ferocious barking the moment that she recognised that the thing which Basil Thornton had thrown over the wall was the will of old Richard Mayne, the will that she had witnessed, leaving the property to Jack Summers.

It had fallen away from the wall. And to a staple in the wall a chain was fastened, and at the end of the chain an enormous bloodhound danced and pawed in rage at sight of her. The will was under his very paws. Oh, Heavens, if the dog should seize it and destroy it!

She was afraid to reach it, for the dog was so threatening.

Yet she must dare. With a new idea she flung a stone against the wall, and, as the dog swerved towards the sound, she made a dash for the precious packet. But the bloodhound's distraction was only for half a second; he swung back again, growling horribly. She fled out of his reach, screaming and more afraid than before.

Ah, why could she not be brave? She *would* get that packet and prevent it from being destroyed, at any risk or injury.

She went forward and bent resolutely down. The hot breath of the bloodhound was upon her; his claws drew blood from her face and twisted in her hair, giving her a pain not to be borne. She shut her eyes and groped blindly for the packet; she felt the touch of it with a little cry of thankfulness.

The next minute she had rolled away. The blood was streaming from her deathly face, and she had fainted.

* * * * * * *

It was Jack Summers, her lover, who found her there not long after. She was clasping tightly the red-ribboned packet that meant so much and might so easily have been destroyed.

It was after all a happy couple who went back hand in hand through the morning to the house of death.

And Basil Thornton, the schemer, never saw either again.

Warwick Wright.

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AN UNSUSPECTED MATCHMAKER.

The Story of an Unfounded Rumour.

"THAT silly rumour spoilt the whole thing, Jean!" said Roy Dennison dejectedly to his sister. "You want to know why I'm suffering so acutely from the blues, and I'm making a full confession!"

"This is interesting!" observed Jean Dennison, surveying her brother critically. "When, a fortnight ago, the rumour got abroad that you and Kitty Bryne were engaged, the idea appeared to me to be so utterly absurd that I laughed till I cried!

"I knew that you and Miss Bryne had never exchanged more than a couple of dozen words, which made the rumour impossible, quite apart from the fact that you have been the most invulnerable of men! In fact, Roy, to speak to you in a frank and sisterly manner——"

"As you generally take good care to do!" he interrupted drily.

"Don't be so pointed!" she remonstrated with a frown. "But it does you good to be told the truth, Roy! Well, to finish my remarks, you have been quite a thorn in my side; for all the girls I meet wish to know why you are not more amiable to their sex!"

"Oh, come!" objected Roy with animation. "I have always been polite to ladies; I am neither a bear nor a bore!"

"No, it isn't that!" explained Jean somewhat awkwardly. "But you have never shown any disposition to—to——. Oh, dear! How dense you are, Roy! Don't you understand?"

"I cannot say that your explanation is a very lucid one," remarked Roy with a slight flush, "but I suppose you mean that I have never shown any disposition to select one as a life-partner. I have never attempted to make love to anyone, eh?"

"That's it!" cried Jean quickly. "Well," she added, with a curious twinkle in her merry brown eyes, "now you tell me plump and plain that you had fallen in love with Kitty Bryne, and you were just about to make some advance when that rumour of an engagement was spread concerning you two—and that spoilt your life. Well, it *was* awkward, because she may think that you circulated the rumour as a move to further your conquest!"

"That's just what she must think," cried Roy dismally. "She cut me dead the very next time we passed in the street! I did my best to contradict it, but even the contradiction is hurtful, because it has the air of saying, 'I don't want her, and I'm indignant at the idea'! See, Jean? It has made my case simply hopeless!"

"It *is* awkward!" admitted Jean with puckered brows. "But I think if I had been you, and in love with the girl, I should have gone to her boldly and explained that the affair was a hoax, told her that you were in love with her, and asked her if she had any objection to transforming the rumour into actual truth."

"What!" gasped her less excitable and energetic brother. "Why, that would have convinced her that I had done it on purpose! Besides, I wasn't sure that I really loved her enough to make her my wife, and it isn't right to jump into matrimony. However, since she cut me, nearly a fortnight ago, I have come solidly to the conviction that I am in love and that my life without her will be a blank!"

"H'm!" said Jean, the mischievous twinkle becoming more mischievous, "and now you wish me to help you to undo the mischief wrought by the unknown rumourist—I think that that's rather a good word, don't you? That means that you want me to assist in bringing Kitty Bryne and you together?

"Seriously, Roy," she went on with pretended gravity, "I scarcely feel justified in doing so till I am quite satisfied that you are really in love. I have no proper proof of that fact yet!"

Roy looked up in alarm at the prospect of losing his lively sister's aid; her attitude was unexpected.

"I am in deadly earnest, Jean!" he cried passionately. "I love that girl to desperation; I have felt my love increasing day by day, I could worship the ground she walks on, and it is maddening to me to see her pass; I long to take her in my arms and tell her how madly I adore her, and yet I must not even meet her lovely eyes!

"What will life be without her? What will be the value of position, distinction, honours, if I cannot lay them at her feet? My whole being is hers, and the thought that another may possess her is intolerable! I yearn for her!"

"You've improved wonderfully!" said Jean calmly. "Jack never talks to me like that, and the very next time he comes I shall want to know why. When we were first engaged he did say something about his heart, but it was tame compared with you! I'll tell him to have a chat with you and take lessons, or I'll give him back his ring. I don't see why I shouldn't be treated as well as any other girl!"

Roy rose and stared haughtily at his irrepressible sister.

"This is not a joke, Jean!" he said stiffly. "I don't want Jack to ask me questions and if it won't help me——"

A ripple of laughter interrupted him. Jean sprang up, clasped her big brother round the neck, and kissed him.

"You're a goose, Roy! You know, dear, that you have been so invulnerable, so impregnable to the darts of Cupid, that to hear you talk like that is quite startling, and you deserved to be chaffed about it a little! You forget that you chaffed me when my engagement was announced, don't you? That's always the way with you cold, unimpressionable sort of men, when you *do* get caught in the toils, you—— But I won't tease you, Roy; I'll help you and, if you'll do your part, I will undertake that Kitty shall give you a kiss like this one day!"

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She kissed him again with additional fervour. "Oh, you needn't blush so furiously! It will be very nice, I'm sure!"

Before the confused Roy could speak she had seated herself on the couch and begun to reflect.

"How can it be managed?" asked Roy at length.

"I'm thinking!" responded Jean.

There was no mistake about the thinking, if her appearance could be taken as a guide; for her brows were knit, her lips set tightly, and her eyes became grave and had a far-away expression.

"I shall have to press Jack into it," she said at length, "and I'm pretty confident of success. Listen, and I'll tell you my plan."

He listened, his face betraying doubt and perplexity, mingled with a trace of expectancy.

"But don't you think that she will——" he began, but Jean stopped him.

"Not at all, afterwards," she declared. "Why should she, if she is married and happy? It only paves the way and leads up to the point where you come in and do the rest!"

"Very well," he agreed. "Oh, you need not fear that I shall not have the courage to go on, if I get the chance. I love her so dearly; she is the——"

Jean's rippling laughter rang out again and she vanished through the doorway as he took up a book and made pretence of being about to throw it at her.

"That girl plagues the life out of me, but I will forgive her if she will put things right!" he murmured.

"It's all right so far," announced Jean on the following day to her expectant brother. "Jack and her brother are good friends, and Jack has so worked on the brother that he has partly wheedled and partly chaffed and partly dared her going to Madame Navarro's to have her fortune told. Kitty has a keen scorn of all that kind of thing, so the best way to get at her was to insinuate that she was afraid to learn what was in store for her, and that finished it. She has plenty of pluck and she is going, just to show that he is wrong."

"What a shame!" cried Roy with a feeling of compunction. "And Madame Navarro?"

"Jack says that you owe him a guinea for services rendered, but you need not send it by return of post as he is not hard up," said Jean enigmatically.

"I understand! It's worth a guinea if Madame does her work."

"She demurred at first, and said it might spoil her reputation, but Jack told her that it was quite likely to come true, whether the oracle said so or not, so she ought to have no fear for her renown."

"Jack and you will make a good pair of schemers!" was Roy's smiling comment on this speech, whereat Jean laughed happily.

That very evening the object of this conspiracy, Miss Kitty Bryne, went to the house of Madame Navarro to consult the oracle. She was tall and pretty; stately, and with an air of determination, but her stateliness and her determined air were not so pronounced as to prevent her from looking most winning.

It was rather a cold evening, and the sharpness of the air, coupled with the inward expectancy, produced a tinge of colour on her cheeks sufficient to enhance her attractiveness in a way that would have made it difficult for Roy to have restrained himself had he seen her at that moment.

Madame Navarro had had no notice from Kitty that she intended to call, but she found the feminine seer at home, and she required no introduction.

"Pray be seated, Miss Bryne," she requested, much to Kitty's surprise. Then she produced the cards and began.

Various things were told, and Kitty listened languidly till Madame asked, after making a fresh shuffle and laying half a dozen cards on the table. "Do you know anyone whose name begins with 'R'?"

Kitty reflected and finally returned a decided negative, a look of unbelieving triumph in her eyes.

"Strange," murmured Madame slowly. "Yet the cards plainly indicate such a person, who will be to you as one who brings good fortune. He or she will be your mascot! Let us go on!"

Madame continued her divinations. The cards showed evidence of an engagement, either just consummated or soon to be. Was Kitty already engaged? No? Then the saying of the cards was a prediction.

"You will soon meet someone to whom you will ultimately be engaged," Madame assured her. Kitty shrugged her shoulders slightly, whereon Madame continued: "It will come, and you will be foolish to repel the feeling through pride, believe me!" This was said so earnestly that Kitty was impressed.

After the cards, Madame did a little palmistry; she invariably gave her consultants the benefit of three sources of inspiration, the cards, the hands, and the magic mirror.

In Kitty's hands there were the same indications of an early engagement, a happy married future, and so forth, but this time the additional information was vouched that the future husband was a man who had not hitherto shown himself very impressionable.

Then came the mirror. Kitty had to place her hand on it for one minute, after which Madame wiped the surface carefully and gazed at it with much earnestness. It was necessary for the consultant to place her hand on the glass in order to have the magic effect of predicting the consultant's future, otherwise there was no conception between her and the glass, and there would be no pictures.

Madame saw several picutres; but it is unnecessary to mention those which do not deal with this story; it is sufficient to say that, as in the case of the cards and palmistry, there was just enough that was true to cause Kitty to feel that there must be something in these things which were of the future. Madame saw a young woman passing a man; the woman she recognised as Kitty, the man she did not know. She had certainly never seen him. The young man appeared to think, from his expression, that he had been unjustly treated. Kitty's face grew warm.

Another picture represented Kitty and this same young man; Madame could see him better now, and she gave a description which Kitty recognised as that of Mr. Dennison. The two were talking amiably and he appeared to be very attentive; Kitty seemed to be pleased. Another picture represented the same pair standing and apparently receiving congratulations. Madame said that the picture became blurred after a moment and she was unable to say whether the couple were dressed as if for a wedding or merely in ordinary clothes.

"Ah, I can see no more pictures; the mirror will tell me no more to-day!" cried Madame regretfully.

Kitty was satisfied. She placed the usual amount of silver thanks on the table and rose to say good evening. As if impelled by a sudden thought, Madame remarked. "Perhaps his name begins with 'R'? I can assure you that there is something in that statement of the cards!

Kitty shook her head slowly and left. She was disturbed by the consultation. She might have been more disturbed if she could have seen Jean retailing the interview to Roy; it was third-hand, having come through Jack.

"Jack's people are giving a party in a week; they have invited Kitty's brother and, as he (poor fellow!) is not engaged, he will persuade his sister to come. You are invited, Roy, so there's the first chance; make use of it!" said Jean.

Roy looked forward eagerly to that night, and when the evening arrived and he was in the house of the Masons, he looked just as eagerly for Kitty.

He soon espied her, and, nerving himself for an effort, he approached her and took a seat by her side.

They had been introduced weeks previously, but that cut in the street undid all that had preceded, or would have done in ordinary circumstances. But Roy screwed up his courage and ignored that disagreeable fact.

"I think this will be a decidedly pleasant evening, Miss Bryne, don't you? The Masons are good entertainers."

Thus deliberately addressed, she felt bound to answer politely. She wished he had not taken that seat; and then the

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recollection of that picture in the magic mirror came to her. Perhaps, after all, she had really been unjust in cutting him. She looked at him from the corner of her eye, and decided that she had. Having arrived at that conclusion, Kitty felt bound to make amends, and, although she could not see her way to make a plain apology yet, still she could efface the sting of the slight by being gracious now!

The result was that they were soon chatting quite pleasantly, and Roy was so happy that he trembled with joy. Kitty occasionally thought of the suggested engagement so persistently mentioned by Madame, and it chilled her for the moment, but she dismissed it and continued her process of making amends for her past rudeness.

"It doesn't follow that I am to marry a man because I talk to him," she told herself. "Mr. Roy Dennison was—— Oh, that 'R'!"

Now, however much we may disown it, there is a stratum of superstition in the breasts of all human creatures, and Kitty Bryne, usually strong-minded, had quite an ordinary mortal's share of it.

We all long to know something of the future, and, when we are told of something that is supposed to be in store for us, we endeavour to realise that something, unless it be extraordinarily disagreeable. This endeavour may even be unconscious, strange as that may appear.

Jean was shrewd enough to know this fact, and she had determined to use it for all it was worth; hence the visit to Madame Navarro, and now the effect was becoming tangible.

Kitty was simultaneously repelled and attracted by the fact that Roy Dennison and she were to be thrown together. She did not at first relish the idea, and yet—yet Roy was a grand specimen of a man, and she had heard a good repute of him! Roy played his part well, and before the evening was over, it was practically arranged that Jack Mason, with Mr. and Miss Dennison, should come to the Brynes' party a week later.

That week seemed more like a year to Roy, and by the time it had passed away he was in such a fever of excitement that he made a false move. He schemed for a few moments' conversation with Kitty and succeeded; but he boldly began to talk about the rumoured engagement.

"Suppose that rumour had been correct, Miss Bryne," he commenced, "we should have been thinking about the wedding by now, I imagine?"

Kitty flushed, and then she looked angry.

"I do not think we need discuss that piece of stupidity, Mr. Dennison!" she remarked coldly. "It was vexing to me!"

Roy saw his mistake; Jean's notion of a bold attack had not been rewarded with the desired result. Perhaps the conditions were different now that so long a time had passed! Roy, in his anxiety not to spoil his chance this time, developed unexpected coolness and artfulness.

"I can cordially echo your sentiments, Miss Bryne!" he declared with assumed sincerity. "It was most vexing to me to have my name linked in such an unwarrantable fashion with that of a young lady whom I scarcely knew."

Kitty did not like that speech; it was practically telling her that she had not attracted his attention in the least—she, whom so many young men had courted, or tried to court, in vain! She set her lips firmly, but Roy gave her no time.

"Yet," he continued musingly, "you really thought that *I* set that rumour afloat, I do believe! Now, I wonder why on earth you should have thought that?"

Kitty felt ready to cry; it was not often that her feelings got the better of her, but she was conscious of her unjustified rudeness, and she was being informed in plain, matter-of-fact language that she had no grounds for having harboured the idea! It was rather humiliating for such a favourite as Kitty Bryne!

Their little chat was interrupted and it was an hour later before they met again. It occurred to Roy that Kitty had watched for an opportunity for this second chat, and he was right; Kitty's vanity was wounded and she had resolved to show this cool young fellow, who had almost boasted of his immunity, that he was not impregnable.

"I was thinking just now of your remark," she said, boldly plunging into the difficult subject. "Suppose that announcement had been true?"

"Well?" he inquired.

He was looking straight into her eyes with a glance that seemed to read her soul. She was nonplussed; she had expected him to take up the thread, and there he was, leaving her to go on! And he was gazing at her in such a disconcerting manner! Poor Kitty, despite her usual self-possession, found her heart beating violently.

"Well, suppose?" she continued lamely, "I——"

She was so vexed with herself for having started the foolish topic. It was so silly of her to collapse in that way, yet how could she go on when he gazed at her like that, when her own heart was beating so hurriedly, and when he left it all to her to say?

Roy saw the position and risked a bold move this time; he had failed before in the bold attack, but he forgot it. He simply could not help it; he was impelled by some unknown force.

"I am quite ready to suppose that it is true, Miss Bryne—Kitty! Are you?"

She sprang to her feet, her lips trembling, and would have hurried away, but he quickly strode to her side and guided her to a quiet corner, which was in reality a small room thrown into the larger one for the occasion.

"Well, Kitty, I am waiting for the answer!" he said softly, when they were secluded from all observers. "Can I have it? I did not circulate that rumour, but I was at that time just awakening to a knowledge of the fact that I was falling in love with you, and I wished that it were true! I was playing a game this evening when I said I was vexed; I said so because you treated me so coldly and I thought that it would make you reflect. Do you wish me to tell you how much I love you before you give me the answer?"

Apparently she did, for he told her, and he took some time about it, and she appeared to be well pleased with what he said. And before they left that nook, he had asked for and obtained the first kiss. As their lips parted, he remembered the words of Jean—"I am sure it will be very nice!" And he acknowledged that it was!

"Oh, I'm so glad!" was Jean's exclamation when she heard the great news. "How will you tell her about the fortune-telling?" she added, in response to her brother's perplexed inquiry. "Well, I'll settle that, Roy. As soon as the engagement is announced—or shall I say as soon as the announcement made some time ago is confirmed?—I shall have something to say!"

So she did. Roy and Kitty were sitting together when Jean entered.

"I must apologise for intruding," she observed lightly, "You don't like it, of course; *I* don't, when I am listening to Jack! But I have a confession to make!"

Roy felt hot, Kitty looked mystified; but neither knew exactly what was coming.

"I always thought that you two would make a very happy couple," she went on volubly, "so I thought I would turn matchmaker and engineer a marriage. So I circulated that rumour! Don't look so surprised both of you! Unfortunately it failed. I was not much disturbed till I discovered, a fortnight afterwards, how my brother was affected by it, and then I went further!" Here she told about the fortune-telling.

"Now, Kitty, I'm sure you'll be all forgiveness, because you are *so* happy, aren't you? Yes, I thought you would!" she rattled on. "Don't you think we might make a double event of it, Kitty? Jack says he can't, positively can't, wait more than another six weeks, and I'm sure that Roy will agree if you will, dear! Won't you, Roy,?"

Of course, he replied in the affirmative, so Kitty, with flaming cheeks, gave her consent also.

Neva Grant.

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A Fragment - - of Wood.

Which Played a Prominent Part in Two Lovers' Lives.

In a tiny room of a miserable house in a wretched East End street, before the dying embers of a fire which had never been higher than the grate's second bar, sat a tall, thin youth of about nineteen. His chin was resting on his delicate, taper-like fingers, his big, dreamy eyes stared vacantly into space. A sheet of music was propped up in front of him, and a violin and bow lay on a clothless table.

There was the sound of much creaking as someone dashed precipitately up the rickety stairs, followed a moment later by a tap on the door. There was a second tap, to which was vouchsafed no answer. Then the door suddenly flew inwards, and a young girl, whose cheap, poor garments could not disguise her beautiful features, her flaxen hair, or the glory of her lustrous eyes, stood on the threshold. She stepped into the room and placed a brown-paper parcel on the table.

"Mr. Raymond," she said hesitatingly, "an old gentleman's just left this for you. He was all of a tremble, and said I was to carry it very carefully. And here's a letter."

"Oh, Marjorie, is that you?" The tall youth rose languidly. "I was just dreaming, Marjorie, that I was in a crowded theatre conducting an opera, which I had composed myself, and that you, dressed as you should be in lovely silk clothes, were smiling at me from a private box. But I say, Marjorie, won't you ever call me simply Raymond?"

The girl's face flushed with evident pleasure, but she replied never a word.

Raymond Wynne, "the young Paganini," as he was billed by the promoters of the public-house smoking concerts at which he earned a scanty livelihood, tore open the letter.

"My Dear Nephew," he read. "*I haven't got long to live. I am an old man, and my fingers are stiff with the rheumatics, so that I can't play my old fiddle as I used to. But you are a musician, you love a good fiddle like I do, and so I leave you my greatest treasure.*"

The young man clapped his hands with delight.

"Oh, Marjorie," he cried ecstatically, "my fortune's made.. It's a real Strad."

With frantic haste the eager hands of the girl, and the more eager ones still of the young man, stripped the paper from the case. Then Raymond's manner suddenly changed.

"Don't touch it," he almost screamed. "It's mine—mine. Nobody must touch it but me."

He lifted the valuable instrument from its plush-lined bed, and caressed and hugged it. Then he tuned it, and, in a few moments, the miserable garret was flooded with delicious melody.

All this time the girl stood in the doorway gazing with rapturous eyes at her lover.

"I must go down now," she said, as the violinist paused for a moment; "mother is calling me."

The young man made no sign of having heard her words. His mind was completely taken up with his new possession.

It was past midnight before he laid down his bow. But he was up again at break of day—practising, continually practising. And so for days and weeks, no matter whether the other lodgers in the house grumbled or even threatened, he continued practising upon his beloved instrument.

No more did he sit in the long evenings with Marjorie and her half-blind mother, reading to them, playing to them, or inventing other amusements. No more did he take Marjorie for those delightful Saturday afternoon rambles, for which she dressed with such scrupulous care in all her finery, and to which she looked forward so longingly all the week.

And, Marjorie? How she hated the instrument that had robbed her of her lover. When she remonstrated, somewhat feebly, with Raymond, he was vexed with her for noticing such silly trifles. But he grew cool and preoccupied, and never talked of anything but his ambition, and the great name that awaited him, when once he could get a start. And the more her lover drifted away from her, the more Marjorie hated the instrument with all the strength of her passionate, untrained soul.

At last the chance came. By this time Raymond had secured a place in the orchestra of a London theatre. One day he bounded up the stairs, three at a time, of the miserable house, and burst into Marjorie's room.

"It's come, Marjorie, it's come," he shouted, throwing his cap to the ceiling. "My fortune's made, my dream's realised."

The girl stared at him.

"This morning," he went on excitedly, "the great Max Baumer was in the theatre—at the rehearsal. He heard me play my solo in the orchestra, and he clapped his hands and told the manager he had discovered a genius. And I'm to make my *début* to-night at one of his concerts. A performer has fallen ill. I am to take his place. If I am well received, my name is made. To-morrow I leave these rooms for better ones. See, Baumer has given me a cheque."

He kissed Marjorie carelessly, and tore away to his room to caress his magic instrument, and to draw from it the ecstatic strains of pure delight.

He never noticed that Marjorie didn't return his kiss, or that while he spoke she walked away from him to the window with white cheeks and clenched, trembling hands.

Late in the afternoon, he hurried out to purchase a ready-made suit of evening clothes for the concert.

Raymond had not left the house more than half-an-hour

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when the door—which in his excitement he had forgotten to lock—was pushed gently back and Marjorie tiptoed softly into his room.

But the figure which crept in so stealthily was very unlike the pretty young seamstress. Her face was whiter than ever, her lips were compressed tightly, and there was an evil light in the deep blue eyes.

Without pausing a moment she went straight up to the case inclosing the object of her hatred. With a shaking hand she threw open the case.

"It's you!" she cried, and her sweet voice had an angry snarl, "you who have stolen him from me! You have driven him mad, and now you are going to take him away. And, I—oh, Heavens, how I love him!"

She stamped a small foot sharply on the floor. Her eyes seemed ablaze. Then suddenly she seized the Stradivarius by its neck, dragged it from its case, snatched a knife from the table, and in a moment the strings were cut by a furious stroke. Though her body rocked with the passion that consumed her, she did not pause. Raising the violin high above her head she brought it down again and again with a sickening crash on the bars of the iron grate.

In two minutes the valuable instrument was a hideous, splintered wreck—almost past recognition—at the feet of Marjorie, who stood panting, but beginning to slowly realise what she had done.

The sound of a man's light-hearted whistling as he hurried up the stairs caused her to turn to the door—to encounter the eyes of Raymond Wynne. His face was glowing with happiness, and he carried a bulging parcel.

Throwing down the parcel, he began to incircle the girl's waist with his arm.

"Why, Marjorie, dear, you——" He stopped suddenly. His eyes caught sight of the mangled remains. In a flash he understood. His face turned livid, his breath came in quick gasps.

But as suddenly as his passion had risen, so Marjorie's had died completely away, and she now stood terrified and pleading.

"Raymond," she sobbed, clutching at his arm. "Oh, Raymond, forgive me! It was my love for you. Think——"

Like an angry tiger he turned upon her, mad and blind with rage.

"Murderess," he called her again and again. Then, raising his arm, he struck her twice with his clenched fist across the brow. She fell like a log—a thin stream of blood spurting from her temple. Raymond looked at her a moment, a gleam of savage exultation lighting his face, and then, without a word, he rushed blindly down the stairs and out of the house.

For two days and two nights Raymond Wynne wandered about, fighting with many sensations. At last his mood softened—an agony of penitence came upon him, and he returned to his old room. He meant to ask Marjorie's forgiveness.

But Marjorie and her mother had gone, no one knew whither.

On the table of his room he found a note from Max Baumer. He had come in search of Raymond when he failed to keep his engagement, and seeing the remains—which still lay by the hearth—had guessed pretty correctly what had occurred; being as kind as he was great, he offered to lend his own instrument to Raymond if he would consent to play for him the following week.

* * * * *

Twenty years have passed away. The ambitious, unknown lad has developed into a great composer and musician, whose name is a household word. Poverty has given way to wealth, obscurity to fame, and yet he is not satisfied.

The ormolu clock on the mantelpiece of the superbly-furnished drawing-room has chimed the hour of eleven, yet Raymond Wynne, though looking pale and weary, shows no sign of retiring for the night.

There seemed no reason on this particular evening why he should sip coffee and blow smoke rings into the small hours.

He had scrawled the final chord of his new opera early in the afternoon, and though, as a matter of course, he was neck-deep in engagements, he had decided, with the easy unconcern of the popular idol, to disregard them all. Truth to tell, it had suddenly drifted into the cells of his over-stocked mind that the 23rd of June was an anniversary, and he intended to keep it up his own particular way.

It seemed strange to him that he should have remembered it. Usually such matters made no impression upon him, and his wife was wont regularly to prod his memory when conventionality demanded that he should appear interested in such events as their wedding day or her birthday.

He thought of his wife, and he sank back languidly into his chair—thought with calm complacency how exactly she suited him.

This evening she was out—shining somewhere in their brilliant circle with some of the reflected radiance of his fame.

She had been a wealthy widow when he married her, and a famous beauty into the bargain, and that of itself is a sufficiently alluring candle for the average Society moth. As for love—well, there had never been any pretence of that between them. They had both been too old when they met for anything so—so hysterical.

But then Vera wasn't that kind of woman at all. Society called her the "Iceberg," and the musician smiled. He rather liked the name—it pleased his self-esteem. He was quite aware that she had simply chosen him because a celebrity is a good investment when pride is the capital.

Even after three years of married life he knew very little of her, he reflected. He hadn't troubled to know much. Vera wasn't given to confidences, and this was just as well, because confidences would have been rather a nuisance to a busy man.

Her beauty pleased him; her social triumphs were put to the fire of his ambition; her discretion was beyond challenge; and what more did he want?

"Ah, what more?" He repeated the words aloud, and then rising abruptly, he walked across the room to a cabinet, unlocked it, took something from it, and reseated himself.

It was no romantic relic that he held in his hand; neither a tendril of hair nor a faded flower; not even a packet of letters. It was merely a small, thin piece of polished wood. Like a flood the incidents of that miserable evening, twenty years before, rushed back to his memory.

He glanced round the luxurious room and thought of the miserable garret he once rented in that wretched East End street; he looked from the corner where, by a grand piano, were heaped several of the costliest violins money could buy, to the scrap of wood in his hand, the sole remains of his first Stradivarius.

Then his eyes sought the stately features of his wife in the full length portrait painted by a celebrated Royal Academician, and another picture rose out of the mist before his eyes—the picture of a girl in lowly dress with a soft tenderness in her deep blue eyes, who pleaded with him for forgiveness—the picture of Marjorie.

* * * * *

His head was still buried in his breast when his wife came into the room.

"Still up?" she asked, slightly elevating her handsome eyebrows. "Isn't it a little late—even for you?"

The composer started, and passed his hand across his fevered forehead as if trying to collect himself.

"I suppose it is," he said "but, strange to say, Vera, I've been thinking."

She shrugged her faultless shoulders.

"Gracious me!" she said. "One shouldn't think. If I thought—why, good Heavens, I should have wrinkles and furrows and grey hairs in a fortnight!"

He looked up quickly. Despite the carelessness of her tone, there was a note in it he did not quite understand.

"What's that?" she asked suddenly, pointing to the scrap of wood which still lay on the table.

He picked it up again and fingered it tenderly.

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"It's a piece of a violin—one of the first violins I ever had. It's been reminding me of something which happened on this very day, twenty years ago. I—I should like, if you'd let me, Vera, to tell you about it."

He marvelled then, as he often marvelled afterwards, at the sudden impulse which impelled him to speak to her. But his heart was too full, and the desire to unburden it to someone was too strong to be resisted.

Without waiting for her to answer he began. He talked quickly—half-afraid that she would interrupt him with some chilling piece of sarcasm or some politely incredulous inquiry.

He spoke of the garret, of the Saturday afternoon rambles with little Marjorie, of his uncle's legacy, of his ambition, and of the shattered Strad.—he did not even spare himself when he came to the cruel blow that had separated him and Marjorie for ever. When he had finished the recital he sat waiting impatiently for her verdict. But she did not speak.

At last he glanced nervously at her. Was it possible that she could be jealous of this little dead and gone tragedy of so many years ago—or was she merely bored?

Her face was as calm and impassive as ever, but her eyes looked bigger and darker than usual. If she had been any other woman the musician would have sworn there were tears in them.

"I've tired you, Vera?" he asked quickly. "These things sound foolish to you?"

She waited an instant before answering, loosening the cloak from her shoulders as if its weight had suddenly become too much for her.

"No," she said. "You've surprised me, that's all. But tell me, Raymond, if you had found her—this child, this Marjorie—would you have forgiven her—really forgiven?"

The great violinist pressed his hands together—his thin cheeks flushed.

"Heaven knows I would!" he said; "it is her forgiveness I want. That blow has haunted me like a deadly nightmare for twenty years."

"And you cared for her all the time?"

Her voice was softer than usual—there was even tenderness in it. Against his will, it drew from him the truth.

"I love her still, Vera. Forgive me, I love her still."

Then a very amazing thing happened.

His wife stepped suddenly forward, and heedless of damaging her rich satin gown and delicate lace, she knelt with bowed head at the musician's feet. Taking both his hands in hers, she covered them with kisses.

"Then forgive her, Raymond," she whispered. "She needs your forgiveness badly, for she too has been a coward—too great a coward to tell you the truth when you asked her to become your wife, and she saw you no longer recognised the child in the woman; such a coward that she gave you only her second name and not her first—such a coward that she has never shown you this."

She lifted a corner of her fringe and disclosed a small red scar, showing up sharply against the white of the skin.

For some minutes the only sound in the big drawing-room was the ticking of the little clock which seemed to hammer into their brains.

A great sigh left the lips of the musician. As one who awakes from some overpowering trance he staggered to his feet.

Then he stooped down and gently raised his wife, and, folding his arms about her, he held her tight against his heart as if he never meant to release her.

Again and again he kissed the disfiguring scar as if he would have kissed it back into comeliness once more.

"Couldn't you have trusted me, darling?" he asked at last. "What made you so afraid?"

And the woman whom Society called the "Iceberg," whispered the little word "Love!"

J. G. Jones.

He: "That fellow over there cheated me out of a cool million." She: "How could that be?" He: "Wouldn't let me marry his daughter."

Your Editor Chats.

A Personal Note.

At the risk of appearing egotistical, I should like to devote just a few lines this week to a brief chat about myself and my paper. I think that every reader will acquit me of boasting if I say that I believe *Short Stories* is at the present time a splendid little paper. An editor is always proud of the paper over which he has control, more especially so if his own particular paper is at the top of the tree of his contemporaries. And undoubtedly *Short Stories* is the best and brightest of its kind. The motto of its staff is "Unflagging Energy and Ceaseless Progression," and the motto is never unheeded. Popular as it has ever been, it has never been so popular as it is at the present time. I account for this by divers reasons. The picture covers have been so highly appreciated that I am sure that they must have brought some scores of thousands of fresh readers to *Short Stories*. Then again, it has been most gratifying to see the interest evoked by such series as our Unsolved Love Problems. The excellence and high quality of the stories, both serial and short, appeal to the vast numbers who like good fiction, especially when there are copious illustrations by clever artists. And, in conclusion, I may say that I have in preparation for you some startling new features, which I am positive will be liked by all. I have been induced to write these few words as a reply to the many letters I receive congratulating me on the quality of *Short Stories* and wishing the paper every success. The senders of these I thank most heartily.

"Brian Cresswell's Choice."

I shall have much pleasure in announcing next week the name of the winner of the guinea offered in connection with the Eleventh Unsolved Love Problem. Readers who wish to enter for the Twelfth Problem must note that the closing day is next Friday, May 6th.

Pity the Poor.

The spirit of holidays is in the air. You, gentle reader, are considering where you shall spend your summer vacation, away from the worry of work. You, perhaps a unit of London or of one of our great commercial cities, are "tired of the din and rattle of wheels, sick of the dust," and are pining for the brief spell of a more open existence in the country or at the seaside. The knowledge that you will soon realise your wishes is comforting in the extreme. It gives you greater heart for the work that you needs must do.

But there are others—others, on the threshold of life, who from year's end to year's end never get out of the slums in which they abide, never taste of the great and glorious fields, shining under a great and glorious sun, that are but a few miles away. So near and yet so far. So pitiful and yet so true.

Won't you, more Providence-blessed reader, lend a helping hand to the children whose vision of Paradise is fields—green fields? It is within your means to give one poor unfortunate a whole day's transportation from misery to joy. Ninepence is all that is required—ninepence that is judiciously spent. You send along your donation, and the organisers of Pearson's Fresh Air Fund do all the rest. For every ninepence received one child of the slums spends a day in the country.

Send along your ninepences (as many as you can spare) to the Hon. Secretary of the Fresh Air Fund, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The Editor.

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AN UGLY DUCKLING.

. . . And a Collie Dog. . . .

He was just a ball of orange and white fluff. But I ought to begin at the beginning.

Dicker, our coachman, brought him to me first. He came to me one morning when I was in the garden, and said :

"I thought you'd like to see this, miss, he seemed just the sort what you could fancy." He unfastened his coat, and from inside it two shining eyes looked into mine, and an orange and white paw was thrust out in friendly greeting.

I nearly screamed with delight.

"Oh, Dicker," I said, "how lovely—how lovely ! What is he ? Where did you get him ?"

"'Tis a collie pup, miss, six weeks old. I found they had a litter of them up at Mr. Grindlay's, and I thought maybe you'd like one—if——"

As Dicker spoke he was drawing from under his coat the most fascinating person I ever saw. He was just what I said first—a ball of orange and white fluff and he had a tiny feathery tail, and a pointed nose and two of the brightest eyes that ever looked out of a dog's face.

"Oh, Dicker !" I exclaimed, "if only I might have him—I wonder if father would let me keep him—I should love him so."

"You might take him in and ask the master now, miss ; he's in the library," Dicker suggested. Dicker had been our coachman ever since I was a baby and he and I were fast friends.

So I picked up the puppy and scurried round the terrace and arrived breathless at the library door, and just listened outside for a moment, because I knew that if my step-mother were in there I had no chance of getting the dog. My step-mother and I didn't agree very nicely, but father and I—well, father and I were like chums.

The library was quite quiet, and I opened the door softly and went in.

Father was by himself, sitting writing at the table. He held out his hand and smiled.

"Well, my child !" he said.

"Dad, did you ever in all your life see anything so lovely ?" I answered him, laying the collie pup on his knee with one hand and putting my free arm round his neck. "Dad, I do want him," and I laid my cheek against father's dear grey head. The puppy looked into father's face, and lifted one of its paws in a pleading sort of way.

Father smiled.

"But, my dear," he said doubtfully, "I don't know what your mother will say."

"Dad, I promise you he sha'n't get into mamma's or anybody's way. I'll train him ever so well."

(I never would call my step-mother "mother." I don't know whether it was naughty of me or not, but I could not and would not do it.)

Father smiled again. I hugged him a little harder.

"Please, dad, dear." I whispered, "I don't believe I ever wanted anything so much in all my life—and he will be such a lovely companion for me."

Mamma said father always spoilt me dreadfully, and that I was odious in consequence. Perhaps I was odious ; I don't know, but I think she really did contrive to provide an excellent antidote for any spoiling I got from father, because she never approved of anything I did, or was, or said. Well, after all, it doesn't matter much about all that. Anyhow, that morning father said :

"Well, well, my dear, if you will undertake to look after the dog yourself and not allow him to worry anybody, you shall have him. Only, mind, you must take entire charge of him."

"Rather," I answered, and I hugged father till he cried out for mercy.

Mamma always said I was nothing but a tom-boy, and that I should never learn repose of manner. I don't believe father cared so very much about repose ; in his secret soul I think he liked his little "boy-girl." His second wife and her daughter were so very full of repose that there didn't seem to be anything else in them at all. "Icily regular, faultlessly dull," applied to them excellently.

Mamma was not at all pleased about Jock ; she invariably called him "that horrid dog," but really he was not so very horrid ! He was never in her way. He was not allowed to go into any room in the house except the schoolroom, my own special sanctum, from which there was a separate stair into the garden, and Jock's education and mine went on there apace.

Though I was seventeen I still had a governess. Mamma said my education had been disgracefully neglected before she married father, and that now I must make up for lost time.

Father and I did not dare say a word, but I don't think we either of us thought I *had* been neglected, really. You see, I had done lessons always with him, and you don't know how dreadful it was to work with a governess afterwards. At first I used to cry myself to sleep every night, I was so miserable ; but that did no good, and it made father miserable to see me unhappy, so I tried not to mind about my lessons. There were so many things to mind about just then that one more or less hardly mattered.

Father and I had lived oh ! so happily together for fifteen years of my life, and then—well, then somebody persuaded him that he ought to marry again for my sake, that I needed a mother's care, and so on, and he listened to what that dreadful busybody said and married Mrs. Lane, who already had a daughter of her own, and began by thinking me everything that was tiresome and disagreeable. Perhaps I was. But I do not think, looking back on it dispassionately, that I can have been quite so objectionable as my step-mother thought me.

Be that as it may, life was not very pleasant or endurable in the days when my collie pup first came to gladden my heart.

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I was a lonely little girl just then for a girl of seventeen. Till my father's second marriage I had been his constant companion, but it was soon plain that nothing vexed my step-mother more than to find me in the library with father, or to watch us strolling through the garden together arm in arm. So it was very occasionally now that my dear old dad and I had any of our happy talks. My governess was, well, she was middle-aged and well-informed, and a governess to her finger-tips, and she had not two ideas beyond seeing that I sat upright and learnt those stereotyped lessons correctly. My step-sister was twenty, and had been out two years and looked down upon me from a lofty height, so you see I was rather lonely—till Jock came!

He grew with amazing rapidity, chiefly at the legs. They became lengthy and spindly, and his fluffy body lost that puppy fluff which changed into beautiful silky fur, his tail grew more feathery than ever, and his dear eyes brighter and more loving every day.

He was not always an angel in his youth. He took a great deal of teaching. Like his mistress, he dearly loved mischief.

He and my step-mother steadily and persistently disliked each other, and though Jock was too much of a gentleman to be aggressive, he would never go near her if he could help it. My father he silently and unobtrusively adored.

He loved me with all the depth of his faithful doggy heart, in spite of the many beatings I had bestowed on him. Well, he had to be taught that it was not right to scurry downstairs and hunt for slippers to be devoured slowly on the dust heap in the garden.

It had to be impressed on him by tedious and painful means that to scrab a hole in the midst of the best flower beds was not a thing a self-respecting dog should do, and out of much tribulation it came home to him at last that sheep in the fields must not be chivied and hunted into a corner.

But he learnt all his difficult lessons at last and by the time he was a year old, and I nearly eighteen, Jock was a thoroughly well-mannered, well-brought-up dog!

Just before my eighteenth birthday my step-mother called me into her boudoir after lunch.

"Barbara," she said coldly, "your father and I think that it is time you left off being a child, and that you tried to be a little more grown up," she glanced at my short skirt severely.

My step-mother always made me feel nervous. I felt myself moving from one foot to the other in a maddening way.

"Do not try to shuffle about like that," she said icily; "it is quite sufficiently annoying to have to take out a girl so utterly indifferent to her appearance as you are without your adding to it by ungainliness. Nothing," she paused to give her words weight, "nothing will ever make you passably good-looking, but really you might try to attain to some sort of gracefulness."

"Am I to come out?" I blurted out, with utter disregard of grace of speech.

"Your father seems to wish it. *I* should have preferred keeping you at home for another year, till you have learnt to improve your manners and appearance a little. However," she shrugged her shoulders expressively, "when you have had a season, perhaps you will learn to be more like other people and not spend your whole time in going about with that horrid dog in the foolish way you do now."

It was on the tip of my tongue to say that I had no one else to go about with, but I luckily refrained, and after listening to a few more remarks on my personal appearance and my lack of good looks and qualities, I escaped.

Jock was lying outside my bedroom door and we went in together. I sat down before the glass disconsolately. It was all very well for my step-mother to say I did not care how I looked or what I wore, but no girl likes to be told she is plain!

"I wonder if I am so ugly, Jock," I said, and I leant my elbows on the table and looked long and earnestly into the glass. "I ought to be sure by this time that I am an ugly duckling. I've been told so often enough."

Jock sat and watched me with loving and adoring eyes. In *his* sight at any rate I was beautiful.

Out of the glass there looked back at me a small brown face, and two green eyes (eyes that were undoubtedly green). The mouth that smiled at me was not at all like buttons, or cherries or Cupid's bows, or nice things of that sort. It was rather wide, and when I laughed a great dimple came in my chin. My hair was always a sore point with my step-mother. It would not brush back smoothly, but rioted all over my head in curls that refused to be straightened by any comb in creation.

"I am an ugly duckling, Jock dear," I said, and Jock wagged his tail, "and I've got to go to London and dance at balls, and sit up and behave properly as a young lady should, and I'd much rather walk about with you in the country."

Jock wagged his tail again. "And it will all be as horrid as possible—if one's ugly, things are always horrid and I wish I wasn't grown up!"

Jock lifted a paw and put it in my lap. He quite understood the situation and sympathised with me entirely.

That same afternoon he and I wandered off to our favourite dell in the park, where the ground was golden with daffodils and sweet with the scent of violets; we generally went there when things were a little unbearable at home.

Jock lay on a bank of primroses and I lay with my head on his. He made a delicious pillow and before very long we were both sound asleep.

Jock's moving suddenly woke me, and I sat up with a start to find a tall stranger looking down at me with amused, grey eyes.

Jock was on his feet in a moment and on guard beside me, his eyes watching the intruder suspiciously.

"I beg your pardon," the stranger said, raising his hat, "but I think I have missed my way and am trespassing."

I saw then that he was not quite young—in fact, I thought him quite old, for he had a lot of grey hairs. His face was thin and brown and very kind, and his eyes made you feel at once that he was nice!

"Well, I'm afraid you are trespassing," I answered; "but it doesn't matter, because this is part of our park."

"It is very lovely," he said, lifting his hat again that the breeze might ruffle his hair; "I don't wonder you and your beautiful dog chose this place for your siesta."

"I *was* sound asleep," I laughed; "I never heard you come. Jock and I always come here when we——"

I pulled myself up short.

"When you what?" the stranger asked.

"Well, you won't say anything about it, will you?" I said, "but the thing is, when we are rather unhappy we come here, then we feel better."

By this time we had all sat down among the daffodils and Jock had expressed approval of our new acquaintance by giving him a paw.

"I am sorry you and Jock are ever unhappy," our new friend said gently; "what is it all about?"

"Well, this time it's because I've got to go to town, and come out, and be grown up—and it is *such* a bore. Jock and I are so much happier here."

"But—" a little amused smile came into the grey eyes watching me—"but surely you like balls, and fun, and all the other things young people enjoy."

"I've never been to a ball, and, you see, the thing is when you are very ugly, and awkward, and rather stupid you don't much like parties."

"No-o; perhaps under those circumstances one might not." He did not smile one bit, but his eyes still looked amused.

"Well, those are the circumstances," I answered nonchalantly; "anybody can see I'm ugly and awkward, and my step-mother is always reminding me of it, and I'm rather stupid, too. Besides that, I really like the country best, and Jock and I have a very nice time together, and, you know, I do so hate long frocks."

"Do you? They are a bore, I expect," he said, and his eyes twinkled.

I thought that most likely he had grown-up girls of his own, because he had some grey hairs and looked—well—looked quite elderly, and he seemed so kind and interested that I just went on.

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"And it isn't only long dresses, but you can't think what a bore gloves are, and veils—well, of course, one's face and hands get brown, but what *does* that matter? And if you're all dressed up in those sort of things, how can you possibly go long scrambles in the woods, or—or——"

"Or climb trees," the stranger put in mischievously.

"How did you know," I exclaimed; "perhaps your daughters climb, too, do they?" I asked eagerly.

"My *what?*"

"Your daughters. Haven't you got any? Oh, dear, I thought you must have, you seemed to understand so well." But the stranger put back his head against the trunk of a tree and laughed, and laughed.

"Do I look so old as all that?" he asked presently.

"Well—you look pretty old," I answered, contemplating him thoughtfully.

"I suppose I do," he said, and I thought his voice sounded a little sad. I could not help exclaiming:

"Oh, *please* don't mind about it, I really like old people best. They're much the nicest, and I simply can't *bear* young men."

"Can't you, why not?"

"Do you know, I never can think of one single thing to say to them, not one. They come to lunch sometimes, and my step-mother says afterwards that, with my education, I really ought to have more conversation. But nothing in my education ever taught me how to talk to young men. Old ones are easy enough—I could talk to you all day."

And at that he went again into peals of laughter. I can't think why.

Jock liked our new friend very much, and Jock was a very good judge of character. When the stranger got up to go a few minutes later, Jock got up too, and wagged his tail, and then gave him a paw again, and Jock only does this to people he really likes and respects.

That evening, when I went down into the drawing-room after dinner, I had such a surprise. There, standing by the fireplace amongst other guests talking to my father, was my friend of the afternoon.

He came forward at once and shook hands with me.

"I didn't know I should have the pleasure of seeing you again," he said; "I had no idea to whose house I was coming with Mr. Grindlay," then he turned and told father how we had met in my daffodil dell.

"This is Sir Reginald Ainslie, Bab dear," father said; "he is coming to settle at Upton."

"How jolly!" I exclaimed, for you see Upton was only five miles off, and I thought how nice it would be to have my new friend in the neighbourhood. I saw my step-mother looking daggers at me, but as I didn't know that I had done wrong, I didn't pay much attention to her, and when father said: "Take Sir Reginald into the conservatory, dear, and show him the roses," I went gladly.

"You haven't started on that new frock yet," Sir Reginald said, glancing at my white muslin, which certainly *was* rather short.

"No, I'm going to put it off till the last minute. You don't know how I hate them and everything that they mean."

"They mean growing up and having a good time."

"I don't know about the good time," I said.

"But growing up means ever so much that is pleasant to a woman," he persisted softly, pulling a yellow rose to pieces as he spoke; "it means seeing life and the world, and then marrying and——"

"Me *marry?*" I laughed; "that isn't very likely. No one in this wide world would ever wish to marry me, and I'm quite sure I don't want to marry anybody. I mean to be an old maid and live with Jock. He is really and truly nicer than any young man. He's always the same," I added.

"And men are not?"

"I don't think young men are," I said gravely; "they never seem to be the same two minutes together. Now, Jock is always the same."

"It will be a case of love me, love my dog, I see," Sir Reginald laughed.

"If you mean that if anybody cared for me he'd have to care for Jock too, you are quite right," I said. "I wouldn't go anywhere without him, and as for marrying—well—I don't want to marry at all, but I certainly shouldn't dream of marrying anybody who wouldn't take Jock as well as me! He's such a lovely dog."

I didn't quite understand the look that came into Sir Reginald's eyes when I said that.

"Faithful little soul," he said, and I wondered whether he meant me or Jock, only Jock's is a big soul, so he must have meant me!

It was quite funny after that how often Jock and I met Sir Reginald in the daffodil dell. I suppose he liked it just as much as we did. He and I had ever so many jolly talks about all sorts of things, and he never seemed to think me stupid or tiresome in my ideas, though I was only a little girl, and he so much older and wiser.

The time for us to go to London was getting horribly close, and I dreaded it more every day. We were so happy in the country just now, Jock and I, and—Sir Reginald; I did so hate trying on my new frocks with their long skirts, and mamma never seemed to lose an opportunity of telling me how badly I

I looked up and saw a tall, handsome gentleman raising his hat to me.

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walked, or how much I stooped, or how unfortunately plain I was!

And then something most extraordinary happened, so extraordinary that even now I sometimes have to pinch myself to see if I really am Barbara or somebody quite different!

One afternoon I came up to the front door, Jock as usual beside me, and I found father on the steps talking to Sir Reginald. Father's expression was half pleased, half bewildered, and he held out his hand to me and drew me close to him with a little tender movement.

"Well, my child," he said gently, and the look in his eyes puzzled me—it was full of love and wistfulness.

I looked at Sir Reginald. He was watching me, and something in his eyes made me suddenly turn away and pat Jock's head in a great hurry.

"Sir Reginald wants—" father began, then hesitated, his voice shook.

"I want you and Jock to come down to our pet dell for a stroll, will you?" Sir Reginald said, and there was a tone in his voice that made my heart give a funny little jump.

But, of course, I went with him. He seemed like a dear old friend now, and before we went father patted me on the shoulder and smiled down at me tenderly.

All the way across the park we never spoke a word. I don't know why I suddenly felt as though I had not anything to say, and Sir Reginald seemed struck with silence too.

Even Jock walked sedately and soberly like a very grown-up dog.

When we got to the daffodil dell we all sat solemnly down and still nobody said anything for a few minutes, and I began picking the daffodils round me from sheer nervousness.

Then—all at once Sir Reginald touched my hand softly.

"Little Barbara," he said, "do you know what I've been talking to your father about?"

I shook my head.

"I've been asking him a great favour."

"Well, then, I'm sure he'll grant it," I said. "Father never refuses people when they ask him things. I wonder whatever you wanted from him," and I forgot my nervousness and looked up at him, and again his eyes made me turn away quickly, and lay my hand on Jock's soft ears.

"He said"—Sir Reginald's voice was very gentle—"I might have what I want if—you will give your consent?"

"I?" I was so surprised that I jumped up. "Why, what have I got to do with it? It's much more likely to be my step-mother who would arrange any of father's business for him, not I."

"It's not exactly business," he hesitated, then took my hand into his and held it closely. "I asked your father whether, if you agreed, he would let you put off your season for a month or two, and then begin it—with me."

"With *you?*"

The clasp of his hand made me feel, oh! I don't know how, so happy, and yet as if I wanted to cry, and Jock seemed to understand, for he laid his dear head against me and wagged his tail.

"Yes, little girl, do you think you could be happy as—as the wife of an old fellow like me, and begin your first season with me to take care of you?"

"Do you want to marry *me?*" I asked, and I was so dreadfully surprised that I looked at him again; "you must have forgotten how very ugly I am, and, truly, I am most stupid and awkward," I spoke earnestly.

"Are you, dear?" he said, and all at once he put his arm round me and gathered me close up to him. "I don't think so—I think you're the dearest little girl in all this wide world, and quite the prettiest. And, Barbara darling, I am not so very old, you know."

The wistfulness in his voice made a queer sort of choking feeling come into my throat. I hid my face against his rough coat, and whispered:

"I don't think you're a bit old, and oh! Jock and I will be so very happy with you!"

"Jock is to come, too, then?" he said.

But I knew he was only laughing at me, because he drew my face up to his and kissed me, and Jock stood up and gave him his paw quite gravely, as though he were giving us his approval.

* * * * *

And as I write I am looking out of my window upon a lawn covered with daisies, where Jock is sitting looking extremely important and grave and responsible, whilst beside him on the grass kicks and crows and laughs a sturdy, grey-eyed person who is just learning the use of his two fat legs, and who grabs at Jock's orange and white coat with two chubby hands.

Jock adores him and he worships Jock, and do you know he is really and truly my son, though as I have told you, I often have to pinch myself to be sure that I am actually and really Barbara, the ugly duckling.

L. G. Moberly.

AUNT MATILDA: "Why do you look so utterly wretched, Jimmy?" Jimmy: "I'm on good behaviour, aunt, when we has company."

"ARE you married?" said the manager to a man who was looking for a situation. "No, sir." "Then I can't employ you. We find that married men know better how to obey than bachelors."

MISTRESS: "Mary, go to the door at once. Someone has rung three or four times." Mary: "Oh, it's all right. It's only that young feller as is mashed on Miss Maud. Yer needn't be afraid of his goin' away in a hurry."

THE grammar pupils were saying their lessons. "In the sentence, 'I love you,' what is the mood of the verb?" asked the teacher. "Sentimental mood," replied one of the big girls, who had spent the last summer at the seaside.

GENTLEMAN VISITOR: "Is Miss Winterbloom in?" Servant: "No, sir; she told me to say that she waited for you until half-past four." Gentleman Visitor: "But I told her expressly I shouldn't be here until five." Servant: "Yes, sir; so I heard her say."

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A Nonsensical Notion.

Telling How Tom Dean Chose His Wife.

We had just finished breakfast. Tom laid down the egg-spoon he had been playing with, and looked across at mother.

"Aunt Anne, I think I'll take a wife," he said, exactly as he might have said: "I think I'll take another cup of coffee!"

"Take a wife?" repeated mother, by no means receiving the information as tranquilly as it had been given. "What for?"

"Well, I don't know," answered Tom, thoughtfully. "It's a notion I've got in my head, somehow."

"All nonsense!" said mother, sharply.

"Do you think so?" said Tom, apparently doubtful, but not in the least put out.

"Think so? I know it. What in the world can you want with a wife? After all these years we have lived so comfortably together, to bring home somebody to turn the house upside down! And, then, what's to become of that poor child?"

The "poor child"—that was I—reddening at being brought into the argument in this way, was about to speak for herself, when Tom interposed, warmly:

"I'm sure May knows I would never have any wife who would make it less a home for her—don't you, May?"

"Of course," said I.

"And I'm sure she knows nothing of the sort," persisted mother, "nor you, either, Tom Dean. How can you answer for what a wife may take it into her head to do, once you get her installed here? You can't expect her to forget, as you do, that May has no real claim on you."

"That I have no real claim on her, I suppose you mean, Aunt," Tom put in for the second time, just as I was getting thoroughly uncomfortable. "But, for all that, I intend to keep her—that is," added Tom, with one of his short-sighted blinks sideways at me, "as long as she'll stay with me, eh, May? And whoever has anything to say against that arrangement will have to go out of my house to say it—not that I'm afraid of any such result in this case—and, on the whole, Aunt Anne, I should like to try the experiment."

Mother smiled grimly, but Tom was so evidently bent on his "experiment," as he called it, that she gave up the argument.

"You can dance, if you're ready to pay the piper," she said, shortly. "And, pray, how soon do you mean to be married?"

Tom's face fell a little at this question.

"Well," said he, "I can't say, exactly. I suppose we shall have to be engaged first."

"What!" said mother, opening her eyes; "why, you don't mean to say, Tom, you haven't spoken to her yet?"

"Not yet," replied Tom cheerfully. "Time enough for that, you know, after I had spoken to you."

Mother, as a minister's widow, was not much given to the idle mirth that is as the crackling of thorns under a pot; but now she leant back, and laughed till the tears stood in her eyes.

"Well," she said, "if it was anybody else, I should say he was cracked; but you never were like other people, and you never will be, Tom Dean. But, at least, you have fixed on the lady?"

"Oh, yes!" answered Tom; "but, if you will excuse me, Aunt Anne, I would rather not say anything about her just yet; for, if—if anything should happen, it wouldn't be pleasant for either party, you know."

With which veiled allusion to his possible rejection, Tom took his hat, and left the room.

Our household was rather queerly put together. There was no particular reason why I should have been of it at all; for I was not really related to Tom, nor even to "mother," as I called her, though I am sure we were as dear to each other as any mother and daughter could be. She was the second wife of my father, who, like most ministers, had been richer in grace than in goods, and had left us at his death with very little to live on.

Then it was that Tom Dean had come forward, and insisted on giving a home to his aunt and to me, whom he had scarcely seen a dozen times in his life before. That was exactly like Tom—"queer Tom Dean," as his friends were fond of saying "who never did anything like anybody else." I suppose, in spite of his clear head for business, there is no denying that he was whimsical; but I am sure, when I think of his unfailing generosity and delicacy, I can't help wishing there were a few more such whimsical people in the world.

Naturally, at the time I am speaking of, my opinion had not been asked; all I had to do was to go where mother went, and, while she gave her energies to the housekeeping, I gave mine to growing up, which by this time I had pretty well accomplished. But perhaps for that very reason—for one sees with different eyes at twelve and eighteen—my position in the house had already begun to seem unsatisfactory to me; and the morning's words put it in a clearer light, since it had been used as an argument against Tom's marrying.

I knew that mother had spoken honestly, believing that such a step would not be for his happiness. But was not he the best judge of that? I knew him, if reflection should bring him round to her opinion, to be perfectly capable of quietly sacrificing his own wishes for my sake, who had not the shadow of a claim on him; so it must be my part to prevent his own kindness being turned against him now. Still, it was not so easy to see how I was to provide for myself, in case it should become advisable. What could I do? Draw and sing, and play tolerably; but not in a manner to compete with the hosts that would be in the field against me. Literature? I had read so many stories whose heroines, with a turn of the pen, dashed into wealth and fame. That would be very nice, only—I was not the least little bit literary. I had never even kept a diary, which is saying a great deal for a girl in her teens. The "fine arts," then, being out of the question for me, what remained? There was some outdoor situation, or a place in some family, and—and there was Will Broomley!

That may seem like going away from the point, but it was

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not. I was matter-of-fact; but I could see well enough what was going on right under my eyes, and I had a pretty clear idea of what was bringing Will to the house so often as he had taken to coming lately. There was a "situation," then, that would give me the home life I liked best, and felt myself best suited for; but—would it answer in other respects?

I overcast the long seam I was sewing twice over, I was so busy trying to make up my mind whether I liked Will Broomley well enough to pass my whole life with him; and even then I had not come to any decision, when I was called downstairs to see Letty Walters.

Letty was the prettiest, I think, of all my friends, and certainly the liveliest. Tom called her "the tonic," and used to laugh heartily at her bright speeches. I suppose it was this that made mother fix on Letty as his choice.

When I came into the sitting-room, I found a kind of cross-examination going on. It was amusing to anybody in the secret, as I was, to watch mother's artful way of continually bringing the conversation round, as if by chance, to bear on what she wanted to know. But it all amounted to nothing—either because Letty was too good a fencer, or because she really had nothing to betray. But, when Tom came home, mother took care to mention that Letty had called.

"What, 'the tonic'?" said Tom. "Too bad I missed her."

"But for your choice being already made," said mother, with a covert scrutiny of his face, "I daresay you might have as much of the tonic as you liked."

"But I go on the homœopathic principle, you know," answered Tom, with a twinkle in his eye.

After that mother's belief in Letty's guiltiness wavered. Her suspicions were transferred from one to another of our acquaintances, but always with the same unsatisfactory result.

"It passes my comprehension," she said to me, despairingly, one day. "I am positive I could tell the right one, by Tom's face in a minute, and yet I have mentioned everybody we know."

"Perhaps it is somebody we don't know," I suggested; "some friend of his whom we have never seen."

"What! a perfect stranger?" said mother, sharply. "Don't be so silly, child; Tom's not capable of that!"

I was silent, for I did not want to worry her; but that was my opinion, all the same.

The same evening—it was rather more than a week since Tom had hurled that thunderbolt of his at us—mother began about it openly.

"When are you going to introduce your wife to us, Tom? I suppose you have come to an understanding by this time?"

"Oh, there's no hurry," Tom said, as he had said before; but this time he did not speak quite so cheerfully. "The fact is," he continued, with a little hesitation, "there—there's a rival in the case."

"A rival?" repeated mother, with unfeeling briskness.

"Yes, a young fellow—younger by a good deal than I am," and Tom's face assumed an absurdly doleful look. "He is always there now. I confess I don't see my way clear; I'm waiting for her to make up her mind."

"And she's waiting, most likely, for you to make up yours," said mother, forgetting, in her propensity to right matters, that she was playing the enemy's game.

"There's something in that that never occurred to me," said Tom, his face brightening.

Mother saw her mistake, and made a counter-move at once.

"But the ways of my time are old-fashioned now; young ladies, nowadays, take matters into their own hands. If she cared for you, you may be sure she wouldn't have waited till this time to let you know it; that is, I judge by the girls I am in the habit of seeing; but if this one is a stranger to me"—(here mother riveted her eyes on Tom's face; oh, dear, my unfortunate words!)—"if she is an entire stranger, I cannot pretend to form any opinion of her, of course."

"Of course," repeated Tom, absently.

"Not that I have any such idea," resumed mother, growing warmer; "I have said, and I say again, that to bring a perfect stranger under this roof is not my opinion of you, Tom!"

I felt mother's words like so many pins and needles; for Tom was looking meditatively across at me, and though that was just a way of his, it seemed now as if he were reading in my face that the opinion was mine, and that I had been meddling in what did not concern me. I felt myself for very vexation getting redder every moment, till it grew intolerable.

"It is so warm here," I said, for an excuse, turning towards the French window, "I am going to get a breath of air."

I went out into our little strip of garden ground. Tom followed. I thought I should never have a better opportunity to say what I had it in my mind to say, so I waited for him by the bench under the old pear-tree.

"Sit down here, Tom," I said; "I've something to say to you."

"Have you?" said Tom; "that's odd, for I—well, never mind that just yet. What is it, May?"

"Tom," I said, still surer now he had misjudged me, and more resolved to set him right, "I want a place."

"A place?" repeated Tom, puzzled, as well he might be, by this sudden and indefinite announcement; "what kind of a place?"

"I don't know," I said; for, indeed, my ideas were of the vaguest. "I thought you might know, being in the way of such things. Now, pray, Tom," I went on, quickly, "don't fancy I am discontented, or—or anything of that sort. The truth is, ever since I left off school, I have wanted something to do, and had it in my mind to speak to you about it."

With this I looked at Tom, fearing he might be vexed; but he did not look vexed, only preoccupied.

"I do know of a place, as it happens," he said, after a while, "only I'm not sure how it would suit you."

"That's soon seen," said I. "What is it like?"

"Well, it's a sort of — of general usefulness——"

"Why, it must be to run errands," said I, laughing. "And where is it, Tom?"

"Well," said Tom, hesitating again, "it's with me."

"How very nice!" I exclaimed. "How soon can I have it?"

"The sooner the better, so far as I am concerned," said Tom; and with that he turned round and looked at me, and directly I met his eyes I knew somehow, all in a moment, what it was he meant; and I knew, too, at the same instant, that I could not have passed all my life with Will Broomley, and why I could not.

I am sure Letty Walters, who interrupted us just then, must have thought my wits were wandering that evening, and, indeed, they were; for I was completely dazed with the sudden turn things had taken. But Tom, who had the advantage of me there, took it quite coolly, and laughed, and talked with Letty just the same as ever till she went away.

It was rather late when we went in. Mother sat where we had left her, knitting in the twilight.

"Wasn't that Letty Walters with you a while ago?" she said, as we came up.

"Yes," said I, with a confused feeling of an explanation of something being necessary; "she just came to bring the new crochet pattern she promised me."

"H'm!" said mother, as much as to say she had her own ideas as to what Letty came for.

Tom had been wandering about the room in an absent sort of fashion, taking up and putting down in the wrong places all the small objects that fell in his way. He came up, and took a seat by mother. I became of a sudden very busy with the plants in the window, for I knew he was going to tell her.

"Wish me joy, Aunt Anne," said he; "it's all settled."

"Settled, is it?" said mother, in anything but a joyful tone. "So it's as I suspected all along. Well, you have my best wishes, Tom. Perhaps you may be happy together, after all; I'm sure I hope so."

This wasn't a very encouraging sort of congratulation, and Tom seemed rather taken aback by it.

"I'm sorry you're not pleased," he said, after a pause. "I had an idea somehow you would be."

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"I don't know from what you judged. But, there, it's no use crying over spilt milk. You'll be married very soon, I presume; I must be looking out for a house."

And mother stroked her nose reflectively with a knitting-needle.

"What for?" said Tom. "I thought of keeping on here all the same."

"I never supposed otherwise," said mother. "Of course I did not expect to turn you out of your own house."

"But what is the need of looking out for another, then?"

"Why, for myself."

"For yourself?" repeated Tom, in a tone of utter amazement. "Going to leave us—just now? Why, Aunt Anne, I never heard of such a thing!"

"Now, Tom," said mother, speaking very fast, and making her needles fly in concert, "we might as well come to an understanding at once on this subject. I am fully sensible of your past kindness—now just let me finish—I say I appreciate it, and have tried to do my duty by you in return, as I hope I should always be ready to do. I wish all good to you and your wife, and shall be glad to help her if ever I can; but to live in the same house with her is what would not turn out pleasantly for either of us, and, once for all, I can't do it."

"Aunt Anne," said Tom, pushing back his chair, and staring in mother's excited face, "either you or I must be out of our wits."

"It's not I, then, at any rate," retorted mother, getting nettled.

Amusement and a certain embarrassment had kept me a silent listener so far, but there was no standing this; I tried to speak, but could not, for laughing.

"I think you are both out of your wits together," said mother, turning sharply. "What ails the child? It's no laughing matter."

"You don't understand each other," I gasped. "Oh, dear! It's not Letty—oh—oh, dear!" and relapsed again.

"Not Letty?" repeated mother, turning to Tom. "Then why did you tell me so?"

"I never told you so," said Tom.

"Why, yes, you did," persisted mother. "You came in, and told me you were going to be married."

"Yes, so I am," said Tom, still at cross-purposes.

"Now, Tom Dean," said mother, rising and confronting him, "what do you mean? Who is going to be your wife?"

"Why, May, of course," answered Tom.

"May!" and then, after a pause of inexplicable astonishment, it was mother's turn to laugh. "Do you mean to say, Tom, it was that child you were thinking of all the while?"

"Why, who else could it be?" said Tom, simply.

"Well," said mother, "I ought to have remembered you never did do anything like anybody else. But, still, why in the world did you go to work in such a roundabout way?"

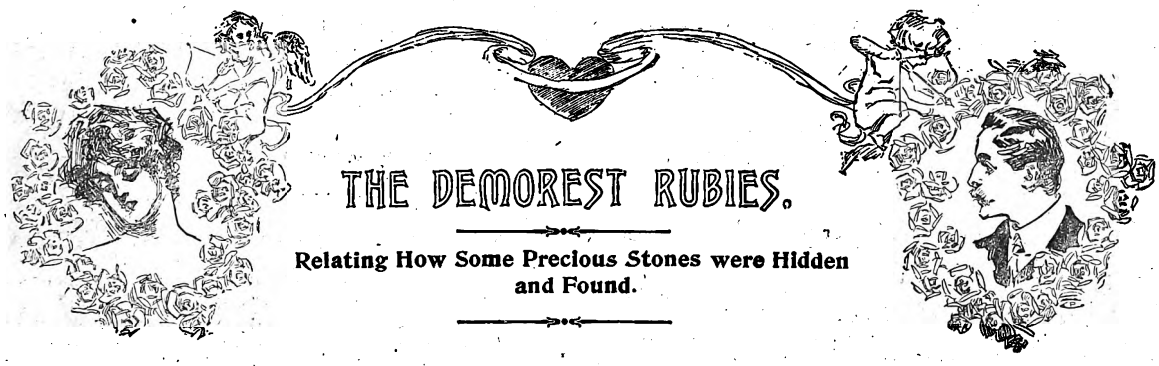
"I wanted to see how you took to my idea," said Tom.

"And how do you suppose we were to guess your idea meant May?" mother asked.

"Who else could it be?" repeated Tom, falling back on what he evidently found an unanswerable argument. It was no use talking to him. Mother gave it up with a shake of the head.

"And you won't want another house, then, Aunt Anne?" said Tom, suddenly. That set mother off again; Tom joined with her, and altogether I don't think we ever passed a merrier evening than the one that made us acquainted with Tom's future wife.

K. P. Owen.



THE DEMOREST RUBIES.

Relating How Some Precious Stones were Hidden and Found.

Yes, she was dead at last—Margaret Demorest of Stony Lodge—and the shock of her demise had shaken Rusper through and through. For years, her numerous relatives, each with an eye to the estate, had watched her movements from a respectful distance, which she herself had interposed between them, and their hearts had grown sick with hope deferred. But the grim looks of the old maid had not power to repulse the King of Terrors when his hand knocked at her gloomy door.

Heart disease, the doctors said, when she was found one morning with a smile of peace frozen on her stern and withered features. The relatives accepted the verdict with due resignation, following the remains of the "dear departed" to their final resting place amid an ostentatious display of crape and black-bordered handkerchiefs. But, when the will was read, the excitement of the heirs-at-law rapidly ascended to fever-heat. Always eccentric in life, Miss Demorest had retained that eccentricity to the end, and woven it into her last will and testament.

With the exception of a few bequests to her servants, the whole of her property, landed and personal, to wit: Stony Lodge, her present residence, with its beautiful park, which was a very Eden of loveliness, together with a splendid house in town and money to the amount of five hundred thousand pounds, was to pass into the sole possession of that one among her kinsfolk who should discover the hiding-place of the twelve Demorest rubies.

Should the gems remain undiscovered after the lapse of one year from the date of her death the estate was to be sold, and the legacy to be devoted to charity.

"The old cat!" muttered fashionable Mrs. Meredith, viciously. "She hid those rubies herself, the spiteful thing!"

"It is too provoking!" pouted her pretty daughter Maude.

"I shall contest the will," said thin-lipped Reuben Gray. "It cannot stand."

Mrs. Meredith was Miss Demorest's niece and Reuben Gray her nephew. The two were brother and sister, and the nearest akin to the dead woman.

Next came Margie Vane, child of a favourite nephew who was to have been the heir had he not displeased his aunt by marrying against her will, a girl of obscure parentage—"a pauper," Miss Demorest termed her.

Harold Vane had died some years back, closely followed by his wife; and the one daughter, Margaret, was left alone in the world and utterly penniless.

Mrs. Meredith had taken her—for the old aunt remained obdurate—and she was now serving in the capacity of maid to her beautiful cousin Maude.

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Margie Vane was not present at the reading of the will. Mrs. Meredith considered it unnecessary, and Margie herself had not the faintest hope of being remembered kindly by her father's stern old relative. When, therefore, they returned in anger and disappointment and gave an account of the wording of the will, Margie's hazel eyes opened wide in wonder.

"Whoever finds the rubies will inherit everything?" she asked, half breathlessly.

"By the terms of the will," answered Mrs. Meredith. "But I very much doubt if anyone will find them. Aunt Margaret was such a spiteful old cat."

"Oh, aunt, hush!" cried Margie, in pained tones. "She is dead now."

"So much the better for the community," said Mrs. Meredith, vindictively.

"Are you going to search for the gems?" Margie asked.

"Of course. There is just one chance in a thousand that I may unearth them."

"In which event you would find no further fault with poor Aunt Demorest's will," said the girl, shrewdly. "Oh, Aunt Jennie, may I go with you to the great house? I was never inside it."

"I suppose you may if you choose," replied her aunt, ungraciously. "In fact, Mr. Fay, the solicitor, insists that you shall take your chance with the rest of us. But it is extremely improbable that you will find the gems."

So that afternoon, and many ensuing afternoons, Mrs. Meredith, Maude, and Margie walked over to Stony lodge, and wandered fruitlessly about amid the treasures of bric-à-brac, statuary, books, and rare old china.

On one of these occasions Margie met Will Demorest, a distant cousin. He was a frank, handsome young fellow, with dark-blue eyes and close-curling, fair hair. His was the genuine Demorest face, the index of a strong noble character.

By occupation he was an artist in glass-blowing, having learnt the art in Venice. He had done considerable work for Miss Demorest, with whom he was a prime favourite. Indeed, there had been times when Mrs. Meredith and her brother Reuben had feared lest a will should eventually be drawn up in favour of this bright youth. But death had settled all that, and their fears were a thing of the past.

"So you thought you would have a look for the rubies with the rest of us," said Mrs. Meredith, with a sneer, as she found the young glass-blower examining the books in the library one morning. "Yet I thought you abhorred mercenary considerations."

"I am not in quest of the gems," Will replied, as his blue eyes rested in unmistakable admiration on Margie's fair, sweet face.

"Humph! I hope you don't take me for a lunatic or a fool, Will Demorest," was the scathing rejoinder.

"For neither, I assure you," said Will, with a bow. "Only at present I am more interested in pearls than rubies. Cousin Margie, may I show you the house? I believe I know it more thoroughly than most people."

Margie shyly acquiesced, and the two went off together, leaving Mrs. Meredith and Maude to continue their search.

"Are you anxious to find the rubies also?" asked Will, as they paused in the china closet to admire the cut-glass.

"I have not even looked for them," answered Margie, with a bright smile.

"Yet you have an equal right with the rest," persisted the young man, watching her face keenly.

"Oh, no, I have not, indeed," she said simply. "Papa displeased Aunt Demorest, as you know, and she has never taken the slightest notice of me. This being the case, I should not feel entitled to join in the search for the rubies, even if I desired to do so."

"They are magnificent gems," said Will, "and they were never set. I saw them just once, and they nearly took my breath away."

"I should like to see them," Margie said, musingly, "but oh, Will, were they more beautiful than these exquisite cups? Surely that is impossible."

The cups in question were indeed exquisite. Blown of the costliest Venetian glass, lily-shaped, with curled leaves for saucers and glowing with rainbow tints, they resembled nothing so much as a bed of gorgeous tropical flowers.

Margie's eyes sparkled as she looked at them.

"How lovely! How dainty! How fairy-like!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "See, Will, this one is exactly like an opal with a touch of fire; and here is an amethyst, and here a glowing emerald. Oh, Will, do look! See how that strange glow of hidden fire flashes from each! This one is jacinth, this beryl, and—Mr. Demorest, here is a ruby! Oh, the beauty! The real gems cannot be more superb."

As she spoke she took the ruby cup into her hand. Will half started forward as if to prevent her, but drew back again with a pale, startled face.

"But how fragile it is, Will!" commented Margie, turning it round and round. "Surely Aunt Demorest never drank tea out of them! And where did she find the beautiful things?"

Before he could frame a reply Mrs. Meredith and Maude appeared upon the scene.

"Margie," cried the former, "put down that cup and come along. I should think you would have more pride than to dawdle here all day talking with Will Demorest."

Margie's soft, hazel eyes filled with tears as Mr. Fay entered the room and from under his bushy brows glanced sharply at each of the group.

"Hunting for rubies, eh?" he said, sarcastically. "But Miss Margie seems to be the only successful one of the party. That is a rare bit of glass, Miss Margie, and was blown by our friend here," with a motion of his hand towards Will.

Margie's hand tightened on the cup in her surprise; her rosy fore-finger pressed a raised stamen in the calyx of the lily bell, when presto! change! it sank beneath her touch, and her startled eyes gazed straight into a small cavity where glowed a ruby of inestimable value, like a drop of rosy fire.

"Found!" shouted the solicitor, as his eyes also beheld the gem.

Will, very white, shrank back against the wall, while Mrs. Meredith and her daughter pressed closer to Margie and the lawyer.

"The rubies!" gasped the avaricious woman, making a dive for the other cup.

But the lawyer placed himself in her way.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "The discovery is Miss Margie's, and in accordance with the terms of the will of my deceased client she is sole heiress to the Demorest estate."

Mrs. Meredith grew pale with chagrin, Maude burst into tears, and Reuben Gray, who had heard all from the door, announced his intention of breaking such an unjust will.

"You may try it," was all Mr. Fay said to the threat.

Will came slowly forward and congratulated Margie on her good fortune.

"And my congratulations are none the less sincere that with them I resign the sweetest hope of my life," he said.

"Resign a fiddlestick!" muttered the old lawyer. "Miss Margie, that boy refused to be made Miss Demorest's heir, insisting that it would be an injustice to those nearer of kin. Then she made him blow these cups of tinted glass, with the central cavity and spring. She inserted a ruby in each cup, which, combined with the different tints, gave them their rich colouring. He watched her hide the rubies, and he has kept the secret. Does he not merit some reward?"

Margie flushed and glanced timidly at Will; then she looked round for her aunt and cousin. Both had disappeared.

"Take her, Will," said the old solicitor, with twinkling eyes, "and bless you, my children."

With a melodramatic gesture he, too, vanished, and I think the young people were not long in coming to an understanding; for cards are now out for their wedding.

The disappointed relatives maliciously declare that the whole thing was neither more nor less than an infamous conspiracy between Will Demorest and Mr. Fay. But Margie says the property is rightly Will's as he was the old maid's favourite, and in wedding him she is but giving him back his own.

Stanley Hammond.

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Circumstances Alter Cases.

She: "How hot it was in there! And I do hate to be squeezed in a crowd!" He (moving closer): "That is very natural, Miss Flossie; but—er—there is no crowd here, you know."

She Said "Ja."

Julie: "So you are engaged to Jack! You told me once that if ever he asked you to marry him your answer would be a word of two letters." Nellie (blushing): "I answered him in German!"

Ah! Flattering Courtier!

"What! You call me pretty? Why, I am an old woman; my hair is turning white, and, look, here is a wrinkle!" "A wrinkle! No, madam, it is a smile that has drifted from its moorings!"

Food For Thought.

Husband: "Are you aware, my dear, that it takes three-fourths of my salary to meet your dressmaker's bills?" Wife: "Goodness gracious, whatever do you do with the rest of your money?"

Cynicism.

The Adorer: "It's wonderful, old man, what love will enable a fellow to see in a girl that he never saw before!" The Onlooker: "No doubt! But it's equally wonderful what it won't let him see that he'll see later."

It Was Detachable.

Lady (at telephone): "Are you there? Are you Mr. Frizzle, the barber? Well, I want my hair done for a party this evening." Mr. Frizzle (at the other end of the wire): "Certainly, mum. I'll send a boy round for it in five minutes."

Very Absent-Minded.

She (after the elopement): "I have received a letter from my father. Dear papa is so absent-minded." He: "In what way?" She: "He inclosed a lot of millinery and dressmaking bills and forgot to put in the money to pay for them!"

Sheer Spite Again.

Maude: "Charlie Wiggins sent me a beautiful mirror for a birthday present." Clara: "That accounts for the funny question he asked me the other evening." Maude: "What did he ask you?" Clara: "If a woman ever got too old to be pleased with a looking-glass."

Foremost In His Thoughts.

"I suppose, colonel," said the beautiful grass widow, "that there often are moments when you wish you were again on the battlefield, thrilled by the roar and fired by the excitement of war?" "Yes," he answered, looking round eagerly for a way of escape, and seeing none, "even now the old feeling comes back to me."

What It Will Come to.

Visitor: "Rock-a-bye, baby, on the tree top——" Up-to-date baby: "Excuse me, madam, but I consider arboreal oscillation extremely dangerous."

And He Stayed On.

Fiancee: "George, can't you see what the face of the clock tells you?" Mr. Late-bird: "Yes, darling, but what the face of the clock tells me your face makes me forget!"

Hard Lines!

Frank Fairleigh: "Yes, Miss Antique, to be frank with you——" Miss Antique (with a chirp): "Oh, Mr. Fairleigh, of course you may be Frank with me; but this is so sudden."

A Secret Society.

Lulu: "We girls are getting up a secret society of our own." George: "Indeed! What's the object?" Lulu: 'I don't know yet, but I'll tell you all about it after I'm nitiated."

Very Remarkable.

Ada: "Flo was just going down for the third time when Dr. Watson dived off the yacht and caught her." Grace: "And saved her life! Wasn't that wonderful?" Ada: "Yes, for a doctor."

No Sympathy Needed.

Millionaire: "My dear Prince, I am so sorry you are engaged to my daughter. The crash has come, and I am ruined." Prince: "Oh, don't you worry about me, my dear sir; I can easily get another heiress."

Cause For Suspicion.

"Poor Mrs. Jaysmith," exclaimed Mrs. Gargoyle. "Her husband must treat her shamefully." "What makes you say that?" asked Mrs. Gummey, "she never complains." "I know it. That is what makes me suspicious."

Thankful For Small Mercies.

"Did you say there were accidentals in that music?" asked the father of the young lady at the piano. "A great many," answered his daughter. "Well, it's a great comfort to know that you were not doing it intentionally!"

A Nasty Knock.

Envious Young Man (speaking of favoured rival): "Yes, George is clever and handsome, but he is abominably conceited." Sharp Young Lady: "But, Mr. Dumley, if you were handsome and clever would not you be conceited?"

So He Did.

Mr. Hopeful: "Miss Wellthy, I adore you. Will you not be my wife?" Miss Wellthy (haughtily): "The idea of you proposing to a girl in my station! You should know better." Mr. Hopeful: "I do know better, but no richer."

Of Course They Don't.

"How lucky," said Mrs. Nuwed, "that I happened to pass that cigar sale this morning! These cigars are exactly the shade of George's new smoking jacket, and the smart little green bands round them will go with the lining beautifully. Men never think of these little things!"

Then He Collapsed.

Footinitt (energetically helping at bazaar): "Won't you take a share in a raffle for this cushion?" Lady: "Oh, no, thanks!" Footinitt: "Of course, it's rather useless and gaudy, and all that, you know; and personally I think the design rotten. But do take a share!" Visitor: "No, thanks! I made it!"

She Was Forgiven.

Mistress (to nurse-girl): "I hear that you are seen quite often speaking to the policemen in the park. I cannot allow that." Artful Maid: "I can't help it, ma'am. All the policemen in the park admire the baby so much—they will stop the perambulator to speak to him. They all say that he's the prettiest baby that comes into the park."

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START THIS SPLENDID SERIAL TO-DAY

A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

Mr. Theodore Racksole, American multi-millionaire, arrives at the Grand Babylon Hotel, and in consequence of an altercation with Jules, the all-important head waiter, he purchases the hotel for £400,000, with the intention of dismissing Jules from the staff.

Reginald Dimmock, English companion to Prince Aribert of Posen, dines the same evening with Racksole, who suspects that there is some sort of secret understanding between the young equerry and Jules.

The millionaire that night retires to bed very late, and is greatly surprised to see the waiter emerge from a room which he believes to be occupied by his daughter Nella.

Investigating the matter, Racksole finds that Dimmock is inhabiting the rooms, he having volunteered to change apartments with Nella, as a window of those she had intended to occupy had been broken by a stone flung from the outside. The millionaire accepts the explanation, although the circumstances of the case worry him considerably.

The next morning he learns that Miss Spencer, the bureau clerk, has left the hotel during the night, without giving any warning whatsoever.

Racksole dismisses Jules the first thing in the morning, forbidding him to enter the hotel again. Prince Aribert of Posen arrives, and Nella recognises him as a gentleman she has met in Paris as "Count Steenbock."

Dimmock is seen to drop dead in the quadrangle of the hotel. The cause of death is mysterious. More mysterious still is the way in which Dimmock's dead body disappears during the night—a coincidence being that Racksole discovers Jules in the hotel precincts.

Prince Aribert is in great grief, and tells Nella that he has been informed that his nephew, Prince Eugen, the hereditary Grand Duke of Posen, who is almost of an age with himself, has disappeared in Ostend or the neighbourhood. Aribert returns to the Continent at once.

On the morning following the Prince's departure, Miss Spencer comes to the Grand Babylon disguised as the Baroness Zerlinski. Nella sees her take a note out of a cream puff that is served to her at lunch.

Suddenly the identity of the Baroness as Miss Spencer strikes Nella. Discovering that she has set out for Ostend, Nella decides to follow her, and tracks her to a house in that town. Boldly confronting Miss Spencer with a revolver, she learns various important facts about the Dimmock mystery; but by a trick, Miss Spencer eventually bests Nella.

The latter faints, and, awakening, finds herself on board a yacht. Jules is approaching her.

The erstwhile waiter tells Nella that he has her in his power, but that he will release her if she will consent to marry him.

Nella boldly refuses, and suddenly Prince Aribert springs out of a dinghy a few feet away and knocks Jules down. They both eventually leave the yacht, and reach Ostend again, where Nella wires to her father to come to them.

A Mr. Sampson Levi, stockbroker, seeks an interview with Theodore Racksole at the Grand Babylon. The two men are attracted to one another, and exchange confidences. Racksole tells the stockbroker of the occurrences at the hotel, and Mr. Sampson Levi explains how he had an appointment with Prince Eugen in order to arrange the terms of a State loan. The Prince was wishing to marry Princess Anna of Eckstein-Schwartzburg, but could not do so until he had paid off his debts, amounting to one million pounds.

The disappearance of the Prince had complicated matters considerably, for the day had arrived when the money was to be paid over. If Prince Eugen did not appear he could not have the money.

Suddenly an idea strikes Racksole. Another pauper prince might be wishing to marry Princess Anna, and therefore it would be to his interests to stop the loan. Hence, perhaps, the solution to the disappearance of Prince Eugen.

That night Racksole discovers Rocco in the State bathroom embalming the body of Reginald Dimmock! Racksole intends to hand the chef over to the police, but by a clever ruse Rocco escapes. The next morning the millionaire receives Nella's telegram summoning him to Ostend. He at once journeys thither, and is told the whole story of Nella's adventure. When the two men are alone, Aribert tells Racksole that he has seen in Ostend a well-known Berlin actress whom he believes is concerned in the mystery of Prince Eugen's disappearance.

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THIS WEEK'S INSTALMENT.

SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.
The Woman with the Red Hat.

"BUT how does this theory square with the murder of Reginald Dimmock?" asked Racksole.

"It does not square with it. My idea is that the murder of poor Dimmock and the disappearance of my nephew are entirely unconnected—unless, indeed, this Berlin actress is playing into the hands of the murderers. I had not thought of that."

"Then what do you propose to do to-night?"

"I propose to enter the house which Miss Racksole entered last night and to find out something definite."

"I concur," said Racksole. "I shall heartily enjoy it. But let me tell you, Prince, and pardon me for speaking bluntly, your surmise is incorrect. I would wager a hundred thousand dollars that Prince Eugen has been kidnapped."

"What grounds have you for being so sure?"

"Ah!" said Racksole, "that is a long story. Let me begin by asking you this. Are you aware that your nephew, Prince Eugen, owes a million of money?"

"A million of money!" cried Prince Aribert astonished. "It is impossible!"

"Nevertheless, he does," said Racksole calmly. Then he told him all he had learnt from Mr. Sampson Levi.

"What have you to say to that?" Racksole ended. Prince Aribert made no reply.

"What have you to say to that?" Racksole insisted.

"Merely that Eugen is ruined, even if he is alive."

"Not at all," Racksole returned with cheerfulness. "Not at all. We shall see about that. The special thing that I want to know just now from you is this: Has any previous application ever been made for the hand of the Princess Anna?"

"Yes. Last year. The King of Bosnia sued for it, but his proposal was declined."

"Why?"

"Because my nephew was considered to be a more suitable match for her."

"Not because the personal character of his Majesty of Bosnia is scarcely of the brightest?"

"No. Unfortunately, it is usually impossible to consider questions of personal character when a royal match is concerned."

"Then, if for any reason the marriage of Princess Anna with your nephew was frustrated, the King of Bosnia would have a fair chance in that quarter?"

"He would. The political aspect of things would be perfectly satisfactory."

"Thanks!" said Racksole. "I will wager another hundred thousand dollars that someone in Bosnia—I don't accuse the King himself—is at the bottom of this business. The methods of Balkan politicians have always been half-Oriental. Let us go."

"Where?"

"To this precious house of Nella's adventure."

"But surely it is too early?"

"So it is," said Racksole, "and we shall want a few things, too. For instance, a dark lantern. I think I will go out and forage for a lantern."

"And a revolver?" suggested Prince Aribert.

"Does it mean revolvers?" The millionaire laughed.

"It may come to that."

"Here you are, then, my friend," said Racksole, and he pulled one out of his hip-pocket. "And yours?"

"I," said the Prince, "I have your daughter's."

"The dickens you have!" murmured Racksole to himself.

It was then half-past nine. They decided that it would be impolitic to begin their operations till after midnight. There were three hours to spare.

"Let us go and see the gambling," Racksole suggested. "We might encounter the Berlin lady."

The suggestion, in the first instance, was not made seriously, but it appeared to both men that they might do worse than spend the intervening time in the gorgeous saloon of the Kursaal, where, in the season, as much money is won and lost as at Monte Carlo. It was striking ten o'clock as they entered the rooms. There was a large company present—a company which included some of the most notorious persons in Europe. In that multifarious assemblage all were equal. The electric light shone coldly and impartially on the just and on the unjust, on the fool and the knave, on the European and the Asiatic. As usual, women monopolised the best places at the tables. The scene was familiar enough to Prince Aribert, who had witnessed it frequently at Monaco, but Theodore Racksole had never before entered any European gaming palace; he had only the haziest idea of the rules of play, and he was at once interested. For some time they watched the play at the table which happened to be nearest to them. Racksole never moved his lips. With eyes glued on the table, and ears open for every remark of the players and the croupier, he took his first lesson in roulette. He saw a mere youth win fifteen thousand francs, which were stolen in the most barefaced manner by a rouged girl scarcely older than the youth; he saw two old gamesters stake their coins, and lose, and walk quietly out of the place; he saw the bank win fifty thousand francs at a single turn.

"This is rather good fun," he said at length; "but the stakes are too small to make it really exciting. I'll try my luck, just for the experience. I'm bound to win."

"Why?" asked the Prince.

"Because I always do, in games of chance," Racksole answered with gay confidence. "It is my fate. Then to-night, you must remember, I shall be a beginner, and you know the tyro's luck."

In ten minutes the croupier of that table was obliged to suspend operations pending the arrival of a further supply of coin.

"What did I tell you?" said Racksole, leading the way to another table further up the room. A hundred curious glances went after him. One old woman, whose gay attire suggested a false youthfulness, begged him in French to stake a five-franc piece for her. She offered him the coin. He took it, and gave her a hundred-franc note in exchange. She clutched the crisp, rustling paper, and with hysterical haste scuttled back to her own table.

At the second table there was a considerable air of excitement. In the forefront of the players was a woman in a low-cut evening dress of black silk and a large red picture hat. Her age appeared to be about twenty-eight; she had dark eyes, full lips, and a distinctly Jewish nose. She was handsome, but her beauty was of that forbidding, sinister order which is often called Junoesque. This woman was the centre of attraction. People said to each other that she had won a hundred and sixty thousand francs that day at the tables.

"You were right," Prince Aribert whispered to Theodore Racksole; "that is the Berlin lady."

"The dickens she is! Has she seen you? Will she know you?"

"She would probably know me, but she hasn't looked up yet."

"Keep behind her, then. I propose to find her a little occupation."

By dint of a carefully-exercised diplomacy, Racksole manœuvred himself into a seat opposite to the lady in the red hat. The fame of his success at the other table had followed him, and people regarded him as a serious and formidable player. In the first turn the lady put a thousand francs on double zero; Racksole put a hundred on number nineteen and a thousand on the odd numbers. Nineteen won. Racksole received four thousand four hundred francs. Nine times in succession Racksole backed number nineteen and the odd numbers. Nine times the lady backed double zero. Nine times Racksole won and the lady lost. The other players, perceiving that the affair had resolved itself into a duel, stood back for the most part and watched those two. Prince Aribert never stirred from his position behind the great red hat. The game continued. Racksole lost trifles from time to time, but ninety-nine hundredths of the

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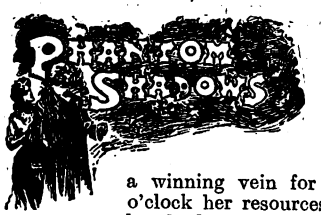

luck was with him. As an English spectator at the table remarked, "He couldn't do wrong." When midnight struck the lady in the red hat was reduced to a thousand francs. Then she fell into a winning vein for half an hour, but at one o'clock her resources were exhausted. Of the hundred and sixty thousand francs which she was reputed to have had early in the evening, Racksole held about ninety thousand, and the bank had the rest. It was a calamity for the Juno of the red hat. She jumped up, stamped her foot, and hurried from the room.

At a discreet distance Racksole and the Prince pursued her.

"It might be well to ascertain her movements," said Racksole.

Outside, in the glare of the great arc lights, and within sound of the surf which beats always at the very foot of the Kursaal, the Juno of the red hat summoned a fiacre and drove rapidly away. Racksole and the Prince took an open carriage and started in pursuit. They had not, however, travelled more than half a mile when Prince Aribert stopped the carriage, and, bidding Racksole get out, paid the driver and dismissed him.

"I feel sure I know where she is going," he explained, "and it will be better for us to follow on foot."

"You mean she is making for the scene of last night's affair?" said Racksole.

"Exactly. We shall—what you call, kill two birds with one stone."

Prince Aribert's guess was correct. The lady's carriage stopped in front of the house where Nella Racksole and Miss Spencer had had their interview on the previous evening, and the lady vanished into the building just as the two men appeared at the end of the street. Instead of proceeding along that street, the Prince led Racksole to the lane which gave on to the backs of the houses, and he counted the houses as they went up the lane. In a few minutes they had burglariously climbed over a wall, and crept, with infinite caution, up a long, narrow piece of ground—half-garden, half-paved yard, till they crouched under a window—a window which was shielded by curtains, but which had been left open a little.

"Listen," said the Prince, in his lightest whisper; "they are talking."

"Who?"

"The Berlin lady and Miss Spencer. I'm sure it's Miss Spencer's voice."

Racksole boldly pushed the French window a little wider open, and put his ear to the aperture, through which came a beam of yellow light.

"Take my place," he whispered to the Prince; "they're talking German. You'll understand better."

Silently they exchanged places under the window, and the Prince listened intently.

"Then you refuse?" Miss Spencer's visitor was saying.

There was no answer from Miss Spencer.

"Not even a thousand francs? I tell you I've lost the whole twenty-five thousand."

Again no answer.

"Then I'll tell the whole story," the lady went on, in an angry rush of words. "I did what I promised to do. I enticed him here, and you've got him safe in your vile cellar, poor little man, and you won't give me a paltry thousand francs."

"You have already had your price." The words were Miss Spencer's. They fell cold and calm on the night air.

"I want another thousand."

"I haven't it."

"Then we'll see."

Prince Aribert heard a rustle of flying skirts; then another movement—a door banged, and the beam of light through the aperture of the window suddenly disappeared. He pushed the window wide open. The room was in darkness, and apparently empty.

"Now for that lantern of yours," he said eagerly to Theodore Racksole, after he had translated to him the conversation of the two women.

Racksole produced the dark lantern from the capacious pocket of his dust coat, and lighted it. The ray flashed about the ground.

"What is that?" exclaimed Prince Aribert with a swift cry, pointing to the ground. The lantern threw its light on a perpendicular grating at their feet, through which could be discerned a cellar. They both knelt down, and peered into the subterranean chamber. On a broken chair a young man sat listlessly with closed eyes, his head leaning heavily forward on his chest. In the feeble light of the lantern he had the livid and ghastly appearance of a dead man.

"Who can it be?" said Racksole.

"It is Eugen," was the Prince's low answer.

SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Release of Prince Eugen.

"Eugen," Prince Aribert called softly. At the sound of his own name the young man in the cellar feebly raised his head and stared up at the grating which separated him from his two rescuers. But his features showed no recognition. He gazed in an aimless, vague, silly manner for a few seconds, his eyes blinking under the glare of the lantern, and then his head slowly drooped again on to his chest. He was dressed in a dark tweed travelling suit, and Racksole observed that one sleeve—the left—was torn across the upper part of the cuff, and that there were stains of dirt on the left shoulder. A soiled linen collar, which had lost all its starch and was half unbuttoned, partially incircled the captive's neck; his brown boots were unlaced; a cap, a handkerchief, a portion of a watch-chain, and a few gold coins lay on the floor. Racksole flashed a lantern into the corners of the cellar, but he could discover no other furniture except the chair on which the Hereditary Prince of Posen sat, and a small deal table on which were a plate and a cup.

"Eugen," cried Prince Aribert once more, but this time his forlorn nephew made no response whatever, and then Aribert added in a low voice to Racksole: "Perhaps he cannot see us clearly."

"But he must surely recognise your voice," said Racksole, in a hard, gloomy tone.

There was a pause, and the two men above ground looked at each other hesitatingly. Each knew that they must enter that cellar and get Prince Eugen out of it, and each was somehow afraid to take the next step.

"Thank God he is not dead!" said Aribert.

"He may be worse than dead!" Racksole replied.

"Worse than—— What do you mean?"

"I mean—he may be mad."

"Come," Aribert almost shouted, with a sudden access of energy—a wild impulse for action. And, snatching the lantern from Racksole, he rushed into the dark room where they they had heard the conversation of Miss Spencer and the lady in the red hat. For a moment Racksole did not stir from the threshold of the window. "Come," Prince Aribert repeated, and there was an imperious command in his utterance. "What are you afraid of?"

"I don't know," said Racksole, feeling stupid and queer; "I don't know." Then he marched heavily after Prince Aribert into the room. On the mantelpiece were a couple of candles which had been blown out, and, in a mechanical, unthinking way, Racksole lighted them, and the two men glanced round the room. It presented no peculiar features; it was just an ordinary room, rather small, rather mean, rather shabby, with an ugly wall-paper and ugly pictures in ugly frames. Thrown over a chair was a man's evening-dress jacket. The door was closed. Prince Aribert turned the knob,, but he could not open it.

"It's locked," he said. "Evidently they know we're here."

"Nonsense," said Racksole brusquely; "how can they

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know?" And, taking hold of the knob, he violently shook the door, and it opened. "I told you it wasn't locked," he added, and this small success of opening the door seemed to steady the man. It was a curious psychological effect, this terrorising (for it amounted to that) of two courageous, full-grown men by the mere apparition of a helpless creature in a cellar. Gradually they both recovered from it. The next moment they were out in the passage which led to the front door of the house. The front door stood open. They looked into the street, up and down, but there was not a soul in sight. The street, lighted by three gas-lamps only, seemed strangely sinister and mysterious.

"She has gone, that's clear," said Racksole, meaning the woman with the red hat.

"And Miss Spencer after her, do you think?" questioned Aribert.

"No. She would stay. She would never dare to leave. Let us find the cellar steps."

The cellar steps were happily not difficult to discover, for in moving a pace backwards Prince Aribert had a narrow escape of precipitating himself to the bottom of them. The lantern showed that they were built on a curve. Silently Racksole resumed possession of the lantern and went first, the Prince close behind him. At the foot was a short passage, and in this passage crouched the figure of a woman. Her eyes threw back the rays of the lantern, shining like a cat's at midnight. Then, as the men went nearer, they saw that it was Miss Spencer who barred their way. She seemed half kneeling on the stone floor, and in one hand she held what at first appeared to be a dagger, but which proved to be nothing more romantic than a rather long bread-knife.

"I heard you, I heard you!" she exclaimed. "Get back; you mustn't come here."

There was a desperate and dangerous look on her face, and her form shook with scarcely controlled passionate energy.

"Now, see here, Miss Spencer," Racksole said calmly, "I guess we've had enough of this fandango. You'd better get up and clear out, or we'll just have to drag you off."

He went calmly up to her, the lantern in his hand. Without another word she struck the knife into his arm, and the lantern fell extinguished. Racksole gave a cry, rather of angry surprise than of pain, and retreated a few steps. In the darkness they could still perceive the glint of her eyes.

"I told you you mustn't come here," the woman said. "Now get back."

Racksole positively laughed. It was a queer laugh, but he laughed, and he could not help it. The idea of this woman, this bureau clerk, stopping his progress and that of Prince Aribert by means of a bread-knife aroused his sense of humour. He struck a match, relighted the candle, and faced Miss Spencer once more.

"I'll do it again," she said, with a note of hard resolve.

"Oh, no, you won't, my girl," said Racksole; and he pulled out his revolver, cocked it, and raised his hand.

"Put down that plaything of yours," he said firmly.

"No," she answered.

"I shall shoot."

She pressed her lips together.

"I shall shoot," he repeated. "One—two—three."

Bang, bang! He had fired twice, purposely missing her.

Miss Spencer never blanched. Racksole was tremendously surprised—and he would have been a thousandfold more surprised could he have contrasted her behaviour now with her abject terror on the previous evening when Nella had threatened her.

"You've got a bit of pluck," he said, "but it won't help you. Why won't you let us pass?"

As a matter of fact, pluck was just what she had not, really. She had merely subordinated one terror to another. She was desperately afraid of Racksole's revolver, but she was much more afraid of something else.

Eugen—poisoned by his own hand—lay 'twixt life and death! Would he recover or not? This dramatic episode will be related in a forthcoming instalment of this splendid serial.

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"Why won't you let us pass?"

"I daren't," she said, with a plaintive tremor; "Tom put me in charge."

That was all. The men could see tears running down her poor wrinkled face. Theodore Racksole began to take off his light overcoat.

"I see I must take my coat off to you," he said, and he almost smiled. Then, with a quick movement, he threw the coat over Miss Spencer's head and flew at her, seizing both her arms, while Prince Aribert assisted.

Her struggles ceased—she was beaten.

"That's all right," said Racksole; "I could never have used that revolver—to mean business with it, of course."

They carried her, unresisting, upstairs and on to the upper floor, where they locked her in a bedroom. She lay on the bed as if exhausted.

"Now for my poor Eugen," said Prince Aribert.

"Don't you think we'd better search the house first?" Racksole suggested; "it will be safer to know just how we stand. We can't afford any ambushes or things of that kind, you know."

The Prince agreed, and they searched the house from top to bottom, but found no one. Then, having locked the front door and the French window of the sitting-room, they proceeded again to the cellar.

Here a new obstacle confronted them. The cellar door was, of course, locked; there was no sign of a key, and it appeared to be a heavy door. They were compelled to return to the bedroom where Miss Spencer was incarcerated, in order to demand the key of the cellar from her. She still lay without movement on the bed.

"Tom's got it," she replied faintly, to their question; "Tom's got it, I swear to you. He took it for safety."

"Then how do you feed your prisoner?" Racksole asked sharply.

"Through the grating," she answered.

Both men shuddered. They felt she was speaking the truth. For the third time they went to the cellar door. In vain Racksole thrust himself against it; he could do no more than shake it.

"Let's try both together," said Prince Aribert. "Now!" There was a crack. "Again," said Prince Aribert. There was another crack, and then the upper hinge gave way. The rest was easy. Over the wreck of the door they entered Prince Eugen's prison.

The captive still sat on his chair. The terrific noise and bustle of breaking down the door seemed not to have aroused him from his lethargy, but when Prince Aribert spoke to him in German he looked at his uncle.

"Will you not come with us, Eugen?" said Prince Aribert; "you needn't stay here any longer, you know."

"Leave me alone," was the strange reply; "leave me alone. What do you want?"

"We are here to get you out of this scrape," said Aribert gently. Racksole stood aside.

"Who is that fellow?" said Eugen sharply.

"That is my friend, Mr. Racksole, an Englishman—or, rather, I should say, an American—to whom we owe a great deal. Come and have supper, Eugen."

"I won't," answered Eugen doggedly. "I'm waiting here for her. You didn't think anyone had kept me here, did you, against my will? I tell you I'm waiting for her. She said she'd come."

"Who is she?" Aribert asked, humouring him.

"She? Why, you know! I forgot, of course, you don't know. You mustn't ask. Don't pry, Uncle Aribert. She was wearing a red hat."

"I'll take you to her, my dear Eugen." Prince Aribert put his hands on the other's shoulder, but Eugen shook him off violently, stood up, and then sat down again.

Aribert looked at Racksole, and they both looked at Prince Eugen. The latter's face was flushed, and Racksole observed that the left pupil was more dilated than the right. The man stared, muttered odd, fragmentary scraps of sentences, now grumbling, now whining.

"His mind is unhinged," Racksole whispered in English.

"Hush!" said Prince Aribert. "He understands English." But Prince Eugen took no notice of the brief colloquy.

"We had better get him upstairs, somehow," said Racksole.

"Yes," Aribert assented. "Eugen, the lady with the red hat, the lady you are waiting for, is upstairs. She has sent us down to ask you to come up. Won't you come?"

"Himmel!" the poor fellow exclaimed, with a kind of weak anger. "Why did you not say this before?"

He rose, staggered towards Aribert, and fell headlong on the floor. He had swooned. The two men raised him, carried him up the stone steps, and laid him with infinite care on the sofa. He lay, breathing queerly through the nostrils, his eyes closed, his fingers contracted; every now and then a convulsion ran through his frame.

"One of us must fetch a doctor," said Prince Aribert.

"I will," said Racksole. At that moment there was a quick, curt rap on the French window, and both Racksole and the Prince glanced round, startled. A girl's face was pressed against the large window-pane. It was Nella's. Racksole unfastened the catch, and she entered.

"I have found you," she said lightly; "you might have told me. I couldn't sleep. I inquired from the hotel-folks if you had retired, and they said no; so I slipped out. I guessed where you were." Racksole interrupted her with a question as to what she meant by this escapade, but she stopped him with a careless gesture. "What's this?" She pointed to the form on the sofa.

"That is my nephew, Prince Eugen," said Aribert.

"Hurt?" she inquired coldly. "I hope not."

"He is ill," said Racksole; "his brain is turned."

Nella began to examine the unconscious Prince with the expert movements of a girl who had passed through the best hospital course to be obtained in New York.

"He has got brain fever," she said. "That is all, but it will be enough. Do you know if there is a bed anywhere in this remarkable house?"

EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

In the Night-time.

"He must on no account be moved," said the dark little Belgian doctor, whose eyes seemed to peer so quizzically through his spectacles; and he said it with much positiveness.

That pronouncement rather settled their plans for them. It was certainly a professional triumph for Nella, who, previous to the doctor's arrival, had told them the very same thing. Considerable argument had passed before the doctor was sent for. Prince Aribert was for keeping the whole affair a deep secret among their three selves. Theodore Racksole agreed so far, but he suggested further that at no matter what risk they should transport the patient over to England at once. Racksole had an idea that he should feel safer in that hotel of his, and better able to deal with any situation that might arise. Nella scorned the idea. In her quality of an amateur nurse, she assured them that Prince Eugen was much more seriously ill than either of them suspected, and she urged that they should take absolute possession of

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the house, and keep possession till Prince Eugen was convalescent.

"But what about the Spencer female?" Racksole had said.

"Keep her where she is. Keep her a prisoner. And hold the house against all comers. If Jules should come back, simply defy him to enter—that is all. There are two of you, so you must keep an eye on the former occupiers, if they return, and on Miss Spencer, while I nurse the patient. But first you must send for a doctor."

"Doctor!" Prince Aribert had said, alarmed. "Will it not be necessary to make some awkward explanation to the doctor?"

"Not at all!" she replied. "Why should it be? In a place like Ostend doctors are far too discreet to ask questions; they see too much to retain their curiosity. Besides, do you want your nephew to die?"

Both the men were somewhat taken aback by the girl's sagacious grasp of the situation, and it came about that they began to obey her like subordinates. She told her father to sally forth in search of a doctor, and he went. She gave Prince Aribert certain other orders, and he promptly executed them.

By the evening of the following day everything was going smoothly. The doctor came and departed several times, and sent medicine, and seemed fairly optimistic as to the issue of the illness. An old woman had been induced to come in and cook and clean. Miss Spencer was kept out of sight on the attic floor, pending some decision as to what to do with her. And no one outside the house had asked any questions. The inhabitants of that particular street must have been accustomed to strange behaviour on the part of their neighbours, unaccountable appearances and disappearances, strange flittings and arrivals. This strong-minded and active trio—Racksole, Nella, and Prince Aribert—might have been the lawful and accustomed tenants of the house, for any outward evidence to the contrary.

On the afternoon of the third day Prince Eugen was distinctly and seriously worse. Nella had sat up with him the previous night and throughout the day. Her father had spent the morning at the hotel and Prince Aribert had kept watch. The two men were never absent from the house at the same time, and one of them always did duty as sentinel at night. On this afternoon Prince Aribert and Nella sat together in the patient's bedroom. The doctor had just left. Theodore Racksole was downstairs reading the *New York Herald*. The Prince and Nella were near the window, which looked on to the back-garden. It was a queer, shabby, little bedroom to shelter the august body of a European personage like Prince Eugen of Posen. Curiously enough, both Nella and her father, ardent democrats though they were, had been somehow impressed by the royalty and importance of the fever-stricken Prince—impressed as they had never been by Aribert. They had both felt that here, under their care, was a species of individuality quite new to them, and different from anything they had previously encountered. Even the gestures and tones of his delirium had an air of abrupt yet condescending command—an imposing mixture of suavity and haughtiness. As for Nella, she had been first struck by the beautiful "E" over a crown on the sleeves of his linen, and by the signet-ring on his pale, emaciated hand. After all, these trifling outward signs are at least as effective as others of deeper but less obtrusive significance. The Racksoles, too, duly marked the attitude of Prince Aribert to his nephew: it was at once paternal and reverential; it disclosed clearly that Prince Aribert continued, in spite of everything, to regard his nephew as his sovereign lord and master, as a being surrounded by a natural and inevitable pomp and awe. This attitude, at the beginning, seemed false and unreal to the Americans; it seemed to them to be assumed; but gradually they came to perceive that they were mistaken, and that though America might have cast out "the monarchical superstition," nevertheless that "superstition" had vigorously survived in another part of the world.

The Strange Tricks It Does.

AT first this seems like a strange thing; almost an absurd thing. Can you account for it? "My case puzzled me," says Mrs. Martha Beverley, "and puzzled others. I had a good appetite and ate plenty of nourishing food, yet I lost flesh and got weaker all the time." The lady says she had suffered from indigestion and debility for twenty years. What do we mean by *debility?* Is it a disease? No, it is an *effect* of a disease.

"Food did not strengthen me," says Mrs. Beverley, "but often gave me much pain across the chest and between the shoulders. Often, when I stooped down, I could hardly straighten myself up again. As the years rolled by I got worse, and was always in pain after eating. My body would swell with wind and I had fearful griping in the stomach. Sometimes they made me faint dead away. For months I knew not what it was to have a good night's sleep. My breath was short and I was troubled with palpitation of the heart. To live was to carry a load almost greater than I could bear. I was pale as a ghost and was scarcely more than bones covered with skin. Now, however, thanks to Mother Seigel's Syrup, I am well and strong again.

"A friend (who was a friend indeed) argued its merits to me until I gave up and tried it. Mother Seigel's Syrup first cured my indigestion and all the pains, aches, and ailments that were caused by it. Then it made me profit by the food I ate, so I gained flesh fast; and with that came new life and strength. I used Mother Seigel's Syrup regularly for six months and it delivered me completely from a disease that had clung to me for *twenty years*, and came near laying me in the grave. What I would say to sufferers is this:—Use Mother Seigel's Syrup and *keep on using it*; don't doubt or get discouraged. Where one takes it now a thousand should take it."

When she made that statement on July 18th, 1900—four years ago—Mrs. Beverley lived at 102 Lumley Street, Middlesboro'. On February 18th, 1904—this year—at her new home, 154, Abingdon Road, Middlesboro', she made and signed this statement:

"Referring to my testimonial of four years ago, to the merits of Mother Seigel's Syrup, I am pleased to inform you that I have enjoyed good health ever since. I still take a dose occasionally on the principle that prevention is better than cure; but the old complaint never troubles me now. For twenty years I had endured the tortures of indigestion when Mother Seigel's Syrup restored me to health. From little beginnings it had come to be the haunting menace of my life. My doctor declared I should never recover, but he was wrong. Mother Seigel's Syrup restored me to perfect health, and I feel that I can never praise it too highly."

Indigestion does more tricks than any other necromancer. Watch it and use the Syrup immediately.

INDIGESTION

"Six or seven years ago," says Mrs. Mary Northey, 13 Hull St., Newcastle-on-Tyne, "I wrote you of the cure made in me by Mother Seigel's Syrup. I had suffered for years, and in 1897 was four months in bed when I began using the Syrup. Several doctors had failed to help me. My trouble was indigestion. Mother Seigel's Syrup saved my life. I have ever since been as well as any woman could wish to be."

YIELDS TO MOTHER SEIGEL'S SYRUP.

Price 1/1½ and 2/6 per Bottle.

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"You and Mr. Racksole have been extraordinarily kind to me," said Prince Aribert very quietly, after the two had sat some time in silence.

"Why? How?" she asked unaffectedly. "We are interested in this affair ourselves, you know. It began at our hotel—you mustn't forget that, Prince."

"I don't," he said. "I forget nothing. But I cannot help feeling that I have led you into a strange entanglement. Why should you and Mr. Racksole be here—you who are supposed to be on a holiday!—hiding in a strange house in a foreign country, subject to all sorts of annoyances and all sorts of risks, simply because I am anxious to avoid scandal, to avoid any sort of talk, in connection with my misguided nephew? It is nothing to you that the Hereditary Prince of Posen should be liable to a public disgrace. What will it matter to you if the throne of Posen becomes the laughing-stock of Europe?"

"I really don't know, Prince," Nella smiled roguishly. "But we Americans have a habit of going right through with anything we have begun."

"Ah!" he said, "who knows how this thing will end? All our trouble, our anxieties, our watchfulness, may come to nothing. I tell you that when I see Eugen lying there, and think that we cannot learn his story until he recovers, I am ready to go mad. We might be arranging things, making matters smooth, preparing for the future, if only we knew—knew what he can tell us. I tell you that I am ready to go mad. If anything should happen to you, Miss Racksole, I would kill myself."

"But why?" she questioned. "Supposing, that is, that anything could happen to me—which it can't."

"Because I have dragged you into this," he replied, gazing at her. "It is nothing to you. You are only being kind."

"How do you know it is nothing to me, Prince?" she asked him quickly.

Just then the sick man made a convulsive movement, and Nella flew to the bed and soothed him. From the head of the bed she looked over at Prince Aribert, and he returned her bright, excited glance. She was in her travelling-frock, with a large white Belgian apron tied over it. Large dark circles of fatigue and sleeplessness surrounded her eyes, and to the Prince her cheek seemed hollow and thin; her hair lay thick over the temples, half-covering the ears. Aribert gave no answer to her query—merely gazed at her with melancholy intensity.

"I think I will go and rest," she said at last. "You will know all about the medicine."

"Sleep well," he said, as he softly opened the door for her. And then he was alone with Eugen.

It was his turn that night to watch, for they still half-expected some strange, sudden visit, or onslaught, or move of one kind or another, from Jules. Racksole slept in the parlour on the ground floor. Nella had the front bedroom on the first floor; Miss Spencer was immured in the attic; the last-named lady had been singularly quiet and incurious, taking her food from Nella and asking no questions; the old woman went at nights to her own abode in the purlieus of the harbour. Hour after hour Aribert sat silent by his nephew's bedside, attending mechanically to his wants, and every now and then gazing hard into the vacant, anguished face, as if trying to extort from that mask the secrets which it held. Aribert was tortured by the idea that if he could have only half an hour's, only a quarter of an hour's, rational speech with Prince Eugen, all might be cleared up and put right, and by the fact that that rational talk was absolutely impossible on Eugen's part until the fever had run its course.

As the minutes crept on to midnight the watcher, made nervous by the intense, electrical atmosphere which seems always to surround a person who is dangerously ill, grew more and more a prey to vague and terrible apprehensions. His mind dwelt hysterically on the most fatal possibilities. He wondered what would occur if by any ill-chance Eugen should die in that bed—how he would explain the affair to Posen and to the Emperor, how he would justify himself.

He saw himself being tried for murder, sentenced (him—a Prince of the blood!), led to the scaffold—a scene unparalleled in Europe for over a century! Then he gazed anew at the sick man, and thought he saw death in every drawn feature of that agonised face. He could have screamed aloud. His ears heard a peculiar resonant boom. He started—it was nothing but the city clock striking twelve. But there was another sound—a mysterious shuffle at the door. He listened; then jumped from his chair. Nothing now! Nothing! But still he felt drawn to the door, and after what seemed an interminable interval he went and opened it, his heart beating furiously. Nella lay in a heap on the door-mat. She was fully dressed, but had apparently lost consciousness. He clutched at her slender body, picked her up, carried her to the chair by the fire-place, and laid her in it. He had forgotten all about Eugen.

"What is it, my angel?" he whispered, and then he kissed her—kissed her twice. He could only look at her; he did not know what to do to succour her.

At last she opened her eyes and sighed.

"Where am I?" she asked vaguely, in a tremulous tone. "Ah!" as she recognised him. "Is it you? Did I do anything silly? Did I faint?"

"What has happened? Were you ill?" he questioned anxiously. He was kneeling at her feet, holding her hand tight.

"I saw Jules by the side of my bed," she murmured; "I'm sure I saw him; he laughed at me. I had not undressed. I sprang up, frightened, but he had gone, and then I ran downstairs—to you."

"You were dreaming," he soothed her.

"Was I?"

"You must have been. I have not heard a sound. No one could have entered. But if you like I will wake Mr. Racksole."

"Perhaps I was dreaming," she admitted. "How foolish!"

"You were over-tired," he said, still unconsciously holding her hand. They gazed at each other. She smiled at him.

"You kissed me," she said suddenly, and he blushed red and stood up before her. "Why did you kiss me?"

"Ah! Miss Racksole," he murmured, hurrying the words out. "Forgive me. It is unforgivable, but forgive me. I was overpowered by my feelings. I did not know what I was doing."

"Why did you kiss me?" she repeated.

"Because—Nella! I love you. I have no right to say it!"

"Why have you no right to say it?"

"If Eugen dies, I shall owe a duty to Posen—I shall be its ruler."

"Well!" she said calmly, with an adorable confidence. "Papa is worth forty millions. Would you not abdicate?"

"Ah!" he gave a low cry. "Will you force me to say these things? I could not shirk my duty to Posen, and the reigning Prince of Posen can only marry a Princess."

"But Prince Eugen will live," she said positively; "and if he lives——"

"Then I shall be free. I would renounce all my rights to make you mine, if—if——"

"If what, Prince?"

"If you would deign to accept my hand."

"Am I, then, rich enough?"

"Nella!" He bent down to her.

Then there was a crash of breaking glass. Aribert went to the window and opened it. In the starlit gloom he could see that a ladder had been raised against the back of the house. He thought he heard footsteps at the end of the garden.

"It *was* Jules," he exclaimed to Nella, and, without another word, rushed upstairs to the attic. The attic was empty. Miss Spencer had mysteriously vanished!

(Another long instalment next week.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

High School Young Ladies.

"TOBY" is very much in love with a young lady who has been educated at a High School. "The only thing I can't stand," he says, "is her manner. She seems to know an awful lot, and to be terribly conceited. In fact, she corrects me in everything, and makes me feel very awkward. Now, is there a cure for this? If not, ought I to go further in my courtship?"

* * * * *

Experience proves that nothing so soon wears off as the High School or University "side." When a young lady first leaves such a school, she is of course very full of her own superiority, just as a young man is on leaving a school to go to college. But very little contact with the world puts that sort of thing right. If "TOBY" is really fond of this young lady, he should put up with her manner for a little time, and if she is at heart a nice girl, of good disposition, she will soon get rid of her little failing, and, in the long run, be all the better for her High School education.

A Puzzle of Promotion.

AN interesting question about marriage comes from "NEWLY-WED." "I am just married," she writes. "My husband is an official under Government, I need not say what, and he has two courses of life open to him. One is to remain in a certain position, and earn a retiring pension in ten years' time. The other is to work up for a higher position, in which he would earn a much larger salary, but would not be entitled to a retiring pension until twenty-five years have passed. My husband himself says he thinks that he would enjoy life on a retiring pension in ten years much better than twenty-five years of hard work, even if he got a higher salary and better social position. I want you to advise me. I believe he will do whatever I wish. Personally, of course, I would rather he had the higher position and larger income, but ought I to respect his wishes in the matter?"

* * * * *

Everything must depend on your husband's nature. Of this you must be the judge. In a Government position a very energetic, capable man certainly ought not to retire when young, as his enforced leisure will probably a nuisance to himself and all with whom he comes in contact, especially his wife. That kind of man usually devotes his spare energy to household matters, with miserable results. On the other hand, if a man is naturally lazy, and has no ambition in the world, it seems to me that he might as well retire on his pension as keep up a pretence of work which he does not enjoy in a better position. However, this is a matter in which men nearly always yield to the wishes of their wives. If you yourself insist on his working for the higher position, and point out that your family—if there should be one—would be the gainers by your husband's increased income and position, I expect he will give in.

What the Young Man Said.

THERE was nothing at all to worry about, "WORRIED EMILY," in what the young man said. He meant that he had taken a great fancy to you, and was not merely a flirt, like so many other fellows. He didn't express that idea so well as he might, but, believe me, that is all he meant. The fact that he has called on you so many times, and that you have kept the appointments with him, and have grown to like him, is sufficient proof that you are safe in continuing the little affair.

A Question of Rings.

"HARRY B."—Your young lady means nothing in wearing a ring on the second finger of her left hand. It is a mere ornament, and not intended as a hint to you to place one on the third. I cannot advise you on the second question, which must depend on circumstances. However, if the matter is as you say, your fears are justified, and your action must depend on the extent to which you are fond of her.

The "Don't Dance" Man.

"I DON'T see enough of my best girl," writes "BERTIE." "I could see more of her if I went to dances, of which she is very fond. Now, I don't dance, and never could, though I get invitations. The point is, should I accept invitations to dance, under the circumstances?"

* * * * *

It seems to me that there are only two courses open to you. One is simply to learn dancing without any delay. It might be a torture to you, but if you could just get through the waltz somehow, it would, at any rate, enable you to go to a dance. On the other hand, if you cannot learn dancing, you might accept the invitations, and then trust to the girl's fondness for you to pull you through without injuring herself. But it is a great test of a girl's love for a man if she agrees to "pull him through" a dance of which she is herself a good dancer.

Alone in Germany.

A LADY writes me from Dresden, in Germany, signing herself "PEARL." "I am over thirty," she says, "and have just a little private income. It is too little to enable me to live in Britain without working, but just keeps me in Germany. Now, I very much wish to meet a gentleman who may suit me for marriage, but I could not bear the idea of marrying a foreigner. Very few Britons come here who are at all likely to know me personally, so I am in an awkward position. Would you advise me to advertise in a British newspaper? Or is the class of man who answers such advertisements generally a rascal?"

* * * * *

I see no reason why "PEARL" should not advertise in a British newspaper. True, there would probably be a good many undesirable answers to such an advertisement, as the man who seeks a wife through the papers is usually not the ordinary type of man. Still, I have known of very happy matches being made in this manner, and "PEARL" might be so lucky as to find the right man. I should advise her to select a trusted friend to interview those who answer the advertisement, a friend able to see that the references were all right, and other details. It would, however, be far better if "PEARL" returned home, and met the gentleman for herself. One more word to "PEARL." Why this objection to foreigners? As you are living in a foreign city, would not your life be happier if you did marry a native? Foreigners, after all, are not bad fellows personally, if you get rid of your little prejudices, and many British girls are happily married to them.

Cynthia.

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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MISCELLANEOUS ADVERTISEMENTS.

Will be inserted in this column at the rate of 6d. per line of 8 words or part thereof. All advertisements should be addressed to Advertisement Manager, "Short Stories," 17 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., 11 days prior to date of appearance.

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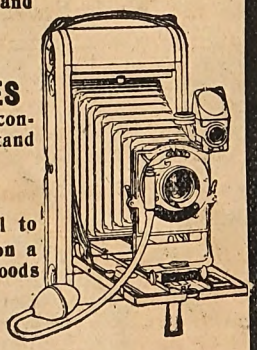

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A DEAL IN DIAMONDS.

Telling how a Small Parcel of Stolen Gems was Passed to the Wrong Person and what Came of the Mistake.

"OH, I do wish the rain and wind would stop!" cried the girl distressfully, as she strove to make headway, with opened umbrella, against a howling wind that drove the rain fiercely before it, drenching her skirt, and making her feel quite crumpled up. She had some difficulty in keeping her breath, and she realised that the umbrella would quickly go inside out if she continued to hold it up. "I must shut it and get still more wet!" she gasped despairingly.

She stood still for a moment with the intention of closing the umbrella, and then she saw that she was in front of the steps of the Holborn Viaduct. It would have been worse than useless to have attempted to go over the Viaduct without closing it; the wind would have caught her with even more force. She placed her finger on the catch, but she was too late. A gust of wind which seemed to come from all four quarters of the compass at one time gave the umbrella a twist this way and that; she clutched frantically at it, and gave a tug that certainly had the effect of shutting it, but not until two at least of the ribs had suffered, and the covering had been torn in more than one place.

Nora Brecon felt like crying; troubles never come alone, and she had had enough and to spare of troubles lately. However, she had no time to indulge in that relief to the overwrought nerves; she was forced to take immediate refuge under the shelter of the archway at the top of the steps in order to save herself from a thorough drenching.

She managed to get her handkerchief out and wipe her dripping face, but she had scarcely begun that process when the figure of a man appeared.

"Here, take it quick, and be off; I'm shadowed!" cried the man, whom she could barely distinguish in the gathering darkness. He thrust something into the hands of the bewildered girl, and flew down the steps. At the same moment there was a shout from the roadway—a shout followed by a cry that rose above the noise of the rattle of cabs and omnibuses; everything seemed to be in confusion in the road. Nora understood that some poor creature had been run over in attempting to cross the road, and the thought, in her present distressed and agitated condition, upset her greatly. She shuddered, left the friendly shelter and hurried away in the rain as fast as she could go, with that cry from the injured person still haunting her.

"I must give it up for to-day and go home!" she almost sobbed. "Home!" It sounded like a mockery! "I can get a 'bus from here to go part of the way."

For once Fortune favoured her in a small way; she was successful in obtaining an inside seat right at one end.

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Having now some time in which to think collectedly and to breathe freely, she began to reflect on the probable nature of the injuries suffered by that unfortunate pedestrian; and then the recollection of the man in the archway came to her like a flash!

Where was that something which he thrust into her hands, or, to speak more correctly, that which he had pushed against her hands? She tried to remember whether she had actually grasped the object or not, but she could not recall the exact occurrence. Where was it? She had not got it, so much was certain! It must have dropped to the ground; probably she let it fall when the cry fell on her ears. What did it contain, and what did he mean by saying that he was shadowed? Those questions were so many riddles to Nora Brecon, and she gave up the attempts to answer them. It really appeared as if some thief had tried to pass his booty in order to save himself; but why try to pass it to her?

Nora's home was a small bed-sitting-room in the equally small house kept by Mr. and Mrs. Smithers. The lady of the house had been an old servant of the Brecons in the happier days, and had always borne an affectionate remembrance of little Miss Nora; but she had heard very little of the family for nearly ten years, and it gave her quite a shock when, a week prior to the opening date of this story, a girl had come up to her in the street and asked if she were Mrs. Smithers. She replied involuntarily in the affirmative, and then she recognised that this girl was little Miss Nora. She was so like her dear mother that there was no mistaking the resemblance!

The kind-hearted woman learnt a sad story of loss of money by the failure of the firm of which Nora's father was chief partner, and of death. Nora's mother had died five years before, so the girl was alone in the world and practically penniless. Mrs. Smithers further learnt that Nora Brecon had been in London a fortnight, trying to obtain a situation as nursery governess or companion, but without success. She only had one sovereign left when she accidentally met the old servant, whom she had half-believed to recognise from a photo; she had asked the question at hazard, and she had been correct.

So Mrs. Smithers insisted that the girl should go to her own house, where she could lodge free, and so eke out her sovereign.

"You can pay me, if you feel you must, when you get on a bit!" Mrs. Smithers had said. And thus it was settled.

Mrs. Smithers was out when Nora returned, so the girl let herself in with the key which had been lent to her. She

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placed the wrecked umbrella in the scullery to dry; she did not like to throw it into the dust-bin, for it had been a present from her father. It was probably quite useless, but she could keep it; there was some comfort even in retaining it, worthless as it was now.

"I can't afford to buy another!" sighed the girl, "so I must borrow Mrs. Smithers' or go out only when the weather is fine."

She did her best to be cheerful, but it was a relief when she could lay her head on her pillow and court sleep, which mercifully came very quickly.

In the morning she felt better, and ready once more to look for a situation of some kind, although it might be only to address envelopes. Two days passed in a weary hunt for the means of earning a living, and on each of those evenings she passed unintentionally over the Viaduct. On the second day she was passing those steps when a hand was placed on her shoulder.

"Were you standing here in the rain two evenings ago?" asked a voice.

She looked up with a start, and saw a man of about twenty-five gazing fixedly at her with keen, blue eyes.

"Yes, that is correct!" she responded, a feeling of fear creeping over her. "Why?"

"Why? Because that being so, you can tell me what became of that small packet of stolen—property!" was the rejoinder.

"I do not know!" stammered poor Nora in dismay at this verification of her original suspicion. "I don't think I had it! That is, I don't know anything about it!"

The man's face, which had assumed an expression of puzzled amusement, became grave.

"It seems to me that you are trying to play the innocent, and are not a good hand at deceiving people!" he remarked sarcastically.

"I have never attempted to deceive people!" cried Nora, her anger rising at this imputation. She drew herself up to her full height and looked so dignified that Maurice Westmoir thought that she must be more than twenty, the age which he had first ascribed to her; she seemed to have added three or four years to her record by that attitude.

"How dare you say that to me?" she continued. "What have I to do with your stolen property?"

"H'm!" thought Maurice. "I thought that she was a new hand and was making a mess of it, but this looks like genuine innocence! No, I don't think there is any acting here! Then what on earth is at the bottom of it all?" Aloud, he said: "I beg your pardon! I see that there is some mistake, some mystery which I did not suspect! I am a detective, trying to unravel a tangle—not a regular detective, I ought to say, but that does not matter. You may be able to throw some light on it. Can I see you anywhere? At the house of someone you know, who can be present?"

His tone was very deferential now, and although it was twilight, yet Nora fancied she detected a light in his eyes that made her feel strangely fluttered. The sensation was not unpleasant, and she answered, somewhat shyly:

"If you like to come to Mrs. Smithers' this evening, she will be at home, and I will tell you all I know!"

"Thank you!" he said courteously, and he made a note of the address.

"I'm sure I don't know if I have done right!" cried Nora to Mrs. Smithers, at the end of her story. "But I told him, and no doubt he will come. He gave me his card; his name is Maurice Westmoir!"

"I don't like young men!" observed the good lady emphatically. "But it'll be all right; *I* shall be here!"

She looked so dragon-like that most people would have agreed with her in the assertion that it would be "all right."

Maurice Westmoir arrived; he was so polished in his manner that the old servant, who prided herself on her ability to recognise a gentleman when she saw one, melted considerably.

"You wonder how it was that I knew you were the lady who was standing at that spot?" he began, addressing Nora. "It is soon explained. A robbery of diamonds has been committed; the police had a clue to the thief. He was trying to get those diamonds to an accomplice—a woman, it was suspected, from his antecedents—who would take them to Holland to dispose of them. The police had got on his track; a detective had succeeded in getting close to him while he had a packet of stones on him. The man dodged across the road on the Viaduct, and the detective followed. The officer was so intent on keeping the man in view that he forgot to be cautious of the traffic. The officer saw the light from a passing vehicle fall on the face of a young woman whom the man went up to; although it was only a flash, the detective saw enough to describe you very well. Then he went under a cab, and was hurt. Oh, not so very badly, Miss Brecon!" he added hastily, as the girl turned pale. "It turns out that his injuries are not severe!"

"I'm so glad!" said Nora simply. "Yes, that is true, and now I will continue the story!" She told him of her own experiences, and concluded: "I suppose you have watched for me in various places?"

"Several of us have!" he laughed. "I had some kind of a presentiment that you would go that way again, and I was right!"

"I am so sorry that I have lost the parcel!" said Nora regretfully. "What is to be done?"

"You can help me to catch the rogues, at least!" remarked Maurice. "And perhaps we shall get most of the other stones back. From what we know, there should have been someone else at the spot at that time, but doubtless the weather delayed that fair accomplice, and you were mistaken for her in his agitation. Now, both the thief and his accomplice must feel very much annoyed that a blunder was committed, and will be on the look-out for a chance to regain possession of that packet. I have a scheme for making use of that fact in order to trap them, and I want your assistance!"

Nora did not like the idea much, but when she raised a rather timid protest, and turned her tender eyes to his, she noticed something in his face that stopped the words on her lips and caused a slight tinge of colour to mantle her cheeks.

"Oh, I am sure you don't feel at all afraid!" he replied, in answer to her half-uttered protestation. He spoke so warmly that the colour on Nora's cheeks deepened. "It will be quite simple—and I shall be close at hand to guard you from any attempt at mischief on their part, you see!"

He appeared to think that this argument would be quite sufficient to allay her fears, and Nora herself was rather surprised when left alone a short time afterwards, to remember that she also had a similar feeling! Maurice Westmoir spoke with so confident an air, with such brotherly—yes, that was it!—with such *brotherly* care, that how could she help feeling that all would be well if he were only near her?

"This is the scheme," pursued Maurice eagerly. "We have learnt a lot about these rascals, and we know that they sometimes use a certain cipher. So I propose to insert an advertisement in a particular journal to the effect that a young lady who received a packet by mistake will be glad to return the same if the address to which it should be returned is stated in a letter to be sent to Miss Welsh (your name sounds Welsh, you know!) at some address on which we can decide—some shop where you can have letters sent on payment of a small fee. I fancy that the plan will give us a good clue!"

"But I haven't got the packet!" said Nora dismally.

"That doesn't matter, Miss Nora!" interrupted Mrs. Smithers, who had remained silent all this time, although anxiously awaiting an opportunity to say something. "The advertisement won't be in strict accordance with the truth"—that was a phrase which Mrs. Smithers had picked up—"but you must fight rascals with some of their own weapons!"

"Exactly!" concurred Maurice Westmoir quickly. But he kept his eyes averted from Nora; it seemed like sacrilege to teach this girl the wiles of the world.

It occurred to Mrs. Smithers that Mr. Westmoir stayed longer than was absolutely necessary, but she said nothing. He came the next evening, and that advertisement required

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a lot of editing and altering. And the next two evenings he came again, and made inquiries about how Nora had stood near the Viaduct steps and other trivial matters which he appeared to regard as very important. Nora found herself looking forward to his coming, and she explained this by telling herself that it was because she was so lonely and so unsuccessful in obtaining work.

Mr. Westmoir had learnt her history, and he had told her his own; he was the son of the diamond merchant from whom the stones had been stolen. He hinted that he might be able to help her to obtain employment, and he urged her to remain at home for a day or two, as she was tiring herself and might find herself laid up with nervous prostration. Poor Nora thought that he would not have given that advice if he had known her financial position exactly! Yet she felt constrained to act upon the kindly advice, for she realised that she was breaking down.

The advertisement had been in for three days, and on the evening of the third day Maurice came again; in fact he had not missed one evening since his first call! He found that she had remained in the house all day, owing to having caught a chill.

"We must get someone to go to-morrow to see if there are any letters," he said. "You have not been able to go to-day?"

"No," answered Nora. "It was useless for Mrs. Smithers or anyone else to go for them, as the people will only give them up to me! They took good stock of me when I made the arrangement, for that very purpose. Otherwise, anyone could get my letters! I shall feel better to-morrow."

He appeared ill at ease, though he tried to talk cheerfully. The conversation flagged; Mrs. Smithers dropped one or two broad hints about his going, which he did not take, and then she was forced to leave them together because she had something to attend to. After all, Miss Nora was able to take care of herself, surely!

The conversation did not brighten, even after the landlady's departure Maurice was decidedly preoccupied. They sat silent for quite five minutes, and, when Nora ventured to turn her eyes towards him, she found that he was gazing at her with undisguised admiration and longing!

"I thought I should never fall in love again!" he said abruptly. "But I have done so, Nora!"

It was a most unconventional declaration! Nora Brecon could not doubt that it was meant for her! She hastily turned her face from him.

"You turn from me! Perhaps you have a right to do so!" he said moodily. "I thought I was in love with *her*, four years ago, but I know now, since I have seen you, that it was merely a youthful infatuation! Let me tell you about it!"

Nora's face had paled at this confession; she still kept it averted, and wondered why everything had changed from light to darkness in her heart. He told her of his infatuation with a young woman who had deceived him; she had taken advantage of his love, or passing fancy, to obtain his confidence and then to rob his father.

"She wrote me a scornful note, jeering at me for having been so easily tricked," he concluded bitterly, "and she said that she would not return to England again, and that it was useless for me to attempt to trace her. I vowed that I would never trust another woman, and I have broken that vow. And I am glad that I have broken it! Nora, I will leave you now, to think over what I have said, but I will come again to-morrow!"

When Mrs. Smithers returned she found that Mr. Westmoir was gone, and that Nora had tear-stained eyes, although she declared that she was happy. Mrs. Smithers was puzzled to understand how he could have left the house without her knowing it, seeing that she had been in the kitchen all the while! She must have been very busy indeed!

Nora was well enough to go for letters on the following day, and she found one. She carried it home in triumph, and, once in her room, she opened it; the contents were in the cipher, which she could not properly read.

"I must give it up!" she sighed aloud.

"You mean the packet, I suppose? Certainly, you must give it up!" said a voice behind her.

Nora sprang to her feet with a little scream, to find that a tall, strongly-built, yet well-shaped woman, with features that were attractive and striking, if not beautiful, was standing behind her.

"I followed you home," said the woman, with an amused smile. "I guessed that that advertisement was a trap, and so I hit upon a plan to outwit the decoy duck and the master hand that used it! I am here to get information out of you, and by all that is bad, if you don't tell me where the stones are, I'll kill you!"

"I haven't got the packet!" said Nora, drawing herself up haughtily. She was bound to put a bold face on the matter, but her position was dangerous. Where was Maurice?

"Tell me what happened?" commanded the woman with flashing eyes, and Nora told her.

"You dropped it!" cried the strange woman. "Where is that umbrella?" she demanded suddenly.

"I put it into that cupboard when it was dry, just as it was. I determined to keep it until I could see if anything could be done with it!"

The woman hurried to the cupboard and took out the damaged umbrella. In a moment she had taken from the closed framework a little packet with discoloured wrapping! The fateful packet had somehow slipped into the umbrella and had lain there all the time that Maurice was trying to find it! And then Nora remembered that she had never mentioned that umbrella incident to Maurice, or he might have guessed!

"Ha, ha!" laughed the woman ironically. "Here it is! It is——"

"Mine!" cried a strong voice, and the packet was deftly snatched from her fingers.

With a shrill cry the woman turned

"Maurice!"

"Laura!"

And then the shrinking girl opposite them knew that the former lovers had met again!

"So you have come back again to rob me?" Maurice cried bitterly. "Once before, you fooled me and stole from my father and me, and now——"

"And now," retorted the woman fiercely, interrupting him and turning his words against him, "you have found consolation—there!" And she pointed her finger towards Nora, who instinctively shrank from her, and placed herself by the side of Maurice for protection. He drew her to him with his left hand, and his arm crept round her waist.

"You must tell me where the other stones are," said Maurice decisively. "If you do that you can go free; if not," he added, as she made a defiant gesture, "you go to prison!"

"Never!" screamed the now infuriated woman.

She made a cat-like spring towards the couple, who stood between her and the door, but she recoiled as Maurice released Nora and attempted to seize her wrists. She stood before him with heaving chest and flashing eyes; she wanted to hate him, to strike him down, yet she could not conquer the love that had manifested itself after she had lost him. If she had only been a better woman! Nora saw the expression in her eyes and comprehended it; placing her hand on Maurice's arm, she spoke gently.

"Let her go!" she said. "She has been punished!"

All the hardness and fury died out of the woman's features; she hesitated for a moment to take advantage of Maurice's movement to the side of the room to allow her a free passage out.

"You are right!" she said quietly. "And I deserve it! Make him happy!"

She passed through the door, and they never saw her again.

Maurice urged Nora to marry him at once, but she would not consent; there must be a probation time for both. So they agreed to wait a year, at the end of which time they were happily married.

George Day.

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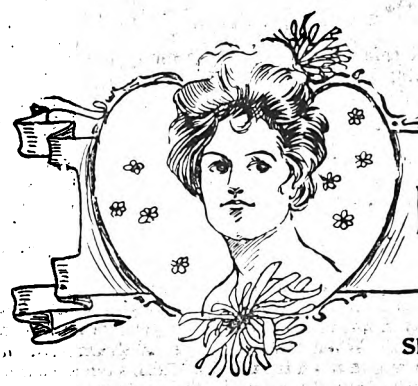

LOVE THE CONQUEROR.

Showing How True Love Overcame all Obstacles.

THE son of wealthy parents who idolised him, scarcely out of his teens, handsome, with genial spirits that appreciated his good fortune, Ronald White was supremely happy as he sauntered carelessly along that sunny day in May.

Winifred Charters stepped quickly towards him. A tall, graceful girl, hazel-eyed, shy, and beautiful, her silver-tinted Spring costume set off her charms the more. She held out a neatly-gloved hand.

"Yes, I am ten minutes late, I know. But I have finished my shopping, and am free for the afternoon."

"Free," exclaimed Ronald, laughing. "You mean bound to me unconditionally—for the afternoon."

She blushed—a pretty, shell-pink blush—and allowed her lover to draw her hand within his arm.

They walked slowly along, absorbed in each other, yet vaguely conscious of the delicious warmth in the air, the smart costumes of the passing crowd, the glory of the shop windows.

"I ordered my parcels to be sent to the railway station. It is so much pleasanter than to carry them about," said Winnie.

"Of course. And you are sure of finding them at the last minute?"

"Oh, yes. No one ever disappoints me," she returned, a bewitching assurance in her lovely eyes. "But then, you see, I never wait till the very last minute."

"You will have to wait to-night."

"Why?"

"Oh, well, you surrendered to me unconditionally, remember. Besides, I have sent a telegram to your sister, telling her you will not be home till midnight. And I have bought tickets for the theatre. After the performance is over we shall just have time to catch the last train. Won't you like that, Winnie?"

"Yes, very much indeed; but, supposing we lose the train or have no time to get my parcels?"

"Have no fear, dearest. A cabman shall go to the station and procure your packages in advance."

"How thoughtful you are, Ronald. And how easy it is to manage when one has plenty of money."

He winced slightly.

"Why mention that, Winnie? It is not wealth that makes happiness. Should we not be just as happy this afternoon, even without plenty of money?"

"I have no doubt we should be very happy," she replied.

They entered a fashionable restaurant and sat down in a corner before a small table. Winnie had eaten nothing since her breakfast, while it pleased Ronald to order everything that took her fancy. So they ate and chatted with the appetite of youth and the enjoyment of each other's company.

At last Winnie had finished her dessert, and Ronald his coffee.

They were in the street once more, sauntering along in perfect content, pausing now and again to glance into some shop window. Suddenly Ronald stopped before the great glass front of a famous jeweller's.

"I want to buy a little ring for you," he said, "and then we shall just have time to get tea and to reach the theatre."

The young girl blushed.

"Leave the ring till some other time, Ronald. We have had pleasure enough for to-day."

He pressed her hand. There was a tender look in his eyes, but his face was grave.

"I had not meant to buy the ring to-day, dear, but something, somehow, prompts me. I want something very lovely"—taking her hand in his—"to incircle this precious little finger. Bad luck, I'm sure, will follow if I do not put a ring on your finger to-night."

Winnie laughed. "You silly boy. What difference could a ring make?"

The amount of money necessary to secure the ring that took Ronald's fancy almost frightened Winnie. Her lover had been bred to a fortune, she to a pittance. Gratification at any cost was his first impulse, calculation hers.

The purchase over, they had tea, and drove to the theatre.

After the theatre, they hurried to the cab that Ronald had ordered. The parcels were quite safe. In a few minutes they were at the station. Their train was ten minutes behind time, they learnt. Warm as the day had been, the night was cold, and as they paced the platform together, Winnie could not refrain from shivering.

"Winnie, you have no coat, and your dress, how thin! My dear, this is unpardonable!"

"I expected to be home before dark, you know."

"And I have kept you. Heavens! I shall never forgive myself if you take cold—if you become ill."

"Don't worry, dear, I shall not be ill. I have not felt the cold till now. It is nothing."

The train steamed in and they took their seats.

"You'd better hurry up," they heard a porter tell the guard, "or the midnight express'll be after you."

They had a carriage to themselves. Winnie was unmistakably cold. She was shaking violently, her teeth were chattering.

"I must get a rug from somewhere," said Ronald, "next time we stop."

He called to the solitary porter of the sleepy station as the train slowed up.

"A rug, quick, fellow. Guard, you must wait a minute."

"I can't do it," replied the guard. "I'm already behind time."

Ronald ignored him, and turned to the porter.

"There's a rug in the master's room," said the excited porter, "but he's gone home, and the door's locked. This is the room, sir."

"Here, lend us your weight," cried Ronald, slipping half a sovereign into the man's hand. The two men threw themselves against the door.

The guard went to the edge of the platform and listened along the track with bated breath. He was well acquainted with his passenger. It was very risky waiting—even for a minute. He would not have waited for any ordinary person.

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but a White—why, was not the boy's father, Sir Ronald White, a director of the company? There was no sound or sign of the express yet. It was perilous work, but he had run just as close before and got through safe. Though they had gained three minutes, they were still nine behind. He would give young White another minute, and try to make up the lost time by crowding on more steam.

A few passengers put their heads out of the windows and grumbled at the delay, but so far as the eye could see the track behind them was dark and silent.

The guard moved towards his van. He placed one foot on the step.

"I can't wait any longer, sir," he shouted.

At that moment there was a resounding smash as the station master's door flew suddenly inwards. A second later Ronald appeared with the rug in his grasp.

"Go ahead, guard," he cried almost breathlessly, as he leapt towards the now moving train.

Ten minutes and a half behind! The express was due there in two minutes!

Ronald staggered with the rug towards Winnie.

"My dear Ron, you should not have troubled," she said.

He drew close to her and slipped his arm about her waist. This was a new intoxication, this feeling which had come over him since she had worn his ring. She was his—his very own.

"How tired you must be, darling."

Winnie looked at him tenderly. "But we are almost home now, dearest," she said wearily.

"Yes, dear," drawing her a little closer, clasping her a little tighter—"yes—our day—is——"

"Heavens, Ronald!"

There was a shriek of terror from the girl's voice. Then a fearful crash and rending, the screaming of whistles, and all was darkness. The train was invaded by a fiend, the scalding water deluging the miserable inmates, the red coals, like horrible hailstones, falling about them. There came a terrific swaying and a sudden stop. Then, save for the groans of the injured and the hiss of escaping steam, there was a dreadful silence. The midnight express had run into the train.

* * * * *

Winifred Charters recovered consciousness in the cool May daybreak in her own room. Her sister was moving softly about, picking up scattered garments—the spoilt and torn pieces of the pretty costume in which Winnie had gone to the city the previous day. Instantly the terrible scenes of the previous night came back to her. She sighed.

"Am I hurt much, Lucy?"

"Your face and neck are scalded, dear. The doctor thinks not very seriously."

"Scalded? Then I shall be scarred! Was Ronald hurt?"

"Yes."

"Not killed, Lucy—not killed?" cried Winnie.

"No, dear. There is an injury to the hip-joint. They have sent to the West End for surgeons. Nothing can be known positively till they arrive."

Winnie lifted her hands.

"My ring," she cried wildly. "My lovely ring. It is gone."

"What ring, Winnie?"

"Of course you don't know, Lucy. Yesterday Ronald bought me a ring—oh, such an exquisite and costly ring. And now it is lost or someone has stolen it." Winnie sobbed into her hands.

"It is not impossible," said her sister. "The confusion was frightful. It was past midnight before I got there. We could not find you and Ronald for an hour."

Winnie shuddered.

"What an awful termination to that happy day!"

"Poor child! It was a happy day, then?"

"Oh, so happy, Lucy!"

"And Ronald gave you a ring, you say. Did he ask you definitely to marry him?"

There was a slight pause.

"Well, I don't think he did in just so many words, but it was the same thing."

"No, Winnie, it is not the same thing," said the elder girl decidedly, with a sigh. "A man who wants a girl for his wife will ask her plainly to marry him."

"Ronald wants to marry me, I'm positive. But you see, Lucy, we are very young to think of marrying yet. And, Lucy, we do love each other dearly. That is enough for the present, surely?"

Lucy Charters turned to the window to wipe the tears from her eyes.

"Winnie, I cannot see you suffer," she exclaimed. "You are too dear to me. Anything that grieved you would kill me. That is why I am so anxious about your relationship with Ronald White. When I received the telegram stating that you were staying in town till the last train, such a weight oppressed my heart that the news of the accident scarcely made it heavier. I could not bear to have you stay. And I wish you had not taken the ring till you were definitely engaged."

Winnie sighed.

"But the ring is gone. We may never be engaged now, Lucy."

"If we were situated differently, if we had a father or a brother, or if we were wealthy, Ronald White would have declared his passion before now. Has he not been wooing you for more than a year? But you have nothing except your pretty face, and he is not the first man who has ventured to trifle with a girl, who was pretty, poor, and unprotected."

"Nothing could persuade me, Lucy, that Ronald's heart is not the seat of honour. He could not be more tender to me were I a princess. You do not know how he left the train at Langley to get me a rug!"

The elder sister shook her head. Counsel or reflection seemed alike idle with the lovers separated as they were, on beds of sickness, and with the shadow of death between them. Try as she would, she could not convince herself that Ronald White, rich, brilliant, with so great a future before him, really loved her sister for herself alone. But she would never tell her that.

"I must leave you now, dear," she said. "Perhaps you will sleep when the room is quiet."

Lucy drew the blinds together before the dormer windows of the little country villa, straightened the sheets, arranged the bandages that swathed the girl's face and throat, and went lightly away.

As soon as she was alone Winnie hid her face in her hands and cried bitterly. Her poor, burnt face. If she were disfigured, would Ronald still love her? What awful things Lucy had said! They could not be true. They were the outgrowth of Lucy's own disappointed life. And she and Ronald had had such a happy day. What a miserable end!

Meanwhile, in the luxurious bedroom of the great house to which he had been carried, Ronald White lay pale and still. Though it was not yet daybreak, everyone in the house was about, speaking in whispers, and treading softly. One after another they came and went—father and mother and sisters—in mute suspense, to look at their darling and wander away, or to glance eagerly down the carriage-drive for the sound of wheels which would tell them of the arrival of the surgeons for whom they had telegraphed, and upon whose verdict hung the life and well-being of their cherished, only son.

Eight o'clock came at last, and with it the famous physicians. There was a long, thorough examination, an anxious consultation. They carried the result to Sir Ronald White. His son's life was not in immediate danger. But—— Well, he would be lame for life, and, more likely than not, an invalid.

"Save my boy's life," cried the anguished father, "only save his life!"

* * * * *

It was the end of June. The roses had bloomed and faded; the merry songsters, with their newly-hatched young, had flown away; the corn had ripened, and the grass grown tall—

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just as if no incident of human misery had come to mar the harmony of the lapsing hours.

Winifred Charters was up and about the house. She had escaped wonderfully from accident, everyone said. No scars disfigured her sweet, fair face, only a slight redness which a few months would remove. She was alone this day. Lucy had gone out on a mission, the thought of which kept the younger sister's heart in a flutter of expectation. She had gone to see Ronald White.

And how had it fared with the handsome young fellow? He had passed through fearful suffering. The fractured bones of the injured joint had been set, and were slowly knitting. Illness had left its mark upon him. He was feverish, peevish, and despondent. Upon this particular morning he awoke early from unrefreshing sleep. The doctors were to visit him at ten o'clock, and he had been promised, should his condition be favourable, that he might sit up for a little while in a reclining chair specially procured for him.

The moment he stirred from his sleep his elder sister stepped from the adjoining room which had been occupied by one or other of the family since Ronald had met with his injury. The White girls were three in number—proud, cold girls, never beautiful, no longer young, but animated with a feeling common among girls in similar families. They almost worshipped their only brother. His present prostrate position gave them the opportunity they so much desired. Never before had they been privileged to coddle and humour him as their hearts craved.

Agnes White stepped lightly in, bringing a costly china bowl of warm water for her brother's toilet. Then she returned again with a tiny tray, upon whose damask cloth was spread his breakfast. All the time she had not spoken. It irritated Ronald to be frequently asked if he were better. He pushed away the food.

"It is nearly ten," he exclaimed. "I will wait till the doctors come. Perhaps I may sit up to eat my breakfast."

Agnes took her seat in silence.

"I hear the carriage," she presently said.

A faint flush mounted to Ronald's cheeks.

"I shall die here," he cried irritably, "if they do not let me get up."

Perhaps the surgeons thought the same. Anyway, they gave permission for him to be cautiously lifted to the cushioned chair, placed by the window. Ronald's hungry eyes devoured the scene without—the trimly-kept lawn, the garden with its multi-coloured flowers, its pleasant fragrances.

"Who would have thought a month ago," he murmured bitterly, "that I should be thankful even to sit here, a crippled prisoner?"

"My dear boy," said his mother, "be grateful that it is no worse."

"We must have a little festival in honour of the occasion," interposed Agnes White, with an attempt at gaiety. "What shall we do in celebration?"

"Give the school-children a strawberry feast out here on the lawn, eh, Ronald, where you could watch them?"

"That would indeed be delightful," returned the invalid with supreme irony.

"Pray, mother, let Ronald make his own proposals."

"Why, of course, Agnes, if the dear boy has any desire, we shall be only too pleased to gratify it. I only suggested something to divert his mind."

"My mind doesn't need diversion, mother, and if you want a celebration, Agnes, please have it on the other side of the house. What I wish you to do is to send a message at once to Miss Winifred Charters. Tell her that I have left my bed, and should like her to come to see me. Send the carriage with the message, and tell the coachman to wait till she is ready."

There was a dead silence.

"Did you not understand me?" continued Ronald presently, his eyes closed, his lips compressed.

"Certainly, dear, of course. I was just going to write the note," and Agnes rose, beckoning to her mother to follow her from the room.

"You see?" whispered Lady White.

"Hush, mother dear. Let me manage him alone."

"He will marry her in spite of you. You see, she is his first thought."

Agnes did not stop to hear her mother's forebodings. Procuring her writing-case, she returned to her brother.

"Ronald," she said after a little hesitation, her pen suspended in the air, "I wish you were able to write this message."

"I wish I were."

"Because I think Miss Charters will scarcely like coming to see you, so conspicuously, you know, in our carriage, unless, of course, she comes as your affianced wife."

"You can consider that she comes in that position."

"You became engaged to her, then, that day?"

"I don't know, Agnes," replied Ronald, almost angrily, "that I am bound to explain my private affairs to you or to anyone else. I intend marrying Winifred Charters. Be good enough to send for her."

Agnes White's heart gave a little bound. They were not positively engaged yet, then. Her brother would have said so.

"But, my dear Ronald," her pen still trembled above the page, "of course I'm going to send for Miss Charters, but a disappointment just now would be *so* bad for you. I want you to reflect, my dear Ron, that she may not come. In the first place, she has not been out yet; she may not be able to drive so far; a sense of delicacy may prevent her; and again, my poor darling, a month has changed you greatly. Is Winifred Charters the kind of girl who would or would not be affected by this change? Dear, dear Ron, life has a very different outlook, at the very best, from what it had a month ago. Your riding, dancing, and similar amusements—all are done with. You have nothing better than this invalid's chair to look forward to, perhaps for years."

Her brother waved his hand wearily.

"Dear, precious boy," continued his lecturer, "who is going to make you happiest? I would not say these things did I not know they must have occurred to you. I am going to write now to Miss Charters, but tell me, before I bring her, is it fair to bind her to a prolonged engagement dependent upon your capricious recovery? Could you expect to fulfil the hopes you have inspired while wooing her? She has dreamt, no doubt, of being your wife, the wife of a wealthy, handsome young man; she has looked forward to a brilliant social position—to a life of gaiety, admiration, dress, and display. Tied to this chair, could you expect her to spend her life happily beside it? Could you be happy in merely supplying the means for her enjoyment in which you could not share?"

Miss White ceased. She told herself that desperate diseases required desperate remedies; that she was cruel in order to be kind.

Her brother leant his head upon his hand and closed his eyes.

"My poor Ronald, have I wearied you?"

"You have."

The tone was dejected. Miss White knew that the shots had told. She dipped her pen in the ink and wrote:

"MY DEAR MISS CHARTERS,—*My brother is sitting up for the first time to-day. He desires to see you, and has asked me to send the carriage, hoping that, if you are able, you will do him the favour of driving over to see him. Allow me to beg you to have no scruples as to the propriety of your doing so. After the frightful accident to which you and my brother were subjected, nothing could be more natural than that you should wish to compare your experiences. Use your own convenience as to time. The coachman has directions to await your orders.—Very truly,* "AGNES WHITE."

Her brother read the note and nodded an approval. There was nothing to object to; he could ask no more; but it galled him.

Winifred Charters took the note herself from the coachman's hand at the door. She turned a little pale as she read it, then handed it to her sister.

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"What shall I do about it, Lucy?"

Lucy's lip curled.

"Can you ask?" she said with a fine scorn. "Will you subject yourself to such humiliating condescension?"

"Miss White is always hard and cold."

"True, but listen to what she says: 'You are to feel no scruples of delicacy,' you are not to come shyly, as you might if you and her brother were properly engaged. Nothing will be thought of your visit by anybody. It will not warrant the assumption of any engagement. How careful she is! You are not for a moment to suppose that they sent the carriage because they regard you as Ronald's future wife."

"But Ronald did not write this."

"No, but he saw the note, of course. He may even have suggested that clause, fearing you might suppose he wished to make his declaration. It is merely as a fellow sufferer that he wishes to see you."

"Then I will not go."

"My brave darling! That is your wisest decision."

"How shall I decline, Lucy?"

The elder sister sat thoughtful for a few moments.

"Say," she said finally, "that it is not thought advisable for you to drive so far quite yet—it is more than two miles, you know. And say how thankful and happy you are that Ronald is able to sit up, and that I shall come over in the course of the day to congratulate him."

"You, Lucy?"

"Yes. And if he has anything to say, he will say it to me."

He saw his ring was not upon her hand.

Poor Winnie wrote her note with pale cheeks and tearful eyes.

"Am I to go home without you, miss?" asked the coachman, when Winnie gave the note to him.

"Certainly."

"Mr. Ronald will be upset, miss. He would have me bring the horses round to see before I started. It's the first thing he's seemed to care about."

Miss Charters bowed gravely and closed the door.

"I did not think she would come to such a summons," declared Ronald, when the messenger returned.

Miss White thought the matter over carefully.

"She will not come, Ronald, unless it is as your betrothed wife. Her motive is obvious."

"Winnie feels herself to be my future wife, Agnes. She wears my ring upon her finger."

"If love was her only motive, Ronald, I should not be surprised if the change which has come over you lately would not alter even her affection. But if she has other motives, if it is your money which tempts her, she will still desire to marry you."

A hot flush mounted to the young man's face.

"Agnes," he cried, "I'm ashamed of you. You shall not poison my mind against her. Leave me instantly!"

Miss White went humbly away. Desperate diseases required desperate remedies. Her brother should not marry Winifred Charters with her pretty face and fascinating ways and her scheming tricks—if she could prevent it.

Nothing came of Lucy Charters' visit to Hollybush Towers, the Whites' residence. She was taken to Ronald's room where, in an atmosphere made oppressive by the presence of the three Miss Whites, she made a brief, cold call. She was truly shocked by the change in Ronald, and her endeavours to conceal her feelings were set down to duplicity.

She was glad when the end came and she was out once more in the leafy lanes where she could have her cry out. It would never do, she argued, to tell Winnie the actual truth—the poor, broken-hearted Winnie, who wandered about the little rooms through the cool hours of the summer afternoon in a feverish anxiety for her sister's return.

"My poor Winnie!" were Lucy's first words. "Ronald White will be a helpless cripple and fretful invalid all his life. He wants a strong, patient nurse, not a beautiful young wife. If you were engaged to him ten times over, it would be wiser to give him up."

"Give him up, Lucy? I never will—until some other woman has a stronger claim upon him than I. My poor, darling Ronald!"

"Oh, Winnie. Has his money so strong a fascination? It would not make you happy."

"His money!" retorted the younger sister with scorn. "I care nothing for his money. Would to Heaven that he were poor, that I might marry him, and work for him, and nurse him—to prove how dearly I love him."

And Winifred dropped her fair head and cried long and bitterly.

One day Winnie heard some news. The Whites were going abroad. It was the end of August now, and the outward

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traces of her accident were almost effaced. But she was drooping and pale. It would take a long time, the doctor declared, before she entirely recovered from the nervous shock. Had she been a wealthy patient, he would have prescribed change of air and scene. But as the Charters girls had only their little home and a small income with which to maintain it, it was useless to propose expensive remedies.

Week had succeeded week since the morning when Sir Ronald White's coachman had come in pomp on his fruitless errand, and no further communication had reached Winnie from her lover.

In reality, with an invalid's morbid judgment, and with the ever active poison of his sister's words distilling in his brain, Ronald was angry with her. He considered she ought to have come to see him. For her to stay away looked to him like prudishness. Perhaps, however, she was so truly shocked at his changed prospects that she wished never to see him again. Or, perhaps, it was as his sister had said—but, no, he would not believe that. So the days wearily passed, and his faith in the sweet girl who loved him so tenderly grew weaker and weaker.

Nevertheless, he gained in strength, and the doctors advised his removal to some medicinal springs at the earliest possible moment.

"And if one place doesn't agree with him, try another," said the great man from Harley Street. "The great thing is to keep him cheerful. Give him whatever he asks for."

One of the young autocrat's first steps was to dethrone his sisters. He would have a competent male nurse—a professional nurse who would take orders and obey them. He would no longer stand a crowd of hysterical women about him worrying his life away with their idiotic notions. Alas! for fraternal gratitude!

So a nurse was appointed and preparations were made to depart. Ronald was taking his own carriage with him, into which he could be lifted at ease and when all was arranged for the journey to the railway station, he called to his nurse and valet.

"Tell the man," he said, "to drive me over to Miss Charters!"

The man touched his hat. It was not for him to suggest that in doing so they would most likely lose the train.

The carriage stopped before the door. Without a moment's preparation, Winifred Charters found herself suddenly called upon to meet her lover. What could she say? What would he say? The two servants could not avoid hearing whatever they said.

"We little thought, Winnie, how long it would be before we met again," said the invalid sadly, holding out his hand.

"Little indeed! Are you better? You are going away?"

"Yes," more sadly still. "I have only stopped for a moment to say 'Good-bye.'"

"Good-bye. May you regain your health while you are away."

"My health will never be what it was."

"It may. You must look on the bright side for your friends' sake."

"Yes," he said.

He released her hand. His ring was not on it, he saw. And what conventional phrases she uttered; and how stately and unmoved she looked at him! But how beautiful she was—more than ever, he thought—so marble pale, with heavenly eyes, and the fair, shining hair that reflected the glory of the sun.

Oh, how Winnie wished to tell him the thoughts of her heart. But she must not appear to detain him. She stepped backwards when he released her hand. Not for anything would she let the attendant see her agitated at parting from the man who had been her lover for more than a year, the man who was leaving her now like any chance acquaintance.

"Please drive on," said Ronald quietly. "I thought to see your sister, Winnie. You will say 'Good-bye' for me?"

"Her good wishes," replied the girl, "will follow you with mine."

For an instant there was a wild, pathetic intreaty in his eyes. He must not go without—— She lifted her arms. Her lips parted. The horses stirred and the carriage moved. He was gone. Then, unable to control herself longer, she flew up the stairs to her tiny room and flung herself upon the bed, crying passionately.

The chilly autumnal twilight came on soon.

Lucy Charters was much concerned about her sister. Day by day she grew paler and more spiritless. Hope had left her life. Winnie folded her hands in listless apathy.

"Winnie, dear," said Lucy cheerfully, one morning. "I have a plan. I want you to accept Mrs. Delamere's invitation this winter."

"Oh, I couldn't. She only invites me because the children are fond of me. There is too much gaiety at her house for me."

"Well, the children won't hurt you; and if Mrs. Delamere does like gaiety, she is a bright, wholesome, sensible woman; she is just the tonic you need."

"And you, Lucy?"

"Well, this is my plan. I have had the offer of three boarders—the Ives girls and their father. I shall want your room for his study. Next summer we will go to some quiet seaside resort and spend the proceeds of my speculation."

Winnie sighed. She had not the spirit to remonstrate. A month or two later saw her staying with busy little Mrs. Delamere, forced, in spite of herself, to take an interest in the doings of the world. Mrs. Delamere did not understand the meaning of love-sick.

Slowly Winnie began to recuperate—both in body and heart. By degrees she began to forget how the whole world had seemed to slip out of view when she lost sight of Ronald White's carriage. Mrs. Delamere took her with her everywhere. She met nice women and agreeable men. She no longer cried on her pillow nightly. This, then, was her love test. This was the crucible in which her rejected love was to be proven.

Lucy Charters' speculation was successful. The Ives were profitable boarders. The girls were teachers, clever, and easily satisfied. Their father, unlike most bookworms and literary men, was seldom irritable. Lucy's housekeeping abilities made them more comfortable than they had ever been before.

When July came again, and with it the time for the projected stay at a quiet seaside watering-place, Lucy could hardly get free from her paying guests. Finally it was agreed that the Ives should remain and manage as best they could till Lucy's return.

"But Winnie is coming back with me," objected Lucy. "Your father could not dispense with his study."

Mr. Ives overheard them.

"My dear Miss Charters," he said cheerily. "'Sufficient unto the day,' you know. By the time your holiday is over we will make other arrangements."

Lucy and Winnie were at the seaside—the elder sister enjoying a well-deserved rest, the younger sister drifting along the current of such enjoyments as youth and beauty command even against one's will. She had many admirers—whom she neither encouraged nor repulsed.

Amid the train that followed her footsteps was a last winter's acquaintance—one Walter Grainger, a middle-aged successful stockbroker. His preference pleased her more than any other man she knew. He was no flatterer, but always thoughtful and attentive. Possibly she liked him. Yet when Lucy said: "Mr. Grainger is in love with you," she sneered that love was old-fashioned, and ridiculed the idea.

Lucy was right, however, though his declaration came sooner than she expected. Mr. Grainger had been telegraphed for, but the night before he left he asked Winnie to walk with him along the beach. It was a lovely moonlight night, and the conversation flowed into many topics as they wandered idly along the silvery sands. They seemed almost too good friends to behave like lovers.

A little boat lay high on the sands under the shelter of a cliff. They sat down in it, and in silence watched the long

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lines of waves as they rolled in glittering lengths and broke upon the sands.

"Miss Charters," said Mr. Grainger, at last, almost abruptly, "I have brought you to this spot this evening for a special purpose—to ask you to be my wife."

Winnie started violently. She had been thinking of Ronald White. She covered her face with her hands.

"Oh, why, why, do you ask me?"

"Why?"—taking her cold hands in his. "Why, dearest? Because I love you more tenderly than a whole life of devotion can make you aware of; because you are so dear and so precious to me that I want you for my very own."

He looked long and earnestly into the pale, fair face.

She could not repress a shiver.

"I wish you did not. I shall never marry anyone, Mr. Grainger."

He smiled. The remark seemed childish to him.

"I have been too abrupt, perhaps. I can wait and win your love patiently. We will talk of it no more to-night." Winnie was trembling with agitation.

"No—oh, no! We must end it here, Mr. Grainger. I have nothing to give—no affection to give anyone. My heart was bestowed on a man who did not want it. I shall never love again. Do not mistake me—I shall never alter."

Something came to the ears of both in the silence that followed—something like a moan. It must have been the tide or the wind among the rocks.

Walter Grainger stepped out of the boat.

"I would not willingly have pained you, Miss Charters. We may still be friends, I hope?"

She pressed his hand as he assisted her on to the sands. It was still early when they reached the hotel.

Mr. Grainger bade her "Good-bye." Lucy was playing cards.

Without being observed, she slipped out once more in the moonlight and retraced her steps. A shadow fell on the sands—not her own—and made her start.

It was a peculiar shadow! It was that of a man supported by crutches. Half alarmed, she turned suddenly and found herself face to face with Ronald White! Biting her lip, to check her emotion, she stood still before him.

"Is this my welcome, Winnie?"

The pathos in his voice dissolved her coldness. She uttered a cry and put out her hands. They were near the boat. By mutual instinct they approached it and took their seats.

"I heard every word just now, Winnie."

"You heard, then, what was not intended for your hearing. You have no right to recall it"

She turned suddenly and found herself face to face with Ronald White!

"Oh, Winnie, you are like ice to me. I would not recall it only that I am prevented from asking what, having heard from your lips, my soul yearns to do."

"You speak enigmas."

"Perhaps. And yet you understand that what I yearn for is your love, and what I am prevented from asking for is your hand."

"I understand nothing. There was no need to mention it."

"Do you not understand, Winnie, what it is that prevents me?"

"I know nothing of your reasons."

"Oh, Winnie, what but poverty could prevent me from speaking now?"

"Poverty?"

"Yes, Winnie. My wealth is gone. Shattered in body, ruined in purse, what right have I to ask you to share my lot?"

"What right?" she echoed. "Love does not scruple about rights."

"Love! Winnie, you do not love me now. You loved me strong and prosperous, but maimed and poor——"

"Ronald, Ronald, stop! I do love you!"

"My darling"—drawing her to his breast. "How I have wronged you."

Ronald White's story of his poverty, however, was a fiction. He had promised his sister that in this way he would test his darling's sincerity.

A year had passed away, but he had failed to forget her, and he had determined not to rest till he found her and offered his love.

Lucy went home to prepare for the wedding.

"After all, Mr. Ives," she said, "Winnie will not want her room."

"Ah, I thought so. But, you see, Miss Charters, I have already made other arrangements."

"Other arrangements," replied Lucy. "Whatever do you mean, Mr. Ives? Have you arranged to go somewhere else. I hope not."

"No, my dear, I want to stay here for always. I want you to marry me."

Lucy was not fluttered in the least. She smiled, and a slight flush tinged her cheeks not unbecomingly. She held out her hands to him and said:

"Thank you, Mr. Ives. I am quite willing to marry you."

And she did.

J. G. Jones.

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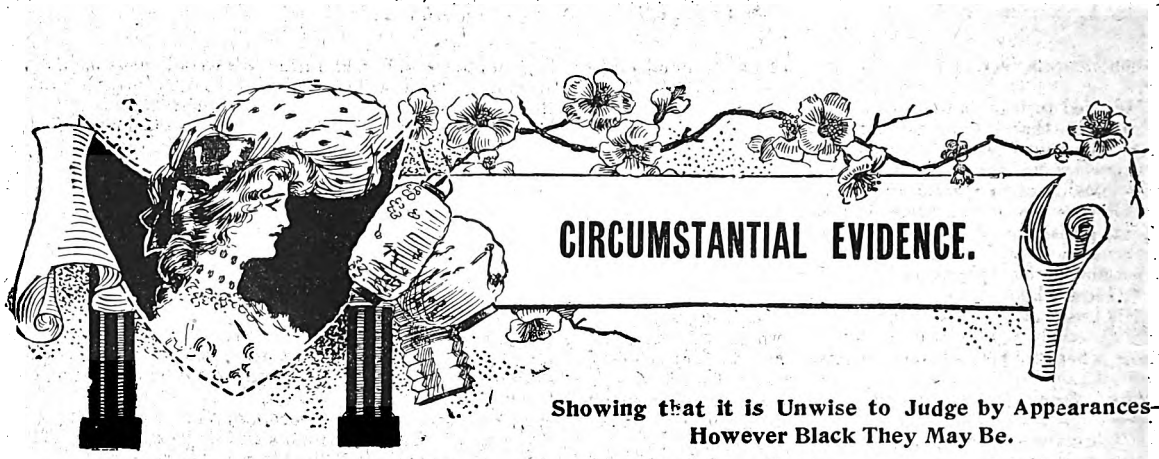

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

Showing that it is Unwise to Judge by Appearances—However Black They May Be.

ROBERT MALCOLM had never been called "Bob" by anyone until his recently-acquired wife, with a coquettish pretence of shyness, had so addressed him. He was a man with a great heart and a simple, kindly soul, whom early struggles had made reticent, and uncultured environment, awkward. Since success, by dint of hard work and boundless energy, had crowned his efforts, and he had become a wealthy and influential man, his reticence and awkwardness had been mistaken for pride and coldness.

He had no close associates, and his wife was the only person between whom and himself there had ever existed the least semblance of love. He could not recall that he had ever particularly desired anyone to call him "Bob," but after she had once pronounced the familiar nickname he had clung to the sound of it, had been thrilled at the remembrance of it and wondered why he had never thought of suggesting to any of his acquaintances that they should address him by that attractive name.

He had known his wife but a short time when he won her by his masterful wooing, which surprised no one so much as himself. He knew little of her past, and cared less. It was enough for him that he loved her, and that she had said that she loved him.

And now, at the end of six blissful months, he was sitting in his splendid library, perplexed and miserable, gloomily eyeing the embers of a grate fire, and trying to persuade himself that the shadow which threatened to wreck his future could be explained away if only he had the courage to ask her.

On coming home that afternoon he had gone to her sitting-room, the dainty furnishing of which was so subtly suggestive of her taste, and had found it empty. Turning to leave, he had seen a piece of note paper lying on the floor as though it had been brushed off her desk as she rose in a hurry. In stooping to replace it, his eye had caught two words, the beginning of a letter—"Dear Tom." Dear Tom! Could it be that there was a dear Tom in her life of whom he knew nothing? He knew she had no brothers and no cousins. He did not try to resist the temptation to read the letter, so he did that which reduced him to abject misery.

The letter read:

"DEAR TOM,—If I were to be asked why I am writing to you, I should have to admit that I am yielding to an impulse. My whole life has been made up of impulses, and I never battled with them but once—alas, the very time I *should* have yielded! You will know what I mean—that night you renounced me—renounced me while your blood was on fire with love for me, which I knew and felt and revelled in—when your eyes dumbly begged me to refuse to be renounced, and your lips told me it would be better to part. Ah, if I had only yielded then to the impulse to tell you I loved you well enough to share your poverty and the task of caring for your poor, helpless old father!

"How well I remember that dear, delightful, *cruel* summer in Dorking! Mother had scraped and saved that I might disguise our poverty, and so not disgrace Aunt Sarah, who, as you know, was a great stickler for appearances. When I bade the poor, shabby, unselfish mother 'Good-bye,' and started off in my new finery, I hated myself for my selfishness, but when once I was behind the beautiful, unsympathetic walls of Aunt Sarah's domain, I was small enough to be glad that I was sailing under false colours and wearing clothes to which I had no right. And so I shut my eyes to the mental vision of mother in her shabby clothes, with her tear-dimmed eyes and her work-worn fingers. Oh, mother, mother, whose beautiful wrinkled old hands I saw last folded peacefully across your breast! Forgive me, Tom—in thinking of her whose life was one long sacrifice I forget everything.

"Well—*you* came, dear, and you stepped into my heart with that first smile on your brave, sunny face. Then, afterwards, Aunt Sarah, when I told her of our betrothal, said in her icy, sneering tones, 'I congratulate you upon your discretion. It is a fitting thing that you should marry Tom Spencer, and let your early poverty be merged into middle-aged and elderly poverty. As Tom Spencer's wife you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have before you such a life as your mother has led, only intensified, since *your* life will be encumbered by his helpless, paralytic old father.

"Tom dear, do not utterly despise me when I tell you that her words had their weight. I did not fear the poverty, for I knew you were bound to succeed, if only, dear one, you were not hampered in your career by your father. I knew you were fond of him, and that while he lived you would keep him with you—that even *I* could not influence you to send him away. So when you told me we had better part, I offered no protestation. I knew your heart was aching, and that you needed comforting words from me. I knew I had to speak only one word to break down the barrier, and have you take me to your heart for ever. I did not speak that word. Though my heart cried out to you that I could not leave you, that I loved you well enough to share your burden, I did not speak that word.

"I am married now. My husband loves me, and I am rich, beyond my fondest expectation. I have all those things which my luxurious and expensive tastes craved—yet I am not happy! Better indeed—

A book of verses underneath the bough,
A jug of wine, a loaf of bread—and thou
Beside me singing in the wilderness—
The wilderness was Paradise enow!

"This is my farewell, dear one. You know now—every word in this letter has told you—what you are to me. Yet you will not misunderstand—you will not come to me.

"It is over, Tom, and——"

Here the writing ended abruptly.

Robert Malcolm was a loyal man, and even though the evidence was against her, he refused to believe his wife guilty of all that the letter implied. He told himself that if he dared to ask her for an explanation, she would give it, and it would be satisfactory. If he dared! To ask her would be to confess

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a dishonourable act, and also to confess a lack on confidence in her.

He tried to formulate explanations in his own head—tried to imagine that he had no cause for the misery which was gnawing at his heart strings; but always he came back to the point where he started, with the wretched conviction that his wife loved another man staring him in the face.

While he was sitting there the door opened noiselessly. A slight, girlish figure stole across the thick carpet and behind his chair. Two soft, small hands were clasped before his eyes, and a voice whispered:

"Guess who it is!"

His heart gave a great bound, and he took the hands down and kissed them. Then he drew her down to the arm of the chair, where her face was on a level with his own, and solemnly and silently looked into her eyes for a long time before he spoke. Finally, as if satisfied with what he saw there, he asked:

"Have you been shopping?"

She seemed surprised at the trivial question following so closely upon the scrutiny she had undergone, and said:

"Is that all, Mr. Bluebeard? Gracious, how you scared me! I expected to hear you say in sepulchral tones, 'Woman there is guilt in your face—where have you hidden the body?' And instead, after that soul-searching gaze, you ask the common-place question in common-place tones, 'Have you been shopping?'"

With a sigh of content and love and relief, he threw his arms round her and drew her close to him for a moment. Then she seated herself opposite him in a low chair, where the firelight fell on her face, bringing out all its charm. It was an attractive face, with ever-varying expression, delicate in contour and colouring, with a rather insignificant nose, a red mouth ever ready to curve into gracious smiles, and big, wondrous grey eyes which glowed and darkened with emotion, and were shaded by heavy dark lashes. The whole was overtopped with a mass of rippling chestnut hair, with a glint of gold upon it.

In the magnetism of her presence her husband became almost happy once more—until the memory of that letter came back to sting him.

As he watched her face, he decided to try some judicious questioning, hoping to elicit the information which he longed, yet feared, to possess. She had been describing some poor woman she had seen and materially aided that day, and when she had finished he asked her suddenly:

"Adèle, were you ever in Dorking?"

She opened wide her eyes and answered:

"No, dear—why do you ask?"

"Just curiosity." Then, after a pause, during which he studied the fire and she studied him, he added: "Did you ever know a man named Tom Spencer?"

She laughed softly, and folding her dainty hands replied:

"Now am I indeed on the rack. Why torture my innocent soul with the curiosity to know your reason for placing me in the witness-box?"

At her irrelevant answer his doubts rose again, and he rather sternly repeated his question, with a request for a direct reply.

"Tom Spencer—Tom Spencer—where have I seen or heard that name?" she queried softly, as if to herself. "I certainly don't know any Tom Spencer, but I believe I have heard the name somewhere."

This puzzled while it relieved him.

"And now, you dear, cross ogre, are there any more conundrums for me? Because, if you have finished, I will go and dress for dinner; and I would advise you to do the same, instead of sitting there and letting the fire bake your brain. If you don't look out, your Tom Smith, or Tom What's-his-name, will take possession of your poor wits."

He laughed responsively, and watched her disappear through the door; then to himself he said:

"What a fool I was to doubt her! But the letter—pshaw! I will think no more of it." So saying, he took her advice and went to dress for dinner.

A month passed, and during this time Robert Malcolm tried to detect a flaw in his wife's devotion, to justify him in the doubt which would creep in whenever he thought of that letter. Try as he might, he could not rid himself of the unsavoury recollection. But it was in vain that he sought an explanation in her manner. There was nothing about her to suggest that wealth had palled upon her, or that without poverty and Tom Spencer her life was a blank. She was, as ever, airily affectionate, daintily tyrannical, flippant, and serious in one breath, with that "infinite variety" which was her greatest charm.

One night, when they had returned from a dance, he decided to make a full confession to her, and to ask for an explanation. She had thrown herself into an easy chair, and looked even fairer than usual. She was pale from fatigue, and there were shadows about her lustrous eyes which only intensified her loveliness.

Making a final effort he began, and rapidly he told her all—all about the letter, his doubts and despair, and the unhappiness he felt whenever he had thought of the matter.

While he was talking, she was looking down and twisting the rings on her slender fingers. When he finished she looked up at him with a slow, amused smile creeping over her face.

"Now I understand those questions you asked me about Tom Spencer. Yes, that was the name—and I know now why the name seemed familiar to me."

She paused musingly, and he said hurriedly and hopefully:

"Well, what of Tom Spencer? Who is he?"

"He is a creature of my own imagination; and once having created Thomas, I straightway forgot him. When you asked me that day, I wondered where I had heard the name."

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Only this, Bob—but first you must promise not to laugh at me." She stopped, looking at him anxiously. He nodded impatiently, and she went on. "Some time ago I conceived the idea of being literary. I thought out a story, and decided that I would depart from the usual routine and have it told in a series of letters. You got hold of the beginning of the story. I was called away that day, and never thought again of my literary venture."

He drew her up to him, and then, with his arms round her, he asked in a husky whisper:

"Adèle, will you forgive me?"

For answer she put her arms round his neck and then replied softly:

"If you'll promise never to doubt me again."

The promise and the forgiveness were consummated in one long kiss.

* * * * *

A week later, in a Surrey paper, Robert Malcolm happened upon the following:

Dorking, April 23rd.—Mr. William Spencer, an old and respected citizen of this city, died yesterday afternoon. The deceased had long been a sufferer from paralysis, but his death was unexpected. He leaves one son, Mr. Thomas Spencer, with whom he lived, to mourn his loss.

Esther Maynes.

ARE YOU IN LOVE?

If so, you will be sure to want to know the best kind of present to give your *fiancé* or *fiancée*, whichever the case may be. More important than this, though, is for you to know if you are really suited to each other, and are likely to be happy if you marry. If you want to know this you should each of you send a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped, addressed envelope, to Ranee, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., in return for which you will each receive an accurate delineation of your character, from which, by comparing the two, you will be able to draw all the conclusions necessary.

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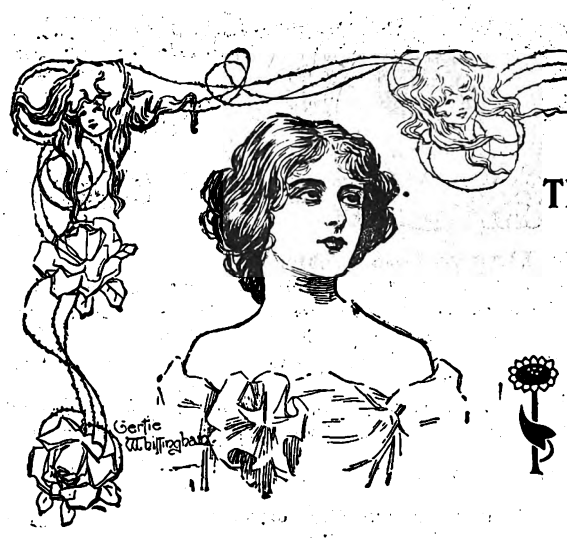

THE COURTING OF MONICA.

Telling of a True and a False Lover.

ALTHOUGH the little village of Olden was beginning to look bright with the green of early Spring, down here on the beach all was grey—sands, rocks, sky, even the water had the same dreary tint. Not a gleam of other colour, except that of the crimson shawl, which the girl, sitting on a ledge of rock, had wrapped round her.

Laurence Dare, coming along the road which ran along above the beach, saw the patch of red and paused.

At sight of her Dare's heart had given a great throb of joy. It was so long, so long since he had seen her. He made a few strides and stood beside her.

"Monica," he said softly.

The girl turned her head with a quick movement.

"Oh, Laurence."

There was a displeased tone in her voice, and her brows came together in a frown as she regarded him.

After a silence of some moments, which Dare spent in devouring eagerly with his eyes every line of her lovely profile he began:

"Monica, you are cruel; you have not let me see you once all this long winter. I have been down from town so often, and tried again and again to see you, but each time that I called you had just gone out. But Chance has been good to me to-day. I have caught you."

The girl made no answer. He went on:

"Last summer you gave me a faint hope that in time you would listen to me. What have you to say to me now; have you not thought of me all these long months?"

She turned round to him, her eyes full of tears.

"I was wrong to let you think you might hope, Laurence, for I can't do as you wish. It seems wrong for me to listen to you. Think, I belong to Allen; I was to have been his wife. He was always talking of cousin Laurence; you seemed cousin Laurence to me, too. Don't you see? I belong to Allen; I can't marry you."

"But Allen is not——"

"Hush; we don't know; he must be living."

"Monica," he said, with great gentleness of voice, "think, it is four years; he was to have returned in a year."

"I must be faithful to him."

"This is nonsense, Monica," he said, half-angrily. "If Allen is living," he went on, "why have we not heard from him all these years? Are you going to waste your life in this little village and give up all chance of happiness for a fanciful idea of being bound to him? And think of me; I have loved you so long. Come to me, I shall love you so much that you must love me in return. Come, I swear that you shall never regret it, Monica."

"I must not listen, Laurence. I wish that you did not care for me."

"I can't help caring for you. I think I have loved you since the first day I saw you, and now that you are free——"

Before he could stop her she had darted away. She went along swiftly until she knew that she was out of sight.

Her thoughts were in a whirl. Why should she not yield? She knew that her happiness would be secure with this strong, tender man. He thought she did not care. In the old days she had compared Allen with him, and always to the former's disadvantage. For after the first glamour of their engagement she had seen the shallowness and selfishness of Allen's nature.

And, these last years, how the tenderness of his nature had shone out! What care he had given to Allen's desolate mother! He had almost filled the place of her son.

When Allen had gone away for a year, she had promised to be ready to marry him upon his return. But the year had passed, and other months had grown into years, and he had not returned. They had had no news of him after that last letter, written seven months from his departure.

The only reasonable solution of the mystery was that he was dead. His mother believed it, but Monica did not. She had promised to wait for him; she dared not break that promise.

Dare did not again see Monica, although each time he visited his aunt during the Spring he called at the parsonage. But Monica always was out.

One day in June Monica was returning home from a walk. Her way was in the neighbourhood of Allen's mother's house. As it was still early in the afternoon, she decided to go and pay her a call. She had not gone to see her often of late, through fear of meeting Laurence.

She felt that she would run no risk of meeting him this afternoon, he having visited his aunt the previous week. On reaching the house she found the hall door open. She knocked lightly and without waiting for a response, walked into the little breakfast-room, where she knew Mrs. Dare was in the habit of sitting.

But at the threshold Monica paused, for there stood Laurence by the window with an open letter in his hand. His aunt sat near him, apparently in a state of great excitement.

As she saw Monica she cried out:

"He lives, Monica, he lives; my boy lives! Come in and hear the letter."

Monica looked from her to Dare in bewilderment. She had turned very white. Laurence went up to her and drew her to a chair. He, too, was pale.

"Is it true?" gasped Monica, at length.

"I received the letter this morning, and came down by the first train."

"Where is he—I don't understand."

"In America."

Monica looked at him confusedly.

"Why—why haven't I—but I have been out all the afternoon. I suppose that I shall find a letter at home."

Dare did not reply. His aunt was still crying. She now looked up at Laurence.

"Finish the letter, Laurence. Listen, Monica; our Allen is still living."

Dare had folded the letter and was putting it into his pocket.

"There is little more of importance, dear aunt."

"But Monica must hear it, Laurence. Monica, child, we'll be happy now. Read the letter to her, Laurence."

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"My dear aunt, you must try to calm yourself, or you will be ill."

Monica was puzzled by Dare's evident desire not to read the letter to her.

"I shall go home now," said Monica. "Perhaps there is a letter for me."

Laurence had left the room and stood at the entrance door.

"I am coming with you," he said, as Monica came out.

Dare regarded the girl stealthily as they walked along. He marvelled at the unimpassioned manner in which she had received the news that Allen was alive. She was still very white, and there was a strained look in her face. Not the expression of joy he would have expected to see.

"Monica," began Dare hesitatingly, "I—do not think that you will find a letter from Allen."

She stopped still and looked at him.

"What is it, Laurence? You are hiding something. What is the mystery? Why did you not wish to read the letter?"

"Monica, I believe you are a brave girl. Call up all your pride now."

She gazed at him with wondering eyes.

"Laurence, what is it?"

He looked round hastily. It was but a short distance to the rocks on the beach, and the place was deserted.

"Let us go down there. I cannot talk to you here."

She followed him submissively. Thoughts of their last interview at this place came to her mind. Allen was alive, and she, wretched girl, was not glad. She did not love him. It was Laurence that she loved, but she must be faithful to Allen. Laurence must never guess what a wicked girl she was.

Dare seated her in a sheltered position and stood looking at her, a world of compassion in his eyes.

"Monica, I would give my life to spare you this. Allen is a scoundrel."

He drew the letter from his pocket, opening it slowly; and Monica said, with a touch of imperiousness in her voice:

"Let me read it!"

He gave it to her, and she read. She passed hastily over the preliminary lines. But what was this?

"*I shall wait until later, Laurence, old boy, to give you the details of all these years. Briefly, the enterprise on which I came out here failed. I kept on trying others, hoping to achieve some measure of success before returning home, but one failure succeeded another. Finally I was taken ill with rheumatic fever.*

"*The woman at whose house I was staying nursed me through it, and her daughter, one of the sweetest girls in the State, helped her. Call me all the hard names you wish, Laurence, I'll not try to excuse myself, but I fell in love with her and we were married. I was a coward, I know, but she loved me to distraction, and we are very happy.*

"*Believe me, I have not been easy when I thought of my mother and Monica. But I met Melton last week out here. He told me that you all believed me dead, and that Monica was reported to be engaged to you, so she is consoled and will forgive me.*

"*That is why I am writing to disclose my whereabouts. I am fairly prosperous, and shall have mother come out here immediately. I know she will forgive me, and she will find the sweetest little daughter-in-law in the country. You will suit Monica far better than I should have done. You have the same high ideals of duty, and all that sort of thing. I confess to living on a lower plane.*"

Dare stood looking at her sadly, reviling Allen in his heart.

"My darling, if I could have spared you this," he said.

Presently Monica looked up at him and said tremulously:

"Laurence, I tried all along to be faithful to Allen, but——"

"But what, Monica?"

She stood up and looked into his eyes a fleeting glance but—it was enough for Dare.

Emily Windsor.

Your Editor Chats.

The Eleventh Love Problem.

I CONSIDER that the best solution to the Unsolved Love Problem, entitled "Brian Cresswell's Choice," was sent by Mr. Ernest McClatchie, 28 Edith Road, West Kensington, London, and I therefore award to him the guinea I offered.

The name of the winner of the twelfth and last problem, "The Test of Ruth Lawson," will be announced as soon as possible.

Our Whitsuntide Holiday Number.

NEXT week's issue will be a splendid Whitsun Holiday number. It will be full of interesting stories and clever illlustrations, and will be the very paper for you to take with you if you are making a train journey. One of the charms of *Short Stories* is that, the stories being complete, you can read it at any time you have half an hour to spare without the risk of losing the "connection" of the story, as you are liable to do when a story is long-winded and drawn-out.

The Signature Competition.

EXPERT examiners are now very busy checking the entries for the Signature Competition that closed a fortnight ago, and as soon as ever it is possible I shall announce the names of the fortunate winners.

A Proverb to Heed.

THE old Latin motto, "*Bis dat qui cito dat*." ("He gives twice who gives quickly"), is one of the truest of all proverbs. I wish that you would demonstrate the force of it to the benefit of the Fresh Air Fund. Just send along one ninepence now, and afterwards follow it up by another. Ninepence is such a small amount that scarcely any of my readers would appreciably miss it. And yet this ninepence will work such wonders if properly spent. It will afford one poor child a whole day's outing in the beautiful country that he never—or seldom—has a chance to see. The organisers of the Fresh Air Fund watch over the welfare of each child for that one day, and see that he or she thoroughly enjoys himself or herself. The actual cost of conveyance to and from the country and the necessary food monopolise the whole of the ninepence—all other expenses are borne by the organisers themselves.

Will *you* not send in just a small donation—just what you think you can afford to give—for the sake of those children of the gutter who long for the warm sunshine and the open air? Do!

All monies received will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*, and they should be sent to the Hon. Secretary, Fresh Air Fund, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Your Editor.

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"Mr. JAMES."

A Pretty Story with a Pleasant Ending.

It was a lovely day in July when Arthur Hayes came into possession of "The Poplars" through the death of an uncle whom he had never seen, and had hardly heard of even.

Up to the present he had been a struggling journalist, scarcely earning sufficient to keep body and soul together, and here he was, suddenly made master of one of the richest estates in the country.

Sir George Hayes had a daughter, a beautiful girl of nineteen, but, as the estates were strictly entailed on the male descendants of the family, he was unable to do anything further than settle an allowance on her of £100 a year, making her the ward of the future Baronet until she should attain the age of twenty-one.

Ida Hayes had never been brought up to expect that she would inherit anything at her father's death, and she had been given a thorough training (at her own express wish) in secretarial duties. Lady Hayes had been much against this course, but Ida had overcome her prejudices, and eventually had her own way.

"You know, mamma," she had said, "if anything happened to papa, we should have to do something, and no lady need be ashamed of earning her living in so pleasant a way!"

"Tut! tut, child! You will be married long before anything of that description happens, I hope!"

Whereupon Ida had wisely held her peace, and said nothing, but she had mentally vowed that, come what might, she would never marry anyone simply for a home or for money.

So it came to pass that, when she had reached the age of nineteen, Sir George had died, after a long illness, and his wife, who had nursed him herself devotedly through the entire eighteen months of his sickness, died three days afterwards, leaving Ida orphaned, and practically homeless!

Ida was, as before stated, a lovely girl. Tall, of a slender, perfect figure, and a queenly carriage, she had golden-brown hair, large, expressive violet eyes, a small, well-shaped nose and mouth with pearly teeth, and a "roseleaf" complexion; she was truly a picture any artist would delight in!

She was not, like many young ladies in her station of life, proud or haughty. No, Ida had a sympathetic and gentle heart, and, what is more, she was an earnest and God-fearing Christian, beloved of all for her kindness and gentle tact, especially for those in sickness or distress.

When Mr. Ramsey, the old family lawyer, had approached her with words of sympathy for her position and altered prospects, she had replied, with a rare, sweet smile:

"Not so, Mr. Ramsey, I am no worse off now than I was before. You know, I have never expected anything, and I have had a thorough business training. I am young and strong, and I am not ashamed to work!"

And the worthy man had left her, inwardly wondering at her quiet and unaltered demeanour, and saying to himself, "A queer lassie, but the best i' the world!" (for he was a Scotsman).

Arthur Hayes had heard of the Baronet's illness from a friend residing in the district, and he had also heard of Ida from this same friend, but, not being a "ladies' man," he had taken little notice of the enthusiastic description.

On receiving the news from Mr. Ramsey he at once made arrangements to visit "The Poplars." Alighting at the little station he perceived a small trap in the distance, coming along at a pretty good pace, and on inquiring from the station-master, learnt that the said trap belonged to "The Poplars." He knew that it could not be coming to meet him, for he had not advised anyone of his coming.

He sauntered along the high road leisurely, when suddenly the pony reared as a large white bird flew across the road, right under its eyes, and set off towards Hayes at a terrific rate. As the trap neared him, swaying violently, Hayes perceived that its only occupant was a young lady, who had evidently dropped the reins, and was clinging to the side of the vehicle for dear life. Pulling himself together, he waited, and as the pony got near enough he sprang at the bridle. The animal reared and plunged, and finally attempted to bolt again; but Hayes hung on for all he was worth. Then suddenly the wheel caught in a rut, and was thrown violently to one side. Quick as thought, Hayes released the horse's head, and turning caught the young lady in his arms, just in time to prevent her being thrown on the ground, letting the trap and pony fall clear into the ditch.

It was some moments before either could speak, when Hayes gasped out, as he released the terrified girl:

"Thank God!"

She tried to smile bravely as she held out a trembling hand, saying in an almost inaudible voice:

"How am I to thank you, sir? You have saved my life. I cannot be grateful enough!"

"I was only too pleased that I was at hand!" he replied courteously.

"But your arm!" she cried, noting for the first time that it hung limply by his side. "You have hurt it!"

"I am afraid I have!" he replied ruefully. "It is only a sprain, though, I think—nothing serious."

"I know a little about sprains," she said shyly. "Will you let me look at it?"

"Indeed it is nothing!" he replied hastily. "I shall do very well, I think, and——"

"No, no; you must let me see!" she said imperiously, and he had perforce to submit.

Passing her hand swiftly and gently along the wrist and arm, she found, to her dismay, that he had dislocated his elbow, and he could not suppress a slight groan, although her touch was almost as light as air.

"Oh, dear! I am afraid this is quite beyond me!" she exclaimed. "It is five miles to "The Poplars," and eight miles to the nearest doctor's. I am afraid we shall have to walk it, too, judging from poor Charlie's appearance and the state of the trap."

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At that moment a labourer's cart turned into view, and very soon reached the scene of disaster. With the help of the two men who occupied it the trap and pony were extricated from the ditch in a very dilapidated condition, the trap being minus of both wheels and Charlie lame. What was to be done now?

"It does not really matter about me," said Hayes, "I can walk; but what about you and the pony and trap?"

"We be goin' towards 'Th' Poplars,' Miss Ida," said one of the men. "Mebbe you'd not care fur a lift?"

"Indeed, Thomas, we shall be very pleased, if you will take us!" exclaimed Ida, smiling gratefully.

The end of it was that Ida and Hayes got into the cart, and the trap was lifted in also, or what remained of it, Charlie being tethered behind, looking very shamefaced, and in about half an hour this strange procession reached "The Poplars."

An elderly woman, in black satin, whom Hayes took to be the housekeeper, met them in the hall, anxiously inquiring:

"Whatever has happened, dearie? Has there been an accident?"

"Yes, Nurse; Charlie reared at something, and this gentleman has done me an everlasting favour, by saving my life, although he won't acknowledge the fact in the least!"

"Oh, dear, I never did trust Charlie, dear; but how grateful we are to you, sir!" she exclaimed, turning to Hayes.

"It is nothing," said Hayes; "there is a saying, you know, that 'beauty in distress is a pleasure to men,' and I can assure you that such is the case!"

"Come along in," laughed Ida, blushing. "Nurse, dear, Mr——?"

"James," supplied Hayes wickedly.

"Mr. James has dislocated his elbow in stopping Charlie, and I think Dr. Bland ought to see it directly."

Nurse waited a moment to send the two men whose aid had been so opportune round to the kitchen for "refreshments," and then followed the two indoors.

"No," Hayes was saying, "I have just arrived, and was going to spend the week here, at the inn. The sea air is so bracing here!"

"Oh, but I hope you will stay with us now, and we can show you heaps of things here. It will be a poor return for all you have done for us!"

"Yes, indeed," rejoined Nurse; "and your arm, you know, will require attention, which you would not get at the inn."

"I have sent Carter for Dr. Bland," said Ida, "so you will have to wait and see him now," as Hayes made a gesture of protest.

The upshot of it was that Hayes, after the elbow had been satisfactorily "set" by the doctor (who had known him since he was a boy at school, and who nearly let the cat out of the bag, but stopped the words on seeing a ferocious frown on the face of his patient), was installed at "The Poplars" until he had to return to London.

Very soon Ida left the room, to change her dress, which had got badly torn and dirtied in the skirmish; and Hayes, wishing to be alone with Dr. Bland for a few moments, said he felt very thirsty, and Nurse bustled off to see about tea.

"Now, what does all this mystery mean, sir?" exclaimed the doctor. "I suppose you're 'Sir Arthur' now?"

"No," replied Arthur, "I'm simply plain 'Mr. James, journalist, of Fleet Street, London!'"

"What do you mean?"—sharply.

"Just what I say, my friend! By-the-bye, I suppose that is the old Baronet's daughter, is it not?"

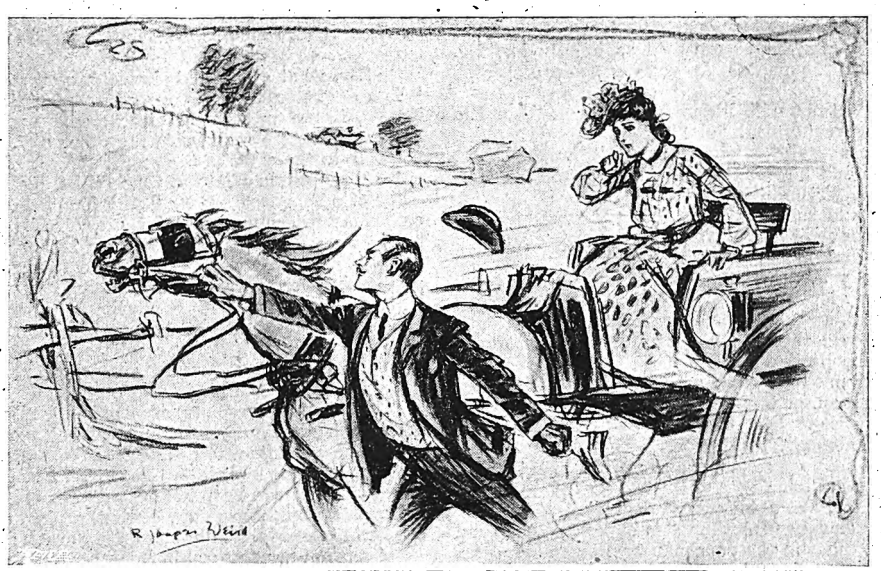
"Yes," replied Dr. Bland, who was an old friend of the family. "That is your cousin Ida, and a better or sweeter girl never breathed!"

"So I should think!" exclaimed Arthur warmly. "But she must not suspect that I am the new Baronet, and her guardian, Bland. I want to make her acquaintance incog. Understand?" And he looked at the doctor significantly.

"All right, my boy, I won't spoil sport!" laughed the doctor, with a twinkle in his kind, grey eyes. "Love at first sight, eh? Well, you'll be a lucky chap if you win her, 'Mr. James'!"

"Here, I say, shut up, Bland!" cried Arthur, flushing to the roots of his curly brown hair. "It's too bad of you, really, you know, and——"

At that moment Nurse re-entered the room, bearing the tea-tray, and followed by Ida, who was now clad in a gown of soft, clinging black material, with a spray of snow-white flowers in her belt.



Hayes sprang for the bridle and hung on for all he was worth.

Dr. Bland, having no pressing engagements just then, stayed to partake of a friendly cup, and afterwards departed, saying he was going towards the station, and would see that Hayes' portmanteau was sent on.

This, however, was rather a puzzling undertaking when he arrived at the station, for the label bore the name "Arthur James Hayes!" However, the worthy doctor was not to be beaten, and, after some little trouble, he succeeded in completely obliterating the last name, and triumphantly dispatched the porter with his burden, smiling to himself the while, for he had never thought that Arthur would have acted so, having almost set him down in his own mind as a confirmed bachelor, although the lad had only reached the age of twenty-nine!

* * * * * *

Three months had passed, and Arthur was still an inmate of "The Poplars." Nor did he seem inclined to quit that hospitable roof. He had written to his solicitor, telling

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him that he was unable to do anything definite for the present, but would communicate with him later. In the meantime, he hoped that the present occupant of "The Poplars" would continue there, at least for the present, until some arrangement could be come to with regard to his ward, and other pending matters.

This Ida was very glad of, for she had not yet secured an appointment as secretary, although she had made strenuous efforts to do so. Her youth and inexperience, too, stood much in her way.

She had been the almost constant companion of Arthur since he came to "The Poplars," finding him a most agreeable talker, for he had travelled a good deal in his capacity as journalist, and he was nothing loth to relate some of his adventures as war correspondent to his fair companion.

The days were now getting rather chilly, and the evenings drawing in, for the first week of November had already passed, It happened that, one evening, Ida was seated at the piano. singing softly to herself that lovely old ballad, "When Other Lips and Other Hearts," when Arthur entered the room silently, and stood behind her until she had finished the song, letting her hands linger over the keys at the concluding bars.

When she rose she was startled to find him standing there, and exclaimed laughingly:

"Whatever do you want to creep in so quietly for, Mr. James, like a thief in the night! Do you want to run off with something?"

"Yes," replied Arthur, with his soul in his eyes, "but I'm afraid it will be rather a difficult job!"

"You will never make a good burglar," laughed Ida, dropping her eyes and blushing vividly, "if that is the view you take of things, Sir Faintheart!"

That was quite sufficient for Hayes. In another moment he was by the side of the chair into which Ida had sank, exclaiming:

"Ida, can you give me the slightest hope, darling? You must know I love you, dearest. Dare I hope that you will consent to share my lot some day? Tell me you care for me just a little, dearest, and I will be content!"

Ida raised her eyes shyly to his face, and then dropped them again, while he pleaded:

"Ida, do not say me nay—not just yet, at least. Perhaps I have spoken too soon, or is it that you do not care to marry a struggling journalist? Oh! Ida, my darling, cannot you love me just a little bit?"

She looked up bravely now, murmuring in a sweet voice, which was scarcely audible:

"Not a little, dear, but a very great deal!"

"My darling!" exclaimed Arthur, "is it possible that you consent to become the wife of a poor man? Remember, dear, I have nothing beyond what I earn as journalist. It would mean, perhaps, waiting for years ere we could build a home."

"Yes," she replied, in the same tone, "I love you, Arthur, and I am young, you know, and can work too!" Then she looked up suddenly with: "But my guardian, dear. I do not know how he will take this. I have not even seen him, and you know I may not marry until I am twenty-one without his consent."

"Never mind the guardian, dear, we must overcome his objections somehow," said Arthur, feeling very guilty; "do not let any doubts sully our happinesss, dearest!"

Here he drew off a small signet ring from his little finger, and slipping it on her left hand, he said:

"That will serve until another is got, darling!" kissing her fondly the while.

The next day Arthur announced his intention of running up to London again, much to Ida's regret.

"You know, darling, my principals are getting impatient, and it would never do for me to get into their bad books now!" To which Ida was reluctantly compelled to agree.

Three days later, Arthur wrote apprising his solicitor (Mr. Ramsey) of his intention of going down to "The Poplars" in a day or two, if convenient, to which letter he received a reply that Miss Hayes would be very pleased to welcome her guardian on Thursday, and hoped that he would be well impressed with the place.

Arthur smiled somewhat at this reply, and took the morning train to Cranfield Glen the next day (Thursday), arriving at the familiar little station about two in the afternoon.

On ringing the bell, he was admitted by a new butler, much to his relief, for he did not want to be recognised yet. He sent his card up to Ida, who very soon came into the room.

"Arthur! Oh, I am so glad!" she exclaimed. "But," looking round, "where is my guardian? I was told he was here."

"And so he is!" replied Arthur.

"But I don't see him," said Ida.

"Darling, don't you understand? I am Sir Arthur Hayes, and——"

"But you said you were Mr. Arthur James, and a journalist?" she said wonderingly, but smiling mischievously the while.

"That is perfectly true, dear. My name is Arthur James Hayes, and up to the present I have been earning my living as a journalist. I thought of coming over here the day you upset the trap, but changed my mind as I thought I should like to have a look round first without being recognised. You know the rest, dear, and I—why, whatever are you laughing at, Ida?" as he looked round and saw that she was standing by the window, her shoulders shaking with suppressed laughter.

"Why, what a dear old simpleton you are!" she laughed. "You ought to have guarded your linen more carefully, sir, if you did not want to be discovered. Look," holding up a handkerchief, "I found this the other day, after you left!" pointing to the mark in the corner "A. J. Hayes."

"Then you knew all the time?" he questioned, colouring.

"Not all the time, dear; I only found this after you left us on Friday afternoon. Oh, base deceiver!"

But there was no trace of anger in her voice at the said deception, and Arthur sprang up, catching her in his arms, and kissing her repeatedly, exclaiming:

"You're not angry then, darling? I was afraid I should not win you in the *rôle* of Baronet and guardian, so I had to resort to the next best means of managing matters!"

"You know I always said you would never make a good burglar!" laughed Ida.

"You don't deserve her, my fine fellow!" was the comment of Dr. Bland, who was summoned the next day to attend one of the servants who had been taken suddenly ill.

"All the same!" retorted Arthur, "I've got her, and what is more, I mean to keep her!"

But Ida would have none of that, saying, as the worthy old doctor imprinted a kindly kiss on her cheek:

"I am not worthy of him, doctor, but I mean to try and make him a good wife, with God's help!"

Twelve months later they were married, and started off on a Continental tour for their honeymoon, the happiest pair that one could wish to see.

Una C. Brown.

A ROYAL PANTOMIME.

Admission—SIXPENCE.

IT isn't every day that you have an opportunity of seeing a pantomime for the modest sum of sixpence. But just now you have the opportunity of seeing *Cinderella and the Magic Slipper*—not the old Cinderella that you were told about as children, but quite a new one with a new slipper—and getting a lot of amusement and enjoyment out of it, for just that amount of money.

Cinderella and the Magic Slipper is the pantomime that was performed early this year at Chatsworth when the Duke of Devonshire entertained Their Majesties the King and Queen with regal magnificence. The little play was specially written for the occasion, and specially performed by a caste of well-known Royal and Society personages. It was a brilliant success, and thoroughly delighted the distinguished company who witnessed its production.

Therefore, get your sixpence ready and buy the May **Pearson's Magazine**, where it is reproduced for the benefit of the general public. And don't waste time, but make sure of an "early door" by making the best of your way to the nearest bookstall.

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- A - Burglar's Romance.

Relating how Mr. Emley Changed his Name to Mr. Smith and Lived in Clover for a Short Time.

Mr. Emley was a burglar. He was, however, a select burglar, an artist in his profession.

On a very dark night one March he walked up the front steps of the finest house in Castletown. The house had been sold a few weeks before to a gentleman in France, and Mr. Emley's reasons for visiting the place before its owner returned from abroad were known only to himself.

He was a cool man, never taken unawares, prepared for any situation which might present itself, and if on that dark night he was surprised to see the door before him suddenly open, no one would have guessed it. Certainly the servant on the inside of the threshold did not. He started back in dismay, believing it to be his new and unknown master who stood confronting him.

"Good evening," said Mr. Emley, raising his hat.

"Wh-h-hy, we didn't expect you for several days yet, sir," stammered the servant.

"Indeed!"

"And nothing is ready, sir; but if you will come in, we can make hasty arrangements."

Mr. Emley stepped into the hall, and the servant turned on the electric lights. A sumptuously furnished room was revealed, a servant in correct uniform, and a tall, brown-eyed gentleman of about thirty-eight years of age.

He wore a tan overcoat and a high silk hat. The servant was greatly impressed with these evident proofs of gentility. He spoke reverently.

"The side room with the bay window is nearest ready, sir. If you would care to go in there——"

"It will do very nicely," said Mr. Emley. "I should have let you know I was coming, but really the idea never occurred to me."

The side room was eminently satisfactory. It was exactly the kind of a room that Mr. Emley had often, with pangs of envy, seen other men sleep in. To sleep in one himself had seemed an impossible dream, but it was fast assuming a reality, a common sureness, that charmed him.

"Would you like something to eat, sir?" suggested the servant.

"I am hungry, and ah—ah——"

"Jenkinson, sir."

"Thanks. If you have something to drink, Jenkinson! It is a trifle raw outdoors. And—by the way, has any letter come for me lately?"

This was an excellent stroke of diplomacy on Mr. Emley's part. He was anxious to know who he was. The address on the envelope would tell him.

"A letter came two or three days ago, sir, but we forwarded it immediately to Paris,"

"I must have missed it. How was it addressed?"

"Just 'F. M. Smith, The Grange, Castletown,' sir. I think it was an advertisement."

"Probably. I'll have supper here."

"Yes, sir."

The servant departed, and Mr. Emley gazed about with a fast swelling air of pompousness.

"Dick, old boy," he said to himself, "it isn't exactly what you came for, but it'll do. It's your infernal luck again, old man, and if you're asleep I don't care, but if you wake up I'll never forgive you."

When supper was finished, and the servant was about to retire, Mr. Emley called to him.

"Jenkinson! Be sure and look everything up securely. I have been told that burglars are very daring in this part of the country."

"Indeed, they are, sir," replied Jenkinson. "There's no telling what they'll do next. But it'll be a very cold day when they get the better of me, sir."

"It is rather chilly to-night," observed Mr. Emley.

* * * * *

By noon the next day Mr. Emley had in a large degree overcome the strangeness of his situation. He no longer had an almost ungovernable impulse to gather to his bosom all the silver on the sideboard, and noiselessly flit through the nearest window.

But it was still a novelty to step out of the front door in full sight of the servants and enjoy the view from the porch without being driven to the extremity of drawing a revolver or taking to his heels. It was a delight to his artistic nature to sit in the drawing-room and cut the pages of the latest magazine with a gold-handled, ivory paper-knife, replacing the knife on the table when finished with.

I must admit he tried this latter experiment several times before successfully accomplishing it, and in spite of his earnest endeavours his pockets were soon filled with a collection of small valuables. However, his environment was having a good effect upon his moral nature.

"I would be an honest man were I in reality Mr. Smith," he told himself, running his hand caressingly over a jewelled sword hilt that hung in the hall.

But the sword hilt held strong attractions not consistent with moral reform, and Mr. Emley strolled out of doors and down the gravel path towards the wrought-iron entrance gates. Through the gates came a messenger boy with an orange envelope in his hand.

"Good afternoon, my little man," said Mr. Emley.

"Good afternoon, sir," said the boy.

"You have a telegram? "For Who?"

"Mr. Jenkinson, sir."

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"All right, I'll take it. I have charge of everything here, and will know just where to find Mr. Jenkinson should he not be at the house."

Mr. Emley coolly appropriated the telegram.

"Now, I wonder," said he, "whom this is from?"

He turned the message round and round in the brilliant sunlight, but no answer to his question shone forth.

"If I were in reality Mr. Smith, I'd take this to Jenkinson, but, as I am not——"

Mr. Emley tore open the envelope. The message was from Paris, and read:

"*Bad accident. Return in a month.*—F. M. SMITH."

"Hurrah! Mr. Emley, allow me the pleasure of bidding you a long adieu! Mr. Smith, make yourself perfectly at home for a month, and I think it's high time you became acquainted with your new neighbours."

Mr. Smith proved an exceedingly popular man. Castletown was rather a dull little place, and its *elite* society was rapidly boring itself to death. Therefore, the new owner of the Grange was welcomed, figuratively speaking, with wide open arms.

And this was not at all strange. Young, handsome, and possessed of great wealth, and a long, silky moustache, when moustaches were scarce, Mr. Smith was an unusually eligible man. Sweet girls smiled encouragingly upon him, and anxious mothers deluged him with invitations.

The older men said he was "a good fellow," and the younger men admired the way he spent his money—or, that is, ran up bills. Altogether his path was one of roses, and he went on his way rejoicing.

* * * * *

It was at a ball that he met the woman in the case. Two of the precious four weeks had flown by on swift wings, and festivities were at their height. Mr. Smith had flung himself into the new life with all the pent-up energy of his strong nature. It was his first taste of this kind of social pleasures, and there must have been a hidden strain of refinement in his unknown parentage, for he easily adapted himself to his new surroundings.

And it was no wonder that under the smile of Fortune he forgot he was wanted by the police of almost every large town in the country, and walked through the ballroom with head held proudly erect.

It was thus that she first saw him.

"Who is that?" she inquired of a friend.

"Where? Oh, that is Mr. Smith of The Grange."

"Of the Grange! Up here on the hill?"

"Yes. Haven't you met him yet?"

"No," she answered, looking curiously at him, "I have not."

She was introduced to him as Miss Lormer.

"She only got back from Paris a few weeks ago, too," said the friend who introduced them. "How strange you did not meet her over there, Mr. Smith."

"Well, ah! Paris is rather a large place, you know," said Mr. Smith.

"Were you there long?" inquired Miss Lormer, looking up with earnest eyes. She was a sweet, pretty, little creature with a delicate oval face filled with childish innocence and purity.

Mr. Smith felt uncomfortable. Fortunately, though, his conscience didn't trouble him much. His acquaintances used to say he didn't have any conscience, but then, of course, that was absurd.

"It all depends upon what you call long," he said, evasively replying to Miss Lormer's question.

He asked her to dance, and was charmed with her conversation and manner. They danced together several times, as was noticed and remarked upon by the eagle-eyed matrons. Miss Lormer's dancing was beyond criticism, and she had an artless way of accompanying her statements with an appealing upward glance that made Mr. Smith's brain whirl.

He lured her into the conservatory, but when he had found a divan small enough for two she seemed deeply interested in the mysterious arrangement of a tea rose she held in her hand. Mr. Smith adored her shy timidity, and planned to get possession of the rose. He was trained to patience.

"It is strange I have not met you before," he murmured, laying his arm on the back of the seat, and looking at the brown curls before him.

"I only came from London last night. Have you been here long?"

The earnest eyes were upliftcd, and Mr. Smith was glad he could tell the truth.

"No, only a fortnight."

"How dull it must seem to you after Paris, especially as you have no relatives here, nor anyone you know very well."

"I don't find it dull now," he said meaningly.

The grey eyes drooped, and the petals of the rose were cruelly mutilated. There was silence for a while.

"Are you going to make your home permanently at The Grange?" asked Miss Lormer, breaking the speaking stillness.

"Well, I can hardly tell yet," said Mr. Smith. "It all depends on circumstances."

"Yes?"

"Yes. But at present I haven't the slightest intention of leaving."

"You came rather unexpectedly, did you not?"

"Yes. It has never been my custom to herald my movements from the housetops."

"Well," said Miss Lormer, rising and breaking the flower to the ground. "I hope you weren't disappointed in your expectations."

"I did not imagine that anything could have so far exceeded them," replied Mr. Smith, picking up the rose, and pressing it to his lips.

They were constantly meeting after this, and although Mr. Smith was not in love, he was heading in the right direction.

* * * * *

The third week seemed hardly begun ere it was finished, and he was gazing with dismay upon the unavoidable ending of his adventure. Another telegram, announcing the exact date of the real Mr. Smith's return, threw him into a momentary whirlwind of passion and defiance.

"I will not give it up! I will not!"

But things finally re-adjusted themselves to their normal condition, and Mr. Smith was but a thin mask covering Dick Emley, smartest burglar that Scotland Yard had ever known.

"I have had my taste of high life, and it has been perfect," he soliloquised, "and the only thing to do now is to gain some lasting benefit from it; a sort of interest on my money, as it were."

Castletown was an old little town, and within its narrow limits treasured many priceless ancestral heirlooms. Family relics were its great distinction, and chief among these was silver. Every housewife recognised in society had her silverware, heavy with age and tradition.

It was strange no one had thought of a silverware exhibition before Mr. Smith proposed one, but nobody had, and the idea was hailed with delight.

"Having proposed the plan, the very least I can do," said Mr. Smith, "is to offer for the exhibition the use of my house and my service."

As he owned many rare pieces of silverware himself, and the public at large was curious to see the interior of his new home, he was gratefully thanked, and the offer accepted.

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Two evenings the exhibition lasted, and all Castletown turned out. The affair was one of great social magnificence. Under nodding palms the silverware reposed upon rich velvet or ruby, green, and gold. Subdued lights flung their rosy radiance upon gleaming statuary, and soft strains of music throbbed through a bower of ferns and lilies.

The host was irreproachable. With a dignified and reserved yet cordial welcome, he put all at their ease, establishing for himself an enviable reputation. Such a social success had never before been known in Castletown. The real Mr. Smith was having a precedent established for him that he might find a difficulty in living up to.

As was to be expected, Miss Lormer was the object of Mr. Smith's most marked attention. The town had recognised this, and the feminine portion of it was honestly endeavouring to accept the fact graciously.

"Now, he will always live here," said the matrons, wisely nodding their heads. "If he had not fallen in love with one of our girls, he would probably grow weary of so small a place, and return to Paris."

On the last evening of the exhibition, Mr. Smith escorted Miss Lormer to her home. In the little outside vestibule he took a hesitating farewell of her.

"Think the best you can of me always," he said. "Although no man can be all a good woman thinks he is, still I would have been all I seem to be, had I always had the opportunities I have now."

Miss Lormer looked troubled, and was about to speak impulsively, when a slight cough was heard, and, blushing slightly, she said, "Good-night."

When Mr. Smith returned home, he found the servants busily packing up the silverware under the stern supervision of the trustworthy Jenkinson. Mr. Smith had expressed himself as disinclined to assume longer than was absolutely necessary the responsibility of the borrowed heirlooms, and had made all arrangements for their return the next morning.

It was very early the next morning when Mr. Smith rose. Indeed, it was still night. It was the day of the real owner's arrival, and with his customary thoughtfulness for others, Mr. Emley had decided to leave. But there were several small matters to attend to first.

All over the house he went, upstairs and down, and not a single sound did he make. It was now that his great art showed itself. Bolts and bars opened like magic before the touch of his slender fingers, and after he had passed it was though an army of strange ants had been at work. The walls and mantels, the cabinets, tables, and floors were bare and unsightly.

He had taken the precaution of having the silverware packed in small boxes, but even so, he found difficulty in loading it on to the cart he had driven out upon the lawn. But at three o'clock the cart was filled. Climbing into the high seat, and taking the reins, he turned back towards the house and smiled.

"It is a very cold day, Jenkinson," he said.

Then he chuckled softly to the horse and began his journey. It was a very little journey. The horse had not taken ten steps before someone stepped out from the shadows and caught hold of the bridle rein. Mr. Emley sprang to his feet, only to find himself looking into the barrel of a revolver.

"I beg your pardon," said a soft voice, "but could I speak to you for a few moments?"

For the first time in his life Mr. Emley was stunned, helpless, at the mercy of his opponent. The voice was that of Miss Lormer.

"If you will get down from the cart," she said, "I will put this revolver away. I am a very good shot," and she laughed, "but the thing makes me nervous."

"Who would have thought that you were in the profession, too!" Mr. Emley muttered in dazed tones as he mechanically climbed down from the cart.

Miss Lormer laughed again, more heartily than before, and it was then he saw that she was not alone. A man stood at the horse's head. One of his legs was bandaged, and he leant heavily on a cane. He was a tall, good-looking young man, and he returned Mr. Emley's survey with great interest.

Noticing the exchange of glances, Miss Lormer turned to Mr. Emley, slightly embarrassed.

"Allow me to introduce to you, Mr. Smith, my *fiancé*."

Mr. Emley started and flushed. Quickly recovering himself, however, he bowed low to the stranger.

"Thank you," muttered the real Mr. Smith.

"Yes," said Miss Lormer, reflectively, leaning her hand on one side, and looking down at the revolver which she held in one hand, and patted with the other; "you see, I met him in Paris, and we became engaged. I wanted a home here, where I was born, so he bought The Grange, and I picked out the servants. That is why you weren't known as an impostor at once. Mr. Smith was coming here with me, but had an accident, so I extended my visit to London, where I was waiting for him. When I came here I was rather surprised to see you, you know"—she looked up with a twinkle in her eye—"but you were such a good actor I hated to interfere. Of course, I had to tell Frank, but he always lets me do as I please, and here we all are."

She smiled triumphantly, as though having successfully gathered together a picnic party, and Mr. Smith stood leaning against the horse, evidently much amused with the situation. It was hard to realise that the gentlemanly Mr. Emley was a common burglar, as, indeed, he was not.

"And now that we are here, what are we going to do?" asked Mr. Emley.

His voice had a strange, unnatural sound that made Miss Lormer wince. Perhaps her conscience was not entirely untroubled as to her treatment of him.

She held out her hand.

"I think," she said gently, "you had better go."

Mr. Emley bowed low over the little hand. He lifted his hat to Mr. Smith, and, turning, walked away from them into the darkness. When he was far enough away to render conversation inaudible, Miss Lormer called to him:

"Wait a minute!"

He stood in the darkness waiting, and she fearlessly went up to him.

"I don't like to think of you going away without anything," she said; "here, take this."

She pulled a tea rose from her hair, thrust it into his hand, and ran back to her lover.

"Dick," said Mr. Emley to himself, "you have been awakened."

R. L. Saunderson.

He: "Are you sure that I am the only man you ever really and truly loved?" She: "Perfectly sure. I went over the whole list only yesterday."

George: "Do you think that your father will consent to our marriage, darling?" Ethel: "Oh, yes. He has always humoured my silliest wishes."

"Do you pay for poetry?" asked the pretty girl. "Y—yes," replied the editor with some hesitation. "What do you pay?" "Compliments."

Young Man: "Are there any—er—tunnels on your railway?" Railway Official: "Yes, three of them. The line is a favourite one with newly-married couples. Two tickets, did you say?"

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A Very Suitable Servant.

Relating How an American Lady at Last Found a Butler that Suited Her, and the Consequences.

Mrs. Madison was an American lady, and she lived in New York.

It was Mrs. Madison's opinion that the servant question would be the death of her. The "question" with her meant, generally: How long will the newly-acquired domestic remain on the field of his or her usefulness—or uselessness?

Mrs. Madison was rich in this world's goods. She had an indulgent husband, charming children, a more than comfortable income, and enough beauty to make her very pleasant to look upon. But all these gifts of a kind Providence were as nothing weighed in the balance against the crushing fact that every one of the Madison butlers was worse than his predecessor. The poor lady had tried every nationality, as she said, except the Chinese; there she drew the line.

At the time when this veracious history opens, the latest venture in the pantry line had proved to be a complete failure, and was to depart on the morrow.

Mrs. Madison sat in her charming sitting-room, over a wood fire, with the hot-water kettle hissing genially among its companion tea-things, which had been brought in for the last time by the present incumbent.

Opposite to her was her sister, Sylvia Arden. She had just come in from walking, and her long sealskin garment was thrown open as she sat toasting her feet and drawing off her gloves.

She was one of the prettiest girls in New York—which means that she was very lovely indeed.

"Shall you have that dinner on the fifteenth, Maud?" asked the young lady. She rose as she spoke, and divested herself of her furs, and as she did so one saw what a lithe and shapely figure she had.

"It all depends on the butler," said her sister. "George will get somebody to-day—goodness knows what."

"Ah, there's George's key in the door," said Mrs. Madison. "Now we shall see what news he brings."

In a moment or two the master of the house entered.

He took the cup of tea which his wife had poured out. Then, seating himself, he said: "Well, I have got him."

"Whom?" asked his wife mischievously.

"John Parkins—an Englishman."

"Was there ever an Englishman who wasn't named John?" asked Sylvia.

"Good references, of course?" said Mrs. Madison, with grim sarcasm. "They always have."

"No," said her husband cheerfully; "none at all."

Mrs. Madison was quite quiet.

"You are tired of the silver, then?"

"Not at all; but he won't take the silver. If there is anything dishonest about John Parkins, then I am wofully mistaken."

"You generally are," said his wife drily.

"Thank you, madam. No; he may be a little green, but he is one of the finest-looking men I ever saw."

"Do you remember our British Adonis?" asked Sylvia. "And how he handed round the lobster sauce in a kitchen jug? And put himself into the dumb waiter instead of the empty dishes?"

"Am I likely to forget it?"

"Then why," said Mrs. Madison, with sudden asperity, "do you subject us to a similar experience? How can you bring a man without a reference into my house?"

"On the same principle," said Mr. Madison setting down his cup with perfect imperturbability, "that you once said you would advertise for an atheist, having tried every religion in the housemaid line and failed lamentably with all the sects represented. I am tired of the men who have lived with all the British aristocracy. Now, Parkins assured me that he hasn't lived with any of them. He has the face of an honest, steady man; and he tells me that he is willing to learn."

Mrs. Madison gave a mock groan.

"That means that I am willing to teach," said she.

"And are we to have the Bellingers on the fifteenth?" asked Sylvia.

"By all means," said her brother-in-law. And so the conversation ended.

The next day, it being the first of the month, promptly at the hour agreed upon, John Parkins presented himself to the lady of the house, with a modest, deferential bearing, which was quite delightful. He was a strapping fellow of about thirty, dressed in worn but well-cut garments. His features were rather handsome, and his smooth-shaven upper lip showed at times a glimpse of very good teeth.

"It is not our custom to engage anyone without a reference," said Mrs. Madison. "We are placing great confidence in you in taking you like this into our house."

"I am aware of that, ma'am," said Parkins. "I am very thankful for your kindness. I hope I shall suit you."

"I hope so," said Mrs. Madison, in a tone which hinted that the hope was a forlorn one. "Have you had much experience in waiting at table?" she continued.

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"Not much, ma'am," said Parkins.

"May I ask where you lived last?"

The man hesitated for a moment.

"On a ranch, ma'am," he said, with a slight air of being unwilling to pursue the subject further. Then he added, with more alacrity:

"I was servant to a gentleman out in Wyoming."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Madison.

She had rather intended to bully John Parkins, but somehow the manner of the man forbade it.

Having this unaccountable feeling that further investigations would be almost an impertinence, she proceeded to instruct the new butler as to what would henceforth be expected of him. He showed great alacrity—zeal not according to knowledge. But in spite of a few awkwardnesses on his part, he produced a favourable impression on his new mistress.

Dinner that day passed off remarkably well, considering that Parkins was rather nervous, as servants are apt to be in new places.

Miss Arden could not help admiring his personal appearance and gentlemanly manner, and Mr. Madison sat at the head of the table, smiling blandly, and full of elation at the success of his latest venture.

When dinner was over, Mrs. Madison entered the pantry to ascertain how the new functionary was behaving. She was surprised to see a row of wet plates standing all round the room, leaning their backs against the wall.

"Why, Parkins, whatever are you doing with those plates?" she cried.

The butler regarded her with a deprecatory air.

"I was letting them dry a bit, ma'am," he said. "Have I done wrong?"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Madison. "The towels in that drawer are for drying the china."

Parkins blushed so brightly that she really pitied him.

"Beg pardon, ma'am," he stammered, "but you see a man gets so awfully rough in the West, ma'am. We hadn't many towels on the ranch. Thank you, ma'am. I'll use them in future. I'm very anxious to learn."

The drawing-room was henceforth entertained with the pantry episodes, of which this was the beginning.

In the main, however, Parkins gave satisfaction. He was sober, diligent, almost chivalrous in his attention to the wants of the ladies. The defects in his education as a butler were soon remedied, for Mrs. Madison was an excellent housekeeper, and was willing to take untold trouble to instruct anyone who was teachable. The fresh, handsome face of Parkins, his respectful and manly bearing, and his charming English accent, which was evidently not that of a cockney, ingratiated him with his employers and even their acquaintance.

Occasionally a new book or paper was missing from the sitting-room, and more than once it was found in the pantry among the rouge-cloths and plate-powder. In one case the missing volume was one of Lecky's, and Miss Arden, who had searched in vain, asked Parkins if he had seen it. He confessed to having borrowed it; and when Sylvia looked at him with obvious surprise, he made some confused remark about "bettering his education."

"If he can appreciate that book," said Miss Arden afterwards to her sister, "his education doesn't need much bettering."

One evening, when John Parkins had been with the Madisons for a month or more, several newly-arrived English people dined at the house. From the moment when the party sat down at the table, Parkins began to behave strangely. He became absent-minded and inattentive. His strongest desire appeared to be to get out of the room as quickly as possible.

Mr. Madison was annoyed, and thought for a moment that his butler might be under the influence of liquor; but after he had watched him for a minute or two he was convinced that the man was perfectly sober, though evidently labouring under great mental perturbation.

But, as one cannot watch one's butler all the evening, Mr. Madison's attention was soon diverted, and the circumstance passed from his mind.

One day in the early spring a letter came for George Madison from the British Legation at Washington.

It requested information in regard to the whereabouts of Mr. Cecil Finch, an English gentleman who was supposed to be in the United States at that time. Mr. Madison replied with polite brevity that he had never had the pleasure of knowing anyone of that name. Then he thought the matter would rest. But by return of post came another letter, which intimated that the Legation could not take Mr. Madison's reply as final, for Cecil Finch had been seen going in and out of Mr. Madison's house in New York.

Mr. Madison was by this time rather curious, and not a little indignant. He was not accustomed to having his word doubted.

He therefore wrote back somewhat sharply to the effect that the only Englishman who came and went in his household in the manner described was his butler, John Parkins.

"Upon my word," he said that night at dinner to his wife and sister-in-law, "I am tired of Mr. Cecil Finch without having seen him. The dogged pertinacity of the English diplomatists does them credit."

Parkins, who was handing a dish of sweets at the moment, started so violently that the dish almost slipped from his fingers.

This did not escape Mr. Madison, but he said nothing.

Afterwards, however, he remarked to his wife:

"If I am not mistaken, Parkins knows something about Mr. Cecil Finch."

In a day or two a third letter bearing the Washington post-mark arrived for Mr. Madison. It said:

"*Strange as it may appear, we should be glad if you would interrogate the man whom you call John Parkins as to the whereabouts of Mr. Finch. Tell him that your reason for asking is that Cecil Finch has come into a title and a fortune by the unexpected death of his uncle.*"

Mr. Madison was now thoroughly excited. What if his butler were the new lord in masquerade? He laughed to himself as he pictured the faces of his wife and sister when they heard the news.

It so happened that this last letter from the Legation had been sent to Mr. Madison's house, and it was there that he read it. His wife was out with Sylvia.

His decision was quickly formed. He touched the bell. Parkins appeared, calm and correct as he was in his best moments when there was nothing to disconcert him.

"Parkins," said his master, "did you ever happen to hear of an English gentleman called Cecil Finch?"

"Yes, sir," said the butler. "I think I heard you mention his name, sir, at dinner, a night or two ago."

"Have you ever seen him?"

"Yes, sir, in Wyoming, sir."

"It would be a good thing for him, Parkins," said Mr. Madison carelessly, "if you could find him."

"How so, sir?" asked the young man, changing colour a little

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"He has just come into his uncle's titles and estates; and he can't be found."

"By Jove! Is Lord Grinsmead dead?" cried the butler, in a voice very different from his usual guarded one.

Before he had time to pull himself together and apologise, Mr. Madison pounced upon him.

"Look here, Mr. Finch!" he said, quite sternly, "you are no butler! Your name isn't Parkins! Why did you lie to me, Cecil Finch?"

"No, Mr. Madison," said the man, "I am not a butler and my name isn't Parkins, and lie is not a word to use among gentlemen!"

"But, hang it, Parkins—Finch—whatever you are, I can't realise quite yet that you're not what I thought you five minutes ago. And I think I have a right to know why you have imposed upon me in this way," said Mr. Madison, still irate.

"Of course you have," said Mr. Finch, late John Parkins. "The story is simply this. I was pretty well down on my luck after having tried ranching and failed, as many a cleverer man than I am has done before. I was too proud to go home. There was no one of whom I could borrow, and I hadn't a penny. I saw your advertisement in the paper, and applied for the situation. I hadn't an idea that you'd take me, but I was touched by your confidence, Mr. Madison, and I've done the very best I could for you. I remembered our old butler at home, and I tried to model myself on him.

"The other night you thought, no doubt, that I was drunk. I wasn't; but the man who sat next to Mrs. Madison was a fellow who knew me well at Oxford, ten years ago."

Both men had been standing while they talked. Madison read candour and integrity in the handsome face of the other.

"Sit down, Mr. Finch," he said, "and tell me the rest."

"I would rather stand, thank you," said Finch. "How do you know that I'm telling you the truth? Is my Oxford friend in town still?"

"I believe so," said Mr. Madison.

"Will you go to him with me and get me identified?" asked Finch. Then he added, smiling a little: "I believe I've got one pretty decent coat."

* * * * *

About six o'clock the ladies came home. The drawing-room was full of Spring twilight.

"Why are no lamps lighted?" asked Mrs. Madison. "Where's Parkins? I never knew him to be so careless."

She rang the bell sharply. It was answered by her maid.

"Where is Parkins?" Mrs. Madison demanded.

"Gone out, ma'am, with Mr. Madison," said the maid demurely.

"With Mr. Madison? How extraordinary!"

"He said he might not come back," said the maid, rather enjoying Mrs. Madison's surprise.

Sylvia then entered.

"The table isn't laid, and I can't find Parkins anywhere," she said.

When the lady's-maid withdrew, the sisters expressed themselves more freely.

"Always the way with my butlers! Is this frightful servant-hunt going to begin again?" moaned Mrs. Madison.

"And really he was a man one could have loved, if he hadn't been a butler," sighed Miss Arden.

Presently Mr. Madison returned alone. Without giving his wife time for indignant questions, he said:

"Parkins wanted to come back and serve dinner, but I wouldn't let him."

"And pray why not?" asked his wife. "What has he done?"

"He has gone and got himself a title, and I thought that a dinner handed round by my Lord Grinsmead would choke us all."

* * * * *

The next day Lord Grinsmead, formerly Cecil Finch, *alias* John Parkins, modestly requested a few moments' conversation with Mrs. Madison.

She was less at her ease than he.

"I wanted to come back last night, Mrs. Madison," he said, coming forward without extending his hand, "but your husband would not hear of it. I am sorry that your proverbial bad luck with butlers has not been changed by me. I sail to-morrow, and I fear that you must supply my place, which will be easily done."

"There you make a mistake," she answered, motioning him to a chair. "You were the very nicest servant I have ever had in the house."

And then they both laughed long and heartily.

"May I see Miss Arden before I go?" he asked presently, with a decided deepening of his colour.

Mrs. Madison said "Certainly," and in a few moments Sylvia entered. He rose and gave her his chair, and she could not but notice how the obsequious alacrity of the butler had given way to the well-bred manner of the English gentleman.

"I want to say before I go," he said almost brokenly, "that I thank you for the happiest and most innocent months of my life. I have had constant kindness from you both, and I hope that you will all come to England some day that I may do something for you in return. I should like to show you the old park. It will be full of primroses in a few weeks." And a mist came before the eyes of the strong man as his heart turned towards his home.

Just before he went away he said very softly to Sylvia (her sister being somewhat in advance of them as they walked towards the door):

"Do you think that you can ever forget that I was your sister's butler?"

I don't know what she answered, but I do know that an account of Lord Grinsmead's wedding appeared in the *Court Journal* about a year later, and that the bride was a very lovely American. Another fact, also, I can tell you, which the *Court Journal* knows nothing at all about—to this day Lady Grinsmead calls her lord nothing but "Parkins."

N. Rothsay.

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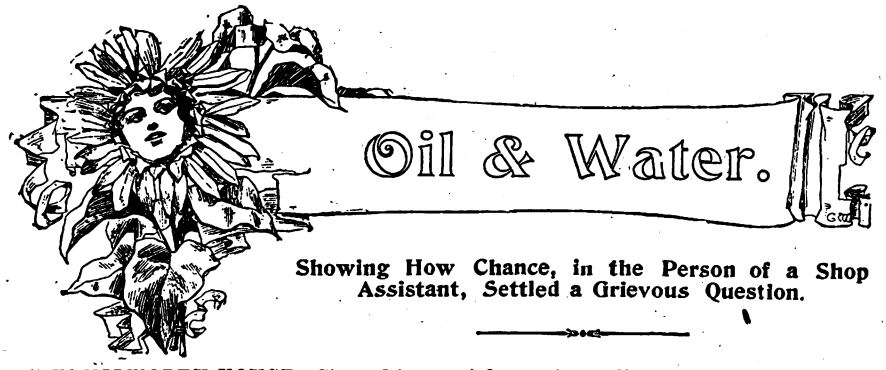

Oil & Water.

Showing How Chance, in the Person of a Shop Assistant, Settled a Grievous Question.

"*KENILWORTH HOUSE—Situated in one of the prettiest spots in the Lake District. Lake, stocked with fish, near by; excellent golf links; fruit and vegetables raised on our own farm.—For terms, address Thomas Kenilworth, Bushwick.*"

All three read the same advertisement on the same morning, in the same train, though none knew of the existence of the others. And all three were leaving on July 1st for their annual holidays.

Jack Dunning left the train first, and as he walked out of Cannon Street station he muttered: "Beautiful country! Good fishing! Just my style! I'll write for terms this morning!" And he did.

At Waterloo Roy Putnam stuffed the morning paper in his pocket, lit his pipe, and remarked meditatively: "Excellent golf links, and home-grown fruits and vegetables. Not a bad combination. I'll write to that man Kenilworth to-day." And he kept his word.

Helen Driscoll, continuing on to Charing Cross, furtively drew forth a hairpin, jabbed out the Kenilworth House advertisement, tossed aside her paper and rose, thinking: "Superb view! And I ought to do some sketching this summer. I am getting so rusty. I hope the terms are not too high. I'll write the first thing when I get to the office." So letter number three started on its journey to Bushwick.

On July 1st the three found themselves at the nearest station to Bushwick. Dunning carried his fishing tackle, Putnam his golf clubs, and Miss Driscoll a sketching outfit.

During the coach ride to Kenilworth House the acquaintance ripened rapidly. By the time they pulled up before it each man was asking why the dickens the other fellow had come, and Miss Driscoll, being wise in her day and generation, could foretell that there would be something more exciting on her hands during the next fortnight than making water-colour sketches.

The second day she made a sketch in colours of the lake, and Dunning lost interest in the speckled beauties—until the sketch was finished. The fourth day she painted a picturesque corner of the golf links, and Putnam might have charged up to profit and loss the sum he had paid his caddy for the morning's work.

The fifth day it rained, and Miss Driscoll very appropriately might have shut herself in her room to paint a pair of bleeding hearts. But, being a healthy, well-balanced young person, she merely laughed at what she termed "the antics of those two boys," and made herself popular with the unfortunate beings, huddled dismally in the sitting-room, whose barrenness no one noticed on clear days.

Dunning and Putnam retired, each vowing that if the other fellow had any sense he would see that his presence at Kenilworth House was not necessary to either general or individual happiness. But the next day being clear of sky and dry under foot, the three started out as usual, Dunning carrying her tin paint box, Putnam her portfolio.

"That's all very well," remarked one of the gossips from the vantage point of a wicker reclining chair. "That Driscoll girl will find she can't play with the hearts of two nice chaps like those much longer. One or the other will bring matters to a climax soon."

In just one respect the speaker erred. Both men brought about the climax, operating, so to speak, within ten minutes of each other.

It happened the night of the dance, and spoilt the evening for Helen. They were both such charming fellows. She had not thought seriously of marriage. She was happily situated in a business way in great, bustling London town. She was not sure whether she really wanted to marry, and absolutely certain that she did not dare select the man. Her dilemma was painful.

Like a defiant little pagan, she told them both that she did not know her heart, but would try to read the signs written therein before she left Kenilworth House. Whereupon she proceeded to turn the matter over to Fate, murmuring carelessly: "And may the best man win."

And Fate, in punishment of her foolhardiness and distinctly feminine frivolity, took a hand in the matter promptly. The very next afternoon Helen laid aside her sketch with a gesture of despair. Her carmine paint was exhausted. Her labour must cease until she could drive into Bushwick and purchase the precious pigment.

Within five minutes she found herself without either cavalier. Each had excused himself with a reckless disregard as to what the other fellow might do if left alone on Love's battlefield.

At half-past five Jack Dunning, dusty, footsore and red-eyed, strode into the stationery shop at Bushwick and paralysed the single assistant by demanding half a sovereign's worth of carmine paint.

"What kind?" inquired the assistant when he regained his breath.

"What kind!" echoed Jack dully.

"Why, yes; you didn't say whether you wanted oils or water colours."

Jack was in a quandary. He had been watching Helen's eyes rather than her painting.

"What do girls mostly use to paint with?" he asked, throwing himself on the mercy of the assistant.

That astute individual thought fast and hard. He had just sold the last tube of carmine oil paint to another young man, who had also appeared hurried, footsore and dusty.

"Is it a water scene, sir?" he asked cautiously.

"It is," answered Jack, greatly relieved. "She is painting the lake."

"Then," remarked the young assistant urbanely, "of course she'll use water colour paints, but we've only got five shillings' worth of carmine."

"Well, give me that. I can send to London for more to-morrow. And thanks very much for your good advice."

Both men were late for dinner. Both sent their precious packages to Helen's room by the page boy. Both put the momentous question for a second time later in the evening.

What Miss Driscoll said to Mr. Putnam is not recorded, but Dunning winked furtively but distinctly at the fair Lady Moon when Helen patted his arm lovingly and murmured:

"You don't know what you owe those cakes of carmine paint, dear. I really didn't know my own mind until you both sent me the paints. That opened my eyes to the fact that you were my affinity. You took a genuine interest in my work. Mr. Putnam is very lovely, but to think of a man's never noticing whether the girl he pretended he loved painted in oils or water colours. Now, you——"

Very gently Dunning drew her head down on his shoulder. And again he exchanged courtesies with Lady Moon, for if ever that goddess condescended to wink, it was a soulful response to his infectious greeting.

Walter A. Tice.

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Her Reply.

They are sitting out a dance, and she delights in waltzing. He: "A penny for your thoughts." She: "They are not worth it. I'm thinking of you."

He's Going to be Rich.

He: "Dora, dear, do you think you could consent to be a poor man's wife?" "No; if he had me and still thought himself poor, I wouldn't want to be his wife."

They Were Faithful Sisters.

She: "I—I think I like you, Mr. Trotter, but I cannot marry and leave my twin sister alone. Wait until she is engaged." He: "Yes—but—er—that's just what she said when I proposed to her."

Both Their Wishes Were Fulfilled.

She (after breaking the wish-bone): "What did you wish?" He: "I wished that you would let me kiss you. What did you wish?" She: "I wished that what you wished should come true."

Too Candid.

Rich Fiancee: "Oh, this bouquet is too costly! You must take it back to the lieutenant." Valet: "Oh, that's all right, miss. Since my master is engaged to you he has been able to get things on credit."

Anxious to Know.

He: "I had a queer dream about you last night, Miss Louisa. I was about to give you a kiss when suddenly we were separated by a river that gradually grew as big as the Thames." She: "And was there no bridge and no boat?"

A Lesson in Punctuation.

Professor in English (to young man): "How would you punctuate the following: 'The beautiful girl, for such was she, was passing down the street'?" Student: "I think, Professor, I would make a dash after the beautiful girl."

Wealth Works Wonders.

Friend: "So yours was a case of love at first sight?" Mrs. Lovejoy: "Yes, indeed. I fell desperately in love with my dear husband the moment I set eyes upon him. I remember it all as distinctly as if it were yesterday. I was walking with papa on the promenade at Brighton, when suddenly papa stopped, and, pointing him out, said: 'There, my dear, is a man worth £120,000.'"

Unaccustomed Travelling.

Fwed: "Why, Cholly, dear boy, whatever is the mattah? You look awfully wowwied." Cholly: "Don't pity me, Fwed; I feel fwightfully upset." "But, Cholly, you weally must tell a fellah." "Well, Fwed, as you're a weal bwick, I'll tell yah. Fact is, I tumbled into the wong twain this mawning, and——" "Good gwacious, however was that?" "Why, I fell into a twain of thought, don't-cher-know?" "Bwute!"

Question for Question.

She: "Why does a woman take a man's name when she gets married?" He: "Why does she take everything else he has?"

An Interview in any Case.

"Emily, if William to-day asks you to marry him, you must tell him to speak to me." "Yes, mamma; but if he does not?" "Then tell him I want to speak to him."

Authoritative.

Big Sister: "Dick, I think it is time little folks were in bed." Little Dick (on Mr. Nicefellow's knee): "Oh, it's all right; mamma said I was to keep this seat until she came downstairs."

A Stern Truth.

Returned Traveller: "Is Mr. Goodheart still paying attentions to your daughter?" "He isn't paying her any attention at all." "Indeed? Did he jilt her?" "No, he married her."

He is Looked Upon with Favour.

Mrs. Matchmaker: "Mr. Wise, I take it from your interest in my daughter Pearl that you're a gem connoisseur." Mr. Wise: "It's due, madam, to my great admiration for mother of Pearl."

The Exception That Proves the Rule.

Albert: "All the world loves a lover, you know." Mildred: "You wouldn't say that if you had heard papa's remarks when he found, yesterday morning, that you had taken his hat by mistake."

He Was Negligent.

"You are not angry with me because I threw a kiss to you, are you?" he asked. "Yes, I am," she replied. "Why?" he inquired. "Because there was no impenetrable barrier between us that made it necessary."

How, Indeed?

She: "A doctor in Berlin, after a great deal of study, has discovered that married men live longer than bachelors." He (imploringly): "Save my life!" She (joyously): "Oh, Clarence, how did you guess that I loved you?"

Then and Now.

Wife (drearily): "Ah, me! the days of chivalry are past." Husband: "What's the matter now?" Wife: "Sir Walter Raleigh laid his cloak on the ground for Queen Elizabeth to walk over, but you get cross simply because poor, dear mother sat down on your hat."

Rather Mixed.

"George," she screamed, "my neck!" "What's the matter?" "There's a pillacatter——" "A what?" "A taperkiller——" "What in the world do you mean?" "Oh, dear!" she moaned, as she clutched him frantically. "A kitterpaller! You know, George! A patterkiller!" "Oh!" said George, with evident relief, and he proceeded to brush the caterpillar away.

The Circumstances that Altered Cases.

"I am sensible of the honour you do me, Mr. Spoonamore, in the proposal of marriage you have just made," said the young woman, with a slight curl of the lip; "but circumstances over which I have no control will compel me to decline the honour." "What are those circumstances, Miss Grimshaw?" fiercely demanded the young man. "Your circumstances, Mr. Spoonamore!"

His First Love.

"Dearest," cooed the sweet girl, "you have told me so often that I am your first love! But should Fate ever part us, promise me you'll never show my letters to your next." "How can you speak so, darling?" broke in the young man. "You know I'd never show them. Why, have I ever shown you the letters written me by——" Here the youth suddenly paused. And the chilling silence could be heard reigning on the roof outside.

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A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Royalty at the Grand Babylon.

THE Royal apartments at the Grand Babylon are famous in the world of hotels, and indeed elsewhere, as being, in their own way, unsurpassed. Some of the palaces of Germany, and in particular those of the mad Ludwig of Bavaria, may possess rooms and saloons which outshine them in gorgeous luxury and the mere wild, fairy-like extravagance of wealth; but there is nothing, anywhere, even on Fifth Avenue, New York, which can fairly be called more complete, more perfect, more enticing, or more comfortable.

The suite consists of six chambers—the ante-room, the saloon or audience chamber, the dining-room, the yellow drawing-room (where Royalty receives its friends), the library, and the State bedroom—to the last of which we have already been introduced. The most important and most impressive of these six is, of course, the audience chamber, an apartment fifty feet long by forty feet broad, with a superb outlook over the Thames, the Shot Tower, and the higher signals of the South-Western Railway. The decoration of this room is mainly in the German taste, since four out of every six of its Royal occupants are of Teutonic blood; but its chief glory is its French ceiling, a masterpiece by Fragonard, taken bodily from a certain famous palace on the Loire. The walls are of panelled oak, with an eight-foot dado of Arras cloth imitated from unique Continental examples. The carpet, woven in one piece, is an antique specimen of the finest Turkish work, and it was obtained from an impecunious Roumanian Prince.

The silver candelabra now fitted with electric light, came from the Rhine, and each has a separate history. The Royal chair—it is not etiquette to call it a throne, though it amounts to a throne—was looted by Napoleon from an Austrian city, and bought by Félix Babylon at the sale of a French collector. At each corner of the room stands a gigantic grotesque vase of German faïence of the sixteenth century. These were presented to Félix Babylon by William the First of Germany, upon the conclusion of his first incognito visit to London in connection with the French trouble in 1875. There is only one picture in the audience chamber. It is a portrait of the luckless but noble Dom Pedro, Emperor of the Brazils.

In one of the window recesses of this magnificent apartment, on a certain afternoon in late July, stood Prince Aribert of Posen. He was faultlessly dressed in the conventional frock-coat of British civilisation.

He seemed to be fairly amused, and also to expect someone, for at frequent intervals he looked rapidly over his shoulder in the direction of the door behind the Royal chair. At last a little, wizened, stooping old man, with a distinctly German cast of countenance, appeared through the door, and laid some papers on a small table by the side of the chair.

"Ah, Hans, my old friend!" said Aribert, approaching the old man. "I must have a little talk with you about one or two matters. How do you find his Royal Highness?"

The old man saluted in military fashion. "Not very well, your Highness," he answered. "I've been valet to your Highness' nephew since his majority, and I was valet to his Royal father before him, but I never saw——" He stopped, and threw up his wrinkled hands deprecatingly.

"You never saw what?" Aribert smiled affectionately on the old fellow. You could perceive that these two, so sharply differentiated in rank, had been intimate in the past, and would be intimate again.

"Do you know, my Prince," said the old man, "that we are to receive the financier, Sampson Levi—is that his name?—in the audience chamber? Surely, if I may humbly suggest, the library would have been good enough for a financier?"

"One would have thought so," agreed Prince Aribert, "but perhaps your master has a special reason. Tell me," he went on, changing the subject quickly, "how came it that you left the Prince, my nephew, at Ostend, and returned to Posen?"

"His orders, Prince," and old Hans, who had had a wide experience of Royal whims and knew half the secrets of the Courts of Europe, gave Aribert a look which might have meant anything. "He sent me back on an—an errand, your Highness."

"And you were to rejoin him here?"

"Just so, Highness. And I did rejoin him here, although, to tell the truth, I had begun to fear that I might never see my master again."

"The Prince has been very ill in Ostend, Hans."

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"So I have gathered," Hans responded drily, slowly rubbing his hands together. "And his Highness is not yet perfectly recovered."

"Not yet. We despaired of his life, Hans, at one time, but, thanks to an excellent constitution, he came safely through the ordeal."

"We must take care of him, your Highness."

"Yes, indeed," said Aribert solemnly; "his life is very precious to Posen."

At that moment Eugen, Hereditary Prince of Posen, entered the audience chamber. He was pale and languid, and his uniform seemed to be a trouble to him. His hair had been slightly ruffled, and there was a look of uneasiness, almost of alarmed unrest, in his fine dark eyes. He was like a man who is afraid to look behind him lest he should see something there which ought not to be there. But at the same time, here beyond doubt was Royalty. Nothing could have been more striking than the contrast between Eugen, a sick man in the shabby house at Ostend, and this Prince Eugen in the Royal apartments of the Grand Babylon Hotel, surrounded by the luxury and pomp which modern civilisation can offer to those born in high places. All the desperate episode of Ostend was now hidden, passed over. It was supposed never to have occurred. It existed only like a secret shame in the hearts of those who had witnessed it. Prince Eugen had recovered; at any rate, he was convalescent, and he had been removed to London, where he took up again the dropped thread of his princely life. The lady with the red hat, the incorruptible and savage Miss Spencer, the unscrupulous and brilliant Jules, the dark, damp cellar, the horrible little bedroom—these things were over. Thanks to Prince Aribert and the Racksoles, he had emerged from them in safety. He was able to resume his public and official career. The Emperor had been informed of his safe arrival in London, after an unavoidable delay in Ostend; his name once more figured in the Court chronicle of the newspapers. In short, everything was smothered over. Only—only Jules, Rocco, and Miss Spencer were still at large; the body of Reginald Dimmock lay buried in the domestic mausoleum of the palace at Posen; and Prince Eugen had still to interview Mr. Sampson Levi.

That various matters lay heavy on the mind of Prince Eugen was beyond question. He seemed to have withdrawn within himself. Despite the extraordinary experiences through which he had recently passed, events which called aloud for explanations and confidence between the nephew and the uncle, he would say scarcely a word to Prince Aribert. Any allusion, however direct, to the days at Ostend was ignored by him with more or less ingenuity, and Prince Aribert was really no nearer a full solution of the mystery of Jules' plot than he had been on the night when he and Racksole visited the gaming tables at Ostend. Eugen was well aware that he had been kidnapped through the agency of the woman in the red hat, but, doubtless ashamed at having been her dupe, he would not proceed in any way with the clearing-up of the matter.

"You will receive in this room, Eugen?" Aribert questioned him.

"Yes," was the answer, given pettishly. "Why not? Even if I have no proper retinue here, surely that is no reason why I should not hold audience in a proper manner? Hans, you can go." The old valet promptly disappeared. "Aribert," the Hereditary Prince continued, when they were alone in the chamber, "you think I am mad."

"My dear Eugen," said Prince Aribert, startled in spite of himself. "Don't be absurd."

"I say you think I am mad. You think that that attack of brain fever has left its permanent mark on me. Well, perhaps I am mad. Who can tell? God knows that I have been through enough lately to drive me mad!"

Aribert made no reply. As a matter of strict fact, the thought had crossed his mind that Eugen's brain had not yet recovered its normal tone and activity. This speech of his nephew's, however, had the effect of immediately restoring his belief in the latter's entire sanity. He felt convinced that if only he could regain his nephew's confidence, the old brotherly confidence which had existed between them since the years when they played together as boys, all might yet be well. But at present there appeared to be no sign that Eugen meant to give his confidence to anyone. The young Prince had come up out of the valley of the shadow of death, but some of the valley's shadow had clung to him, and it seemed he was unable to dissipate it.

"By-the-way," said Eugen suddenly, "I must reward these Racksoles, I suppose. I am indeed grateful to them. If I gave the girl a bracelet, and the father a thousand guineas—how would that meet the case?"

"My dear Eugen!" exclaimed Aribert, aghast. "A thousand guineas! Do you know that Theodore Racksole could buy up all Posen from end to end without making himself a pauper. A thousand guineas! You might as well offer him sixpence."

"Then what must I offer?"

"Nothing, except your thanks. Anything else would be an insult. These are no ordinary hotel people."

"Can't I give the little girl a bracelet?" Prince Eugen gave a sinister laugh.

Aribert looked at him steadily. "No," he said.

"Why did you kiss her—that night?" asked Prince Eugen carelessly.

"Kiss whom?" said Aribert, blushing and angry, despite his most determined efforts to keep calm and unconcerned.

"The Racksole girl."

"When do you mean?"

"I mean," said Prince Eugen, "that night in Ostend when I was ill. You thought I was in a delirium. Perhaps I was. But somehow I remember that with extraordinary distinctness. I remember raising my head for a fraction of an instant, and just in that fraction of an instant you kissed her. Oh, Uncle Aribert!"

"Listen, Eugen, for God's sake. I love Nella Racksole. I shall marry her."

"You!" There was a long pause, and then Eugen laughed. "Ah!" he said. "They all talk like that to start with. I have talked like that myself, dear uncle; it sounds nice, and it means nothing."

"In this case it means everything, Eugen," said Aribert quietly.

Some accent of determination in the latter's tone made Eugen rather more serious.

"You can't marry her," he said. "The Emperor won't permit a morganatic marriage."

"The Emperor has nothing to do with the affair. I shall renounce my rights. I shall become a plain citizen."

"In which case you will have no fortune to speak of."

"But my wife will have a fortune. Knowing the sacrifices which I shall have made in order to marry her, she will not hesitate to place that fortune in my hands for our mutual use," said Aribert stiffly.

"You will be decidedly rich," mused Eugen, as his ideas dwelt on Theodore Racksole's reputed wealth. "But have you thought of this," he asked, and his mild eyes glowed again in a sort of madness. "Have you thought that I am unmarried, and might die at any moment, and then the throne will descend to you—to you, Aribert?"

"The throne will never descend to me, Eugen," said Aribert softly, "for you will live. You are thoroughly convalescent. You have nothing to fear."

"It is the next seven days that I fear," said Eugen.

"The next seven days! Why?"

"I do not know. But I fear them. If I can survive them——"

"Mr. Sampson Levi, sire," Hans announced in a loud tone.

Prince Eugen started. "I will see him," he said, with a gesture to Hans as if to indicate that Mr. Sampson Levi might enter at once.

"I beg one moment first," said Aribert, laying a hand gently on his nephew's arm, and giving old Hans a glance

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which had the effect of precipitating that admirably trained servant through the doorway.

TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Mr. Samuel Levi Bids Prince Eugen Good-Morning.

"WHAT is it?" asked Prince Eugen crossly. "Why this sudden seriousness? Don't forget that I have an appointment with Mr. Sampson Levi, and must not keep him waiting. Someone said that punctuality is the politeness of princes."

"Eugen," said Aribert, "I wish you to be as serious as I am. Why cannot we have faith in each other? I want to help you. I have helped you. You are my titular Sovereign; but on the other hand I have the honour to be your uncle; I have the honour to be the same age as you, and to have been your companion from youth up. Give me your confidence. I thought you had given it me years ago, but I have lately discovered that you had your secrets, even then. And now, since your illness, you are still more secretive."

"What do you mean, Aribert?" said Eugen, in a tone which might have been either inimical or friendly. "What do you want to say?"

"Well, in the first place, I want to say that you will not succeed with the estimable Mr. Sampson Levi.'

"Shall I not?" said Eugen lightly. "How do you know what my business is with him?"

"Suffice it to say that I do know. You will never get that million pounds out of him."

Prince Eugen gasped, and then swallowed his excitement. "Who has been talking? What million?" His eyes wandered uneasily round the room. "Ah!" he said, pretending to laugh. "I see how it is. I have been chattering in my delirium. You mustn't take any notice of that, Aribert. When one has a fever one's ideas become grotesque and fanciful."

"You never talked in your delirium," Aribert replied; "at least not about yourself. I knew about this projected loan before I saw you in Ostend."

"Who told you?" demanded Eugen fiercely.

"Then you admit that you are trying to raise a loan?"

"I admit nothing. Who told you?"

"Theodore Racksole, the millionaire. These rich men have no secrets from each other. They form a coterie, closer than any coterie of ours, Eugen, and far more powerful. They talk, and in talking they rule the world, these millionaires. They are the real monarchs."

"Confound them!" said Eugen.

"Yes, perhaps so. But let me return to your case. Imagine my shame, my disgust, when I found that Racksole could tell me more about your affairs than I knew myself. Happily, he is a good fellow; one can trust him; otherwise I should have been tempted to do something desperate when I discovered that all your private history was in his hands. Eugen, let us come to the point; why do you want that million? Is it actually true that you are so deeply in debt? I have no desire to improve the occasion. I merely ask."

"Do you think I'm mad, Aribert?" said Prince Eugen.

"And, what if I do owe a million?" said Prince Eugen with assumed valour.

"Oh, nothing, my dear Eugen, nothing. Only it is rather a large sum to have scattered in ten years, is it not? How did you manage it?"

"Don't ask me, Aribert. I've been a fool. But I swear to you that the woman whom you call 'the lady in the red hat' is the last of my follies. I am about to take a wife, and become a respectable Prince."

"Then the engagement with Princess Anna is an accomplished fact?"

"Practically so. As soon as I have settled with Levi, all will be smooth. Aribert, I wouldn't lose Anna for the Imperial throne. She is a good and pure woman, and I love her as a man might love an angel."

"And yet you would deceive her as to your debts, Eugen? Is that a very honourable thing to do?"

"Not her, but her absurd parents, and perhaps the Emperor. They have heard rumours, and I must set those rumours at rest by presenting to them a clean sheet."

"I am glad you have been frank with me, Eugen," said Prince Aribert, "but I will be plain with you. You will never marry the Princess Anna."

"And why?" said Eugen, supercilious again.

"Because her parents will not permit it. Because you would not be able to present a clean sheet to them. Because this Sampson Levi will never lend you a million."

"Explain yourself."

"I propose to do so. You were kidnapped—it is a horrid word, but we must use it—in Ostend."

"True."

"Do you know why."

"I suppose because that vile old red-hatted woman and her

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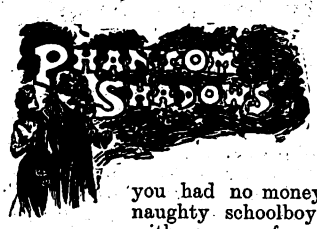

accomplices wanted to get some money out of me. Fortunately, thanks to you, they didn't."

"Not at all," said Aribert. "They wanted no money from you. They knew well enough that you had no money. They knew you were the naughty schoolboy among European Princes, with no sense of responsibility or of duty towards your kingdom. Shall I tell you why they kidnapped you?"

"When you have done abusing me, my dear uncle."

"They kidnapped you merely to keep you out of England for a few days, merely to compel you to fail in your appointment with Sampson Levi. And it appears to me that they succeeded. Assuming that you don't obtain the money from Levi, is there another financier in all Europe from whom you can get it—on such strange security as you have to offer?"

"Possibly there is not," said Prince Eugen calmly. "But, you see, I shall get it from Sampson Levi. Levi promised it, and I know from other sources that he is a man of his word. He said that the money, subject to certain formalities, would be available till——"

"Till?"

"Till the end of June."

"And it is now the end of July."

"Well, what is a month? He is only too glad to lend the money. He will get excellent interest. How on earth have you got into your sage old head this notion of a plot against me? The idea is ridiculous. A plot against me? What for?"

"Have you ever thought of Bosnia?" asked Aribert coldly.

"What of Bosnia?"

"I need not tell you that the King of Bosnia is naturally under obligations to Austria, to whom he owes his crown. Austria is anxious for him to make a good, influential marriage."

"Well, let him."

"He is going to. He is going to marry the Princess Anna."

"Not while I live. He made overtures there a year ago, and was rebuffed."

"Yes; but he will make overtures again, and this time he will not be rebuffed. Oh, Eugen! can't you see that this plot against you is being engineered by some persons who know all about your affairs, and whose desire is to prevent your marriage with Princess Anna? Only one man in Europe can have any motive for wishing to prevent your marriage with Princess Anna, and that is the man who means to marry her himself."

Eugen went very pale.

"Then, Aribert, do you mean to convey to me that my detention in Ostend was contrived by the agents of the King of Bosnia?"

"I do."

"With a view to stopping my negotiations with Sampson Levi, and so putting an end to the possibility of my marriage with Anna?"

Aribert nodded.

"You are a good friend to me, Aribert. You mean well. But you are mistaken. You have been worrying about nothing."

"Have you forgotten about Reginald Dimmock?"

"I remember you said that he had died."

"I said nothing of the sort. I said that he had been assassinated. That was part of it, my poor Eugen."

"Pooh!" said Eugen. "I don't believe he was assassinated. And as for Sampson Levi, I will bet you a thousand marks that he and I come to terms this morning, and that the million is in my hands before I leave London."

Aribert shook his head.

"You seem to be pretty sure of Mr. Levi's character. Have you had much to do with him before?"

"Well"—Eugen hesitated a second—"a little. What young man in my position hasn't had something to do with Mr. Sampson Levi at one time or another?"

"I haven't," said Aribert.

"You! You are a fossil." He rang a silver bell. "Hans, I will receive Mr. Sampson Levi."

Whereupon Aribert discreetly departed, and Prince Eugen sat down in the great velvet chair, and began to look at the papers which Hans had previously placed upon the table."

"Good morning, your Royal Highness," said Sampson Levi, bowing as he entered. "I trust your Royal Highness is well."

"Moderately, thanks," returned the Prince.

In spite of the fact that he had had as much to do with people of Royal blood as any plain man in Europe, Sampson Levi had never yet learnt how to be at ease with these exalted individuals during the first few minutes of an interview. Afterwards he resumed command of himself and his faculties, but at the beginning he was invariably flustered, scarlet of face, and inclined to perspiration.

"We will proceed to business at once," said Prince Eugen. "Will you take a seat, Mr. Sampson Levi?"

"I thank your Royal Highness."

"Now as to that loan which we had already practically arranged—a million, I think it was," said the Prince airily.

"A million," Levi acquiesced, toying with his enormous watch chain.

"Everything is now in order. Here are the papers, and I should like to finish the matter up at once."

"Exactly, your Highness, but——"

"But what? You months ago expressed the warmest satisfaction at the security, though I am quite prepared to admit that the security is of rather an unusual nature. You also agreed to the rate of interest. It is not every one, Mr. Levi, who can lend out a million at five and a half per cent. And in ten years the whole amount will be paid back. I—er—I believe I informed you that the fortune of Princess Anna, who is about to accept my hand, will ultimately amount to something like fifty million of marks, which is over two million pounds in your English money." Prince Eugen stopped. He had no fancy for talking in this confidential manner to financiers, but he felt that circumstances demanded it.

"You see, it's like this, your Royal Highness," began Mr. Sampson Levi, in his homely English idiom. "It's like this. I said I could keep that bit of money available till the end of June, and you were to give me an interview here before that date. Not having heard from your Highness, and not knowing your Highness' address, though my German agents made every inquiry, I concluded that you had made other arrangements, money being so cheap this last few months."

"I was unfortunately detained at Ostend," said Prince Eugen, with as much haughtiness as he could assume, "by—by important business. I have made no other arrangements, and I shall have need of the million. If you will be so good as to pay it to my London bankers——"

"I'm very sorry," said Mr. Sampson Levi, with a tremendous and dazzling air of politeness, which surprised even himself, "but my syndicate has now lent the money elsewhere. It's in South America—I don't mind telling your Highness that we've lent it to the Chilian Government."

"Hang the Chilian Government, Mr. Levi," exclaimed the Prince, and he went white. "I must have that million. It was an arrangement."

"It was an arrangement, I admit," said Mr. Sampson Levi; "but your Highness broke the arrangement."

There was a long silence.

"Do you mean to say," began the Prince with tense calmness, "that you are not in a position to let me have that million?"

"I could let your Highness have a million in a couple of years' time."

The Prince made a gesture of annoyance.

"Mr. Levi," he said, "if you do not place the money in my hands to-morrow you will ruin one of the oldest of reigning families, and, incidentally, you will alter the map of Europe. You are not keeping faith, and I had relied on you."

"Pardon me, your Highness," said little Levi, rising in

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resentment, "it is not I who have not kept faith. I beg to repeat that the money is no longer at my disposal, and to bid your Highness good-morning."

And Mr. Sampson Levi left the audience-chamber with an awkward, aggrieved bow.

It was a scene characteristic of the end of the nineteenth century—an overfed, commonplace, pursy little man who had been born in a Brixton semi-detached villa, and whose highest idea of pleasure was a Sunday up the river in an expensive electric launch, confronting and utterly routing, in a hotel belonging to an American millionaire, the representative of a race of men who had fingered every page of European history for centuries, and who still, in their native castles, were sursounded with every outward circumstance of pomp and power.

"Aribert," said Prince Eugen, a little later, "you were right. It is all over. I have only one refuge——"

"You don't mean——" Aribert stopped, dumfounded.

"Yes, I do," he said quickly. "I can manage it so that it will look like an accident."

TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

The Return of Felix Babylon.

On the evening of Prince Eugen's fateful interview with Mr. Sampson Levi, Theodore Racksole was wandering somewhat aimlessly and uneasily about the entrance hall and adjacent corridors of the Grand Babylon. He had returned from Ostend only a day or two previously, and had endeavoured with all his might to forget the affair which had carried him there—to regard it, in fact, as done with. But he found himself unable to do so. In vain he remarked, under his breath, that there were some things which were best left alone; if his experience as a manipulator of markets, a contriver of gigantic schemes in New York, had taught him anything at all, it should surely have taught him that. Yet he could not feel reconciled to such a position. The mere presence of the princes in his hotel roused the fighting instincts of this man, who had never in his whole career been beaten. He had, as it were, taken up arms on their side, and if the Princes of Posen would not continue their own battle, nevertheless he, Theodore Racksole, wanted to continue it for them. To a certain extent of course, the battle had been won, for Prince Eugen had been rescued from an extremely difficult and dangerous position, and the enemy—consisting of Jules, Rocco, Miss Spencer, and perhaps others—had been put to flight. But that, he conceived, was not enough; it was very far from being enough. That the criminals—for criminals they decidedly were—should still be at large, he regarded as an absurd anomaly And there was another point; he had said nothing to the police of all that had occurred. He disdained the police, but he could scarcely fail to perceive that if the police should by accident gain a clue to the real state of the case he might be placed rather awkwardly, for the simple reason that in the eyes of the law it amounted to a misdemeanour to conceal as much as he had concealed.

He asked himself why he had adopted a policy of concealment, why he had become in any way interested in the Posen matter, and why, at this present moment, he should be so anxious to prosecute it further? To the first two questions he replied, rather lamely, that he had been influenced by Nella, and also by a natural spirit of adventure; to the third he replied that he had always been in the habit of carrying things through, and was now actuated by a mere childish, obstinate desire to carry this one through. Moreover, he was splendidly conscious of his perfect ability to carry it through. One additional impulse he had, though he did not admit it to himself, being by nature adverse to big words, and that was an abstract love of justice, the Anglo-Saxon's deep-founded instinct for helping the right side to conquer, even when grave risks must thereby be run, with no corresponding advantage.

He was turning these things over in his mind as he walked about the vast hotel on that evening of the last day in July. The Society papers had been stating for a week past that London was empty, but, in spite of the Society papers, London

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persisted in seeming to be just as full as ever. The Grand Babylon was certainly not as crowded as it had been a month earlier, but it was doing a very passable business. At the close of the season the gay butterflies of the social community have a habit of hovering for a day or two in the big hotels before they flutter away to castle and country-house, meadow and moor, lake and stream. The great basket-chairs in the portico were well filled by old and middle-aged gentlemen engaged in enjoying the varied delights of liqueurs, cigars, and the full moon which floated so serenely above the Thames.

Here and there a pretty woman on the arm of a cavalier in immaculate attire swept her train as she turned to and fro in the promenade of the terrace. Waiters and uniformed commissionaires and gold-braided doorkeepers moved noiselessly about; at short intervals the chief of the doorkeepers blew his shrill whistle and hansoms drove up with tinkling bell to take away a pair of butterflies to some place of amusement or boredom; occasionally a private carriage drawn by expensive and self-conscious horses put the hansoms to shame by its mere outward glory. It was a hot night, a night for the summer woods, and save for the vehicles there was no rapid movement of any kind. It seemed as though the world—the world, that is to say, of the Grand Babylon—was fully engaged in the solemn processes of digestion and small-talk. Even the long row of the Embankment gas-lamps, stretching right and left, scarcely trembled in the still, warm, caressing air. The stars overhead looked down with many blinkings upon the enormous pile of the Grand Babylon, and the moon regarded it with bland and changeless face; what they thought of it and its inhabitants cannot, unfortunately, be recorded. What Theodore Racksole thought of the moon can be recorded—he thought it was a nuisance. It somehow fascinated his gaze with its silly stare, and so interfered with his complex meditations. He glanced round at the well-dressed and satisfied people—his guests, his customers. They appeared to ignore him absolutely. Probably only a very small percentage of them had the least idea that this tall, spare man, with the iron-grey hair and the thin, firm, resolute face, who wore his American-cut evening clothes with such careless ease, was the sole proprietor of the Grand Babylon, and possibly the richest man in Europe. As had already been stated, Racksole was not a celebrity in England. The guests of the Grand Babylon saw merely a restless male person, whose restlessness was rather a disturber of their quietude, but with whom, to judge by his countenance, it would be inadvisable to remonstrate. Therefore Theodore Racksole continued his perambulations unchallenged, and kept saying to himself, "I must do something." But what? He could think of no course to pursue.

At last he walked straight through the hotel and out at the other entrance, and so up the little unassuming side street into the roaring torrent of the narrow and crowded Strand. He jumped on a Putney 'bus, and paid his fair to Putney, fivepence, and then, finding that the humble occupants of the vehicle stared at the spectacle of a man in evening dress but without a dust-coat, he jumped off again, oblivious of the fact that the conductor jerked a thumb towards him and winked at the passengers, as who should say, "There goes a lunatic." He went into a tobacconist's shop and asked for a cigar. The shopman mildly inquired what price.

"What are the best you've got?" asked Theodore Racksole.

"Five shillings each, sir," said the man promptly.

"Give me a penny one," was Theodore Racksole's laconic request, and he walked out of the shop smoking the penny cigar. It was a new sensation for him.

He was inhaling the aromatic odours of Eugène Rimmel's establishment for the sale of scents when a gentleman, walking slowly in the opposite direction, accosted him with a quiet, "Good-evening, Mr. Racksole." The millionaire did not at first recognise his interlocutor, who wore a travelling overcoat, and was carrying a hand bag. Then a slight, pleased smile passed over his features, and he held out his hand.

"Well, Mr. Babylon," he greeted the other, "of all persons in the wide world you are the man I would most have wished to meet."

"You flatter me," said the little Anglicised Swiss.

"No, I don't," answered Racksole; "it isn't my custom, any more than it's yours. I wanted to have a real good long yarn with you, and lo! here you are! Where have you sprung from?"

"From Lausanne," said Félix Babylon. "I had finished my duties there, I had nothing else to do, and I felt homesick. I felt the nostalgia of London, and so I came over, just as you see," and he raised the handbag for Racksole's notice. "One toothbrush, one razor, two slippers, eh!" He laughed. "I was wondering as I walked along where I should stay—me, Félix Babylon, homeless in London."

"I should advise you to stay at the Grand Babylon," Racksole laughed back. "It is a good hotel, and I know the proprietor personally."

"Rather expensive, is it not?" said Babylon.

"To you, sir," answered Racksole, "the inclusive terms will be exactly half a crown a week. Do you accept?"

"I accept," said Babylon, and added, "You are very good, Mr. Racksole."

They strolled together back to the hotel, saying nothing in particular, but feeling very content with each other's company.

"Many customers?" asked Félix Babylon.

"Very tolerable," said Racksole, assuming as much of the air of the professional hotel proprietor as he could. "I think I may say, in the storekeeper's phrase, that if there is any business about I am doing it. To-night the people are all on the terrace in the portico—it's so confoundedly hot—and the consumption of ice is simply enormous—nearly as large as it would be in New York."

"In that case," said Babylon politely, "let me offer you another cigar."

"But I have not finished this one."

"That is just why I wish to offer you another one. A cigar such as yours, my good friend, ought never to be smoked within the precincts of the Grand Babylon, not even by the proprietor of the Grand Babylon, and especially when all the guests are assembled in the portico. The fumes of it would ruin any hotel."

Theodore Racksole laughingly lighted the Rothschild Havana which Babylon gave him, and they entered the hotel arm in arm. But no sooner had they mounted the steps than little Félix became the object of numberless greetings. It appeared that he had been highly popular among his quondam guests. At last they reached the managerial room, where Babylon was regaled on a chicken, and Racksole assisted him in the consumption of a bottle of Heidsieck Monopole, Carte d'Or.

"This chicken is almost perfectly grilled," said Babylon at length. "It is a credit to the house. But, why, my dear Racksole, why in the name of Heaven did you quarrel with Rocco?"

"Then you have heard?"

"Heard! My dear friend, it was in every newspaper on the Continent. Some journals prophesied that the Grand Babylon would have to close its doors within half a year now that Rocco has deserted it. But of course I knew better. I knew that you must have had a good reason for allowing Rocco to depart, and that you must have made arrangements in advance for a substitute."

"As a matter of fact, I had not made arrangements in advance," said Theodore Racksole, a little ruefully; "but happily we have found in our second sous-chef an artist inferior only to Rocco himself. That, however, was mere good fortune."

"Surely," said Babylon, "it was indiscreet to trust to mere good fortune in such a serious matter?"

(Another long instalment next week.)

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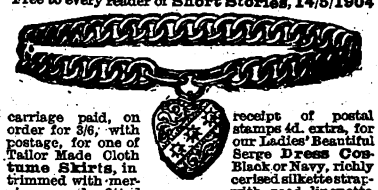

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

Two Brothers—Same Girl.

"I AM seventeen," writes "TRUE LOVE." "I am in love with a girl. My brother is also paying his attentions to her, but is rather a flirt. The young lady has a liking for both of us. I am not sure which of us she really likes the better. I also doubt whether there is any real love between her and my brother. How am I to find out the facts?"

* * * * *

It seems that the case of the young lady is "How happy could I be with either." Evidently she has not made up her own mind about the matter. The thing for you to do is to ask your brother definitely what are his own intentions. Is he really in love with her? If, as you say, he is not, then can you not ask him to desist from going further? It is fairly certain that so long as both of you continue to pay the girl attentions, so long will she keep her own counsel as to which she prefers. One or other of you must make a declaration.

The Workman's Wife Question.

THE best kind of wife, "M. R. E.," in my opinion, for a working-man, is not, as you seem to think, either a servant or a working-girl. A servant, though used to housework, has had no practice in economy, but rather the reverse, for living in the household of those wealthier than herself, she has gained ideas of life which are very often beyond her own station. A working-girl, too, has had no experience of actual housework, as from an early date she has worked out. Besides, she is not very often strong in health, owing to the nature of her life. The best kind of girl is one used to working at home for her own family, and if you could meet such a girl, who has been brought up in the country, you will have hit on the ideal wife for a working-man.

Red Hair and True Love.

"AFFLICTED."—What a funny love affair. You are nineteen, and engaged to a young lady. But you will not be able to marry until you are thirty. Your hair is of a distinct red, and much to the distress of your sweetheart, it seems to get redder and redder as time goes on. She does not say anything about it, but you can see it pains her. Do I think you ought to bind her to wait eleven years?"

* * * * *

Well, if your hair goes on reddening at such a rate, it is terrible to think what it may be like in eleven years' time. It seems a pretty severe test to ask a girl to wait so long for any man, but for you to ask her to wait until a time when your hair must become a public danger, seems like cruelty. There is, however, an old-fashioned way out of the dilemma. Tell her you will dye for her—and keep your promise.

The Friendship of Actresses.

"I WAS very friendly," writes "FREDDIE," "with a lady two years my junior. In a foolish moment we had a row, and have not spoken for some time. She has plainly told her girl friends that she wishes we had never quarrelled. In the meantime, however, I have met several ladies on the stage who have much attracted me. I have not the courage to break off with them and go back to the lady I quarrelled with. Meanwhile, she has not flirted or taken walks with anybody else. What would you advise?"

* * * * *

As there are several "ladies on the stage," I suppose one may say there is safety in numbers. You have not fallen in love with any special lady, but are merely attracted by all of them, so why should you not resume your former friendship with the other young lady? Take pity on her, and see how constant she has been to you, even though you have quarrelled, and try to make it up. The fascination of "ladies on the stage" is not a serious affair, and happens to most young men once in their lives. It is a very different thing from real love, however, and you should not confuse the two.

On Leaving a Dance.

"BERTIE."—If you find you have to leave the dance when you are still down on three ladies' programmes, it would be the correct thing for you to try to find the ladies, and make your apologies in person. If, as you say, you cannot recognise the ladies, then it might be permissible for you to request your host or hostess to apologise for you to them. It is, of course, very impolite for a partner not to turn up when his dance is due, even if he is very pleasantly occupied with another than his partner. However, ladies sometimes forgive the missing one—when they, too, are pleasantly occupied with another.

An Unhappy Engagement.

"I HAVE recently met a young man," writes "NAN," "who is engaged to another girl. It is a very unhappy engagement, as she is very unkind to him—only sees him when she likes, and sometimes says she can't come at the last moment, without any explanation. I am violently in love with him, and he comes to see me once a week. He has never said he is in love with me, but tells me all about his miserable affair with the other girl. He thinks she is tired of him, but does not care to say so. How can I act?"

* * * * *

As he seems to confide everything in you, it really seems as though he is fond of you. Men don't usually confide their love affairs to other girls otherwise. While, of course, you must not interfere in his own engagement, however unhappy it may be, by continuing to show your sympathy his feelings towards you may grow to such an extent that he will break off the engagement for you. Don't attempt to force matters, but rest content with the present state of affairs, until things develop.

The Troubles of Entertaining.

"WHY do I feel so awkward and ill at ease," writes "RECENTLY MARRIED," "whenever my husband brings any friends home to tea or supper? I am very nervous, and cannot think of anything to say to my guests. My husband, I am sure, is much annoyed about it."

* * * * *

I am sure "RECENTLY MARRIED," that if you think less about your feelings, and remember that you, as hostess, should be the one to try and put your visitors at their ease, you will soon get over your nervousness, and will forget that you ever were so shy.

Cynthia

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Will be inserted in this column at the rate of 6d. per line of 8 words or part thereof. All advertisements should be addressed to Advertisement Manager, "Short Stories," 17 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., 11 days prior to date of appearance.

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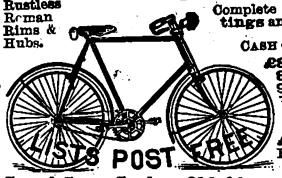

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SHORT STORIES

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(An Intensely Dramatic Incident from the Magnificent Complete Story, "The Greed of Gold." See inside.)

No. 803. Week ending May 21, 1904. [PRICE ONE PENNY.

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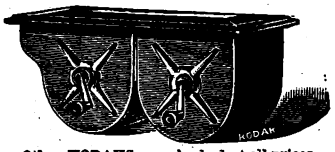

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SHORT STORIES

No. 803.] [ONE PENNY.

Week Ending May 21st, 1904.

THE GREED OF GOLD.

A Thrilling Tale of Love, Passion, and Hate.

Containing the Incident Depicted on the Cover.

"WHAT! Marry the daughter of a country rector! And you ask me to give my consent! Do you think me as profound a fool as yourself?"

Andrew Conway found it difficult to proceed. His anger seemed to deprive him of the power to speak the words that foamed to his lips. But his hearer was in no way abashed. Roy Conway faced his uncle without flinching.

"Yes," he said calmly, "I am no schoolboy now, and I believe I have the undisputed right to choose whomsoever I will in a question which so nearly affects my future happiness. I am sorry to find you so quick to oppose me in my choice of a wife. But, in justice to myself, I must abide by the decision to which I have come. Miss Laura Merrivale, though but the daughter of a country rector, is equal to me in all other respects than that of birth. Nay, she is, in many respects, by far my superior. And as to fortune, what have I to boast of? I have no separate income of my own, save a few hundreds a year bequeathed to me by my dead father, and I owe all else to your indulgence."

Andrew Conway brought his hand down upon the table with a mighty thud. His anger was terrible to witness and his voice could be heard outside the room in which the two men sat.

"You fool!" he burst out. "Have you not sense enough to see that it is this very fact which makes it imperative—do you hear me, sir?—*imperative* that you should marry a woman of means? The bulk of my money goes to my son in India. *He* can choose a wife wheresoever he will. But you—you will have a few more paltry hundreds added to those you already have—nothing more. I have spent money on your education with a lavishness that was due to this one hope. You are well born, and poor. A wealthy marriage is the only possible course for you to take. Please consider this as final, sir, and let me hear no more of this rector's daughter."

He waved his nephew aside, as though the matter were concluded. Roy Conway passed out through the French windows that led from his uncle's study to the smooth grass-grown lawn.

"It's likely to be a battle royal," he said below his breath. "But love will conquer in the end. Poor little Laura! I wonder what she would say could she hear the old fellow. He's been awfully good to me; but, ah, there's the rub! Well, I must try to win him over in time."

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Musing thus, he crossed the lawn and passed out on to the high road. After such a scene, it was as well to seek the soothing society of Laura Merrivale.

* * * * * * *

Ralph Warner was sitting by the writing-table in the study of his tasteful but miniature villa. With an exclamation of surprise, he broke the seal of a thin packet which bore the Indian postmark. True, he had written to his cousin, Egbert Conway, a couple of months back, but he had scarcely looked for a reply. Opening the letter, he read as follows:—

"*Illawarra, India.*

"DEAR SIR,—*I have to announce the sad and unexpected death of a young gentleman travelling through this neighbourhood. From letters found in his possession I gather that his name is Mr. Egbert Conway, a cousin of your own. His father is, I believe, still living, and residing in the same district as yourself. I deemed it wise, therefore, to write first to you, in order that you may have the opportunity of more gently breaking the sad news to the bereaved father. The circumstances of Mr. Egbert Conway's death are most painful. As you are doubtless aware, he revelled in big-game hunting, and it was while on a solitary expedition of this kind, and accompanied only by a few natives, that he lost his life. It is, I fear, but a poor satisfaction that we have succeeded in killing the tiger who was responsible for this sad affair.—Yours very sincerely,*

"M. J. CAREW."

Ralph Warner uttered an exclamation, not of sorrow, but of surprise. For some time he sat there, silently thinking of all this would mean. His face was not a pleasant one. Greed, avarice, covetousness, self-indulgence—all were plainly to be seen there. Presently he began to speak, in a low undertone that was full of dark, mysterious significance.

"So!" he whispered softly to himself. "The road is being cleared. Andrew Conway cannot live for ever. His only son is dead, struck down by a tiger. His nephew Roy is therefore the present heir to all his great wealth. After him—ah, then comes my turn! It's fortunate the old man regards me favourably. I, too, am his nephew, and—some day—well, we shall see."

Again he mused, but presently resumed his monologue.

"The old man's heart is none of the strongest," he whispered. "If I were to break this news to him—suddenly——"

Once more he paused, and a different idea flashed through his brain

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"Suppose—suppose—he should be—murdered—and—and Roy should be accused of the crime. Suppose—Roy should be—hanged!"

He started, looking nervously about him. Then he put on his hat and went out for a walk in the wood hard by.

* * * * * * *

It was night. Dark clouds were hurrying across the sky, blotting out the moon with their thick, impenetrable pall. The hour was late, and Ralph Warner's little villa stood dark and silent by the side of the road.

Presently the figure of a girl came stealing along amid the many shadows till she reached the gate of the villa. Entering silently, she approached the window of the dark study and tapped softly on the pane. There was no response. The window was open a few inches, and, after a moment's hesitation, the girl lifted it still higher and climbed into the room. Closing the window again, she drew down the blind, and striking a match, lit the lamp which stood upon the table. The next instant her eyes fell on the letter which Ralph Warner had that day received from India, and, picking it up, she read it through. When she had finished, the expression on her face was a curious mixture of horror, fear, hope, craft, dread, and anticipation. It was a beautiful face, but the beauty was that of a woman in whose breast all the passions of life are allowed to revel unchecked—beauty that fascinated, yet repelled.

"Ah!" she said, sinking into a chair. "So one hindrance is removed from his path! He may play a desperate game now—nay, if I know the man, he *will!* Well, he mustn't forget *me*!"

A smile of cruel triumph came into her dark, gipsy eyes—a smile that showed all the possibilities of her fierce, uncontrollable nature—that made one instinctively remember the tiger—and shudder.

"He's been trying to shake me off of late," she went on. "He doesn't know what such love as mine can be when it turns to hate. You are a masterful man, Ralph Warner, but you may carry it too far with me. I have played the weak woman long enough. It will be wise not to rouse me into the fiend I *can* be. I wonder where he is gone. Perhaps——"

She started to her feet. A moment, and she had extinguished the lamp, and was once more hurrying through the darkness of the night.

Presently she came to the gates of Andrew Conway's great house. Passing these, she slipped through a gap in the hedge, and, stealing among the tall trees, came at last to the lawn before the house. A light was burning in the study, whence the sound of angry voices reached her ear. Was Ralph Warner with his uncle? Was he breaking to him the news of his son's death? If so, why this angry uproar? She was just about to creep still closer to the house when the French windows were thrown suddenly open, and Roy Conway, flushed and irritated, burst out of the room and hurried across the lawn to the road beyond.

For a few minutes Julia Tempest stood where she was. She was just in the act of moving away when she saw a dark shadow come between her and the light of the study lamp. An instant later she saw a quick flash, and a sharp report rang out through the night. Then, almost before she could realise it, the figure of a man dashed past her in the darkness. He did not see her as he flew by. But she both saw and recognised him. For the man was none other than Ralph Warner.

* * * * * * *

The court was crowded to the doors. From far and near the people had come to hear the trial of a case that was regarded as the most remarkable and sensational of their generation. For upwards of a year the prisoner had been in custody. Remand had followed remand, till the indictment of murder had to be abandoned and the charge of wounding with intent to kill substituted in its place.

Amid the whispering of the many spectators and the cries of the court ushers, the judge took his seat, the prisoner was placed in the dock, and the evidence began. It was shown that one, Andrew Conway, had been fired at with a revolver more than twelve months before. The object of the crime was unquestionably one of murder. Yet, by a curious circumstance, the bullet, which had lodged in the victim's brain, had not effected his death, but had produced a state of coma, indefinitely protracted, and the unhappy gentleman was still alive. Not once in all the past year had he recovered consciousness, but lay there in his bed, uttering no sound, with his eyes half closed, his face white and ghastly.

The law decrees that, should a man live beyond a year and a day after his life has been attempted, the charge of murder shall not be brought against his assailant. Week by week the death of Andrew Conway had been expected. But he still lingered in a state of living death, and Roy Conway, his nephew, stood arraigned for the crime of wounding with intent to kill.

The court was hot and stifling. Wearily the many witnesses took their places in the box and gave their evidence. From the very first, the case looked black against the accused. Servants swore to the repeated quarrels between Andrew Conway and his nephew Roy, and the evident unwillingness with which they gave their evidence told strongly against the prisoner. Angry threats, spoken during these quarrels and now repeated by the servants, seemed to possess a terrible significance in the light of the subsequent tragedy. And then the revolver was produced in court and shown to them one by one. No one attempted to deny it. It was the property of Roy Conway. It had been sent to the gunsmith's two days before the tragedy for some repairs, and had been returned late in the afternoon of the day preceding the night of the crime. Roy Conway was out when it arrived, and the butler had taken it in and laid it upon the hall-table ready for Roy when he should return.

No one seemed to think it worth while to state that Andrew Conway's other nephew, Ralph Warner, had called that same afternoon, while the revolver lay upon the hall-table. The weapon was Roy's.

A violent scene had taken place between the two men—a scene that had terminated, on one side at least, in blows. A few moments later, the sound of a shot was heard, and, rushing in, they found their master prone upon the floor with a wound in his head. The fateful revolver was picked up outside the French windows, and, later, Roy Conway was discovered pacing agitatedly beneath the park trees. A piece of his tweed coat was tightly grasped in his uncle's hand. But from that day to this, poor Andrew Conway had spoken no word.

It all came to an end at last. And, amid the profoundest stillness in the crowded court, Roy Conway received his sentence of fifteen years' penal servitude.

* * * * *

Once more Ralph Warner was seated in his study, and again it was night. He was reading an account of his cousin's trial, and, as he finished, a sigh of relief escaped his lips. But it quickly changed to one of vexation. All his plans seemed to have gone awry. What strange fate had kept his uncle alive so long? Had he died, all would have gone well. But now——

There was a stealthy tap at the window, and his face darkened at the sound.

"Confound her!" he muttered. "Shall I never be able to shake her off?"

He went to the window, threw it open, and assisted Julia Tempest into the room. There was a smile on his face now, but the smile was an ugly one.

"You honour me," he said, placing a chair for her. "Truly you have one virtue which many would do well to emulate. You are a perfect paragon of constancy."

He sneered as he spoke the words, and the girl flashed him a look that told him she understood.

"Yes," she said; "I am constant. You can thank your stars for that, Ralph Warner."

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

Julia Tempest laughed mockingly.

"Ah, I've interested you!" she said. "Well, I've only spoken the truth. Better for you to find me constant than that I——"

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She paused. He was watching her narrowly, almost apprehensively.

"What?" he demanded.

"Than that I—who know you so well—should go over to the enemy. Don't you think so, my lord?"

He forced a laugh and tried to appear at his ease.

"What could *you* do with the enemy?" he said.

"Ah, that is *my* affair," she replied. "Well, Ralph Warner, I have come to you to-night for the last time. Are you, or are you not, willing to redeem your promise to me of marriage?"

He opened his eyes in affected astonishment.

"My dear girl," he said, "you surely must be joking! You are a sufficiently woman of the world to be aware that such promises are never kept—*under such circumstances.*"

His tone was insolent in the extreme. In an instant, the colour had leapt to her cheeks, the dark, gipsy eyes flashed, and she was upon her feet, with clenched hands and heaving bosom, facing him where he sat.

"You cur!" she hissed. "Very well—let it be so! You have defied me—cast me off! Now you shall learn the fierceness, the fiendishness, of a woman's hate!"

Without another word she sprang to the window and was gone.

* * * * *

The sun was beating down on the bare, hot quarries whose stony strata have felt the print of the feet of so many of the central figures in the history of crime. A gang of men were busy hewing the stone from its primitive bed. Armed warders, watchful and alert, stood near at hand, ready to frustrate any attempt at escape. Yet they were not so vigilant but that some apparently trivial incidents passed by unnoticed. As one of the convicts went to his place, he stealthily turned over a piece of stone, and from it took up a small scrap of paper. Watching his opportunity, he read it softly to himself:

"*To-night — just before the whistle sounds—make a dash for the trees to the north-west. I will meet you and help you to escape. Don't fail.*"

That was all. The convict put the slip of paper in his mouth, chewed it to a pulp and spat it out.

"I suppose it's that girl I see hanging about here sometimes," he mused to himself. "I wonder who she is. I seem to recall her face somewhere. Well, whatever the mystery is, it's pretty evident she means to help me. So I'll trust her and make a dash for liberty."

As the day drew in, the sky became dark and threatening. The warders looked apprehensively at the approaching storm. A few minutes and the whistle would sound for the ceasing of work. Suddenly there was a cry, and a man dashed out of the rank of convicts and ran like a deer to the distant trees. Two shots rang out, but still the man ran on. In an instant, confusion took the place of order. The remaining convicts, sympathising readily with their escaping comrade, showed signs of rebellion, and the warders were forced to abandon the runaway. As speedily as they could, they marched the men back to the gloomy prison, and a party of pursuers were dispatched with all speed to recapture the fugitive.

Meanwhile the flying convict had reached the shelter of the wood. A girl was there, awaiting him. She carried a man's long cloak, and a soft, felt hat. Then they hurried on, the storm gathering about them as they went. Great drops were beginning to fall, and ere they had reached their destination the storm had burst above their heads in all its fury.

Some miles had been covered when they arrived at a small town, and the girl led the way to a house that appeared deserted. Entering, they went to an upper room, and threw off their soaking cloaks.

"Now," she said at last, "I am going to make you a proposal. I have helped you so far without imposing a single condition. But my future actions depend upon you."

The man looked at her curiously.

"Speak," he said. "I am ignorant both as to your motives and intentions. But I am in your hands."

Again the girl turned to listen. The faint sound of voices reached her, and for a moment she stood still, as though petrified. The voices sounded nearer, then ceased altogether. But she knew the men had not disappeared. Once more she turned and faced the fugitive, her finger pointing out of the window.

"Consent to marry me, and I will help you to escape," she cried. "Refuse, and your pursuers below shall capture you!"

The man uttered an exclamation of astonishment. Mechanically he put one hand to his brow.

"What is this?" he cried. "What purpose can you have in imposing such a condition?"

The girl's eyes flashed. But she moved a step nearer.

"Listen, Roy Conway," she said in low, concentrated tones. "I have that within my hands which will establish your innocence. I know something else, too, of which you little dream. My motive! Ah, you will learn that also—in time! But, tell me—what is your answer? Will you give me your word of honour to marry me, if I, on my part, establish your innocence and help you to escape until that innocence shall be proven?"

For a few moments Roy Conway made no reply. And then the sweet, trustful face of Laura Merrivale, as he had seen it that day in the crowded court, seemed to rise up before him, and he resolutely put away the temptation which beset him.

"No," he said, "I will not. I love another woman, and my faith is plighted to her. I cannot consent to marry you."

A grey shade came over the face of Julia Tempest, and she moved a step nearer the door.

"Choose ere it is too late!" she urged. "Remember, there is no retreat when once your recapture is effected. Once more—will you marry me?"

"I cannot. You must do your worst. But why have you helped me to escape, only to mock me thus? Who are you?"

But the girl was gone. As the wife of Roy Conway, sole heir of his dying uncle, she could have tasted a revenge such as would have contented even her. But he, too, had refused her, and her heart hardened again. Only as his promised wife would she consent to reveal all that she knew of the crime committed that dark night.

Recovering himself, Roy Conway moved towards the door. But footsteps were already on the stairs; and, a moment later, he was surrounded and again conveyed to the great prison where he had spent so many weary months.

* * * * *

Ralph Warner had just been up to his uncle's house to inquire into the condition of the invalid. For upwards of two years and a half the case had baffled all medical and surgical skill. During all that time there had been no change. An insensibility that was half death held the sufferer in its lethargic arms. But now a slight change was perceptible. There were evidences of approaching dissolution, and Ralph Warner was uneasy, though why he did not know.

He had turned into the wood not far from his own house, and his feet were leading him to a sequestered spot where once he was wont to meet the girl whom now he treated so indifferently. To his unqualified surprise, he found Julia Tempest, stretched upon the grass, her chin in her hands, and with an angry light in her black eyes. She looked up as he came near, and her lip curled disdainfully. Upon Ralph's face, however, dawned an expression of mockery that stung the girl into speech.

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"Ah!" she said bitterly. "You think you have it all your own way, Ralph Warner. But wait. My time is coming soon."

Ralph uttered a low, derisive laugh.

"I've been reading an account of the escape of one of the convicts at Portland," he said. "Fortunately they recaptured the fellow. The authorities seem to think the man was assisted by a woman, who later deserted him. It's a funny story and has set me thinking. If I remember rightly, you were away at the time?"

He looked jeeringly down at the recumbent figure of the girl. But Julia was on her feet in an instant.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

A different shade was stealing into Ralph Warner's dark face—a look of malevolent fury that almost transformed it. But the girl did not flinch.

"Look you," he hissed, coming close up to her. "You are playing a deep game, my beauty. But don't carry it too far, do you hear? I don't know how much, or how little, you know of my plans. But if you go too far, I'll treat you as I do all my enemies. At present you are only a silly little fool. Be content to remain a fool. It's the safest plan by half."

Not an eyelash quivered as Julia Tempest listened to the man's threat. Her blood was up.

"That I am not a fool you will very soon discover," she said defiantly, "and to your cost, Ralph Warner. You speak truly when you say you do not know how much or how little I know of your plans. And it is not my purpose to enlighten you. Only remember—a dark night is not always the safest time to choose for an adventure, since the darkness may conceal others beside yourself."

Ralph Warner stood motionless, rigid, speaking no word. What did the girl mean? But ere he could question her, she turned, and, with a rippling laugh of scornful triumph, disappeared among the trees.

For a moment he thought of going after her. But, with an oath, he turned on his heel and took an opposite direction.

* * * * *

There was stillness in the darkened room wherein lay the unconscious form of Andrew Conway. Two nurses moved silently about the room and, near the bed, stood the two eminent men—physician and surgeon—who were watching the case with so profound an interest. Signs of an approaching change were apparent, and both men waited eagerly for what should occur.

There was a stir in the doorway and Ralph Warner entered the room. As he came in, both doctors looked up with an expression of surprise. His face was white and ghastly, his hands were trembling visibly, and his eyes had in them a hunted look that made his face look still more drawn and haggard. But he paid no heed to the glances of the two men, and sat himself down beside the bed.

For two hours he never moved. His eyes wandered continually from the bed whereon his uncle lay to the window overlooking the lawn. At times, too, he appeared to listen, as though in dread, to voices beneath the window. And then the change, so long expected, so long deferred, came at last, and the sick man opened his eyes. Consciousness was returning. Slowly he moved his head, gazing from one to another in mute bewilderment. At last his eyes rested on the face of Ralph Warner and a look of unspeakable horror and aversion crept into the white face.

Suddenly the sick man made a violent effort and sat upright in his bed. His eyes were still fixed on the face of his nephew, and he pointed to him with one weak, trembling hand.

"Murderer!" he gasped. "Murderer!"

No one spoke. The words seemed to have petrified all present. A ghastly hue had crept into the face of Ralph Warner, but he never stirred. Once more the old man spoke.

"Murderer!" he gasped again. "I saw your evil face when you shot at me through the French windows of the study. Where's my boy—my nephew Roy? Where is he, I say? I was angry with him, but he's a good lad. Send for him. I want to see him and ask his forgiveness for striking him that night. Where is he, I say?"

Still no one spoke. Presently the surgeon, who knew the story of the crime as it had appeared in the papers, turned to the sick man.

"Sir," he said, "do you realise that you have accused of crime a man whom all the world believes to be innocent?"

He pointed, as he spoke, to Ralph Warner.

"I do," came the unfaltering reply. "That man is the man who attempted my life."

Quickly the two medical men made their examination. Finally the surgeon said.

"Mr. Conway, it is my painful duty to acquaint you with the fact that you have but a few hours to live. As medical men, we are able to testify that you are of sound mind. As a magistrate, it is my duty to ask you to make a formal declaration of the statement to which you have just given utterance."

He drew a table to the bedside and prepared to write. Ralph Warner rose hastily from his seat and made as though to leave the room. But the two men detained him, and he sank back into his chair.

Slowly the dying man dictated the story of that terrible night—the quarrel with his nephew, how he had struck him, and, in attempting to forcibly eject him from the room, he had torn Roy's tweed coat. And then—the sight of Ralph Warner's dark face through the glass, the glimpse of a revolver, a flash, and—darkness. And when the story was told, he affixed his signature and the pen dropped from his hand on to the table. His strength was failing. He lay back once more upon his pillow and his voice was feeble and husky.

"Roy!" he gasped. "Where is my boy? And my son Egbert? Will no one send for him?"

Egbert! Ah, there was but one man in that room who knew where Egbert Conway was. Search had been made for him by the dying man's solicitors, but, by a strange accident of fate, they had learnt nothing of that fatal tragedy with an Indian tiger.

And then the end came. Andrew Conway's feeble voice ceased, his eyes closed wearily, and the life that had flickered so long in the prostrate form went out for ever.

There was a great stir downstairs. A moment later the door was flung open and two police officers entered the room.

"We hold a warrant for your arrest, Ralph Warner, on a charge of wounding Andrew Conway some two and a half years ago. Also with the murder of Julia Tempest, from whom we have just obtained a deposition incriminating you."

Ralph Warner stood up. His knees shook and his face was livid with fear.

"I am ready," he said.

They turned to go. Suddenly there was a flash, a report, and the sound of a heavy fall. Ralph Warner, taking advantage of the momentary movement, had drawn a revolver and sent a bullet through his brain.

And Roy? Well, his prison career came speedily to an end. Release came to him when he almost despaired. And when at last the gates of the great gloomy gaol were flung wide open for him to step out again into God's sunlight, the first face that greeted him was the face of Laura Merrivale, smiling, yet with the tears in her blue eyes, to tell him again and again how she had always known he was guiltless and how dearly—how very dearly—she loved him.

So all's well that ends well, and Roy Conway and his sweet wife went at length to live in the great house where his uncle had lived so long. For Egbert's sad fate was discovered at last, and Roy came into all his uncle's great wealth.

Walter J. Mowbray.

THE RAPID REVIEW

No. 4

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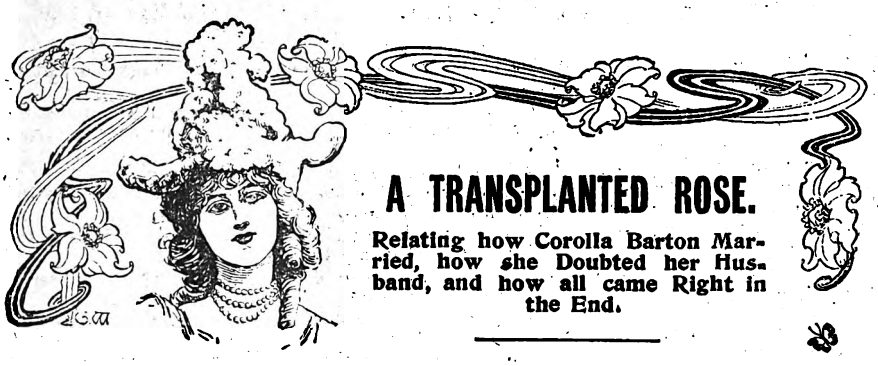

A TRANSPLANTED ROSE.

Relating how Corolla Barton Married, how she Doubted her Husband, and how all came Right in the End.

AFTER her father's sudden death, Fate threw Corolla Burton in the way of Mrs. Douglas, a wealthy American lady, who wished to engage an English governess to take back with her.

Corolla was a graceful, lovely girl, only eighteen years of age, and a blue-eyed, sunny-tempered creature. She had been thoroughly well-educated, and was too high-spirited to remain dependent upon her relations, so she looked naturally for a situation as governess.

"Mamma, mamma," cried little Gilbert Douglas and his sister Minnie, with their arms clasped round Corolla's neck, "please do engage Miss Burton—please do!"

Mrs. Douglas' mother instinct urged her to secure Corolla, f possible, seeing the children were so fond of her.

"But, my dear girl, how can I part with you?" lamented Mrs. Burton. "You are all I have in the world!"

"I know it, mamma," said Corolla cheerfully, and stroking the silvery hair while she spoke; "and I am going away to earn money for you. Mrs. Douglas is very rich, and will give me a large salary. By-and-bye you shall cross over to America and live with me."

Mrs. Burton had a quiet interview with Mrs. Douglas, and grew more reconciled. The lady seemed very kind, and Corolla would be happy with the children. America is not so far away in these days, and if anything happened unexpectedly, Corolla could easily return to England.

They had a pleasant passage, and, later on, were comfortably settled in the handsome home of Mrs. Douglas, who, finding Gilbert Lysle, her bachelor brother of thirty-five, still unmarried, invited Miss Carew, a second cousin of theirs, to spend some weeks with her, for the express purpose of bringing them together.

Miss Carew was a handsome, stylish woman of twenty-six, fond of dress and Society, and not at all averse to be brought within the sphere of her wealthy cousin.

Mrs. Douglas' worldly wisdom prompted her to keep Corolla out of the way as much as possible. "There is no accounting for men's vagaries," she told Miss Carew confidentially.

That lady was arranging some pink rosebuds with the soft white lace at her throat. Her ripe, lovely lips curled in scorn at the idea of the unformed girl, without a particle of style, or knowledge of Society, becoming her rival. But neither of the conspirators counted upon the extreme wilfulness of man.

Lysle suspected his sister's designs. With masculine contrariety he made a point forthwith of seeking the society of the governess. He joined her in her walks with the children, making a pretence of botanising and needing her aid; went into the schoolroom to hear them at lessons; volunteered to read Tennyson to her, and was soon over head-and-ears in love. She was so innocent and natural, so charming in her wild-rose loveliness, in such direct contrast to the women who had so long angled for him, that he was enchanted.

Miss Carew was superb and disdainful. Mrs. Douglas was exasperated. This was the cloud that had appeared dimly above her horizon when she engaged Corolla. She accused her now of artfully inveigling her brother, and of teaching the children to call "Uncle Gilbert" into the nursery. At this, Corolla's British blood was roused. She resented the injustice with a good deal of spirit. Then Mrs. Douglas threatened to pack her off home to her mother in disgrace. Corolla rose equal to this also, and signified her willingness to leave.

Mrs. Douglas over-reached herself, for Gilbert brought matters suddenly to a climax, by asking Corolla to marry him. She was surprised. She had not dared to believe that such a handsome, aristocratic-looking gentleman could care for her in that way. She had looked upon his attentions as merely friendly ones, and taken herself sharply to task when she found she was growing fond of him. Her face was dyed with blushes at the unexpected question. She did not find an answer readily.

"What do you say, little one? Will the English wild-rose bloom beside my hearth, keeping all its sweetness for me? Do you love me, Corolla?"

It would have been useless for her tongue to deny what her fair, blushing, happy face revealed so eloquently. He took her in his arms, and pressed his first kiss upon her lips.

They were married very quietly, went on a short honeymoon trip, and Gilbert installed his wife mistress of his well-appointed home, about a mile from his sister's.

For a while Corolla lived in a blissful dream.

At the first, she had written a glowing letter to her mother, inclosing his photograph. Before long she followed it by another. "By-and-bye you are to come out and live with us," she wrote. "I spoke of it to him one day when I could gather courage, and he said he should be pleased, if it would add to my happiness.

The first six months of their married life were very happy ones. They went but little into Society. Mrs. Douglas refused to countenance her brother's wife, and people looked upon the marriage as a sort of *mésalliance*. Lysle cared but little. He had reached the age when the delights of Society grew stale. Corolla was only too happy to remain in retirement. Lysle had short office hours in his place of business. These over, he hastened home to Corolla, caring only for her wifely welcome and sweet, shy kisses.

After awhile, Mrs. Douglas began to unbend a little, calling occasionally upon Corolla, and inviting her to spend the day with her. Miss Carew, being a relative, joined her, and before long came—upon Gilbert's invitation—for a three weeks' visit, seconded perforce by Corolla, who shrank from her, she knew not why.

Miss Carew was delighted. She had never forgiven Gilbert for slighting her. He would now have a chance to institute comparisons between Corolla's and her own beauty.

Corolla could not understand it, but somehow Miss Carew seemed to draw her husband away from her. She monopolised him in the evenings completely. She could talk well and brightly upon subjects of which Corolla knew very little.

She felt uneasy about this; then took herself to task. She must not expect to engross *all* his attention, as she had done hitherto. He must love her, else why had he married her? Besides, Miss Carew was his cousin.

One evening, while she was out alone in the garden, Mrs. Douglas called. Corolla had left Miss Carew and her husband in the drawing-room. She was aroused from her sad reverie by the voice of Mrs. Douglas.

"I knew how it would be. Gilbert is tiring of bread-and-milk diet. Men do such idiotic things for a mere fancy. If his wife hopes to retain her hold upon him, she must make him feel proud of her. Mere sentiment is short-lived."

"I wish I had the chance back again," Miss Carew said, in a low, resolute tone. "I would bring him to my feet."

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Corolla, hidden from their view by some foliage, felt the blood forsake her cheeks, and her limbs grow suddenly weak. What if their words were true! Gilbert was changed certainly. She had never before suspected that Miss Carew wanted to marry him. The thought made her heart-sick.

"He must have preferred me, or he would not have asked me to marry him," she thought.

But why were his attentions declining? Was he really growing tired of her?

* * * * * * *

Corolla stood by her open chamber window in the warm glow of the August sunset. She was not happy. A reserve was creeping in between her and her husband.

She heard voices below somewhere. By-and-bye her husband and Miss Carew walked slowly along a shaded path. From her elevated position she could see them plainly. They stopped, and sat down upon a rustic bench, apparently engrossed in conversation. While Corolla watched them jealously, he threw his arm over her shoulder; then bent his head, and kissed her.

Corolla drew back with a sudden revulsion of feeling. Her sadness changed into hatred of Miss Carew, and anger against her husband. A sense of isolation came over her—of being alone in a strange country, with even her own husband untrue to her. She dropped down on a low seat, and covered her face with her hands. A longing for England and mother swept over her.

"No love like mother-love," she thought, the trite remark coming home to her as it had never done before.

A servant tapped at the door, and gave her a letter, which had just arrived.

The letter read:

"*My health is failing rapidly. In a few weeks, at most, I believe I shall be at rest. I long to see you, Corolla. I cannot die in peace, without one more look at your face. You are all I have on earth, dear child! Cannot you come to me for a few weeks, that yours may be the last face I look upon before I go to meet your father?*"

In this strain the letter ran on, sometimes almost illegibly, as if the fingers were too weak to guide the pen.

Corolla dropped the letter in her lap wearily. There was a dull, aching pain at her heart. This, then, was the end of her bright dreams for the future. Her mother had figured in all of them; now she was to die. Corolla shuddered at the thought. In her first longing for sympathy her heart turned to her husband. But, no; her confidence had been shaken. *He* could not be her resting-place. She was utterly miserable.

"Mother—mother!" she sobbed. "I wish I could die with you!"

While she sat there her husband entered.

"What is the matter, my child?" he asked, in a tone of concern, sitting down beside her, and looking into her tear-stained face.

"Mother is very ill—I fear dying, and wants me to go to her," she said, in a voice that sounded cold and calm, as she passed the letter to him.

"My poor child!" he said, when he had read it, drawing her within his arms, and caressing her flushed cheek.

She shrank from his touch. The words of Mrs. Douglas and Miss Carew—the scene she had witnessed that night—were rankling in her mind.

"Do you feel that you must go?" he asked.

"Yes, yes. If I did not I should never have a happy moment. Poor, dear mamma! It was so hard for her to part with me, and now——"

"If you think it will be a comfort to both of you, I should advise you to go," he said. "I only wish my business would permit me to accompany you."

She looked up quickly.

"Are you quite sure it would not?" she questioned.

"It is simply impossible at present," he returned; "but I think I can arrange things so that you will not be unprotected."

"He would rather stay where he can be near Miss Carew," she thought bitterly, drawing herself away from his sheltering arm.

"The *British Queen* sails for Liverpool on Thursday," he remarked, after a few moments of thought. "I am acquainted with the captain. He is a capital fellow. I can give you into his care."

"Is it Captain Lester, of whom I have heard you speak?" she asked listlessly.

"Yes. Do you really want to go so soon? Shall you be able to complete your preparations? This is Tuesday, remember."

"I shall not need much preparation," she said; and so it was arranged.

She felt heart-sore because he did not take her in his arms, and protest that he could not part with her for so long a time. "One short month ago he would have done so," she thought.

She made her preparations with a heavy heart. She had the reticent pride that would not allow her to mention her doubts to her husband.

* * * * * * *

The *British Queen* was within fifteen minutes of sailing. Gilbert had introduced Corolla to the captain, and had left a handsome fee in the hands of the good-natured stewardess in her behalf. They were together now in her state-room for the last good-bye. A great wave of tenderness swept over her in these last moments. She clasped her arms about his neck tightly. It seemed to her like a farewell for ever. He, perceiving how nervous she was, without guessing the prime cause, tried to maintain a cheerful demeanour. His manner made her still more unhappy. "If he loves me, why does he not express more regret at parting from me?" she thought.

Lysle was not by nature demonstrative. Love's first ardour had surprised him into a lover's tenderness; now he was the careful husband, more anxious for her comfort than to overburden her with caresses.

"Good-bye, dear child," he said at parting. "It will not be long until we meet again. Keep up your courage!" And so they parted.

"I hope you are not allowing home-sickness to attack you, Mrs. Lysle?" said Captain Lester one day.

She looked up at him with a smile that he could see was a little forced.

"I believe it has, and is drawing me in opposite directions at once."

"Ah, you are divided between England and America, I see. One holds the mother—the other the husband. I suppose it is rather hard to determine which has the stronger claim. Well, we are having a quick passage. Don't be melancholy. In a few days you will have a sight of merry England if all goes well."

* * * * * * *

Corolla felt a warmth and glow about her heart when she looked upon the spires and roofs and smoke of Liverpool, as the good ship made the port.

It was a bright, sunny September day when Captain Lester bade her good-bye, having attended to her luggage and seen her comfortably ensconced in the railway carriage that was to convey her to her mother.

"I hope when I meet you again I shall be better able to thank you for your kindness," she said.

"No thanks are required. Good-bye again. God bless you!"

Corolla had sent a telegram; so when three hours later she alighted at the station her uncle was there to meet her.

"Prepare yourself to see her much changed!" he told her as they drove home through the village, past the churchyard, with its carefully-tended graves, over which flowers bloomed lovingly and birds sang joyously, while the slanting rays of the afternoon sun smiled in benediction, and kindled the church spire and the stained windows with its glow.

Mrs. Burton, in a soft grey dress, with delicate lace round her neck and wrists, was propped up by pillows in an easy-chair.

"Mamma—dear mamma! you will live many years yet," she whispered, entwining her arms about her lovingly. And

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she retired to rest that night under the dawn of this hope, and slept soundly until late the next forenoon.

"Tell me about your home and husband," her mother whispered; "it will rest me to hear you talk. It was the longing to see you that exhausted me."

Corolla had to give her minute particulars, and to mask her own unrest with a cheerful face.

That night in her room she told herself she must carefully guard every word and look. She longed for the privilege of laying her head upon her mother's breast, as she had done in childhood, and telling all her trouble. But it would not do. Her mother's last hours must not be embittered by doubts of her daughter's happiness.

Through the stimulus of Corolla's presence, Mrs. Burton kept up for some days. Then the reaction set in. She could not be removed from her bed. Corolla hovered round her, wearing a smile rather sad and pathetic, and soothed her last days lovingly.

The end came gently and sweetly.

"Kiss me, Corolla," she whispered. "You will come, too, before long, and we shall be together."

Corolla complied. Then, as she moved her fan gently, the mysterious change passed over the face, and it was still. Corolla laid down the fan, and a quiet awe stole over her. She could not remove her eyes from the sight. A sweeter smile than they had worn in life was settling over the features. She could not realise that it was death.

But after the funeral a dreadful loneliness settled upon her. Life stretched before her so long and so desolate. Her thoughts would turn involuntarily to her husband, only to be beaten back by the remembrance of her shaken faith. She had received a cablegram and but one letter from him, which seemed to her cold and unsatisfactory. She could not understand a half-way love. Her own was so fresh, genuine, unalloyed, that she expected the same from her husband.

"He would not care to soothe my sorrow," she thought. "Miss Carew has engrossed his attention."

She had no heart to leave England, yet she told herself she must go. The letter which was due from her husband did not come; but she had money enough for her home passage, and felt so wretched and unsettled, that she resolved to start.

"Corolla has some trouble on her mind, in addition to her mother's death," her aunt said to her husband confidentially. "If she has such a good husband, why isn't she more anxious to return to him? She has been here two months now."

Mr. Frothingham, Corolla's uncle, accompanied her to Liverpool. He saw her safely on board the *Peerless*, and sent a cablegram to her husband to that effect.

It was late in the evening when they sailed. Before they were fairly out into the Channel a thick fog rose. They lost their bearing. Some time towards morning the sleeping passengers were awakened by a terrific crash, the ship shivering and groaning like some human monster in mortal pain. They were on the rocks, not far from the coast, they judged.

The blow was fatal. The ship went to pieces rapidly. A fire broke out in the engine-room, adding fresh horrors. All was confusion. There was no chance to get the boats out. Some jumped overboard, in terror of the flames. There was a universal panic. Corolla afterwards remembered how, in the confusion, a gentleman had given her a life-preserver, secured one himself, and bidding her follow his example, had jumped overboard. Fear of the spreading, mounting flames had nerved her to make the plunge. The last she could recollect was of floating over the heaving waters, which were "dyed with an awful but glorious light"; while through the lurid shroud of fog that enveloped everything, she could hear the shouts and shrieks of men and women belonging to the doomed ship.

Corolla overheard a conversation that made her heart sick.

* * *

"And you think now she will really recover, doctor?"

"Yes; I think she will awake from this long, refreshing sleep to a new life. Her good constitution and your careful nursing have saved her."

"I am very, very thankful," Miss Newton said. She was a lady of middle age, with a pure, earnest face, from which all selfishness and passion had been swept away by a great, purifying sorrow.

Dr. Chudleigh looked at his watch. "I have an engagement at three," he said. "Good afternoon, Miss Newton."

They had been standing in the hall. She re-ascended the stairs, and noiselessly opened the door of a pleasant, roomy chamber. In one corner, on a low, white bed, Corolla lay, breathing softly, her senses all locked in the life-giving slumber. The furniture was tasteful; the windows draped with

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long lace curtains. A bouquet of hot-house flowers stood on a round marble table. The curtains of the windows near the bed were closely drawn; but across the room a square of sunlight lay on the soft drab-and-green carpet. Miss Newton sat down near the sunny window to wait. The doctor had said she would soon awake.

* * * * * * *

Corolla's eyes unclosed, wandered round the room, and closed again. Consciousness, confused at first, was returning. The unfamiliar room furnished no peg of association. Suddenly the fiery scene, which had burnt itself into her memory, flashed into recollection. In its light the foregoing events returned to her: Her dead mother—her sorrow—her husband—Miss Carew—Mrs. Douglas. How long had she been lying on that bed? Was she in England or America? She had a Rip-Van-Winkle feeling about herself.

She drew a long, deep sigh, which reached Miss Newton's ears, who stepped lightly across the carpet to her bedside. Corolla opened her eyes again, to meet the sweetly earnest face bending over her.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"Among friends," was the answer, with a quiet smile. "Let me give you this," dipping a spoon into the glass of dark-coloured liquid which she held.

Corolla swallowed it quietly. It felt cool and grateful to her parched lips.

"Am I in England?" she asked, when Miss Newton had set down the glass.

"Yes, in Ryeport. You were found floating about on a life-preserver. Some fishermen picked you up."

"I remember," she said. "The *Peerless* went on the rocks in the fog—the fire broke out—I, with others, jumped overboard." She paused a moment. "This is not a fisherman's house?" she said.

"No, it is mine," returned Miss Newton, with a smile.

"How long have I been lying here?"

"Four weeks. You were insensible for a long time after they brought you ashore. Soon after you showed signs of life, fever set in."

Corolla improved rapidly. She was reticent about her past life, and Miss Newton did not ask many questions.

"'Corolla,' a rare, but very pretty name," she said, when she heard it. "Have you no message to send to your friends? They will be anxious."

"I have no friends who will care to hear. My mother died shortly before I sailed for America. My father is dead. I have neither brothers nor sisters."

Miss Newton detected the ring of pain in her tone. She said no more for the time.

When Corolla lay convalescent, a strange thought was shaping in her brain. The news of the loss of the *Peerless* had reached America. The papers had announced that only one man had reached shore, Miss Newton told her. Her husband would believe her dead. Why go back now, an unwelcome interloper?

"Gilbert could marry Miss Carew, and be happy," she thought. His attentions to her, that kiss in the twilight, were proofs to Corolla that he loved her.

The more she pondered, the higher seemed the barrier between them. The fact that she was his lawful wife, and had a right to his home and protection, if she could not command his love, had no weight with her. She must be everything or nothing to him. An inherited pride, which disdained to enter where she was not warmly welcome, furthered her resolve. "How foolish I was to accept his offer of marriage so eagerly," she thought. "I ought to have reflected."

The scheme seemed more and more practicable. Her aunt and uncle, with others, would think she was lost. She would be Corolla Burton again, and go out as a governess. She loved children. It would not be a heavy cross.

Miss Newton guessed she had an unhappy secret, and, out of kindness, made several attempts to elicit it. Corolla at last begged her not to question her, and asked her aid in procuring a situation.

"You can have a home with me as long as you choose," said Miss Newton.

"I have had a home with you too long already," she returned with a sad smile. "I love children. If I could get a situation as governess, I should be so grateful."

"After you are strong again, my dear, we will see what can be done; that is, if you think you will be better contented."

"I should feel more independent," said Corolla; and she added, "I hope to be able some day to repay your kindness."

"Do not mention it," said Miss Newton. "It has been a positive pleasure to me to have you here. I find all my happiness now in such things. Like yourself, I am without near relatives in the world. When I was not much older than you are, an act of selfishness on my part deprived me of a noble lover. With him went all that made life desirable. I was rebellious for a long time, but came back to life at last, to find that there was something besides self to live for. It is a luxury to me to make others happy. My life would be intolerable without it."

A few weeks later Miss Newton received a letter from a friend in Manchester, in which she mentioned that she was looking for a governess for her little Lulu. "I can send you, I think, a perfect treasure," Miss Newton wrote in reply.

Preliminaries were arranged. In a week Corolla was domiciled in Mrs. Erskine's cheerful home, with light duties, and treated in all respects as an equal. Miss Newton's patronage was all-potent.

This took place at the beginning of the New Year. Six months, that might have been happy ones had she been Corolla Burton in reality, passed over her head. Then Mrs. Erskine sickened and died. Lulu was motherless.

At Mr. Erskine's invitation an elderly aunt of his came to preside over his home. He begged Corolla to remain in charge of Lulu, who had grown warmly attached to her. Corolla was glad to comply. She shrank from going out into the world again.

* * * * * *

"Miss Burton, I love you. Will you be my wife?"

It was a year since the death of Mrs. Erskine. The air was full of the tender sweetness of Maytime—the season when, according to Tennyson, "a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love."

Corolla looked up into the face of the handsome young widower. Her face flushed hotly, then became very pale. She shrank away from him. In her surprise and agitation she had almost spoken the words, "I am a wife already."

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"Have I startled you? Perhaps I have been abrupt," he said, apologetically, not understanding the pained, scared look in her eyes. "Your sweet face has grown very dear to me," he went on in a low tone, "and my motherless child loves you. Will you not make us both happy?"

"I—I——" she commenced in confusion. "Please forgive me, Mr. Erskine. You must not speak of love to me."

He looked at her searchingly. She had never seemed to him to be a happy person. There was very often a shadowy unrest in the sweet violet eyes, a pathetic expression about the delicate mouth, while the roses in her cheeks had faded away.

"If you could love me a little, ever so little, I would try to make you so happy," he persisted, not sufficiently warned by her words. "We would go to Italy, and your roses would come back. I am afraid you are low-spirited, too. You have kept too close with Lulu."

He moved towards her. She lifted her hand with an appealing gesture. A low cry broke from her, then she left the room abruptly, leaving him standing there the picture of astonishment.

She went to her room. How her heart ached! Not because this man had touched it. Oh, no. His words had broken down the barriers of self-repression. They had opened the floodgates; and the love for her husband, which she had resolved she *would* crush out altogether, overflowed its imposed boundary. She felt a mad, unquenchable longing to see his face once more.

"It is my wife, come back from the dead!" cried Gilbert.

In what a false position she had placed herself! Palming herself off as a girl, she was, of course, open to offers of marriage; while she was a wife, with neither the right nor the inclination to listen to words of love.

To get away from there before Mr. Erskine could renew his pleading, was her first thought; her next was to go over to America quietly, secretly, and, without making herself known, see her husband again. "If I could see his face, and not be seen!" she said.

A tiny hope, which she scarcely dared whisper to herself, had sprung up in connection with this powerful reaction. Might there not be some flaw in the chain of circumstantial evidence she had woven? It was so easy to be mistaken. Might he not be yet mourning for her loss? This hope once admitted, the uncertainty was maddening. She had saved quite a big sum of money from her liberal salary. There was nothing to prevent her from going. She lay until nearly morning, revolving her plans, then fell into a light slumber.

The next day she sought Mr. Erskine, and told him, in tremulous tones, with averted face, that she must leave at once.

"Are you going away on my account?" he asked, seizing her hands gently, but firmly, to detain her.

"No—oh, no! I cannot tell you the reason I am going. I am very unhappy. If you are my friend, please do not question me."

He saw that he must desist.

"Will you tell me, at least, *where* you are going?"

"I would rather not," she said, and, seeing her distress, he would not urge her.

She spent the rest of the day in packing her trunk, and disposing of the things she did not want to take with her. Lulu was disconsolate, and hung round her tearfully. With tears in her own eyes, Corolla kissed her, and tried to comfort her.

Corolla journeyed to Liverpool. The speed of the iron horse seemed a snail's pace to her impatient fancy. She was fortunate in the time of her arrival there. A steamer was to sail that evening for America.

Safely aboard, in the snug state-room which she had been fortunate enough to secure, although so late in taking her passage, her thoughts flew back to the ill-fated *Peerless*. But all nervous fear was swallowed up in the one overmastering anxiety that filled her mind. When she made that resolve upon her sick bed, she did not fully understand upon what an unquiet and momentous path she had voluntarily entered.

The ship made a quick, delightful passage, and one fair morning in June it glided up New York Harbour. Corolla's heart throbbed violently as she stood on deck with others and looked once more upon the great city. Before twenty-four hours she would know the worst. Any certainty would be better than this consuming suspense.

The train steamed out through the early twilight into the suburbs, and stopped at the little wayside station of Heath. Corolla alighted and walked slowly along the platform. The memory of the day when she left there, a little less than two years ago, came back to her vividly. She was very quietly dressed, and a thick veil concealed her features. The same station-master was there, who, as he passed her on the platform, eyed her narrowly. She hurried along out of the glare of the station lights, and walked in the direction of her former home.

The shadows of the June twilight were fast deepening. The trees in the avenue loomed up darkly against the sky. A dewy sweetness seemed to enfold everything. The evening star glimmered in the west. The drowsy hum of happy insects sounded in her ears. She was surrounded by finest harmonies of nature. She alone was out of tune.

She reached the borders of the grounds, which were surrounded by a low stone wall, on the inside of which was a closely-clipped thorn edge. The gate stood open. She stole through it like a guilty thing, and ventured up the walk.

A step sounded ahead of her on the gravel. She shrank behind some tall-growing shrubs until it passed; then pressed

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on towards the house, which showed tall and imposing in the twilight. She was trembling in every limb. Her own heart had made a coward of her.

She drew nearer and nearer. The fountain murmured musically, as in the old, happy days. The outline of the marble Graces in the garden showed faintly. The air was full of the fragrance of roses and other odorous flowers of June. The sweetness sickened her.

A breeze stirred the leaves of the horse-chestnuts. They seemed to whisper:

"You have come on a fruitless quest. Another reigns queen of his heart."

A light glimmered through the half-closed blinds of one of the bay-windows of the drawing-room. Summoning all her courage, she tottered up to it. The couchant lions on each side of the broad stone steps in front of the house seemed to leer at her through the semi-gloom. She pushed aside the clustering roses and sweet-brier, wounding her delicate hands unconsciously, and looked in, for the curtains were undrawn.

The room seemed unchanged. The same tall, costly lamp stood upon the table, its light shining through the white globe, soft and subdued. A handsome painting of Mount Willard, with a blue, transparent mist clinging round its sides, hung opposite the window, as when she left. The easy-chairs stood here and there carelessly, as of yore.

She pushed nearer, to get a view of the sofa in the corner. Gilbert Lysle was stretched at full-length upon it. He was passing his hands slowly and thoughtfully through his hair, in the fashion she remembered so well. No one else was in the room. Was he really true to her? Still living alone and heart-whole for her sake? The faint hope that had brought her there grew stronger.

She half turned away, thinking she would go to the front door, and ring the bell. Her movement was arrested. A door was thrown open, giving her a glimpse of the spacious, lighted hall, and a girl entered with a beautiful child in her arms—of five or six months seemingly. He crowed with delight, and stretched out his chubby hands towards Gilbert, who sat upright at once, and took him into his arms. Corolla could not distinguish any words; but she saw him kiss and fondle the child, and toss him aloft in his strong arms. His child! The thought was agony. His, and not hers! The girl went out, leaving the child in the care of Gilbert Lysle.

A few moments later, a lady, with sweeping skirts, came through the open door. Corolla strained her eyes. It was Miss Carew, beautiful and stately as ever. Corolla felt a cold perspiration on her forehead, and the objects in the room seemed to dance before her eyes.

Miss Carew, or "Mrs. Lysle" now, Corolla told herself, walked to the sofa, and held out her hands towards the child, who made attempts to reach the diamond in her bosom, crowing all the time in baby fashion.

The desolate wanderer at the window saw it all. She had come across the seas in vain. Her husband had forgotten her, and that very soon. He *had* crowned another in her place queen of his life. She was the mother of his child. She remembered vaguely that she had intended to take the eleven o'clock train back to New York again, if her worst fears should be confirmed. She turned to leave the place, under cover of the darkness.

"No husband's kiss for me," she told herself hopelessly. But her trembling limbs refused to support her weight. Her will power forsook her. The starry heavens above her seemed fading into blankness. A deep groan burst from her lips; she reeled, and fell down among the dewy roses, crushing some of them into shapelessness.

The sound was heard inside through the open windows.

"What was that?" Gilbert asked hastily. He gave the child into the arms of his companion, and stepped through a side door that opened into the garden.

"Nero! Nero!" he shouted, for the dog had bounded out, and now with short, disturbed barks, was sniffing round Corolla's insensible form.

He procured a lantern, and went hastily out. Nero stopped barking, and began to whine piteously. Corolla's hat was pushed forward, concealing her face as she lay. He lifted her in his arms, and carried her into the house.

"A woman in a fainting-fit, I think," he said concisely, in answer to the startled inquiries of a lady with a pleasant, matronly face, who met him in the doorway.

He carried her across the room to the sofa which he had just left, and laid her down. Miss Carew stood speechless. The girl, with the child in her arms, looked on in open-eyed wonder.

"Poor creature!" said the matronly lady, stepping forward, and removing the hat and veil from the still, white face.

Gilbert Lysle looked, then started forward, and scanned the face closely.

"Good Heavens!—what a striking likeness!" came from his lips. Trembling, he lifted one delicate hand that lay limp and cold, and drew off the gold band that incircled one of the fingers. He scanned the inside a moment by the lamplight, then turned again to the sofa. "Corolla! It is my wife, come back from the dead! Corolla, darling, open your eyes; speak to me, your husband!"

The others drew near. The elder lady applied restoratives, only half understanding Mr. Lysle's strange actions. He seemed unconscious of their presence.

Miss Carew scanned the quiet face closely for a few moments, then left the room abruptly.

"The prize has slipped from my grasp again, just as I was on the eve of securing it," she hissed, in impotent anger. "What power has raised her from the dead, and sent her back here, with her hated doll-face and yellow hair, to mar my plans a second time?"

Under the influence of the restoratives, Corolla's white eyelids fluttered. She drew a long, deep, shuddering sigh, and her blue eyes unclosed wearily. Gilbert's face was very near hers.

"I—I could not help coming back," she whispered. "I was dying for one more sight of your face. I did not mean to faint. I will go away again, and let you be happy with her."

He thought her mind was wandering.

"Go away, my darling?" he said soothingly, while he stroked her cheek fondly. "Go away, when my heart has ached for you so long? Never again, while these arms have power to enfold you!"

"But the child?" she whispered. "Miss Carew is your wife now, isn't she?"

"Her mind is still wandering," he thought. The others had left him alone with her. "You—not Miss Carew—are my wife," he told her.

"But the child I saw in your arms?" she persisted, with a clear, steady look now in her eyes.

"My brother's child. He and his wife are on a visit here. Miss Carew is spending a day or two with us."

"And there is nothing to separate you and me."

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"Nothing," he returned, repressing, until she should recover her strength, the thousand questions that rose to his lips regarding the past two years.

Too much exhausted to question further, Corolla raised her arms, and drew his face down close to hers. They lay quiet for some time in a close embrace. Corolla's eyes closed. She had not dared to dream of such a glad reunion. Her heart was full of an unutterable content.

* * * * *

When she grew strong, there was a long talk, and many explanations. Corolla confessed all her doubts and fears from the beginning.

"How *could* you voluntarily stay away from me, if you loved me?" he asked.

"It was my foolish pride," she returned. "I knew I was not your social equal, and thought you had begun to realise and regret it. But, after all, I was not strong enough to maintain my resolve, and succumbed weakly."

"For which weakness I am very thankful," he said gravely. "I am very, very sorry that my little wife did not trust me fully."

"But their conversation in the garden; your attentions to Miss Carew; that kiss I saw you give her, which I supposed was one of many; your willingness to let me go away; your one short, cool letter, instead of writing to me every week!" pleaded Corolla. The reproof in his tone grieved her.

"I was not to blame for their idle talk. As regards the kiss, I remember, now, that Laura made some laughing, bantering remark, which caused me to do it. I now suspect she saw you at the window, and wanted to annoy you. I was willing to let you go to England, because I saw it was for your happiness. If my letter seemed cool, it was because I was very much worried about my business just then, and, as I have told you, I wrote others, which must have been lost. The coolness was on your side. I remember you repelled me more than once, at which I wondered."

"Forgive me," Corolla said penitently.

Viewing the matter in a new light, she felt ashamed of her too sensitive, jealous pride.

Mrs. Douglas and Miss Carew held a private indignation meeting over the—to them—untimely return of one they had deemed safely out of the way. They could not again disturb Corolla. Her two years' experience had taught her wisdom.

With her husband's approval, she dispatched two letters to England—one to Miss Newton, the other to Mr. Erskine, in which she told her true story. She was afraid she had compromised herself in their eyes, and wished to retain their respect.

Isabel Harrod.

"ARE you popular with the young ladies of your set?" "Yes, I flatter myself that I am. I can have the refusal of any of their hands in marriage." "Do you really think so?" "I'm sure of it. I have already received the refusal of several of them."

"Now, Tommy," said the spinster aunt, with theories upon the bringing up of other people's children, "now, Tommy," setting her small nephew down hard on the chair, "look me straight in the eyes." Tommy looked. Then, "What beautiful eyes!" he said. He was diplomatic.

SHE: "Did you ever study the question of aerial navigation?" He: "Yes, to some extent." She: "And from what you have read do you believe it possible that we shall ever fly?" He (with a side glance of anxiety): "I think I shall, Alice; I hear ominous footsteps overhead."

"YES, sir, I have come to ask you for the hand of your daughter." "For Mabel's hand?" "Yes, sir. It is a mere formality, I know, but we thought it would be pleasing to you to have me go through with it." "What's that—a mere formality?" "That is what I said—a mere formality." "And may I inquire who suggested that asking my consent to my daughter's marriage was only a mere formality?" "It was Mabel's mother, sir." "Mabel's mother? Then I have nothing further to say."

Your Editor Chats.

Your Editor's Wish

WHITSUNTIDE is generally one of the most enjoyable of our periodical holidays, and, provided the weather be fine, many of my readers will doubtless be travelling by train to country or seaside. They, of course, will be taking their Whitsun *Short Stories* with them, as there is no companion for a railway journey more delightful than this little paper. Nevertheless, there are almost sure to be fellow-travellers in the same carriage who have been unwise enough to neglect to purchase a copy, so I take this opportunity of reminding my readers that it would be a gracious and a kindly act on their art if they would, after having read *S.S.* from cover to cover, pass it on to one of those persons who have armed themselves with the best possible antidote against weariness on the line. In conclusion, I trust that you all will have the happiest Whitsun that your heart can crave for.

Competition Results.

NEXT week I shall publish the name of the winner of the guinea offered in connection with the Twelfth Unsolved Love Problem, "The Test of Ruth Lawson."

I also hope to be able to announce in the same number the result of the recent Signature Competition.

Next Week's Number.

READERS should note that the next number of *Short Stories*, dated May 28th, will be on sale in the country on Saturday, May 21st, instead of Tuesday, the 24th, as usual.

Empire Day.

NEXT Tuesday, May 24th, is the anniversary of the birth of our late greatly-beloved sovereign, Queen Victoria.

It is a Royal day and should be celebrated as such.

Here is a way in which you yourself can celebrate it and also help others to do so. Great efforts are being made by the organisers of the FRESH AIR FUND to collect a big sum of money on May 24th—Empire Day—so that a larger number of the poor children of the slums than usual may this year have a happy day in the country. All contributions received on May 24th will be kept specially for the "Empire Day" outings.

All amounts to go to this special fund should be sent, in envelopes with "Empire Day" plainly marked in the top left-hand corner, to the Hon. Sec. of the FRESH AIR FUND, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Your Editor.

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By Contract Sealed.

The Tale of a Borrowed Love.

THEY were sitting in the library of her home in Kensington. The warm glow from a tall lamp fell slantingly over her, and brought out the deep morocco greens and reds of a heavy portière behind her. He was sitting looking straight ahead of him. They were both silent. There was only the swishing, silky frou-frou of her skirt as she swayed one daintily-slippered foot back and forth with a pretty impatience.

"But, my dear child," Franklin said at last, very patronisingly, "it is absurd! Indeed, it would be quite wrong, you know, for me to pretend I was in love with you."

The soft frou-frou stopped suddenly. She narrowed her wide blue eyes and bit her lip an instant. Then she rose, went over, and sat upon a low chair in front of him, so as to meet his eyes.

"But it is only for a month. Just to make Tom jealous. Ah, please do!"

Franklin moved back uneasily in his chair and faced her eyes.

"But, my dear Miss Dorothy, how could I?"

She only continued to meet his glance with her great, wide eyes. He shifted uncomfortably.

"You see, I had my love affair when I was young. It would be utterly absurd for a man of the world like me to begin again—and on so youthful a plan," he added, with a self-pleased smile.

Franklin was just thirty. He did have a few grey hairs, to be sure, of which, together with his experience, he was vastly proud.

She did not answer. For a full moment she looked the other way, then she turned to him again, and, still fixing him with her wide eyes, said sadly:

"Here you have always professed such interest in me, ever since I was a child. You used to send me flowers ages ago, and you took me to my first ball, and all that—and now when I ask you a tiny little thing like this——"

"You know quite well," he said, very seriously, with his eyes on his boot toes—"you know quite well that I would be glad to do anything in the wide world to please you; but this idea of being deeply in love with you for a month! My dear child——"

She rose and turned away with impatience.

"Oh, as if I wanted you really to love me!" she said petulantly. "I only want you to pretend you do. You do take things so hopelessly seriously."

"And you do place a fellow so hopelessly difficultly," he said, drawing his brows down. "Come now, Miss Dorothy, do you really want me so very much to do it?"

"There now, that's a dear," she said, coming out of her pout instantly, and reseating herself on the low chair before him. "And I promise not to make it the least bit difficult for you. You will only have to lend, not really give, me your affection, you know. You will have to come to see me—well, we will say, four times a week, and you will have to look pensively at me sometimes—sometimes very pensively, the way Tom does—and—that's all."

"Miss Dorothy," he said slowly, with his eyes again on his boot toes, "it does seems such an absurd proceeding for a man of my years and experience! For a month to—why it seems such——"

"Yes," she interrupted quickly; "for only a month. That isn't much, is it? And of course there must be no hedging. You must promise! There now, don't object. I think we shall have to have a contract," she added, laughing a little.

She went to the little Louis Quinze escritoire, seated herself, drew out a sheet of note paper, opened it, and with great seriousness wrote something across it.

"There," she said triumphantly, holding it before him by the tips of the paper, "that is the contract. You must sign it."

He glanced over the sheet and saw written in her bold, girlish hand:

"LENT: *To Dorothy Marshall, for a period of one month, beginning on May Day, the undivided affection of James R. Franklin.*"

With great seriousness she dipped the pen in the ink and gave it to him, and stood over him very gravely while he signed it.

"You shall have this contract back this day month, at which time you will be released from it," she said, folding it carefully, and locking it in a small drawer of the escritoire.

When she turned to him again he was fingering his tie absently and looking into the fire.

It all seemed so absurd to him. He felt with a secret disgust for himself that he, a man of the world and of experience, was being easily outdone now by a wide-eyed, blue-eyed child of eighteen. To be sure, if he could help her with her love affair, why ought he not to do it? Tom Prosser was desperately in love with her already; and yet she had owned frankly that she wanted to make him jealous. That was a peculiar admission.

He looked up and found her looking at him with her wide, persistent eyes. He stopped fingering his tie, and rose to go.

* * * * *

Franklin thought it had been a somewhat trying and awkward evening, though *her* spirits seemed never to have failed for an instant. It was a night or so before a grand ball, and they were both calling upon her.

"You are going with me to the Cavendishs' ball, are you not?" Prosser said, rising to leave.

"No," she said indifferently, pinning a wilful lock of hair close against her temple; "Mr. Franklin is taking me, aren't you, Jim?"

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Franklin started uneasily. It was the first time she had ever called him "Jim."

"Yes," he answered awkwardly, "I believe you did wish me to go."

"How very stupid you were!" she said, after Prosser had gone. "Of course I did suggest your taking me, but you should not have given Tom that idea."

"Well, you should not have called me 'Jim,'" he said, a little sullenly.

"Don't you like it?" she said, laughing in spite of herself. "I thought you would."

"Yes; but somehow it was so sudden," he answered, still rather sullenly.

"Oh, don't say that!" she laughed again. "It sounds exactly as though I had proposed to you."

He was looking intently at his patent-leather boots. There was something peculiarly martyr-like and meek about his face as the lamplight, making deep shadows, fell across it. He raised his head suddenly. The fine lines of his face came out sharp and severe.

"Miss Dorothy!" he broke out, with a sudden fierceness. Then he stopped abruptly, and fixed his eyes again on the tips of his boots. The light fell slantwise again down his face. He was going to tell her that he could not keep to the contract, because it had grown hateful to him; because it seemed dishonourable for him to devote himself to making another man jealous, while he himself was not really in love with—— And then he stopped abruptly at the thought.

"Well?" she said, smiling, her face tilted upward like an impertinent flower. "I thought you were going to say something."

"Well, I don't like it!" he blurted out.

"You mean my calling you 'Jim'?" she said, lowering her head instantly, and with only wonder in her face and eyes.

"Good Heavens, no! Don't think that I mind that," he said. "It is the whole thing, the whole contemptible thing! For me to devote myself to making another fellow jealous and miserable when he is head-over-ears in love with you, and I am not in the least in——" He stopped abruptly. He hesitated at this each time, like an unwilling hunter before a six-barred gate.

Her lips were parted a little, and her whole attitude that of waiting.

"And I am not in the least in——" he repeated; and then he ran wide of his first thought, and wide of the truth as well —"and I am not in the least in the mood for such a thing."

"Oh!" she said. "You mean it has become a bore to you to come to see me so often."

"No," he said, coming back to the truth again—"no, it has not. But can't you understand——"

"Why, no!"—shaking her head—"not if it is not boring or disagreeable to you."

He stood before her and looked down at her a while without a word, then he turned and walked away from her. "That is just it. Can't you see? If I did not care a pin myself about you it might be easy enough. But each day I care more. And he cares, too. And don't you see what a mess it is?"

He came and stood before her again. The colour died down slowly from her face.

"Then you don't want to take me to the Cavendishs' ball?" Her brows were lifted a very little, her lips haughty, and her head tilted up proudly towards his.

"Yes, of course I do," he said inconsistently.

"Then I shall be ready at half past nine. We won't want to go before then," she said calmly, rising.

A moment later, when Franklin had gone, the flush came back slowly to her face.

* * * * *

It was Sunday, and Franklin and Dorothy were walking home together from morning service. In all the buoyant life of sound and colour and breathing sunlight they were strangely silent. Franklin's eyes were straight ahead of him, and there were stiff, severe lines about his face. It had grown white and a little worn during the past few weeks, so that the sharp, fine outlines of it were sharper than usual. There was something very child-like and grave about Dorothy's lips. Her face almost equalled his in seriousness, except that her eyes seemed to smile.

Franklin was bitterly reviewing the past month. He had gone into the thing solely for her sake, to make Prosser jealous, and now, what was the outcome? That he had succeeded only too well he was perfectly aware; for instead of making Prosser jealous, and through that jealousy more devoted; instead of drawing Prosser's affections more strongly to her, as he had meant to do, had he not succeeded only in drawing them from her? For Prosser, once well roused, once well jealous, had completely dropped Dorothy, and was now apparently consoling himself with the charms of Edith Barclay, a pretty little pink-and-white girl of a type that Franklin secretly despised.

In the midst of these thoughts he was conscious that Dorothy was bowing to someone. He was just in time to catch Edith Barclay's radiant smile and nod and to see Prosser's rather stiff bow as they brushed past him and Dorothy. He bit his upper lip fiercely and glanced down at his companion. Her face had flushed swiftly. A strange, miserable thrill came over Franklin and stopped and stuck with a dull little ache at his throat. His heart beat heavily.

What a miserable affair it all was! And to think that he had been the means of bringing unhappiness to her for whose least happiness he felt he would so gladly lay down his life. She never spoke to him nowadays of Tom Prosser! His face stiffened and the lines deepened about his mouth. There came to him with intense bitterness the thought that she was wasting her love on a man fickle enough to transfer his affections, almost at a moment's notice, to a girl, in no wise her equal, and for mere jealousy's sake. He noticed, with the same dull ache at his throat, the absent smile with which she greeted his occasional remarks. For her very pride's sake he dared not sympathise or speak to her of it. He walked beside her, realising that in that month he had learnt to love more dearly than he had ever loved before, than he would ever love again.

They had reached her home. He went slowly up the steps behind her and followed her absently into the library. The library had grown to be such a familiar, dear place to him. It was so natural for him to be there with her. She stood idly by a great mahogany table, pulling off her gloves. He stood beside her, looking down at her absently. She removed her hat and ran the hat pins through it.

"Deadly weapons!" she said lightly, drawing one out and running it back again. He held out his hand, not noticing.

"I suppose I must say good-bye?"

"Well, of course, the month is up," she said, without taking his hand.

"Yes, thank Heaven!" he answered.

She raised her brows slightly, and turned her head with a pretty, bird-like movement which brought him quickly to his senses.

"You know perfectly well why I'm glad," he said doggedly.

"No, I don't," she said lightly; "but, at any rate, it is hopelessly ungracious of you. During the month under my training you really ought to have learnt some tact. I am afraid the month has been of no use."

"You know I can't help saying what I mean," he said almost under his breath; "only, this time you have said it for me. You are right, the month has been of no use."

She coloured quickly up to the soft brown hair lying close to her temples.

"Yes," he hurried on; "you've got to let me speak of it. I know I've only hindered, not helped, you. I know I have only brought grief to you, whom to spare the slightest grief—you know what I mean. Don't try to misunderstand me"—for her eyes were wide and his lips opened slightly. "I have made him jealous just as you wanted I should."

"Yes?" she said, as though waiting for him to continue.

"Yes, and you know what I mean—you know just what a mess I've made of it. I've overdone it; it has gone too far.

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And I didn't have the honest decency to get out of it long ago!"

"What do you mean?" she said very gently, still running the hat pin in and out.

"Oh, you will make me say it, will you?" he said fiercely, and gaining courage now that her eyes were lowered. "Well, I've made him too jealous, and now, like the fool he is, he doesn't care a fig for you."

She raised her eyes, glanced thoughtfully about the room from one thing to another, then at last her glance found his, and she smiled.

"Why, of course he doesn't," she said gently, "and I am glad. That is just it."

"Oh, you brave little thing!" he said, with a thrill of pity in his voice. He had a strong impulse to stoop and fold her closely in his arms. "Don't I know how brave you are! Haven't I seen you trying! But, my dear, a man—you can't deceive a man of my experience."

"I see now what you mean," she said thoughtfully, after a long pause. "And you really thought I loved him? You really thought his waning love was breaking my heart?"

She sat down on the arm of a little low chair, then she looked up at him brightly and continued:

"Why, don't you know, if I wanted Tom's love now, it would take ten, perhaps fifteen minutes to get it back. That is just why I asked your help—because I did not love him—because I do not love him—because I—I love someone else. You see," she hurried on, "I wanted to let him down as easily as possible. I knew the best way to do that was to touch his feelings, to rouse his pride, to make him jealous. I have heard him say he considered it beneath a man's dignity to fight chances with another man for love. He does not love me now; no, of course not; nor does he suffer; that is better still."

She paused. Jim Franklin was looking down at her with a peculiar, half dazed look. She laughed lightly.

"It is so funny! And you thought I wanted you to help me make him jealous so he should love me more. Ah, but that would have been so superfluous, for at that time he was loving me with a changeless and eternal love, you know."

Jim did not answer; he did not even see the funny side of it all, nor smile. He had dropped down into a big armchair, and sat with his head bent. When he looked up his face was white and tired.

"I see," he said slowly; "I am a fool. I am glad I was so mistaken. I can't imagine how I ever thought you need try to win any man's love. But it doesn't much matter. Things are no better as they are. And after all, the month has been of no use—to me, at least. You have accomplished your purpose, and—you love someone else; and I—you know what I mean. I have no purpose now the month is up. You know—you have known since the night of the Cavendishs' ball. In helping let another fellow down easily, I've cut myself pretty badly, that's all. Don't say anything, please!"—as she began to speak. "I won't permit you to say anything. I won't make it hard for you. I know it would pain you to hurt a fly. If you were anxious to let down easily a man who could forget you like that, I won't bother you with myself. Good-bye! You must not think I suffer so much. And yet"—he folded her hand in both his—"and yet, Dorothy, you must know I can't help suffering deeply. I can stand it—just for the sake of loving you. Don't worry over a fellow like me. Good-bye, dear." He stooped and pressed his lips to her hand and left her.

Astonished and dismayed, she stood with the colour dying out of her hot cheeks. For an instant only she was irresolute, then with a swift movement she followed him, reached him just as with bent head he was stepping into the hall, and with a quick, girlish impulse took his hand and led him back into the library.

"You shouldn't have blundered so badly, and you were stupid, of course, not to see, but I don't mind. I've not given you the contract yet; you must have that back before you go."

Her perfect self-control seemed leaving her. It was he who was perfectly calm now. She sat down at the escritoire and unlocked the drawer, and took from it the paper.

"You were to be released to-day."

She was signing her name hurriedly.

"There is no use releasing me. I understand—I know I am no longer needed." Taking the paper she handed to him, he began slowly to tear it.

"Oh, don't!" she pleaded, stopping him. "Read it over first."

"And be released, and then try to forget everything," he said bitterly.

He opened the paper and glanced over it.

"*Lent: To Dorothy Marshall for a period of one month, beginning on May Day, the undivided affection of James R. Franklin. Which is herewith returned.*—"DOROTHY MARSHALL."

"Ah, Dorothy," he said, turning to her passionately, "what need of releasing me! For I shall never be free again! Yet for your happiness I shall try to forget. But at my years—a man of my——"

"Oh," she gasped, half laughing, "but don't you *see*? Oh, you *are* stupid. Don't you see?"

There were tears in her voice.

He glanced over the paper more carefully, then keenly at her an instant. The tears had followed swiftly into her eyes.

Then a sudden light came into his face, and he took her in his arms.

"Oh, Dorothy!" he said, kissing her many times.

Ralph Burdett Elliott.

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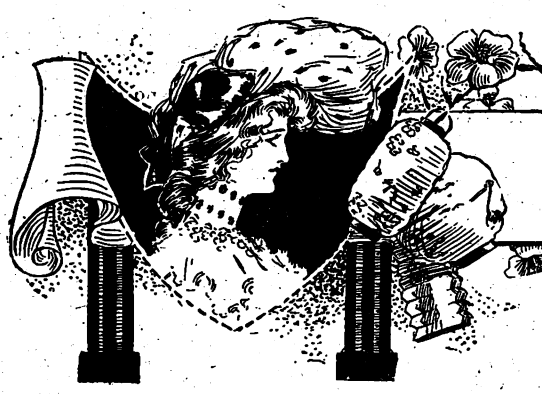

A BID FOR FORTUNE.

Telling How a Clever Scheme was Frustrated.

"THERE seems to be too much work on this job; it isn't worth the trouble."

The speaker threw away the half-smoked cigar in disgust. He was about twenty-five; he had an attractive appearance, and was called good-looking by some and handsome by others. To those better acquainted with human nature, however, there was at times a something in his face that tended to mar the first impression. His name was Lester Mayle, and he was in the company of two other men, one of whom was near enough his own age, while the other was forty at least.

"Not enough in it?" echoed the older man, John Waller. "Well, it means five hundred pounds between three of us, and that's equal to three pounds a week for a whole year. If this thing takes a month to work, we can lie low for the next eleven. That's good enough for me!"

"I'd be satisfied," said the third man quietly. His name was Harry Bennett. "But Lester is more aristocratic. I say, my boy, can you do anything better for the present? That's the question, as Shakespeare says!"

Lester Mayle twisted the ends of his moustache impatiently. "I suppose I cannot," he observed, after a pause. "Yet I feel like higher game than this. Well, it comes to this: Harold Gainsford fetches the cash from the bank on Friday afternoons in order to pay the men at the boot factory where he is assistant manager; every fourth week the amount is heavier, it is five hundred instead of four hundred, because certain salaries have also to be paid and other current monthly expenses met. We take him in hand on the fourth Friday, and relieve him of his burden!"

"That's it," said Waller complacently. "It is easy enough, but the time and trouble necessary to carry out the task come in through finding out the details and in waiting for the most favourable Friday. That's all. You're too impatient, Lester."

"On the whole, you have had less work to do than either of us," interposed Bennett, just a little tartly. "You have had the easy part of discovering details connected with the banking arrangements of the firm, which you could do with your aristocratic appearance; but we have had to loaf about and make arrangements under less easy conditions."

"Then I ought to have the lion's share of the spoil!" laughed Mayle grimly. "I have an aristocratic appearance to keep up."

Bennett would have retorted angrily, but Waller interposed: "That will do. Lester has a fit of the blues to-day; they are growing quite common. Each man does his work and shares with the others. Let us have a game of cards."

Lester sat moodily staring at nothing through the window of the hotel. All three men were well dressed and would have passed for men endowed with fair means. They were living in good style, and they calculated that their money would hold out long enough for their purpose. They had changed their lodgings during the "investigation period," as Waller termed it, more than once, going from town to village and so forth, in order to conceal their doings. Mayle looked up with a bored expression as Waller began to handle the pack.

"You two can play, I don't care about it. Look here, are we bound to stay in Northampton any longer? Haven't we collected all the data we want? At any rate, I think I have done all I can do, and we must wait a solid week. Can't we look round elsewhere?"

"Exactly," replied Waller. "Bennett and I have a little more to do, but we can leave to-morrow. Then we make our appearance on the scene again on Friday next; we meet at the appointed spot at the appointed time."

"I'll wait till then," said Mayle, picking up a London morning paper. "I've got a hazy scheme floating in my head which may bring us more money than this. You chaff me about aristocracy, but I am connected with a titled family, and it occurs to me that there may be something to be got out of it."

He began to read, but within two minutes he laid the newspaper down with a whistle.

"Look here, you fellows," he cried. "Sir James Langford, Baronet, is lying dangerously ill; so is his son; and both are suffering from blood-poisoning, due to something eaten at a foreign hotel. They have just come back from the Continent, and were taken ill on the way."

"What's Sir James Langford to do with us?" asked Waller.

"Just this," went on Mayle. "Neither father nor son is likely to recover; it's about a hundred to one against it, according to this paper. There are no other sons, and—and the successor to the baronetcy will be a son of another branch. *I* am a son of another branch, but I know that there is someone in front of me, if he is still alive! Query: Is he still alive?"

"What's it worth? Is the family rich?" demanded Waller.

The players had thrown their cards on the table at this interesting intelligence, and gazed curiously at Mayle, who was in a brown study. His brows were knit; he was searching the recesses of his memory. Presently he banged his fist on the table with an exclamation which need not be reproduced.

"It's a strange coincidence, but I feel positive of it!" he cried. "That clerk, Harold Gainsford, must be the next-of-kin! And I come after him. I wonder if he knows it? I wonder if any of them know it just off-hand?"

"Pity it isn't you!" growled Bennett. "What's the rent-roll?"

"Ten to twelve thousand a year!" said Lester Mayle, as coolly as he could, looking meaningly at Bennett. "If I were only the next-of-kin instead of being next after that!"

"Oh, well, it's no use worrying about it. It's your luck, said Bennett, picking up the cards again. "Perhaps they won't die, after all."

"Perhaps not," agreed Mayle, with additional moodiness, but there had been a rapid exchange of glances between him and Bennett which had escaped Waller's notice

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The game ended, Bennett said he would go for a stroll; it was a cold night, bitterly cold, but it would freshen him up before going to bed. Waller expressed his intention of going into the smoking-room, while Mayle said he would go to his room and might go out for a stretch in a few minutes. Thus it came about that Bennett and Mayle met in a quiet street outside the hotel.

"Well?" inquired Bennett significantly.

Lester Mayle glanced round fearfully.

"If it should turn out as I think, and the Baronet and his son should die, then Harold Gainsford would take the title, changing his name to Langford," returned Mayle, "unless——"

He paused. His lips were dry; he had never dared to go so far as this, even in thought. Robbery and swindling were his limits, so far.

"Unless, in the scuffle that ensues next Friday, he gets an unlucky knock on the head?" concluded Bennett. "Well, he might get one, if I were paid well enough for it! What's it worth?"

"It would have to be done very cautiously," declared Mayle, with pallid face.

"What's it worth?" demanded Bennett impatiently. "*I* say five thousand a year for three years!"

Mayle protested that it was too much, and Bennett turned fiercely upon him.

"Then do it yourself. Think it over, and decide to-morrow."

They parted, for the simple reason that Bennett left his accomplice. Mayle pondered the matter; he did not sleep a wink, but tossed about in bed, thinking it over. He saw all that it meant; riches and ease, instead of plotting and scheming with the police ever in the background, and a prison just a little more in the background. As he meditated, his fears left him; the plan seemed to be safer and easier, and when he met Bennett again his mind was made up. It was a contract. It only remained for Mayle to ascertain that Harold Gainsford was really the successor, and to see if the Baronet and his son died.

Mayle went up to town and made inquiries; he returned on Tuesday, satisfied that there was no hope of the son's recovery, and very little chance of the father getting over it. As for Harold Gainsford, his kinship was also certain.

Already the newspapers were speaking of the missing heir, for the history of the different ramifications was not so well-known to others as to Mayle, who had traded on his relationship for the purpose of getting various sums of money from the Baronet.

All Mayle's scruples had disappeared; he was cool and collected once more, and entered into details with Bennett as calmly as if planning a trip to Brighton. Waller was the obstacle, but Bennett undertook to take him in hand. Waller was likely to be squeamish.

"So that's settled," said Bennett. "Waller will be off with the cash, while we attend to the man."

But the best laid plans go wrong, and something happened which had not been foreseen.

That very evening Mayle slipped over a piece of orange-peel carelessly thrown on the frosty pavement; he fell heavily and broke one of the small bones of the left leg. He was taken to the infirmary, where he was detained. And that piece of orange-peel changed the destinies of several persons.

His leg was set and bandaged by a surgeon, who gave him a sleeping draught. In the morning he felt better; the pain had almost disappeared, and his chief discomfort was that he would be confined to his bed for three weeks or so—and how would his plan go on? Bennett, on receiving a message, visited him, and assured him that all would be well.

"Waller will help me, as you are laid aside; don't fear," he said.

Mayle settled down to wait, it having been arranged that neither Bennett nor Waller should visit him again lest suspicion should attach to Mayle after the—the event of Friday.

Mayle found the time hang heavily, but he tried to pass it comfortably by day-dreaming. He had no mind for reading. What a change it would be when he was Sir Lester Mayle Langford, Baronet. It pleased him, delighted him. He forgot all the probable awkward points, and thought only of the advantages. He would marry——

"Are you comfortable?" asked a sweet voice by his side, and he turned with a start to see a young nurse standing at the bedside.

"I knew you were not asleep," she told him, with a smile. I saw your eyes opening and shutting occasionally, and I thought you were dull or uncomfortable. Can I do anything for you?"

"No, thank you, nurse!" he replied in a hesitating voice.

How sweet she looked, and what a soothing voice she had! She was a born "ministering angel." The face was not beautiful; some would have felt disinclined to describe it as even moderately pretty; yet it had a charm all its own. She seemed to bring peace with her.

"Let me shake your pillow," she said; "it makes it so much more comfortable!"

She raised his head and turned the pillow, after shaking it up a little. Only those who have spent days in bed know how soothing is this simple process. Nurse Rodney understood.

"Shall I read a little to you?" she inquired. "We have less than our complement of patients here now, and I am not busy just at present."

It was so pleasant to listen to her voice that, although he did not wish to hear anything read, he answered in the affirmative, because he liked to hear the sound of her voice.

So she read to him, and he was sad when she left his bedside. He watched for her to come round the ward, and his eyes followed her wherever she went. She noticed his attention, and it pleased her to think that she was soothing his pain—for, in order to enlist her sympathy and get her often to his side, he had pretended that his leg did cause him pain and great discomfort at times.

When she retired from duty and gave place to a night nurse, he turned over in vexation at the nature of things and went to sleep. He was surprised to find what a hold she had obtained over him and how empty everything appeared when she was gone!

He looked for her in the morning, and she came to him as soon as she entered the ward, asking him if he were feeling better.

"Yes," he replied, his face brightening. "I shall soon get well if you could stay here all day!"

"Oh!" she laughed merrily. "What would the other patients do?"

"They do not want you as I do!" he said warmly. "It does me so much good to have you near me. You are so good yourself that—well, it makes me feel that I am a bad lot!" He blurted out the last clause before he was aware of it.

She had moved towards the foot of the bed during the first portion of this short speech, believing that he was about to pay some compliment to her appearance, but she returned on hearing the finish.

"I hardly think that you are treating yourself fairly in saying that!" she remarked gravely. "Of course, not one of us is as good as he or she ought to be, and you must not speak as if I were entirely good and you were entirely bad. Now, you must rest! I will come again soon."

She saw that he was agitated and she left him.

"It's true!" muttered Mayle sadly. "I see it now that I am face to face with a woman who is good! I've been a bad lot, and how can I expect to make a girl like that love me? Many girls would marry for a title, but she wouldn't! She's too good to do that! Well, I'll enjoy her society while it lasts, and then—oh, then I'll go my own way!"

He laughed mirthlessly, and looked about once more for the sweet-faced, sweet-voiced, sweet-tempered nurse!

She came to him several times, and he engaged her in conversation. She asked him questions about himself, following his example in this, for he had put leading inquiries to her. He could not tell her much, and he concealed his

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family history so far as the baronetcy was concerned. She was an orphan. And so the day passed, and Mayle remembered with a start that the following day was Friday, the all-important day for him!

He slept fitfully that Thursday night, and he felt sorry when morning came, for he half-dreaded to meet those tender eyes of Nurse Rodney! He tried to hide the fact from himself, but he could not! He was guilty of plotting to rob and kill a fellow-creature for his own advancement! How could he face this girl?

She came to him, just as sweet as ever, and he steeled himself against the reproaches of his own conscience so that he might enjoy her society. She was impelled towards him

"I had forgotten that I still had it on!"

He stifled a pang of jealousy that shot through his heart.

"You must tell me about him! We are good friends, yet you have not told me that!" he cried.

"Oh, there is nothing to tell!" she smiled in reply.

"But I want to know his name and something about him!" he urged. It seemed to him that he had a right to know. "Please tell me!"

She told him, just to pacify him. "His name is Harold Gainsford," she said, "and he is assistant manager in a boot factory in one of the places outside Northampton, about half a dozen miles away, you know. That is all!"

All! Heavens, was not that too much? Harold Gainsford, the man whose death he was encompassing, was this girl's affianced husband! He, Lester Mayle, who had learnt to revere this girl for her goodness, was bringing desolation upon her!

She waved the flaming newspaper on high, to attract the attention of the driver of the on-coming express.

by a subtle power which she could not then understand, but which she afterwards recognised as that of the Divinity that shapes our ends, as Shakespeare puts it. She read to him; it was short, but a pathetically beautiful story of doing right at all hazards, and he realised that the girl who sat near him was one of those who would act thus. "And what of me?" he asked himself; in reply there rose in his mind the picture of the brutal attack on Harold Gainsford!

As she rose to leave him, he caught sight of a ring on the third finger of her left hand.

"You are engaged?" he queried involuntarily.

She blushed rosily, and slipped off the ring.

"I do not usually wear it when on duty," she explained.

She hurried away from him, and he lay in his bed a prey to the most terrible feelings. If he allowed Gainsford to be sent to his doom? And yet, how could he prevent it without laying himself open to a charge of attempted murder? And could he save Gainsford, even if he were prepared to suffer himself?

She did not come near him again till after dinner, and then it was to chide him for not eating his portion.

"I believe you were sulking because I didn't come!" she said, holding up a warning finger.

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"Do you know if Sir James Langford and his son are recovering?" he asked suddenly. "You have seen the case in the papers?"

"Both have succumbed!" said the girl, shaking her head sadly. "It is dreadful, is it not?"

No reply. Mayle was thinking. If the son had lived and the title had not gone to Harold Gainsford, he (Mayle) might have tried to stop the crime; but now! A big rent-roll and ease awaited him!

Ease? He glanced at the girl, and there flashed across his mind the thought of what it would mean to her. How could he expect ease when he would be for ever haunted by that face? He seemed to see her pointing him out as a murderer! He shrank from her, and she noticed the movement.

"What is it?" she asked.

"This," he cried suddenly. "Harold Gainsford will be attacked on his way from the bank with the money this afternoon! I am one of those concerned in the crime! He will be robbed, then killed!"

A scream of fear came from her lips.

"Oh, what is this you are saying? Tell me, tell me! Oh, Harold!"

He told her all, as she knelt by his bedside. It was nearly three o'clock; the winter day was drawing to a close and darkness was falling. Harold would be on his way back to the factory on his bicycle, and he would meet this awful fate. In the light of present knowledge, it seemed like tempting Fate for him to do this bank business alone, yet he had done it for more than a year, and nobody had dreamt of danger. It was exactly the fact of this assumed security which had given Mayle and his accomplices their opportunity.

"I must try to save him!" she panted, pressing her hands to her side. "I will try, I will try! Harold, my Harold!"

Like a flash she was gone. Out in the bleak air, clad only in her simple nurse's costume, and after a hasty word to the matron, she sped towards the spot indicated by Mayle. Hurry as she might, she could not reach it under an hour; she would be too late to avert the tragedy, she was forced to realise that, but she went on, on! Perhaps she might find him alive!

At length, footsore and exhausted, she reached the place She could find no trace of Harold, so she went on in the direction he must take, which was towards the railway. In a bend of the road she came upon the damaged bicycle, but Harold was not there! With eyes that burnt for lack of the tears that would not come, she passed on. Over the low stile that kept people from the railway line and on the track. She knew that Harold had avoided a long detour sometimes by lifting his machine over this stile. By the side of the metals she gazed up and down the track in the darkness, and her heart stood still as she saw some dark object lying right in the four-foot way! A moment later she was kneeling by this object. It was Harold, insensible, his body right across the metals of the up-line! And in the distance she heard the faint sound that denoted the approach of the up-express from Rugby.

Harold was alive, but death in another form awaited him. She tried to lift him, but he was a strong, heavy young man, and he lay like a log! She herself, never muscular, was now exhausted by her hurried journey and by grief. She found her strength unavailing—and the train was coming, coming! She could hear the noise a little more distinctly!

With a cry of despair she sprang up. A newspaper lay near the track, dropped probably by Harold's assailants. An idea had seized her!

She usually carried a box of wax matches with her. She struck a match, set light to the newspaper, and waved it aloft, standing right in the track.

The driver of the on-coming train, keeping a good look-out, saw a strange light suddenly spring into life right in his path. He put on the screw, and it seemed to him that there was borne to him on the wind that beat against the engine the appeal:

"Stop! Oh, stop!"

The train was brought to a standstill within a few yards of Harold's inanimate figure. The passengers got out of the carriages, and the utmost consternation prevailed for a few moments. It looked like attempted suicide, but Florrie Rodney tottered up and gave her explanation.

"We will take you two to Northampton Station and give you over to the station master!" said the guard. And this was done.

Harold was alive and very little hurt. He had been knocked senseless and then dragged on to the line. His death would have appeared to be suicide through fearing to face the consequences of losing the money. It was a clever scheme, but it was frustrated by the influence of a good woman over a bad man, and by the heroic conduct of that woman.

Bennett and Waller were never caught, but the money was quickly replaced by Harold Gainsford when he came into the Langford baronetcy. Mayle was the only one who suffered; he ought to have been prosecuted for attempted murder, but both Harold and his sweetheart thought that repentance was worth something, so they allowed it to be supposed that Mayle was concerned only in the robbery. They would have liked to get him off the consequences of that piece of wickedness, but the law stepped in. However, Mayle got off lightly with twelve months' imprisonment, and when he was liberated, he received from Sir Harold and Lady Langford a sum of money that gave him a fresh start in another country, and they promised him an annuity if he lived well.

The engine driver, too, came in for a gratuity that made him stare, but Sir Harold and his sweet wife thought that he should be well rewarded for his promptitude in paying heed to the strange signal.

G. Merriam.

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"Oh, Ralph, all afternoon? One whole afternoon all alone without a soul in this terrible place to talk to——"

"Can't you read, dear?"

"Yes, and make my eyes and head ache. It's perfectly provoking of your brother to fall ill just while we're on our honeymoon. He should have more consideration. Ralph, there's the carriage; you'll whip up the horses, dear, won't you? Oh——" and the poor little bride was alone, with the prospect of a lonely afternoon to herself; which prospect, in a large hotel in a town where one doesn't know a soul, and when one is on one's honeymoon, is not an enviable one, as any unbiassed person will admit. The bride of three weeks sat down in a hopeless sort of way on the broad verandah overlooking the hotel grounds. She wearily turned over the list of guests, which an attentive waiter had put into her hand, without the least sign of interest in its contents. Suddenly an exclamation escaped her.

"Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Lonsdale!" she said, half aloud. "Mrs. Lonsdale! So that is the reason of his silence, and here I've been tormenting myself about him—picturing his grief at my fickleness, his anger, his despair—only to find him married, in the same hotel in which I am spending my honeymoon. Oh, Cliff, what a goose I've been to spoil my new happiness by worrying over you! I might have known that the affection of light grey eyes and fair hair wouldn't stand the test of a two years' absence from the beloved object, any more than—than a schoolgirl of seventeen knows when she is really in love. What fun it will be to meet him! Some confusion on both sides—mutual congratulations—'Allow me to present my wife'—'Mr. Lonsdale, my husband'—perfectly glorious! Oh, I can see it all!" And leaning back in her chair, Edith shut her eyes as if to enjoy the scene in her mind's eye.

When she opened them again the look of amused enjoyment gave place to one of surprise, for a few paces away from her, leisurely smoking a cigar, stood unmistakably the man of her thoughts. She started up. Turning at the sound, the object of her gaze beheld the girl whom of all persons on earth he was least anxious to see. Edith stepped towards him with outstretched hands.

"Why, Clifford Lonsdale!"

"Miss Noble!"

While on her face was a look of pleasure, and a gleam of mischief, too, on his was expressed amazement mingled with embarrassment. Her quick eye and ear took in the situation at once.

"I've the advantage of you, dear old chum!" was her mental ejaculation. "I know your little secret, and mine is safe—until Ralph comes back." Mr. Lonsdale, hastily throwing away his cigar, took her proferred hand, while the embarrassment deepened on his face as she gave his hand a soft pressure, and said with a well-feigned little accent of tenderness: "Oh, Cliff, I cannot tell you how glad I am to see you!"

"Why, Edith, who in the world would have thought of seeing you here?" he managed to exclaim.

"And who you, sir? I'm overcome with astonishment. But I'm perfectly delighted to see you, too. I'm all alone this afternoon. My guardian angel"—"if he wants to think I mean my chaperon, it's not my fault," she whispered to her conscience—"had to go and see an invalid brother, and I didn't know what I could do to pass the time. But now that Fate has so kindly sent you in my way, you must, you positively must amuse me. And to think that I haven't seen you for three whole years! I've so much to tell you and ask you that it will take hours! And these beautiful grounds have just the loveliest places, where we can be all to ourselves. Do you see that large tree? Let's go there."

Lonsdale helplessly followed the pretty tyrant, with a remorseful thought of his bride left alone upstairs with a blinding headache. He turned to his companion with an excuse at the end of his tongue, but now she was tripping ahead with the airy grace of a nymph, and crying gaily: "Hurry up, Cliff! Do come and look! Here are some of the dearest little ducks. See, aren't they sweet?"

Her clear, silver laugh rang out with the musical ring he remembered so well, when the girl before him was a budding woman of seventeen, and he a slender youth of twenty, her devoted slave. The excuse died on his lips, and he joined in her laugh, as the mother duck, with angry, startled quacks, led her seminary of downy ducklings away to the pond, gleaming silver blue through the trees.

"Edith, you are as much a child as ever. I thought three years would surely make a young lady of you."

"Never! I shall never be anything but a child, I fear. But come, sit down by me here," and then, as he sat down on the rustic bench beside her, "doesn't it seem like old times to be together once more? Now I am prepared to hear all the news. Pray tell me, sir, what have you been doing for the past three years—since I bade you a tearful farewell?"

With genuine interest she followed the recital of his varied experiences—battles hardly won, obstacles overcome with difficulty, and ultimate success; while Lonsdale forgot time, place, circumstances, everything in the pleasure of answering her eager questions, and in asking news of old scenes and mutual friends. She told him the history of her life during his three years' absence, carefully omitting all that might lead him to suspect a change in her circumstances. As often as he attempted to lead up to the fact of his marriage, with her quick woman's intuition of what was coming, she interrupted him with another question. Never had she been so gay, so animated, and it was without effort, too, for she really delighted in living over the past in company with her handsome old playmate.

For some time their talk was merely such as might have passed between any two old friends, and they both enjoyed it thoroughly; but Edith did not intend to let her old sweetheart off without some punishment. Seeing his careful avoidance of tender topics, she interrupted him in a description of life in South Africa, and with a sudden change of tone, said:

"Yes, Cliff, you men have much the best of it in a case of

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this kind." What kind he was left to infer. "When you are compelled to leave the girl you like, though it may be a wrench at first, you have so much to do and to think about, your lives are so full, that you have but little time to grieve; while we poor women have to stay at home with no absorbing work to bury ourselves and our troubles in, with nothing to do but to count the minutes and wish they would fly faster. Now, while you have been out in a far-off land, like Ulysses, winning wealth and glory (and a coat of tan, too, Cliff, which is very becoming!) I, like poor, patient Penelope have been spinning——"

"Yarns, I'll wager!" he interrupted, laughingly, "for they're the only things I ever heard of your spinning."

She joined in his laugh, but added severely:

"Your levity is unseemly, sir, when it spoils such a fine comparison. But, seriously, I do wonder sometimes," she went on, getting pathetic, "how I have stood the last three years—without you, I mean. But I don't believe you have cared one bit, Cliff!" And she shot a challenge from her blue eyes into his grey ones.

"Edith!" He was about to add a hasty remonstrance, when the realisation of his position came to him, and he remained silent.

"You say 'Edith' just as you used to say it when I tormented you so, when we were—children. I never used to like my name until you told me you thought it pretty. Then, whenever you would say it, I used to think it was the very prettiest name in the world."

She said all this with a little droop of her head which struck a chill to Clifford Lonsdale's heart. The conversation was plainly becoming dangerous. What should he do? Edith evidently believed in the reality of his attachment for her, and meant to resume their relations at the point where they had been broken off when he went to South Africa, to seek the fortune which was to win the favour of her guardian. A year's absence had calmed his youthful ardour, and six months' companionship with the pretty daughter of his employer had given rise to another attachment which he realised was the grand passion of his manhood, and not the impulsive affection of youth. There had been no correspondence between himself and Edith, according to the mandate of her guardian. It would have been an easy matter to write her the news of his marriage, but to tell it to her with her eyes looking into his was a task before which he quailed. If she still loved him, how could he bear to see her radiant face overclouded by the story of his faithlessness?

He stole a look at her, and his heart failed him. She was sitting on a root of the tree now, her hands at her side lightly touching the tree, and one little arched foot idly drawing figures on the ground, while a smile curved her rosy, wilful mouth. She wore a dark blue skirt, and a pretty blue and white blouse; this, with a blue walking hat and natty leather belt, completed a rather masculine costume, which suited to perfection the trim, slender figure.

The sunlight glittered through the branches, and gleamed upon her bronze-coloured hair, which waved in a wealth of ripples about her small, well-shaped head.

Clifford felt the old witchery coming over him, when suddenly he seemed to see the picture of a dear form, tall and willowy; one who, womanly in everything, never affected the mannish mode of dressing, but preferred soft, clinging stuffs and dainty laces; one who was the light and happiness of his life. In place of the imperious, dark-blue eyes he seemed to see a pair of warm brown ones, whose every glance told of a tender, affectionate nature. Then he said with a good deal of emphasis:

"I think it is one of the sweetest names in the world."

"*One* of the sweetest? You used to say it was the very sweetest. Now, Cliff, I believe someone has wheedled you into saying *her* name is the sweetest. Villain, speak!" with mock tragedy.

He felt that his opportunity had come.

"Well, you see, after the senior partner came out to Johannesburg I used to go to his house a good deal, and he—you see, had a daughter, and——"

"I thought so! What was *her* name, please?"

"Dorothy."

"So! And you consider that name prettier than Edith? I don't admire your taste, sir! Do you remember the verses you scribbled in my autograph book?"

His golden opportunity for confession was lost, and he looked down at her in a disheartened sort of way, as he answered abstractedly:

"No, I've forgotten them."

Her eyes glanced up at him with a world of reproach in their blue depths.

"Have you really, Cliff? And they were so pretty."

He felt compunction seize him.

"Oh, yes, I do remember them now!" he interrupted. "Don't they go something like this?—

> "*She who comes to me and pleadeth,*
> *In the lovely name of Edith,*
> *Shall not fail of what is wanted.*
> *Edith means 'the blessed'—therefore*
> *All that she may wish or care for*
> *Will, when best for her, be granted.*"

"There, I knew you couldn't have forgotten them. Aren't they pretty? I'm so glad my name means 'the blessed'; and really"—her face lighted up—"it seems to fit in my case, now, at any rate; for I have always wished to travel, and here I am in this beautiful place, with the one I care for most on earth!"

Her eyes glowed, and Lonsdale, not dreaming that she might refer to anyone but himself, was stricken with horror at having allowed her to make such a confession. He nerved himself with an effort, but Edith, pitying his confusion, and feeling that she had gone so far that explanations must inevitably follow unless she made a diversion, rose hurriedly, and said:

"Listen, Cliff! Don't you hear the dinner gong?"

Cliff did not, nor did she, but without waiting for his answer, she hurried towards the hotel. Lonsdale, reviling his evil genius, followed her. She had used this ruse as a means of escape, and felt rather conscience-stricken for the trick; but in a moment all qualms vanished, for in a carriage just entering the courtyard she perceived her husband. At the same moment Lonsdale, glancing towards the verandah, saw his wife seated at one end, alone. She looked in calm surprise at him and the girl at his side. Edith, noting the look, smiled to herself, and turning quickly to Lonsdale, said, with a meaning glance towards the verandah:

"You'd better hurry, Cliff; your wife is waiting for you!"

He started with amazement.

"You knew, then?"

"Yes. Wasn't I clever to mislead you so?" Then, after another glance at Mrs. Lonsdale: "Really, Cliff, I must admire your taste. She is as sweet as—honey. I'm awfully glad for your sake, Cliff; let me congratulate you."

With a world of relief on his face, Lonsdale warmly grasped the hand she held out, but flushed hotly at her next words.

"I'm very pleased and all that, you know, but I think you might have let me know before. How long since?"—with another interrogatory glance.

He stammered.

"Not very long—a few weeks—we're on our honeymoon now——"

"Why, how odd!" she exclaimed in mock surprise. "Two bridegrooms in the same hotel! Do you see that tall, handsome man just getting out of that carriage? Well, he's on his honeymoon, too."

"Very odd!" Clifford began, when a look at her roguish face stopped him, and he finished by saying: "Why, Edith, you little hypocrite! I really believe you are—you must be——"

A wave of crimson swept over her face, and she hastened towards the man who had just alighted from the carriage; but as Lonsdale stood staring after her, with perplexity written on every line of his face, she threw a charming look over her shoulder at him.

"You're right, I am," she said.

Nancy Leigh.

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ENTIRELY RECONCILED.

Being the Most Interesting Love Story of Esther Remington.

ESTHER REMINGTON stood before her long mirror, the picture of dejection. Evidently her thoughts were not of the charming reflection centred in its clear depths, and yet the slender, erect figure, in its close-fitting, satin gown, with filmy lace forming delicate shadows on the round arms and neck, was very pleasant to contemplate. But the proud face, with its daintily pencilled eyebrows and clear, grey eyes fringed with heavy lashes, had an air of weariness and sadness. Yet it was only three months since Esther Vane had stood in all the splendour of this very attire, and pronounced the words which made her Arthur Remington's wife.

The door was opened with noisy haste, and a young man entered.

"I forgot everything about this confounded party, Esther," he began in hurried explanation. "I see you are dressed, but you know it never takes me long to get ready." And Mr. Remington commenced the preparations for his toilet.

"We shall be rather late, I think," his wife responded, without turning towards him; but there was a tremulous resentment in the manner with which she clasped the wide band of gold upon her arm.

"It's a terrible bore, I know, this party-going," said her husband. "I always thought you women liked arriving at 'sensation time,'" he added carelessly; "but then—I can see that you have the bad taste to be 'huffy' again this evening," as Esther maintained silence.

She confronted him with flashing eyes.

"I certainly should not go at this late hour," she said in proud disdain, "except that it might appear a trifle odd to be absent from an entertainment given especially in honour of our marriage."

"At least you can decline all such invitations in the future," her husband coolly retorted. "You know I do not care for parties and balls—indeed, they are almost new in my experience."

"You would rather stay at home with a nasty old book, I suppose."

"I certainly should. Our own fireside is good enough for me."

"But I like society. I have been accustomed to it all my life."

"That is unfortunate, for mother and I entertain very little. It's no use, Esther—you can't make a society man of me. If you want to go to social functions you must provide yourself with another escort." And with a laugh Remington deliberately proceeded to arrange his tie.

Poor Esther! She walked proudly into the next room and threw herself upon the pretty blue lounge, regardless alike of lace, flowers, and daintily-dressed hair. But there were no tears—only miserable thoughts that filled her heart almost to bursting, and took away the power to draw long breaths. She had looked forward almost with a child's pleasure to this evening, and now it was spoilt by the words just spoken.

But it would not do to think just now. Her husband was ready, and the ordeal must be got over somehow; and she must personate the happy bride. A wretched evening it proved to her, for Arthur made no attempt to conceal the fact that he was bored, and to please him she proposed an early departure. All the happiness of her life was over already, she thought, as they rolled silently homeward in the carriage. And she had given up the old free home life, and come miles and miles away from the dear home faces, to meet only coldness and neglect.

Oh, how she detested this new home, where the watch-word of life seemed work, with never any amusement except some dismal lecture or literary reunion equally tedious! And her husband—how changed he was since those happy days at Rusper, when they first met and loved each other. Already he was accustomed to receive her affection and ministrations as ordinary events, while in her own home it was always she who had received homage and attention.

All this Esther Remington went over in her mind, with a sense of distress working at her heart as she thought of the future that was to be so different from the life she had planned.

Where was the lover-husband with the constant, devoted attentions that had begun with their courtship?

But she knew the cause of it all. It was that stern woman whom she now called mother. It was so different from the "happy-go-lucky" life of her maiden home. Here it was breakfast at seven, dinner at one, tea at six, and to get three meals well over seemed the chief business of the day.

When her husband's mother prepared to wash the china and polish the silver, Esther offered rather timidly to assist in these duties; Mrs. Remington accepted her services, but did not veil her contempt of the inefficiency with which the task was performed. It was all very different from what Esther had pictured; but she was determined never to complain, for had not her husband told her he was comparatively poor? And had she not declared, with the enthusiasm of a girl who loved the man she was about to marry, that she would be his willing helpmate and that his mother should be her mother?

To do Remington justice it was impossible for him to understand the depressing effect of this new home atmosphere upon his young wife. All his life he had been accustomed to see his mother move in the same routine with the same regularity; and truly she had been a good mother to him, for she herself had prepared him for college and sacrificed many things to his advancement.

It was a shock to her when Arthur, taking his summer holiday at Rusper, had written a glowing description of the beautiful girl who had consented to become his wife; and when Esther at length arrived after their brief courtship—for Arthur had been a very ardent wooer—the mother's heart was hardened against this piece of mere girlish prettiness as with some justice she considered her.

The evenings that Esther had expected to be full of brightness proved to be very dull affairs, with the elder Mrs. Remington ceaselessly knitting, and by her very presence putting a constraint upon her most trifling words.

Esther mistook the elder woman's undemonstrative manner for coldness, and failing to understand the really kind nature beneath a stern exterior, was awkward and constrained in her presence. So it ended in Arthur's first yawning a good deal, and then settling down to a book, and to Esther, who loved life and laughter, it seemed very dismal to pass evening after evening with no sound but the turning over of leaves and the clicking needles.

On her side Mrs. Remington secretly condemned her daughter-in-law's "incorrigible idleness." Both were good women, but it was impossible that they could understand each other. And Arthur, carelessly content with his own life, selfishly forgot that it was all new and strange to poor little Esther, who gradually lost her innocent gaiety, and became pale and silent, the mere shadow of her former self.

* * * * *

Esther was ill—so ill that they spoke only in whispers near

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her, and outside straw was strewn on the road to deaden all sound. Her father had just arrived, summoned by telegram.

"And you tell me that Esther fell in going down the cellar steps?" he asked in a tone of astonishment. "And pray, madam, what necessity could there be for my daughter to do such a thing?"

"It was her own offer," said Mrs. Remington, quite as haughtily. "Esther was assisting me in my household duties. Why should she not? Her husband, as you ought to know, is a poor man."

Mr. Marston turned away without ceremony, and went quietly into his daughter's room. What a change to him was this pale-faced woman with the purple shadows under the dull eyes, and the pinched lips all purple, too! Where was the man who was responsible for it all, he asked himself in bitter anger, as he glanced round; and then he saw his son-in-law kneeling at the other side of the bed, with his wife's passive hand in both his own.

"Do you think she will die?" he whispered when Mr. Marston had beckoned him out of the room, and surely anyone could read the haggard misery in his face. But the father answered with a cruel directness:

"I think that if she dies you have killed her by your neglect and coldness."

Arthur Remington had come to believe this himself. The very morning of the accident he had found a bundle of Esther's dainty love-letters, full of allusions to the future sweetness of their lives together; the difference between the dream and the reality had suddenly dawned upon him. There came before him a vision of Esther as he had first seen her in her dress of pale blue, with laughing eyes, looking out from under her wide-brimmed hat. How pale and quiet she had grown! He had been cross to her that morning because of some trifle. Accustomed to self-reliant women, her childishness sometimes jarred upon him. He forgot that he had chosen her from all others, and it was his duty to make all things easy for her. Pierced with sudden remorse he started up, resolved to seek her at once; but as he reached the door a dreadful shriek rang out and then his mother's terrified call for help.

Mrs. Remington, busy at her cooking-table, had required some jelly to be taken to the cellar. The one servant not being forthcoming, Esther had volunteered to carry it. It was a simple task, and Mrs. Remington willingly confided it to her; but poor Esther was awkward and inexperienced; her high-heeled shoes caught on the cellar stairs; her head swam round, she faltered, then fell heavily down the whole steep flight.

Arthur scarcely knew how he reached her or carried her up those dreadful steps again. The hastily-summoned physician looked very grave indeed over his new patient. And then in the terrible delirium that followed Remington began to realise all that his young wife had suffered in their brief wedded life. Her constant complaints of his coldness brought the tears to his eyes. It is a torturing experience to waken to a sense of our own deficiencies too late for expiation, and this was his condition. It came upon him like a revelation that he had been a careless and inconsiderate husband; but his easy-going nature had received a shock that developed all his higher qualities. Hereafter he was resolved to lead a life full of consideration for all humanity.

When Esther came slowly back to health and strength again, her father insisted, with rather an imperious manner, that his daughter should accompany him home.

"And you may depend upon it," he added, "that I shall detain her as long as possible from a place where she is expected to do general housework."

Mrs. Remington naturally enough resented this remark.

"You are mistaken, sir," she said in her stiff way. "I do most of the work here. I seldom called on Esther to assist me."

Mr. Marston pointed towards his daughter's room.

"How came I to find her there, then?" he sternly asked. "Had she not been performing a menial's work——"

"It was very unfortunate that Esther could not do me a slight service without endangering her life," was the cold answer. "But as for menial work—pray remember that my son's wife occupies no higher a position than my son's mother."

"Esther is not accustomed to anything of the kind. She was brought up in luxury," answered Mr. Marston.

"In that case you should not have been so ready to give her to a poor man," said Mrs. Remington, unflinchingly. "I have done my best to make your daughter's home comfortable, I could do no more. Unhappily, she has few resources within herself, and attaches too much importance to trifles."

"Hush, mother!" interposed Arthur, who had listened with ill-concealed impatience to all this. "What fault exists lies at my door. I made too little allowance for my poor girl's pleasure-loving nature, and denied her the social excitement to which she had been accustomed. In future——"

"We will say nothing about that just now." Mr. Marston spoke decidedly. "My daughter will remain with me until her health is re-established; then we can decide what is best for you both."

To this decision Arthur Remington submitted in proud silence when he found that it was Esther's wish to go back to her old home. At parting he clasped her in his arms and implored her passionately to forgive his past thoughtlessness. She answered languidly, with the apathy of a statue:

"Indeed, Arthur, I have nothing to forgive. I only regret that we have understood each other so little. Two such different people should never have come together."

"You will write to me often, and send for me when you desire to come home?" he asked her at the last moment.

She assented indifferently, and in another instant he was alone upon the station platform.

The weeks went slowly by and lengthened into months without bringing home again Arthur Remington's wife. Her letters were few, cold, and constrained. Her father needed her, she wrote; she was quite well and contented, and would write again soon. This was about the substance of each letter, and involuntarily Arthur adopted the same colouring of constraint. He had resolved to let his wife choose her own time to return to him, but he forgot that it was impossible for her to read between the lines of his letters, or to gather from their contents his longing for her presence. In the meantime his home seemed very empty, and his heart desolate.

Fortune smiled upon him in the year he and his wife were estranged. A bachelor uncle left him all his money. He resigned his position in the bank, established his mother in a home of her own, and resolved to go abroad. When he expressed his intention of settling a part of his fortune on Esther, Mr. Marston haughtily declined the proposition in his daughter's name, so he intimated, and Arthur, now seriously hurt and angry, made up his mind to a life-long estrangement from his wife. If she could live without him, he could live without her, he proudly thought.

But first he would gratify a long-repressed yearning to revisit the place where he had first met his lost love. It was in the sweet, early autumn, which brought back so vividly the old happy days, that Arthur reached Rusper. As he strolled idly along over the now solitary walk, the sweet, laughing face of Esther came before his memory with a thrill of positive pain. Surely he had been sufficiently punished for his thoughtlessness. Could nothing regain him his sweet wife?

As he thus pondered he turned a sudden curve in the path, and there stood before him a slender figure clad in pale blue, with a wide-brimmed hat; but the grey eyes were not laughing now; they had filled suddenly with tears, and husband and wife stood gazing silently into each other's faces. But only for an instant; the next Esther was in Arthur's arms, held there with a passionate intensity that it seemed would never relax, while kisses rained upon the sweet, tear-stained face.

"Never shall we part again!" he murmured brokenly. "Esther, promise me that neither pride nor estrangement nor anything but death shall separate us again in this life."

Esther's face lit up with a smile as she whispered softly: "I promise."

They sealed the vow with a kiss of entire reconciliation; and after all Arthur Remington went abroad, but not alone—his wife accompanied him.

Grace Maynard.

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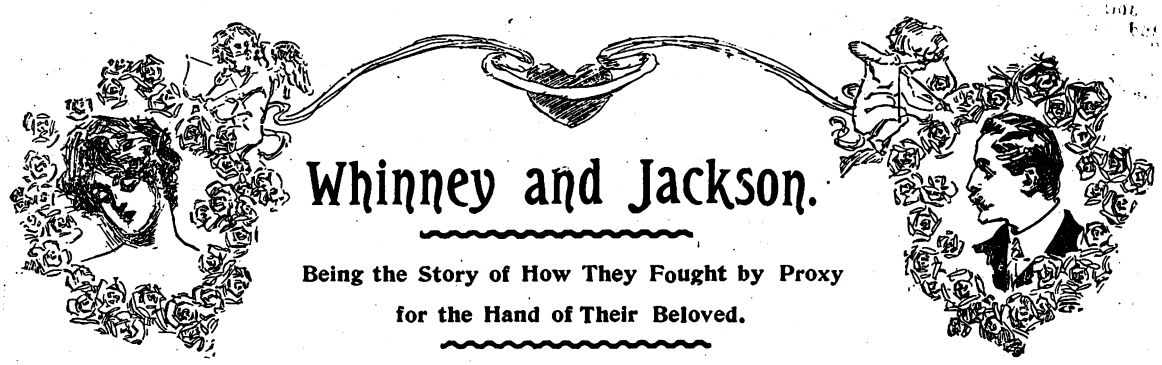

Whinney and Jackson.

Being the Story of How They Fought by Proxy for the Hand of Their Beloved.

WHINNEY loved Miss Robins. So did Jackson. Whinney was determined, and so was Jackson. Whinney won a prize at golf and was convinced that his victory over Miss Robins was complete, but the next day Jackson won a prize. Also as to which was her favourite no one could determine. Upon both she smiled; to both she held out her hand with equal frankness. Jenkins, a common friend and a shrewd observer, said that a lucky word, a look, a gesture on the part of either one might settle it at any moment. He understood women.

One afternoon, on the golf links at the Scottish village in which they were staying, Whinney and Jackson refused to speak to each other.

"I would rather be her caddy than a millionaire," said Whinney, so that she might overhear him.

"Than a king," spoke up Jackson, looking far away.

How handsome she was in her short skirt, and as graceful as the new-fledged bird that hops upon the first grass of spring. Surely she was enough to turn the head of any man, to make him stake his all upon the chance of winning her love. Jackson had avowed his devotion and she had listened patiently and smiled sweetly as she declared that as yet she did not know her own mind, and as her heart was companion to her mind, she could not answer. She had listened and smiled, and said the same thing to Whinney.

The sun was down and the players and the spectators were leaving the links. Miss Robins' ball was lost, and out in the dusk the two rivals were hunting for it.

"Now, don't substitute another ball and swear that you have found it," said Jackson.

"Ah, I see you credit me with a deception that is at this moment passing through your own mind," Whinney declared.

"If she were not here I would call you a scoundrel."

"Oh, out with it! Don't let her stand in your way."

"If I weren't afraid that her tender nature would prompt her to take pity on you I would scalp you with a golf stick."

"Ah, when you show her a drop of my blood I will exhibit to her a pint of yours."

"Come, gentlemen, don't quarrel," Jenkins exclaimed, in a voice more than loud enough.

"Jenkins," cried Whinney, "attend to your own affairs. One would think that you were a peace commission appointed by all the powers on earth."

"And when you want to shout," Jackson spoke up, "reserve your strength for an occasion when I am not present."

"Ah," said Jenkins, "so you have both resolved upon insulting me, your friend. You have mistaken my gentleness for timidity. But I want to tell you that I'm as revengeful——"

"As a lamb," suggested Jackson.

"Or a rampageous worm," put in Whinney.

"All right, you'll pay for this." And then walking back to Miss Robins he offered her his arm and took her away.

The next morning the two rivals received a copy of the following note:

"GENTLEMEN,—*You have misunderstood my nature if you suppose that I am only a dove. In my veins flows the blood of the old vikings who loved danger and blood. I have often declared that the man to whom I give my hand must fight for me. Hitherto there has been no occasion, but now there is a pressing opportunity. You must fight each other. The battle-ground shall be the little grassy spot to the left of the golf links, where the two oaks bend over and intertwine their horny figures. There you shall meet to-morrow night, at ten o'clock, and with no words, for they might lead to a reconciliation, fight with golf sticks till one of you is vanquished. Then let the victor repair to the little church near by, which will be lighted up, where I shall gladly receive him.*"

When Whinney read down and grasped the name of the writer, a thrill shot through him. Indeed he was shot with a thrill several times before he reached the end. "Golf sticks," he muttered. "Why, I'd rather a man would come at me with a scythe. And in his arm that scoundrel Jackson's got the strength of a mule. I don't want to fight—but I adore her and something must be done. But why should not wit fight my battle for me? Why can't I hire some tramp and let him go there in the dark and hammer that scoundrel's head into a jelly? I will."

The night came and it was almost pitch dark. On a knoll not far from the two oaks stood Whinney and his tramp.

"Now you understand it thoroughly, I believe," said Whinney.

"I think I've got it all right, sir."

"I don't want you to kill him, you understand—but I *do* want you to make him sore."

"Very well, sir."

"Well, go along, and when the thing's over, come up here and I'll give you a five pound note."

The tramp disappeared, and soon there arose the sharp noise of the fray. It was to be a stubborn combat. Whinney heard a footfall on the grass and turned round. "Who are you?" he inquired.

"What, that you, Whinney?"

"Jackson, as I am alive! Yes, it is I."

Jackson laughed. "I thought you were down in the hollow fighting my man."

"And I thought you were fighting mine."

"Well, we've tricked each other. I'm too civilised to fight."

"So am I. Listen, they'll crack each other's skulls."

"Let 'em crack. Here comes someone with a lantern—and see, the little church is lighted. Now, how are we going to settle it?"

"Let our men decide by their valour."

The combat had ceased, and they heard the fighters approaching, and they arrived just as the man halted with the lantern. They were paid, and asked as to who was the victor.

"It was a good joke," spoke up the man with the lantern. "I came over to see them fight. My friend Jenkins got the thing up—and see that church lighted over there? He is marrying Miss Robins."

The two tramps grinned in the yellow light.

"I admit we hain't done bad," said one of them. "We are pals, you know, and so we sat down and hammered each other's sticks."

Whinney and Jackson reached over and shook hands.

Oliver Read.

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His Parting Shot.

HE: "But couldn't you learn to love me, Ida?" She: "I don't think I could, George." He (reaching for his hat): "It is as I feared. You are too old to learn."

Quick Work.

GUSSY: "Well, old fellow, I asked Miss Amy last night to marry me, and she declined." Goslin: "Did she deliberate, as though hesitating to pain you?" Gussy: "No; she produced her negative by the instantaneous process."

She Wouldn't Like it.

JACK (to his *fiancée*): "I think of getting a musical instrument, Maud. For instance, a cornet." Maud (in dismay): "Oh, no; not that horrid thing." Jack (in surprise): "And why not, dearest?" Maud (blushing violently): "It makes the lips so hard."

A Matter of Emphasis.

GRACIE: "So John proposed last night, and you accepted him! Do tell me how it all happened?" Rosie: "Oh, it was simply a matter of emphasis." Gracie: "Of emphasis?" Rosie: "Yes, he said, 'Don't you love me a little *bit?*' And I answered, 'No, I do not love you a *little* bit.'"

No Time to Spare.

GENTLEMAN FROM CHICAGO: "I want to be personally conducted over London, only please be quick, as I only have sixty minutes to spare." Tourist's Guide: "You wish to see the whole of the Metropolis in the space of one hour? Well, sir, it seems to me that what you require is a lightning conductor."

How Good of Him!

THEY had just entered the conservatory from the ballroom. "Oh, dear!" said the sweet girl, fanning her cheek. "I'm melting." The young man saw an opportunity. "I knew it was rather warm," he said, "but I didn't think it was as hot as that." "What do you mean?" "Why, hot enough to melt pure gold."

And the Robin Robbing.

MR. CHATTERTON: "I've decided to go into business, Miss Weatherbee." Miss Weatherbee: "I'm very glad to hear it, Mr. Chatterton." "Yes, I've made up my mind to become a farmer. Think how jolly it must be to go out of a morning and see the butterflies making butter, and the grasshoppers making grass—and—all that sort of thing, you know."

Her Look of Admiration.

BIG BROTHER: "I should like to know what you've been flirting with that Saphead for?" Pretty Sister (indignantly): "I haven't." "Yes, you have. He told a friend you stood before him for ten minutes as if entranced, and you looked straight into his eyes if you would read his very soul, and he said if ever ardent admiration shone in a human face, it did in yours." "The conceited fellow! I was looking at my own reflection in his eye-glasses."

Safe.

"So you are going to marry? Have you anything laid by?" "Yes, I've got a rich uncle laid by with a paralytic stroke, and I'm his only surviving relative."

A Lucky Find.

"ALBERT, dear, while looking through some of your old clothes I made such a lucky find that I ordered a new dress on the strength of it." "What was it, dear?" "Half a dozen cheques that had never been written on."

More Household Economy.

YOUNG WIFE: "I wish you would take a day off and help me bring up all those jars of fruit I preserved last year, and find some way to get rid of the stuff. It's all spoilt, as usual." Husband: "What's the hurry?" Young Wife: "I want the jars to preserve more fruit."

Wise Advice.

FOND MOTHER: "If that young man should take advantage of you, and try to kiss you, what would you do?" Dutiful Daughter: "I should remind him that I have a mother whom I love very dearly." Fond Mother (after reflection): "I think, dear, you had better remind him that you have a father."

Insinuating!

"MISS ETHEL is a long time coming down," said the youth to the servant, after waiting some time for the young lady's appearance. "Perhaps," he added, with a laugh, "perhaps she is making up her mind whether to see me or not." "No," said the servant, with an icy smile, "it isn't her mind she is making up."

Took Him as a Bargain.

HE (humbly, after being accepted): "I know I am not worthy of you. Tell me, my beautiful darling, what you saw in such a plain sort of fellow to—— Do you know, I was dreadfully afraid you were going to refuse me." She: "I did intend to, but you know my weakness. I could never resist a bargain, and when you proposed you did look so awfully cheap! How could I let you go?"

Difficult to Please.

BROWN: "Why don't you marry and settle down?" Jones: "Well, I've got my reasons for it. The woman I want to marry must have lots of money and be smart, but when I find a woman who has money, and who is willing to marry me, her willingness to marry me is positive proof to my mind that she is stupid, and then, of course, she doesn't suit me. I want a smart woman for a wife."

Dizzy Heights.

MR. POPINJAY (falling on his knees): "Miss Perkins, I can no longer resist the passionate impulse to appeal to you on the momentous subject that is fraught for me with the issues of life and death. And yet I am overawed at my presumption when I take into consideration the celestial glamour of your personal charms, the dazzling lustre of your intellectual attainments, the exquisite, the adorable——" Miss Perkins: "Excuse me, Mr. Popinjay, but there are times when eloquence is rather out of place. If you wish to pop the question, pop it, and be done with it." This was duly done.

The Curative.

SHE looked at him piteously, a sorrowful expression stealing over her face. "Your love is growing cold," she said. The words seemed forced as though within her breast lurked a desire not to tell him. The tears seemed nigh to her eyes. He placed his arm round her waist tenderly. One might think by this act that her words were untrue. He gave her a look of pity, but his eyes spoke his uneasiness. Clearly he was at a loss what to do. But suddenly his eyes lighted up as if by magic. "If you wouldn't mind," he told her, "you might wear my overcoat. I can stand the chilly night air." The moon smiled as, looking at the girl wrapped warmly in the man's coat, he saw that she would not be cold again.

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A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

In the Wine Cellars of the Grand Babylon.

"I DIDN'T trust to mere good fortune. I didn't trust to anything except Rocco, and he deceived me."

"But why did you quarrel with him?"

"I didn't quarrel with him. I found him embalming a dead body in the State bedroom one night——"

"You what?" Babylon almost screamed.

"I found him embalming a dead body in the State bedroom," repeated Racksole in his quietest tones.

The two men gazed at each other, and then Racksole replenished Babylon's glass.

"Tell me," said Babylon, settling himself deep in an easy chair and lighting a cigar.

And Racksole thereupon recounted to him the whole of the Posen episode, with every circumstantial detail so far as he knew it. It was a long and complicated recital, and occupied about an hour. During that time little Félix never spoke a word, scarcely moved a muscle; only his small eyes gazed through the bluish haze of smoke. The clock on the mantelpiece tinkled midnight.

"Time for whisky and soda," said Racksole, and got up as if to ring the bell; but Babylon waved him back.

"You told me that this Sampson Levi had an audience of Prince Eugen to-day, but you have not told me the result of that audience," said Babylon.

"Because I do not yet know it. But I shall doubtless know to-morrow. In the meantime, I feel fairly sure that Levi declined to produce Prince Eugen's required million. I have reason to believe that the money was lent elsewhere."

"H'm!" mused Babylon; and then, carelessly, "I am not at all surprised at that arrangement for spying through the bathroom of the State apartments."

"Why are you not surprised?"

"Oh!" said Babylon, "it is such an obvious dodge—so easy to carry out. As for me, I took special care never to involve myself in these affairs. I knew they existed; I somehow felt that they existed. But I also felt that they lay outside my sphere. My business was to provide board and lodging of the most sumptuous kind for those who didn't mind paying for it; and I did my business. If anything else went on in the hotel, under the rose, I long ago determined to ignore it unless it should happen to be brought before my notice; and it never was brought before my notice. However, I admit that there is a certain pleasurable excitement in this kind of affair, and doubtless you have experienced that."

"I have," said Racksole simply, "though I believe you are laughing at me."

"By no means," Babylon replied. "Now what, if I may ask the question, is going to be your next step?"

"That is just what I desire to know myself," said Theodore Racksole.

"Well," said Babylon, after a pause, "let us begin. In the first place, it is possible you may be interested to hear that I happened to see Jules to-day."

"You did!" Racksole remarked with much calmness. "Where?"

"Well, it was early this morning, in Paris, just before I left there. The meeting was quite accidental, and Jules seemed rather surprised at meeting me. He respectfully inquired where I was going, and I said that I was going to Switzerland. At that moment I thought I was going to Switzerland. It had occurred to me that after all I should be happier there, and that I had better turn back and not see London any more. However, I changed my mind once again, and decided to come on to London, and accept the risks of being miserable there without my hotel. Then I asked Jules whither he was bound, and he told me that he was off to Constantinople, being interested in a new French hotel there. I wished him good luck, and we parted."

"Constantinople, eh!" said Racksole. "A highly suitable place for him, I should say."

"But," Babylon resumed, "I caught sight of him again."

"Where?"

"At Charing Cross, a few minutes before I had the pleasure of meeting you. Mr. Jules had not gone to Constantinople after all. He did not see me, or I should have suggested to him that in going from Paris to Constantinople it is not usual to travel *viâ* London."

"The cheek of the fellow!" exclaimed Theodore Racksole. "The gorgeous and colossal cheek of the fellow!"

"Do you know anything of the antecedents of this Jules?" he continued, helping himself to whisky.

"Nothing whatever," said Babylon. "Until you told me, I don't think I was aware that his true name was Thomas

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"Come out, you villain!" Theodore Racksole cried, in low, almost vicious tones.

Jackson, though of course I knew that it was not Jules. I certainly was not aware that Miss Spencer was his wife, but I had long suspected that their relations were somewhat more intimate than the nature of their respective duties in the hotel absolutely demanded. All that I do know of Jules—he will always be called Jules—is that he gradually, by some mysterious personal force, acquired a prominent position in the hotel. Decidedly he was the cleverest and most intellectual waiter I have ever known, and he was specially skilled in the difficult task of retaining his own dignity while not interfering with that of other people. I'm afraid this information is a little too vague to be of any practical assistance in the present difficulty."

"What is the present difficulty?" Racksole queried, with a simple air.

"I should imagine that the present difficulty is to account for the man's presence in London."

"That is easily accounted for," said Racksole.

"How? Do you suppose he is anxious to give himself up to justice, or that the chains of habit bind him to the hotel?"

"Neither," said Racksole. "Jules is going to have another try—that's all."

"Another try at what?"

"At Prince Eugen. Either at his life or his liberty. Most probably the former this time; almost certainly the former. He has guessed that we are somewhat handicapped by our anxiety to keep Prince Eugen's predicament quite quiet, and he is taking advantage of that fact. As he is already fairly rich, on his own admission, the reward which has been offered to him must be enormous, and he is absolutely determined to get it. He has several times recently proved himself to be a daring fellow; unless I am mistaken he will shortly prove himself to be still more daring."

"But what can he do? Surely you don't suggest that he will attempt the life of Prince Eugen in this hotel?"

"Why not? If Reginald Dimmock fell on mere suspicion that he would turn out unfaithful to the conspiracy, why not Prince Eugen?"

"But it would be an unspeakable crime, and do infinite harm to the hotel!"

"True!" Racksole admitted, smiling. Little Félix Babylon seemed to brace himself for the grasping of this monstrous idea.

"How could it possibly be done?" he asked at length.

"Dimmock was poisoned."

"Yes, but you had Rocco here then, and Rocco was in the plot. It is conceivable that Rocco could have managed it—barely conceivable. But without Rocco I cannot think it possible. I cannot even think that Jules would attempt it. You see, in a place like the Grand Babylon, as probably I needn't point out to you, food has to pass through so many hands that to poison one person without killing perhaps fifty would be a most delicate operation. Moreover, Prince Eugen, unless he has changed his habits, is always served by his own attendant, old Hans, and therefore any attempt to tamper with a cooked dish immediately before serving would be hazardous in the extreme."

"Granted," said Racksole. "The wine, however, might be more easily got at. Had you thought of that?"

"I had not," Babylon admitted. "You are an ingenious theorist, but I happen to know that Prince Eugen always has his wine opened in his own presence. No doubt it would be opened by Hans. Therefore the wine theory is not tenable, my friend."

"I do not see why," said Racksole. "I know nothing of wine as an expert, and I very seldom drink it, but it seems to me that a bottle of wine might be tampered with while it was still in the cellar, especially if there was an accomplice in the hotel."

"You think, then, that you are not yet rid of all your conspirators?"

"I think that Jules might still have an accomplice within the building."

"And that a bottle of wine could be opened and recorked without leaving any trace of the operation?" Babylon was a trifle sarcastic.

"I don't see the necessity of opening the bottle in order to poison the wine," said Racksole. "I have never tried to poison anybody by means of a bottle of wine, and I don't lay claim to any natural talent as a poisoner, but I think I could devise several ways of managing the trick. Of course, I admit that I may be entirely mistaken as to Jules' intentions."

"Ah!" said Félix Babylon. "The wine cellars beneath us are one of the wonders of London. I hope you are aware, Mr. Racksole, that when you bought the Grand Babylon you bought what is probably the finest stock of wines in England, if not in Europe. In the valuation I reckoned them at sixty thousand pounds. And I may say that I always took care that the cellars were properly guarded. Even Jules would experience a serious difficulty in breaking into the cellars without the connivance of the wine-clerk, and the wine-clerk is, or was, incorruptible."

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"I am ashamed to say that I have not yet inspected my wines," smiled Racksole; "I have never given them a thought. Once or twice I have taken the trouble to make a tour of the hotel, but I omitted the cellars in my excursions."

"Impossible, my dear fellow!" said Babylon, amused at such a confession, to him—a great connoisseur and lover of fine wines—almost incredible. "But really you must see them to-morrow. If I may, I will accompany you."

"Why not to-night?" Racksole suggested calmly.

"To-night! It is very late: Hubbard will have gone to bed."

"And may I ask who is Hubbard? I remember the name but dimly."

"Hubbard is the wine-clerk of the Grand Babylon," said Félix, with a certain emphasis. "A sedate man of forty. He has the keys of the cellars. He knows every bottle of every bin, its date, its qualities, its value. And he is a teetotaler. Hubbard is a curiosity. No wine can leave the cellars without his knowledge, and no person can enter the cellars without his knowledge. At least, that is how it was in my time," Babylon added.

"We will wake him," said Racksole.

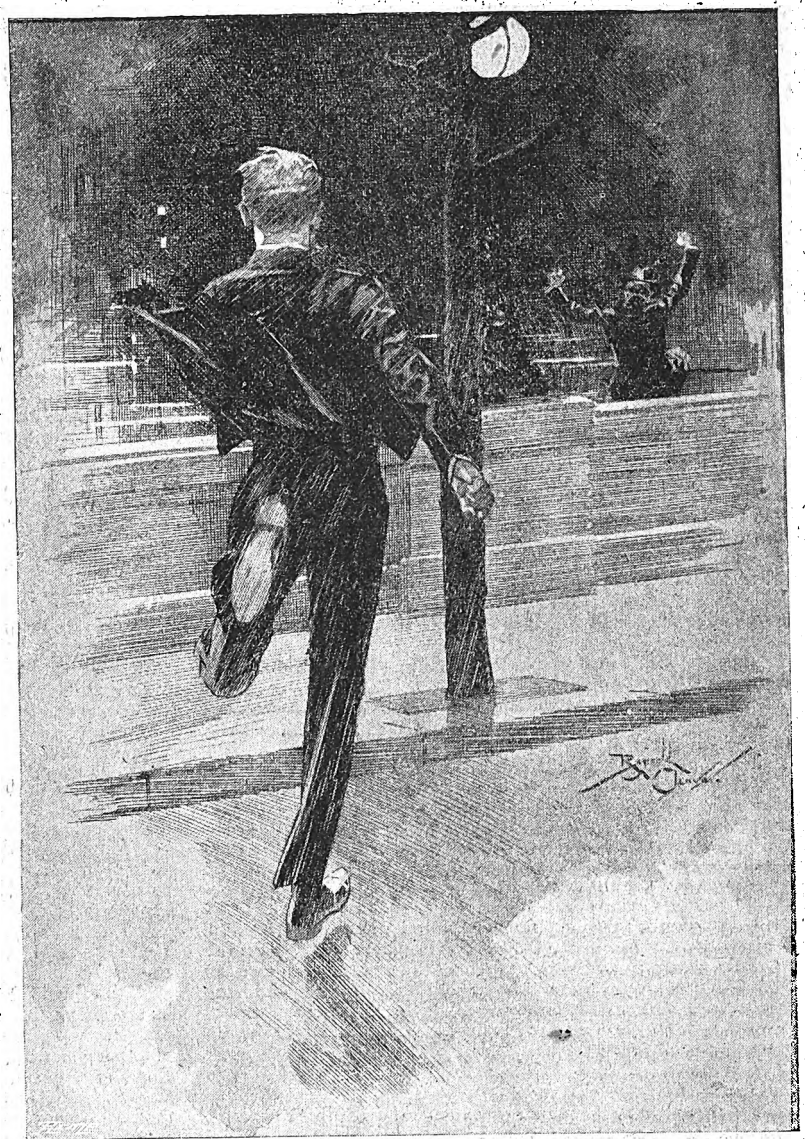
"But it is one o'clock in the morning," Babylon protested.

"Never mind—that is, if you consent to accompany me. The cellar is the same by night as by day. Therefore, why not now?"

Babylon shrugged his shoulders. "As you wish," he agreed, with his indestructible politeness.

"And now to find this Mr. Hubbard, with his key of the cupboard," said Racksole, as they walked out of the room together. Although the hour was so late, the hotel was not, of course, closed for the night. A few guests still remained about in the public rooms, and a few fatigued waiters were still in attendance. One of these latter was dispatched in search of the singular Mr. Hubbard, and it fortunately turned out that this gentleman had not actually retired, though he was on the point of doing so. He brought the keys to Mr. Racksole in person, and after he had had a little chat with his former master, the proprietor and the ex-proprietor of the Grand Babylon Hotel proceeded on their way to the cellars.

These cellars extend over, or rather, under, quite half the superficial area of the whole hotel—the longitudinal half which lies next to the Strand. Owing to the fact that the ground slopes sharply from the Strand to the river, the Grand Babylon is, so to speak, deeper near the Strand than it is near the Thames. Towards the Thames there are, below the entrance level, a basement and a sub-basement. Towards the Strand there are basement, sub-basement, and the huge wine cellars beneath all. After descending the four flights of the service stairs, and traversing a long passage running parallel with the kitchen, the two found themselves opposite a door, which, on being unlocked, gave access to another flight of stairs. At the foot of this was the main entrance to the cellars. Outside the entrance was the wine-lift, for the ascension of delicious fluids to the upper floor and, opposite, Mr. Hubbard's little office. There was electric light everywhere. Babylon, who, as being most accustomed to them, held the bunch of keys, opened the great door, and then they were in the first cellar—the first of a suite of five. Racksole was struck not only by the icy coolness of the place, but also by its vastness. Babylon had seized a portable electric hand-light, attached to a long wire, which lay handy, and, waving it about, disclosed the dimensions of the place. By that flashing illumination the subterranean chamber looked unutterably weird and mysterious, with its rows of numbered bins, stretching away into the distance till the radiance was reduced to the occasional far gleam of the light on the shoulder of a bottle. Then Babylon switched on the fixed electric lights, and Theodore Racksole entered upon a personally-conducted tour of what was quite the most interesting part of his own property.



Racksole followed Jules in hot pursuit, but the latter jumped clean over the Embankment wall into the river.

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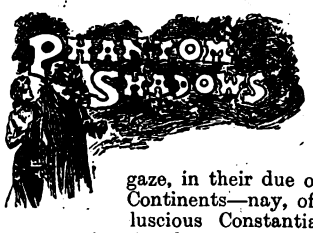

To see the innocent enthusiasm of Félix Babylon for these stores of exhilarating liquid was what is called in the North "a sight for sair een." He displayed to Racksole's bewildered gaze, in their due order, all the wines of three Continents—nay, of four, for the superb and luscious Constantia wine of Cape Colony was not wanting in that most catholic collection of vintages. Beginning with the unsurpassed products of Burgundy, he continued with the clarets of Médoc, Bordeaux, and Sauterne; then to the champagnes of Ay, Hautvilliers, and Pierry; then to the hocks and moselles of Germany, and the brilliant imitation champagnes of Main, Necker, and Naumberg; then to the famous and adorable Tokay of Hungary, and all the Austrian varieties of French wines, including Carlowitz and Somlauer; then to the dry sherries of Spain, including purest Manzanilla, and Amontillado, and Vino de Pasto; then to the wines of Malaga, both sweet and dry, and all the "Spanish reds" from Catalonia, including the dark "Tent" so often used sacramentally; then to the renowned port of Oporto. Then he proceeded to the Italian cellar, and descanted upon the excellence of Barolo from Piedmont, of Chianti from Tuscany, of Orvieto from the Roman States, of the "Tears of Christ" from Naples, and the commoner Marsala from Sicily. And so on, to an extent and with a fulness of detail which cannot be rendered here.

At the end of the suite of cellars there was a glazed door, which, as could be seen, gave access to a supplemental and smaller cellar, an apartment about fifteen or sixteen feet square.

"Anything special in there?" asked Racksole curiously, as they stood before the door, and looked within at the serried ends of bottles.

"Ah!" exclaimed Babylon, almost smacking his lips, "therein lies the cream of all."

"The best champagne, I suppose?" said Racksole.

"Yes," said Babylon, "the best champagne is there—a very special Sillery, as exquisite as you will find anywhere. But I see, my friend, that you fall into the common error of putting champagne first among wines. That distinction belongs to Burgundy. You have old Burgundy in that cellar, Mr. Racksole, which cost me—how much do you think?—eighty pounds a bottle. Probably it will never be drunk," he added, with a sigh. "It is too expensive even for princes and plutocrats."

"Yes, it will," said Racksole quickly. "You and I will have a bottle up to-morrow."

"Then," continued Babylon, still riding his hobby-horse, "there is a sample of the Rhine wine dated 1706 which caused such a sensation at the Vienna Exhibition of 1873. There is also a singularly glorious Persian wine from Shiraz, the like of which I have never seen elsewhere. Also there is an unrivalled vintage of Romanée-Conti, greatest of all modern Burgundies. If I remember right, Prince Eugen invariably has a bottle when he comes to stay here. It is not on the hotel wine list, of course, and only a few customers know of it. We do not precisely hawk it about the dining-room."

"Indeed!" said Racksole. "Let us go inside."

They entered the stone apartment, rendered almost sacred by the preciousness of its contents, and Racksole looked round with a strangely intent and curious air. At the far side was a grating, through which came a feeble light.

"What is that?" asked the millionaire sharply.

"That is merely a ventilation grating. Good ventilation is absolutely essential."

"Looks broken, doesn't it?" Racksole suggested, and then, putting a finger quickly on Babylon's shoulder, "there's someone in the cellar. Can't you hear breathing, down there, behind that bin?"

The two men stood tense and silent for a while, listening under the ray of the single electric light in the ceiling. Half the cellar was involved in gloom. At length Racksole walked firmly down the central passage-way between the bins and turned to the corner at the right.

"Come out, you villain!" he said, in a low, well-nigh vicious tone, and dragged up a cowering figure.

He had expected to find a man, but it was his own daughter, Nella Racksole, upon whom he had laid angry hands.

TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER.
Further Events in the Cellar.

"WELL, father," Nella greeted her astounded parent. "You should make sure that you have got hold of the right person before you use all that terrible muscular force of yours. I do believe you have broken my shoulder-bone." She rubbed her shoulder with a comical expression of pain, and then stood up before the two men. The skirt of her dark grey dress was torn and dirty, and the usually trim Nella looked as though she had been shot down a canvas fire-escape. Mechanically she smoothed her frock, and gave a straightening touch to her hair.

"Good evening, Miss Racksole," said Félix Babylon, bowing formally. "This is an unexpected pleasure." Félix's drawing-room manners never deserted him upon any occasion whatever.

"May I inquire what you are doing in my wine cellar, Nella Racksole?" said the millionaire, a little stiffly. He was certainly somewhat annoyed at having mistaken his daughter for a criminal; moreover, he hated to be surprised, and upon this occasion he had been surprised beyond any ordinary surprise; lastly, he was not at all pleased that Nella should be observed in that strange predicament by a stranger.

"I will tell you," said Nella. "I had been reading rather late in my room—the night was so close. I heard Big Ben strike half-past twelve, and then I put the book down, and went out on to the balcony of my window for a little fresh air before going to bed. I leant over the balcony very quietly—you will remember that I am on the third floor now—and looked down below into the little sunk yard which separates the wall of the hotel from Salisbury Lane. I was rather astonished to see a figure creeping across the yard. I know there was no entrance into the hotel from that yard, and, besides, it is fifteen or twenty feet below the level of the street. So I watched. The figure went close up against the wall, and disappeared from my view. I leant over the balcony as far as I dared, but I couldn't see him. I could hear him, however."

"What could you hear?" questioned Racksole sharply.

"It sounded like a sawing noise," said Nella; "and it went on for quite a long time—nearly a quarter of an hour, I should think—a rasping sort of noise."

"Why on earth didn't you come and warn me or someone else in the hotel?" asked Racksole.

"Oh, I don't know, dad," she replied sweetly. "I had got interested in it, and I thought I would see it out myself. Well, as I was saying, Mr. Babylon," she continued, addressing her remarks now to Félix, with a dazzling smile, "that noise went on for quite a long time. At last it stopped, and the figure re-appeared from under the wall, crossed the yard, climbed up the opposite wall by some means or other, and so over the railings into Salisbury Lane. I felt rather relieved then, because I knew he hadn't actually broken into the hotel. He walked down Salisbury Lane very slowly. A policeman was just coming up. 'Good-night, officer,' I heard him say to the policeman, and he asked him for a match. The policeman supplied the match, and the other man lighted a cigarette, and proceeded further down the lane. By cricking your neck from my window, Mr. Babylon, you can get a glimpse of the Embankment and the river. I saw the man cross the Embankment, and lean over the river wall, where he seemed to be talking to someone. He then walked along the Embankment to Westminster, and that was the last I saw of him. I waited a minute or two for him to come back,

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but he didn't come back, and so I thought it was about time I began to make inquiries into the affair. I went downstairs instantly, and out of the hotel, through the quadrangle, into Salisbury Lane, and I looked over those railings. There was a ladder on the other side, by which it was perfectly easy—once you had got over the railings—to climb down into the yard. I was horribly afraid lest someone might walk up Salisbury Lane and catch me in the act of negotiating those railings, but no one did, and I surmounted them, with no worse damage than a torn skirt. I crossed the yard on tiptoe, and I found that, in the wall, close to the ground, and almost exactly under my window, there was an iron grating, about one foot by fourteen inches. I suspected, as there was no other ironwork near, that the mysterious visitor must have been sawing at this grating for private purposes of his own. I gave it a good shake, and I was not at all surprised that a good part of it came off in my hand, leaving just enough room for a person to creep through. I decided that I would creep through, and now wish I hadn't. I don't know, Mr. Babylon, whether you have ever tried to creep through a small hole with a skirt on. Have you ?"

"I have not had that pleasure," said little Félix, bowing again, and absently taking up a bottle which lay to his hand.

"Well, you are fortunate," the imperturbable Nella resumed. "For quite three minutes I thought I should perish in that grating, dad, with my shoulder inside and the rest of me outside. However, at last, by the most amazing and agonising efforts, I pulled myself through, and fell into this extraordinary cellar more dead than alive. Then I wondered what I should do next. Should I wait for the mysterious visitor to return, and stab him with my pocket scissors if he tried to enter, or should I raise an alarm ? First of all I replaced the broken grating, then I struck a match, and saw that I had got landed in a wilderness of bottles. The match went out, and I hadn't another one. So I sat down in the corner to think. I had just decided to wait and see if the visitor returned, when I heard footsteps, and then voices, and then you came in. I must say I was rather taken aback, especially as I recognised the voice of Mr. Babylon. You see, I didn't want to frighten you. If I had bobbed up from behind the bottles and said 'Booh !' you would have had a serious shock. I wanted to think of a way of breaking my presence gently to you. But you saved me the trouble, dad. Was I really breathing so loudly that you could hear me ?"

The girl ended her strange recital, and there was a moment's silence in the cellar. Racksole merely nodded an affirmative to her concluding question.

"Well, Nell, my girl," said the millionaire at length, "we are much obliged for your gymnastic efforts—very much obliged. But now I think you had batter go off to bed. There is going to be some serious trouble here, I'll lay my last dollar on that !"

"But if there is to be a burglary I should so like to see it, dad," Nella pleaded. "I've never seen a burglar caught red-handed."

"This isn't a burglary, my dear. I calculate it's something far worse than a burglary."

"What ?" she cried. "Murder ? Arson ? Dynamite plot ? How perfectly splendid !"

"Mr. Babylon informs me that Jules is in London," said Racksole quietly.

"Jules !" she exclaimed under her breath, and her tone changed instantly to the utmost seriousness. "Switch off the light, quick !" Springing to the switch, she put the cellar in darkness.

"What's that for ?" said her father.

"If he comes back he would see the light and be frightened away," said Nella. "That wouldn't do at all."

"It wouldn't, Miss Racksole," said Babylon, and there was in his voice a note of admiration for the girl's sagacity.

"Listen, Nella," said the latter, drawing his daughter to him in the profound gloom of the cellar. "We fancy that Jules may be trying to tamper with a certain bottle of wine—a bottle

(*Continued on page* 670.)

St. Paul's Dome Points the Way.

Some things in this world, even though the purpose in creating or constructing them may have been more or less selfish, appear to be ordained to do good in some way to the people at large. Thus, St. Paul's Cathedral was built simply as a place of worship, yet it is a sort of hub to the great wheel of London; a monument whereby to identify and locate the city. For many miles outside of London you can see the great dome of St. Paul's swelling up in the air; and you have only to say to the inquiring stranger who is seeking the centre of the largest city in the world, "You see the dome of the Cathedral ? Yes. Well, make straight for it, and it will lead you into the heart of London."

Oblige me now by reading these sentences, taken from a letter written by Mrs. Mary Northey, of 20 Hull Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne, on June 2nd, 1897, and the little talk that follows it, and you will understand the point of the chat about the dome of St. Paul's :—

"In September of 1896 my health began to fail me. I felt low, weak, and tired. My appetite was poor, and after eating I had a nagging pain at the chest through to my back. I had a doctor attending me and I saw two other doctors, and went to the Newcastle Infirmary, where they wanted to operate on me, but I refused to let them do it. Nothing gave me relief. One doctor said that my stomach was ulcerated, and gave me up, saying he could do no more for me. I had a nurse attending me, being very weak. I gave up hopes of getting better, when in November (1896) I *read in a book* of cases like mine that were cured by Mother Seigel's Syrup. I got a bottle of it, and after taking it I felt that it was doing me good. I persevered with it, and soon gained strength and gradually regained good health, all the pain leaving me."

Mrs. Northey now lives at 13 Hull Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne, and on February 15th, 1904, she signed another statement in which she says :—"Some six or seven years ago I had occasion to write to you of the wonderful cure effected in me by Mother Seigel's Syrup. Since then I have continued in excellent health, and am now as well and strong as a woman could wish to be. When I began taking Mother Seigel's Syrup I had almost given up hope of relief. I could eat no solid food, and I became so weak that I had to take to bed, and I had been there four months when I finally tried Mother Seigel's Syrup. Soon I was on the high road to health again, and I have never had a day's illness since. Mother Seigel's Syrup saved my life, and I shall always recommend it when I can."

The little book Mrs. Northey read in bed served, in her distress, the same purpose that St. Paul's dome does to the wayfarer seeking London—it "pointed the way," and by following its directions she regained health and strength and happiness rapidly, and at little or no expense. Take a leaf of wisdom from her book of experience; let her point the way for you.

A SPRING TONIC

Helps to purify the blood and cleanse the system; makes you strong and "fit" for the labours, and pleasures, of the coming summer. "I had a good appetite, and ate plenty of nourishing food; yet I grew thinner and weaker all the time," says Mrs. Martha Beverley, of 154, Abingdon Road, Middlesboro'. "I had pains in my stomach after eating; my nights were sleepless. Four years ago I was cured by using Mother Seigel's Syrup, in six months, after suffering for 20 years."

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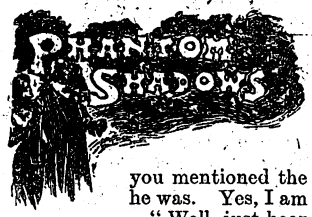

which might possibly be drunk by Prince Eugen. Now, do you think that the man you saw might have been Jules?"

"I hadn't previously thought of him as being Jules, but immediately you mentioned the name I somehow knew that he was. Yes, I am sure it was Jules."

"Well, just hear what I have to say. There is no time to lose. If he is coming at all he will be here very soon—and you can help." Racksole explained what he thought Jules' tactics might be. He proposed that if the man returned he should not be interfered with, but merely watched from the other side of the glass door.

"You want, as it were, to catch Mr. Jules alive?" said Babylon, who seemed rather taken aback at this novel method of dealing with criminals. "Surely," he added, "it would be simpler and easier to inform the police of your suspicion, and to leave everything to them?"

"My dear fellow," said Racksole, "we have already gone much too far without the police to make it advisable for us to call them in at this somewhat advanced stage of the proceedings. Besides, if you must know it, I have a particular desire to capture the scoundrel myself. I will leave you and Nella here, since Nella insists on seeing everything, and I will arrange things so that once he has entered the cellar Jules will not get out of it again—at any rate through the grating. You had better place yourselves on the other side of the glass door, in the big cellar; you will be in a position to observe from there. I will skip off at once. All you have to do is to take note of what the fellow does. If he has any accomplices within the hotel we shall probably be able by that means to discover who the accomplice is."

Lighting a match and shading it with his hands, Racksole showed them both out of the little cellar. "Now, if you lock this glass door on the outside he can't escape this way; the panes of glass are too small and the woodwork too stout. So, if he comes into the trap, you two will have the pleasure of actually seeing him frantically writhe therein, without any personal danger; but perhaps you'd better not show yourselves."

In another moment Félix Babylon and Nella were left to themselves in the darkness of the cellar, listening to the receding footfalls of Theodore Racksole. But the sound of these footfalls had not died away before another sound greeted their ears—the grating of the small cellar was being removed.

"I hope your father will be in time," whispered Félix.

"Hush!" the girl warned him, and they stooped side by side in tense silence.

A man cautiously but very neatly wormed his body through the aperture of the grating. The watchers could only see his form indistinctly in the darkness. Then, being fairly within the cellar, he walked without the least hesitation to the electric switch and turned on the light. It was unmistakably Jules, and he knew the geography of the cellar very well. Babylon could with difficulty repress a start as he saw this bold and unscrupulous ex-waiter moving with such an air of assurance and determination about the precious cellar. Jules went directly to a small bin which was numbered 17, and took therefrom the topmost bottle.

"The Romanée-Conti—Prince Eugen's wine!" Babylon exclaimed under his breath.

Jules neatly and quickly removed the seal with an instrument which he had clearly brought for the purpose. He then took a little flat box from his pocket, which seemed to contain a sort of black salve. Rubbing his finger in this, he smeared the top of the neck of the bottle with it, just where the cork came against the glass. In another instant he had deftly replaced the seal and restored the bottle to its position. He then turned off the light, and made for the aperture. When he was half-way through Nella exclaimed, "He will escape after all. Dad has not had time—we must stop him."

But Babylon, that embodiment of caution, forcibly, but nevertheless politely, restrained this Yankee girl, whom he deemed so rash and imprudent, and before she could free herself the lithe form of Jules had disappeared.

As regards Theodore Racksole, who was to have caught his man from the outside of the cellar, he made his way as rapidly as possible from the wine-cellars up to the ground-floor, out of the hotel by the quadrangle, through the quadrangle, and out into the top of Salisbury Lane. Now, owing to the vastness of the structure of the Grand Babylon, the mere distance thus to be traversed amounted to a little short of a quarter of a mile, and, as it included a number of stairs, about two dozen turnings, and several passages which at that time of night were in darkness more or less complete, Racksole could not have been expected to accomplish the journey in less than five minutes. As everybody knows, there is a sharp, short bend in Salisbury Lane near the top. Racksole ran round this at good racing speed, but he was unfortunate enough to run straight up against a policeman.

"Hullo!" he said, his naturally suspicious nature being doubtless aroused by the spectacle of a bareheaded man in evening-dress running violently down the lane. "What's this? Where are you orf in such a hurry?" and he forcibly detained Theodore Racksole for a moment and scrutinised his face.

"Now, officer," said Racksole quietly, "none of your larks, if you please. I've no time to lose."

"Beg your pardon, sir," the policeman remarked, though hesitatingly and not quite with good temper, and Racksole was allowed to proceed on his way. The millionaire's scheme for trapping Jules was to get down into the little sunk yard by means of the ladder, and then to secrete himself behind some convenient abutment of brickwork until Mr. Tom Jackson should have got into the cellar. He therefore nimbly surmounted the railings—the railings of his own hotel—and was gingerly descending the ladder, when lo! a rough hand seized him by the coat-collar, and, with a ferocious jerk, urged him backwards. The fact was, Theodore Racksole had counted without the policeman. That guardian of the peace, mistrusting Racksole's manner, had quietly followed him down the lane. The sight of the millionaire climbing the railings had put him on his mettle, and the result was the ignominious capture of Racksole. In vain Theodore expostulated, explained, anathematised. Only one thing would satisfy the stolid policeman—namely, that Racksole should return with him to the hotel and there establish his identity. If Racksole then proved to be Racksole, owner of the Grand Babylon, well and good—the policeman promised to apologise. So Theodore had no alternative but to accept the suggestion. To prove his identity was, of course, the work of only a few minutes, after which Racksole, annoyed, but cool as ever, returned to his railings.

In the meantime, our friend Jules, sublimely unconscious of the altercation going on outside, and of the special risk which he ran, was, of course, actually in the cellar, which he had reached before Racksole got to the railings for the first time. It was, indeed, a happy chance for Jules that his exit from the cellar coincided with the period during which Racksole was absent from the railings. As Racksole came down the lane for the second time, he saw a figure walking about fifty yards in front of him towards the Embankment. Instantly he divined that it was Jules, and that the policeman had thrown him just too late. He ran, and Jules, hearing the noise of pursuit, ran also. The ex-waiter was fleet; he made direct for a certain spot in the Embankment wall, and, to the intense astonishment of Racksole, jumped clean over the wall, as it seemed, into the river. "Is he so desperate as to commit suicide?" Racksole exclaimed as he ran, but a second later the puff and snort of a steam launch told him that Jules was not quite driven to suicide. As the millionaire crossed the Embankment roadway he saw the funnel of the launch move out from under the river wall. It swerved into midstream and headed towards London Bridge. There was a silent mist over the river. Racksole was helpless.

(Another long instalment next week.)

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Will be inserted in this column at the rate of 6d. per line of 8 words or part thereof. All advertisements should be addressed to Advertisement Manager, "Short Stories," 17 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., 11 days prior to date of appearance.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

A Case for Waiting.

"ELDRED" is just beginning to keep company with a young lady. He feels he would like to ask her to become more to him than a friend, but he is only twenty-one, and though he is in a permanent situation, he is not yet making enough money to ask her to be his wife. Should he, in the circumstances, propose, or wait until he is better off?

* * * * *

As you have only just met the young lady, and do not seem to have got beyond the friendship stage, it would be unwise in any case to commit yourself to a proposal until you know each other better. It is all very well for a young man in such a position as yourself to become engaged to a girl, if he and she are really deeply in love, and determined to be faithful to each other, but it is not wise for a young couple to tie themselves to an engagement in the absence of any such constant devotion. Certainly wait a while, before you propose anything, in the meantime taking every opportunity to improve your intimacy with her.

Wedding Points.

"PATER." It is not compulsory for you to provide the carriages for all the guests at your daughter's wedding. You provide the bridal carriage, of course, and those for your own party. The friends and relations of the bridegroom generally provide their own, and the happy man himself rides in a vehicle hired for himself by the best man, with whom he travels to the church. As to the other point you mention, no doubt the bride herself knows all about it. However, it is usual for her to retain her bridal costume during the breakfast, and while the compliments are being passed. After that, she steals away, and changes her dress. It is very unusual for a girl to travel in her bridal costume, unless it is properly covered by a travelling cloak. Nowadays, people do not go in for advertising the fact that they are newly-married to all and sundry, but like to get rid of wedding clothes and attributes directly the ceremony is over.

An Introduction Problem.

"PHIL" is acquainted with a young lady, who lives in a different district. Recently, the lady came to stay in the same neighbourhood as "PHIL'S" home. "PHIL" naturally wanted to introduce her to his parents and family. Would it be etiquette for "PHIL" to ask her himself to call at the house, or how could the introduction have been arranged?

* * * * *

It would have been better if you had managed to meet the lady while walking in the street with your mother, or one of the family. You could then have introduced her, and your mother would have said: "We shall be very glad to see you if you can come to tea." That would save the awkwardness of your asking her yourself to make the call.

Be Perfectly Open.

"UNDECIDED" is a young lady who was engaged two years ago, but having broken it off, is now engaged to another young man. She wishes to know if she should tell her present *fiancé* of her former engagement. I should advise "Undecided" to do so, because if she does not he is almost sure to hear of it sooner or later from somebody else. To be perfectly open with those we love is the only way to insure a happy life with them.

Coolness.

I CANNOT offer you much advice, "N. B. H." You evidently failed to keep an appointment with the young man who had been so attentive to you, and he took offence because you gave no reason for failing him. Since this, he has been cool towards you, and has refused to give you an explanation. Well, that seems a very likely thing to happen. Young men, just beginning to be interested in a girl, are very sensitive to anything which resembles a slight, and their wounded feelings are difficult to heal. As, however, you say he is anxious to meet you again, though he refuses to give you an explanation of his coolness, you must decide for yourself whether or not your fondness for him is such as to warrant your forgiving his silence. Personally, I think it would be better for you to agree not to ask him to give a reason. It is never well for love to reopen old sores, after they have once healed.

When Not to Propose.

"M. E." If the young lady does not seem at all in love with you, it would not be very wise to propose marriage to her. However, a young man can declare his love for a girl, without committing himself to a proposal. I believe in declarations of love, as, though the girl may be cool, it turns her thoughts to the possibility of her getting to love the man, and when a girl's thoughts are once turned that way, a happy result may often be expected. So I advise you to declare your love, and abide by the result. Will "ANXIOUS" take this advice also in his own case, as he and "M. E." seem to be in exactly the same position.

Girl, Man, and a Cab.

"I TRAVELLED some distance in the train with a strange gentleman," writes "CISSIE," "whose looks rather suggested that he would like to know me. However, he did not speak to me. It was a very wet night, and on arriving at the station we were both going to, we found there was only one cab to be had, which both of us required. The young man came up and spoke to me. 'I hope,' he said, 'that you will take the cab. I will walk.' I accepted his kind offer. What I want to know is: Ought I to have asked him to share the cab? Secondly, do I know that young man if he should bow when next we meet?"

* * * * *

An awkward position, "CISSIE." Personally, I don't think there would have been much harm in your sharing the cab under the circumstances, if it was very wet, and the walk a long one. But though some young ladies might safely have done this in the case of certain young men, in other cases it would have been wrong. A girl well able to look after herself might agree to such a thing in the case of a man who had the appearance of respectability. You, however, took the more becoming course, though under some circumstances you might have acted differently. Of course, you don't know the young man when you next meet, and I don't suppose he would be so forward as to bow to you. But one has heard of romances beginning in the way you mention, and very pretty ones, too.

Cynthia

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SHORT STORIES

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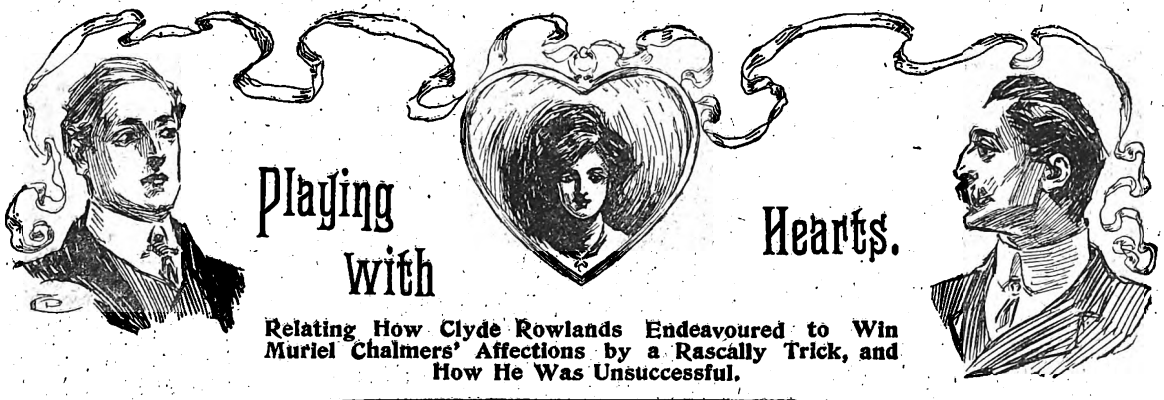
Containing the incident depicted on the cover.



Playing with Hearts.

Relating How Clyde Rowlands Endeavoured to Win Muriel Chalmers' Affections by a Rascally Trick, and How He Was Unsuccessful.

"I SHALL not take your decision as final, Miss Chalmers!" said Clyde Rowlands, cleverly masking his feeling of baffled rage behind a suave smile. "A real prize usually requires a good deal of winning, so I must not be discouraged by a rebuff. I was too hasty—a pardonable error in the circumstances—and I ought to have waited, perhaps, till you had learnt to know me better!"

Muriel Chalmers experienced a sentiment of mingled sympathy and antipathy—a strange combination, but perfectly true. She was sorry for this man in his disappointment, and, at the same time, this speech had aroused a feeling of dislike.

"I hope, Mr. Rowlands, that you will accept my answer as final," she replied, in a halting manner. "I am sorry—so very sorry—that you—— Oh, please let us end this interview, which is as painful to me as it is to you," concluded the girl in evident distress.

"Pray do not be so distressed," he urged, bowing gallantly. "It is all my own seeking, and I am man enough to know how to take a temporary set-back. You see, I cannot regard it as defeat, in spite of the fact that appearances are against me."

With another bow, and a look in those keen, steel-grey eyes that made her feel uneasy for hours afterwards, Clyde Rowlands left her. There was something in that glance that fascinated her; it was like the gaze of a serpent at a dove!

Rowlands went for a long walk in the cool of the evening, he could not stay in the house another minute. He was generally calm, exasperatingly so, in all circumstances, but this refusal had upset him for a while

"A walk will restore me," he told himself. "And, as I usually think better when I am on the move, I shall probably be able to devise some plan for attaining my end. I swear that I will have Muriel Chalmers for my wife! I am passionately in love with that girl, and it matters not to me whether she loves me or not. I want the money, too, but I would have her if she had no money in prospect."

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He strode on for about half-a-mile before he recommenced his half-audible soliloquising. A cynical smile curved his lips.

"Of course, I know well enough that she is in love with Basil Ashton, and he loves her. Nothing definite has occurred yet, and I thought that her affection was that of mere association, a sort of friendship. This rebuff tells me the exact position. Well, I'll undertake to upset it. And I can begin this very night."

Returning to the house in which he was an honoured guest by reason of the fact that he had saved Muriel's father from a severe, if not a fatal, accident, he went to his room and eagerly examined a small basket into which he was accustomed to throw odds and ends of paper, torn letters, and the like. With a triumphant expression, he drew from it an envelope that had passed through the post. It was crumpled, and slightly torn at one corner. but sufficiently whole for his purpose; it was addressed to Basil Ashton, and the writing was that of a woman. As a matter-of-fact, it had contained a business letter, and the envelope had been written by a lady clerk.

"When I picked it up, I thought it might give me a clue to something," murmured Rowlands; "but I threw it in here afterwards as useless. I'm glad they haven't emptied that basket; this envelope will be very serviceable, I fancy."

He was busy till dinner-time. Immediately after dinner, he found himself alone with Basil; Muriel had left the gentlemen to smoke, but Mr. Chalmers had complained of a twinge of gout and had retired without the customary indulgence in a fragrant cigar.

"I say, Ashton, I'll ask you to excuse me this evening," said Rowlands, simulating with much effect the air of a man who has a secret and is trying to talk as if he hadn't. "I must put off that game of cards. I'm going for a stroll."

Basil laughed; it was a good-natured, frank expression of enjoyment, and just such a one as you would have expected after a look at the man.

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"You needn't look so mysterious about it, Rowlands. What if you have a chance of meeting a fair and lovely maiden," Basil observed jestingly. "You must be on the alert against the machinations of Cupid! These extensive grounds contain one or two spots that are distinctly dangerous from that point of view."

Rowlands stifled a chuckle; Basil was simply paving the way for him.

"Well," he observed hesitatingly, "I don't mind your chaff. I'll admit that you're on the right tack, but I hope you won't mention it. I am going to the Copse with her, but Mur—— she wouldn't like everyone to guess. You're so dreadfully 'cute. Excuse me now, won't you? You stroll that way yourself some evenings, so if you chance to see anything—— Oh, well, I don't suppose we shall mind *you!*"

He was gone before Basil could recover from his surprise, and he was quite satisfied with his work. He read Basil's face like a book, and he concluded that the bait had been taken.

"The plot is simple enough," muttered Clyde Rowlands, as he left the house quietly. "I'll make each one angry, jealous, mortified, and then, if I judge a woman's heart correctly, she will be ready to accept me. In order to insure absolute success, I shall place him before her as a dishonourable man, and I know that *that* will finish matters. Otherwise there might be explanations. Confound it, I must have her and the money. I'm afraid that demand received by this evening's post is too peremptory to be put off for long, and if I can't meet it, why, it spells ruin."

The plot may have been simple, but it required a villain to execute it; Clyde Rowlands, when driven to a corner, was villain enough for most things, and the besmirching of a man's good name was a bagatelle in his eyes.

Clyde Rowlands made his way towards the spot known as the Copse, with the assurance that Muriel Chalmers had gone on ahead and would be there when he arrived. He had arranged that by an artfully-ambiguous note of two lines, written in a style that resembled Basil's, and yet was not exactly like it. The note had been placed in a book that she had been reading, and Rowlands had made certain that she had seen it. He was right; he saw the figure of Muriel walking slowly among the trees in the gloaming.

She was surprised when she saw him; she had expected Basil. She still did not doubt that Basil had written the note, and she regarded the appearance of Rowlands as an unfortunate coincidence.

"It seems that the Copse has attractions for others besides myself," he remarked gallantly. "I am intensely poetic at heart, Miss Chalmers, although many people would smile if they heard me say so. Is it not Wordsworth, the poet of Nature, who has some exquisite lines on such a place as this?" And he rattled on, remaining by her side as she walked, and keeping up a flow of talk that entertained the girl in spite of her desire that he would leave her.

Thus it came about that Basil, perplexed by Rowlands' remark in the house, and moved by mystification and jealousy to betake himself to the Copse, saw the two apparently in earnest conversation, and turned on his heel with an angry exclamation. Rowlands' keen eyes had detected his approach, and he had skilfully engineered a turn in the walk that hid Basil from Muriel till the former had disappeared.

Rowlands left the girl two minutes later; she had wished to remain at the Copse for a while. But Basil came not; Rowlands had overtaken him, and they returned to the house together.

Muriel was mortified at Basil's conduct, and this prevented her from doing the most natural thing—asking him for an explanation. Had it been a matter of business, an explanation would have been demanded; but love is not business, and so a chasm began to open between the two. Muriel soon had something more to think about, for another part of the villainous scheme came into operation. She saw an opened letter, somewhat crumpled, lying right in her path on the following morning.

The envelope had been neatly slit, just as methodical Basil always did, but the letter had been replaced in the envelope in the narrow way, so that about one-third of the width of the note-paper was visible. Naturally, she surveyed it curiously, saw that it was addressed to Basil, and then caught sight of "Dearest Basil" on the exposed part of the note-paper. She did not see Clyde Rowlands surveying her with cruel eyes from behind a bush.

"Dearest Basil!" In a woman's hand, although Basil had not one solitary feminine friend except herself. And in the corner, Basil had scribbled in pencil "Copse, 9.30," just as he would do in ordinary matters. For a moment Muriel stood irresolute; should she read the letter or no? She loved Basil and had given her heart to him; she believed that his heart was going out to her, she had reason for believing so, yet—— Tormented by doubt, an aching pain making her feel faint, she decided that she had a right to know whether this man was playing her false. It was not fair, she realised, to pry into the contents of a letter not intended for her, but she argued that it was a justifiable act, and, to the delight of the scoundrel watching her every movement, she drew forth the letter and perused it.

She read an impassioned love missive; Clyde Rowlands knew what she was reading, for had he not written it? He saw the tears well to her eyes and her cheeks flush crimson, and then become deadly pale. Muriel stood gazing dully at the letter for a few seconds, and then she tore it all into shreds and scattered them over the bushes. Some of the pieces fell on Rowlands, and he shook them off with a sardonic smile as he stepped from his hiding-place and glanced in the direction in which Muriel had vanished.

"Very good!" he murmured, rubbing his hands softly; "*very* good! Fortune favours the daring! We are getting on! I must be nice and humble towards her! Her spirit will respond to kindness just now, and that is my chance! I'll bet that she goes to the Copse at the time mentioned, so I must have my confederate there, even if Basil Ashton doesn't turn up! I fancy he will go there, though; he will be irresistibly attracted, in the vague idea that he will see us again! Anyhow, Muriel will have her fears realised by seeing a woman there. Anyone could get over the boundary fence, or through it, so there's nothing extraordinary about his meeting a sweetheart within the grounds. When I am master here, I'll alter that!"

Later in the day a telegram came for Rowlands, and he turned deadly pale. He seated himself on the lounge in the smoking-room and reflected deeply.

"I'll do it!" he muttered at length. "I must have some money to-night, so I'll get Basil on for a game of cards. He won't go to the Copse, but I think that will be better, after all. I'll prepare the bogus sweetheart so that she can speak to Muriel and throw oil on the—no, not on the troubled waters, but on the fire!"

Old Mr. Chalmers was confined to his room, where he passed the day in trying to sleep and in growling at gout, doctors, and everything in general. It was thus easy for Muriel to slip away after the dinner, which was a much more silent affair than usual. She purposely announced her intention of not appearing again that night, and she imagined that Basil would hail this intention with secret joy. Rowlands was delighted; it meant that Muriel would fall into the trap, and that he would have Basil to himself.

"And I'll have him for enough to stave off the threatened steps!" he said under his breath. "I'll pay that old fiend of a money-lender for his threats, one day!" he added, with an expression that was not one of those which one puts in print. "But he'll keep it, if I do not respond, and the final upshot of it will be prison!"

Clyde Rowlands steadied himself by an effort; he generally had a wonderful control over himself, and he exerted it now. Basil, on the contrary, was full of disappointment and anger at the course of events. He blamed Muriel for her fickleness, mentally calling her an accomplished flirt. He was glad that he had found her out, yet he was angry that she should have proved herself so different from what his fancy had painted

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her! He was bitter against her, also, for having tried, as he supposed, to cover her fault by treating him haughtily during that day, thus preventing him from even attempting to upbraid her. Rowlands had secretly kept his wine-glass full during dinner, and Basil had drunk more than he was wont to do; and now his enemy plied him with drink and proposed a renewal of the friendly games at cards which had been interrupted during the stay at Mr. Chalmers' pretty country house.

"Let us play for a few shillings," he said, with a shrug of his shoulders; "this place is a trifle slow, and we want something to wake us up. Only playing for stakes will do that!"

Basil agreed recklessly. The first stakes were low, and Rowlands lost; he pretended to grow excited, the stakes were doubled and still further increased. Basil's luck changed; he lost and continued to lose. The stakes were constantly increased; occasionally he won, but he lost far more often. With flushed cheeks he played madly, and Rowlands grew even more calm. He was winning all round, and these two poor fools were as puppets in his hands! How was Muriel faring with the "sweetheart"? His thoughts wandered to the Copse, but he felt that his cause was in good hands and that he could afford to forget that part of his scheme for the time and devote his whole attention to this reckless gambler before him!

And how was it faring with Muriel? She had stolen out unobserved, and taken up a position in the Copse. It was spying, and she hated herself for it as soon as she found herself there. An inward struggle ensued; should she wait and confirm the duplicity of her lover? She clenched her slender fingers as the word crossed her mind. Lover? He did not love her, but—yes, she loved him! Even now, she loved him and she could not help it! Was it right, was it womanly, to spy upon him, in any circumstances?

"No, I will not!" she cried aloud.

She uttered a little cry of fear as she felt the touch of a finger on her shoulder at that very instant; she turned, expecting to see Basil, but she found herself face to face with a woman!

"Why are you here?" asked the newcomer, hissing the words like one who is in the throes of jealousy. "Who do you come to see? Have you come to try to take him from me? I tell you, Basil Ashton is my promised husband, and woe be to you if you try your wiles on him, to take him from me!"

She leant forward and peered into Muriel's face.

"Yes, you are the one!" she continued vehemently. "I know that you have been winning him from me, or doing your best that way! But I warn you!" She shook her fist at Muriel, who stepped back in horror mingled with disgust. "He has promised to come here to meet me, and I will make him answer for what he has done. He mustn't play fast and loose with me! Now you go!"

Muriel was stunned. This woman was very little older than herself; she was not vulgar, yet she was not of the same social standing as Basil and Muriel. Why was it that Muriel experienced this sentiment of abhorrence? She could just distinguish the woman's features in outline, and she judged that the face was rather a pretty one. Muriel conceded in her own mind that she had been unjust to the woman in shrinking from her; if the stranger were enraged, perhaps she had cause! Certainly, if Basil had pledged himself to her, she had cause for anger, for Basil had led Muriel by his actions to believe that her own love was returned in some degree! How dared he act thus when he had given himself to another?

"I beg your pardon!" said Muriel humbly and brokenly. "I will go away!"

Before the stranger could utter another word, Muriel was running swiftly through the trees, and was soon lost to sight.

When Rowlands and Basil rose from the card-table, Muriel was sobbing convulsively, her face buried in the pillow. Rowlands had lost some of his calmness and his cheeks showed a faint tinge of red; Basil was deadly pale, for the fact had come home to him with stunning force that in his foolishness he had lost a large sum of money. Basil went straight to his room and drew a cheque for an amount that almost exhausted his account, and this he immediately handed to Rowlands.

"I have my revenge to-morrow?" he said unsteadily.

Rowlands assented. As Basil went out, Rowlands murmured: "And you will lose again! To-morrow night, I will show you as a cheat! That will settle Muriel, for if she does not consent, I will coerce her by threatening to expose you!"

The following day, the small house party was practically broken up; Mr. Chalmers was still in his room, Muriel avoided the others, and in the afternoon went off to the village to do what she could for someone who had been knocked down by a motor, and the two men kept apart. Both Basil and Rowlands were waiting for the gamble at cards; at dinner they scarcely spoke, although they had it to themselves. Muriel had not returned.

On the previous evening Rowlands had manipulated the cards; this evening he intended to let Basil have a short run of wins on the low stakes, and then charge him with cheating. The difficulty would be to prove it if Basil protested, but Rowlands evolved a line of action which, he imagined, would cause disinterested persons to attach more importance to his word than to Basil's.

He carried out his plan at the psychological moment. "I wish I could have engineered a witness, but it was too risky!" he said to himself.

Unknown to him, there *was* a witness! Muriel, trembling with agitation, but determined, had crept in and stood watching behind a curtain. She realised the full significance of the position; they were, in reality, playing for the hand of the girl they loved, and Muriel, from her hiding-place, saw the villain swiftly draw the ace of hearts from his sleeve. A mist swept before her eyes; she did not see what immediately happened, but she knew enough. As Rowlands sprang to his feet, proclaiming in a loud voice that Basil had cheated by having two aces of hearts in the pack, turning his own misdeed against Basil, Muriel ran forward to protect her lover, the man whom Rowlands was seeking to ruin that he, and not his more fortunate rival, should obtain her hand!

"'Tis false, you villain!" she cried, her eyes afire and pointing an accusing finger at the scoundrel, who flinched under her gaze. "I know all! Your accomplice of last night was knocked down and fatally injured by a motor, and she has confessed to me! I saw you take that card from your own sleeve!"

"Then he robbed me last night!" gasped Basil, bewildered.

"Get out of my house, you fiend!" spluttered another voice, and old Chalmers hobbled in. "My daughter finds that you told your accomplice too much for your own safety. You forgot that people tell the truth when on their death beds, and death comes unexpectedly. What's this about cheating and about robbery last night?"

Basil hurriedly explained. Rowlands edged towards the door at the other end of the apartment. Mr. Chalmers went livid with rage.

"If you dare to present that cheque, you will be arrested!" he roared. "I'll have it stopped, and you won't get the money! Don't attempt to bluster, but get away while you're safe, or it may be the worse for you!"

Rowlands deemed it well to take the hint. He left the house just as he was. Chalmers turned to the two young people.

"If we had had any case on which to prosecute, I'd have prosecuted, but the actual legal evidence is too small. We shall never get properly to the bottom of this, but it is perfectly clear that he plotted to separate you and have Muriel for himself! Now, if you two are not foolish, you'll get married as soon as you can!"

And the best proof that this hint was also taken is found in the fact that a certain marriage was announced five weeks later!

Geo. Day.

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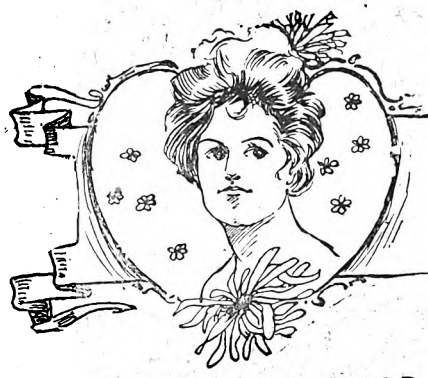

WITHOUT A HEART.

A Splendid Story relating how a Girl considered that Love was not an Essential Part of Life, but how she was convinced in the End.

"You are an awful little humbug, and you know it!"

So Kitty Seabright's tall brother, Murray, used sometimes to say to her when she had vexed him beyond control by her caprices, or he had watched her driving some one of her adorers, who chanced to be a friend of his own, to the verge of distraction by her coquetries.

"I am not!" Kitty would asseverate. "How can you be so cruel to a poor little thing like me? I wonder at you, I do indeed!"

Sometimes she would pout, sometimes go into a passion. Then Murray would sternly read her a lesson, which had no effect whatever. But more frequently the discussion ended by her coaxing him to forgive her.

One other person used occasionally, when she fretted and worried him beyond endurance, to bring the same accusation against Kitty. This was Roy Devereux, who had been her adorer, her victim, ever since she was a golden-haired fairy of six, and he a brave little knight of eleven.

But Roy's formula of condemnation differed slightly from that of his friend Murray.

"You are an awful little humbug, Kitty," he would say, "but you don't know it!"

"And I don't believe it either," Kitty would say, and generally forced him to repent his outburst, in metaphorical dust and ashes, before she forgave him.

Aunt Henderson never told her she was a humbug. That wise and worldly dame had carefully trained Kitty in the ways wherein a marriageable maiden should walk, who is expected to make what is called "a good match"—that is, marry wealth and position. And Kitty seemed to be going the way that her aunt wished.

In the ordinary affairs of life Kitty was gentle, loving, and honest. But when men were concerned, she displayed neither conscience nor heart. Murray said it was because she possessed neither. But Roy inclined to a more merciful opinion, excusing her on account of the vitiated atmosphere of Aunt Henderson's influence.

These two, Kitty's brother and her chief knight, were firm friends, though Murray was several years the elder, and had already begun to gain wealth, as well as win praise in the artistic career which his example, as well as personal longings and aspirations, had induced Roy to enter. This step mortally offended Devereux's old uncle, who had brought him up to be respectable and a broker, and he turned his back on the misguided youth accordingly.

The two men discussed Kitty with as much freedom as if she had been no relation to Murray, and the nearest approach they ever got to quarrels was when Murray's harsh judgment of the girl roused Roy to a passionate defence of the little Circe.

For bewitching Kitty was! She could even fascinate women, and when a pretty girl is able to do that one must admit there can be no limit to her powers. She was not a regular beauty; pick her features to bits, and you could find blemishes—inconsistencies as great as these were in her character, but somehow these very defects made her the prettier! Her complexion was purity itself; her great hazel eyes could express every shade of feeling, from fun to tenderness; her smiles were legion, and varied from heavenly sweetness to bewitching provocation; and her dimples—but there is no comparison for Kitty's dimples—they had to be seen to gain the slightest idea of their charm, and few men ever saw them, if free, and of an age to be inflammable, without growing enamoured to imbecility.

Aunt Henderson permitted her to amuse herself, but she kept careful watch. When any ineligible adorer threatened to prove dangerous, that wily lady artfully encouraged him to put his passion into words, and then Kitty sent him to the right-about. "Because you know, aunty, there is no fun at all when they get maudlin," said Kitty.

She had not yet ended her first season "in Society," and she would not be eighteen for some months yet; but thanks to Aunt Henderson's care, she was as worldly as if she had been money-hunting for a decade; and thanks to certain naughty instincts of her own, as skilled in coquetry as a veteran flirt, long before she left the schoolroom.

Roy Devereux had been making love to her for so many years that she took it quite as a matter of course that he should do so. She missed him if he were absent, and was glad to see him come back; she liked to indulge in an approach to poetical dreams now and then, but they didn't mean anything.

Murray read her aright so far—Kitty was a humbug; but then Roy was right, too—Kitty did not know it. There was nobody whom she humbugged so successfully as she did herself, for under all her folly and her wickedness, Kitty had a heart, and if it awakened one day, when too late, there would be terrible misery.

Early in February Mr. Erastus Chillingford came back from Brazil after an absence of several years. He was sixty, though he did not look his age; a widower; rich as Crœsus; and a very handsome man.

He had two married daughters, and two sons, and he quarrelled incessantly with the whole brood. But people declared that Mr. Chillingford was in the right, for his children were an idle, extravagant lot, with the exception of the eldest son, who was a miser, and grudged every penny his father spent as if stolen from himself. And now he wanted to punish them! And the most effectual way of doing this was to marry!

Only two evenings after his return he met his old friend Mrs. Henderson, at a dinner-party, and they resumed at once their former familiar relations. He knew she was a woman to be trusted, and he confided his secret to her, though he did not mention his desire to revenge himself on his family. He talked about his loneliness, his empty home, and though he

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frankly admitted that for a man of his age to take a wife was usually a folly, he opined that in his particular case there were cogent reasons, which would not only excuse, but render his determination meritorious.

He had not seen Kitty half-a-dozen times since she was a child, and had forgotten her existence; but Mrs. Henderson's pulses beat fast with triumph as she listened to his confidence. Naturally, she held her peace, made only casual mention of her niece, and invited him to dine with her the next night, so that they could talk of old times, and discuss the future with more freedom.

He accepted the invitation, and appeared, looking such a stately cavalier in his scrupulously-correct evening dress, his luxuriant grey hair softening his stern-cut features, and instead of making him look old, taking away from his age, and brightening his black eyes, till the effect was rather as if his curly locks had been whitened with powder instead of years, that Mrs. Henderson felt he must prove satisfactory to Kitty in every way.

And while the two sat waiting in the carefully-subdued light of the library, till dinner should be announced, Kitty herself came floating in with her white robes trailing about her. She chanced to be in one of her quiet moods, and looked like a youthful Sybil, or an enchanted princess, or some other rare and marvellous creature far removed from the capabilities and petty charms of ordinary girlhood.

Mr. Chillingford did not lose his head. Aunt Henderson saw that. But she saw that Kitty was a new revelation to him, and to a man of sixty this means a great deal! He was an admirable conversationalist. His manners, without being stiff, were a happy contrast to those of the free and easy youth of our day; he descended to no compliments; but every word or glance was a delicate tribute of admiration; and Kitty was charmed.

The dinner proved delicious. Mr. Chillingford surpassed himself, and Kitty flashed into gaiety, and displayed half-a-dozen of her Protean guises, before ten o'clock came and Murray appeared to escort her to some reception at the house of a friend.

Many times after that Mr. Chillingford called.

Kitty was given no leisure for thought. She was hurried on down the perfumed atmosphere, until her head was in a whirl; her vanity was excited till it became for the time her most prominent characteristic; her love of power was gratified by her influence over this man, whom the world delighted to honour, whose manners and conversation were charming beyond anything she had ever known.

Then Murray and Roy discovered something of the truth, and poor Roy allowed his impulsiveness to get the better of his reason, and he flew to Kitty and upbraided her bitterly.

"You are the very embodiment of the Eastern myth of the fire-fly and the white moths!" cried he, so terribly in earnest that exaggerated speech came natural. "The moths are her lovers, and she sends them to bring her a light, and they burn their wings off and die!"

"I have no sympathy for their folly," said Kitty, setting her face as hard as a flint. Murray had just been lecturing her, and she was in her worst mood.

"I know you are only flirting—I know you never mean to marry him," cried Roy, quite beside himself. "Kitty—Kitty—you are breaking my heart! I have loved you all my life—you do care for me at bottom—I know you do—you cannot hlep it—you must!"

"We are the best friends in the world—always have been—oh, Roy, don't spoil it all by turning silly like the rest!" she answered, a little disturbed, she could not have told why, by his pleading. Something seemed to stir away down in the depths of her being; some chord responsive to his prayers. Some secret lying there seemed to awake, to be trying to make itself intelligible; but her ears were so dulled by the brazen ring of worldly noise, that she heard it only vaguely, and the language was unintelligible—unknown. Mrs. Henderson had trained her in many tongues, but she had so carefully smothered the creature's head under the swaddling bands of vanity and pride, that the girl did not even recognise its tones, when the stifled prisoner heard the voice of the enchanter, and strove to call in answer.

"Don't put me off. You can't. I have gone too far. I must speak!" cried Roy. "It is no new thing for you to hear. You have always known I loved you! Listen, Kitty. I have to go away, you know—abroad—oh, the time is coming very near! Let your heart speak. Give me your promise. It will only be a few years! I shall succeed. I shall be able to offer you a home—and love, too, for you do love me, Kitty!"

She began to feel indignant with his presumption. She caught at that sensation, in order to escape the kind of fright which that inexplicable inward tumult had roused.

"How dare you talk to me like this!" she exclaimed. "I have liked you, but I shall hate you if this goes on. You and Murray do nothing but make scenes! I have told you over and over again, I don't know what love means. I am incapable of it. I haven't what you call a heart. I've told you that, too! Oh, don't tease me, Roy, don't! It's a shame! You will make me cry, and then my eyes will get red, and I shall look horrid, and we are going to Mrs. Wentworth's ball, and I've such a lovely gown!"

He stared at her with eyes full of wrath and pain. Their anguish hurt her a little. Her own nonsensical talk hurt her also. But she meant it, every word, and her sorrow for him was only because he was her old friend. Of this she

Kitty ran to the piano, and dashed into an old Scottish melody.

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assured herself again and again, as she shivered under his glance.

"By Heaven!" he groaned. "Don't—don't make me believe you in earnest!"

"But I must," she said; "it's all true! Go away, Roy, and get your senses back, till we can be as we were in old times."

"You love me, Kitty. You can't deny it. You love me!"

Again something stirred away down beneath what she called her real self. Again that frightened sensation smote her, that vague consciousness, that though she had never learnt the tongue he spoke, something in her soul partially understood and tried restlessly to catch its full meaning.

"If you ever say that again, I will never speak to you as long as I live!" she exclaimed. But, angrily as she spoke, she was nearly crying. And he saw it.

He caught her two hands. He tried to draw her towards him. But she resisted, he pleading all the while.

"I shall not give you up," he said. "You shall not break my heart, nor your own; for if you sent me away, it would wake, some time, when too late, and teach you the truth. Kitty! Kitty! Let your real self speak. Promise me now. Once you have promised, I know nothing could induce you to break your word. Say that you will be my wife!"

She had a hasty, half-formed thought, that it was a pity Roy had not a fortune; then her fright and her anger rose higher. The dread that she should weep seemed in an instant to nerve her. She pulled her hands free; she ran to the piano; she dashed into the old Scottish melody of "Roy's Wife of Aldivalloch;" turned her head towards him with a cruel, smile, and half-said, half-sang:

"But her name it wasn't Kitty—no, no! her name was never that!"

Roy fairly staggered into a seat. For the moment it seemed to him that he hated her. Before he could speak, the door opened, and a maid entered, saying:

"If you please, miss, your aunt says, will you come into the drawing-room?—there are visitors, and she wants you."

Kitty sprang up, waved her hand to Roy, and ran out of the room. He sat for a few moments. Then he rose and left the house.

A week went slowly by. Again Roy found an opportunity to see Kitty alone. Again he annoyed, pained, and angered her. But Mrs. Henderson, finding that he was there, came to the rescue, and after Kitty had fled, the two had a battle royal, and Roy was forbidden to enter the house.

He wrote to Kitty, and she sent his letter back, having scribbled on the envelope:

"I have not read it—I hoped you meant to be sensible; when I found you did not, I stopped reading."

And so she had. The tender, passionate words disturbed her to read, in the same odd fashion they had done when his lips uttered them.

That night Roy left town. He stayed away for a fortnight. When he got back, and rushed to Murray's studio for news, Murray told him that Kitty was engaged to Mr. Chillingford. "The engagement," he said, "was publicly announced yesterday." Murray had quarrelled with his aunt, and tried to quarrel with the intended bridegroom. But his wrathful reproaches glanced off the polished armour which that gentleman wore, as a child's arrows might off a steel breastplate. Kitty herself he had formally disowned, cast off; patience and moderation had never been virtues possessed by any of the Seabrights. That night, as he watched his friend struggling through the awful hours, which must carry him on to the more unendurable new day, he could have found the heart to revile the girl outright; for he understood the capabilities of her character as no one else ever had. He knew that she was able to understand what she had done; that she remained wilfully deaf and blind.

Roy was really very ill for a week. But Seabright guarded him in his lodgings, and kept the fact of his return a secret; for he reflected that later it would be hard on the poor boy, if careless acquaintances discovered how completely the blow had prostrated him.

The marriage was to take place in a month. But before that time Murray and Roy would have crossed the sea. When Mrs. Henderson and Kitty heard that Murray would not come to the wedding they were both somewhat disturbed. "It would look odd," the elder lady said; and anything which looked odd was terrible in her eyes. She wrote a beseeching letter to her nephew. But he paid no attention to it. At last Kitty determined to try if a personal application would not soften Murray. He would scold her, she knew, and she hated to be scolded. Still she could not believe that any human being could resist her very long.

With her usual impulsiveness, Kitty acted upon her resolution as soon as it came into her head. She had to go out shopping, and took occasion to pass by her brother's lodgings. She ran lightly upstairs, putting on her most pensive expression of countenance, in order to subdue Murray's obduracy at the first glance.

The ante-chamber led into both rooms and studio, and the two rooms were connected by double doors. Kitty decided to enter the *salon*, and knock in order to give Murray warning of her presence, as she had often done in the days before her conduct brought trouble between them.

The curtains were drawn, the room in shadow. Kitty was near the studio door, when up from the sofa rose Roy Devereux, and confronted her, pale and gaunt, and changed, as if years, instead of a few weeks, had passed since they parted. He stood still and looked at her, but did not speak. Kitty was frightened and troubled, too. But she got her wits back quickly.

"How you startled me, Roy!" she exclaimed. "I didn't know you were in town. I almost thought you were a ghost."

She tried to laugh. But the merriment died on her lips, as she met the heart-broken reproach in his eyes and heard his answer.

"It is the ghost of the man whose life you have ruined," he said; "and you are only a ghost, too! The real Kitty, noble and honest, died when she stooped to falsehood—sold herself for gold!"

Kitty shivered from head to foot. The old terror came back. But, as usual, anger came also.

"I'm afraid you have been drinking, Roy," she said. "I'd be ashamed, if I were a man, to talk about any woman ruining my future."

"Don't you be afraid, Kitty!" he said, savagely. "You'll live to see what I can make of my life. You'll live to repent what you have made of yours."

"Is my brother in, Mr. Devereux?" she asked, loftily.

"Your brother is not in, Miss Seabright."

"Then I'll go," said Kitty. "Perhaps you will kindly tell him I called. Good morning."

She turned to flee. Roy started forward, caught her in a fierce embrace, and kissed her twice. Then he released her.

"Go!" he said. "Every time your husband touches his lips to yours, my kisses will burn you like fire, Kitty, for you loved me—you'll find it out some day."

Kitty rushed away. On the stairs she met her brother. She said not a word about what had happened, but held him fast, and pleaded with him to remain for her wedding.

"I'd rather go to your funeral," he said; and then Kitty sobbed piteously, till at last he took her in his arms, moaning: "Poor little girl! It's not all your fault. Come, we sha'n't meet often in this world, so we won't part enemies. Good-bye! I shall sail in three days."

The month passed. Murray and Roy had crossed the sea. Mrs. Henderson had been dazzled by the promised golden rain. Kitty was married.

I have no persecution, no cruelty, no hardness to record of her husband during the years which followed. Yet, from the first, under all his elaborate courtesy, his gentleness, his affectionate attentions, Kitty was made to feel that the hand which guided her every step was iron, that she must

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walk wherever it willed, else the velvet glove which covered it would be flung aside, and if she did not obey its slightest impulsion, she would be dragged ruthlessly along in the way it pointed.

She shut her eyes to the fact as much as she could, and Kitty had marvellous powers of self-deception. She was such an odd compound, too, that though wilful and headstrong, she could not help admiring the man who was able to make himself her master. Then, too, Mr. Chillingford was the most cultivated, the most intellectual person she had ever known intimately. His superiority was so manifest that to be admired by him was a triumph; and shallow and frivolous as her education had been, Kitty had real talents, and was capable of appreciating mental supremacy.

Her house was almost as luxurious as Aladdin's palace. Kitty's jewels might have been the envy of a queen. She was allowed every amusement. She could have the world at her feet. But the handsome face, so stern beneath its smiles, was always beside her; the iron hand never released its hold.

She could receive as much general attention from men as she pleased, but there must be no approach to flirting; no singling out one man for the recipient of her smiles! He did not tell her this in words; he seldom put his commands into speech; but she was made to feel this restriction, as she was made to feel all others, and rebellion was useless.

She tried it once, and three months' seclusion was the consequence. Yet he was so charming a companion all the while, that she could not hate him. Aunt Henderson attempted to interfere, and met with her reward.

"Keep by me, and we are friends," said Mr. Chillingford, with his iciest smile. "Oppose me, and you never enter my doors. I am your niece's master, and so far, I am yours."

Roy Devereux knelt at her feet and in another moment she burst into tears.

Kitty came back from her seclusion more quiet, older, but immensely improved. With her natural gifts, her mind, in companionship with her husband's, could not fail to grow, and he took every pains with her, and enjoyed his task. But she was not to become grave and lose her playful ways. He wanted to be amused, and she must amuse him.

"You are not so kittenish as you used to be," he said.

"Perhaps because I'm growing old," said she; and then she sighed to herself.

But she knew that he meant her to play at being a kitten if she was no longer one—and she had to do it! Wealth and luxury gradually lost their charm. They were so freely lavished, that satiety followed. Amusements no longer interested her, as they had done in more frivolous days; she was outgrowing the petty power of their spell. Life, brilliant as it was, looked cold and hard amid its glitter; yet what she needed to fill it, Kitty could not have told for a long, long while, but the knowledge came at length.

Her husband entered her room one day so softly that she did not hear him. She was nestled in an easy chair, vaguely dreaming. He drew her head back, and kissed her lips. For the first time Kitty remembered Roy's menace.

She did not love Roy. She hated him, for it was his doing that she had at last reached the truth which must embitter her existence! She knew what the lack was. The touch on hers of the lips of the husband whom she did not love had, at this moment, in some strange way, made her comprehend what life would have been with a man she had loved.

Eighteen months after her marriage Mr. Chillingford was seized with paralysis, which confined him to his chair. But his mind remained as vigorous as ever, his will as indomitable. From that time, for nearly two years, it is scarcely an exaggeration to assert that Kitty was never allowed to leave his presence. He removed into the country. He could take daily drives; he could read and study. But he lived on. And in every occupation Kitty must bear her part—must amuse him to the very best of her ability!

Life was sad and dreary, and she hated it. But she could not hate him. She learnt almost to hate money, for she saw in family quarrels, in the mercenary spirit of professed friends, how odious it could become.

She hated Roy Devereux, too, for the knowledge he had taught her never faded from her mind, and yet she never played a Scottish melody—and she had to do it often ("Roy's Wife," among them) for Mr. Chillingford was fond of the old tunes—without there rising before her eyes that scene with Devereux in the library.

Ah, it looked so far off, and yet so near, that day when in cruel mockery she had frenzied her lover's soul by her scornful chant—and she knew now—she knew that his wife's name might have been Kitty, had she only believed him when he told her that she had a heart, and she comprehended that the voice she had heard crying out, in a language she did not then understand, was her own heart beseeching to be heard.

But she never went beyond this reflection. Kitty was dead. Roy was dead! Mr. Chillingford's wife was alive, and a man called Roy Devereux was alive, too, far away over the seas, earning fame and fortune already. But he was not the Roy whom Kitty had known; he was an enemy, who loathed and despised Mrs. Chillingford.

Three years from the date of her marriage Kitty was a widow. The will could not be read for three months, because Mr. Chillingford had ordered that it was to be done in the presence of both his executors; and one of them was on the Continent and ill, and could not return for at least that time.

However, everybody knew that Kitty was mistress of the millions. Her husband had made no secret of his testament. When the will was opened at last, and proved to be in her favour, the eldest son determined to dispute it. But after

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taking the preliminary steps, Oscar Chillingford was obliged to go back to China, and the case was kept off by artful delays for a whole twelvemonth.

Mrs. Henderson lived with Kitty now, and Kitty had her millions! Already, into her seclusion, admirers forced themselves. Go where she might, they followed, and Kitty could not forget a speech an old friend made, unaware that she overheard it.

"It is now Mrs. Chillingford's turn to be hunted. She is a gold fish now, and all the sharks are after her. She is young enough and handsome enough to be loved—but it won't happen! Every good has its drawback. Kitty can never trust any more, and there isn't one living who wouldn't think more of the millions than of her, try as he might to forget them."

Money—money! It seemed to Kitty as if every creature who approached her, from Aunt Henderson to the slightest acquaintance, thought of nothing else—wanted nothing else—tricked her—deceived her. And it was almost the truth, for that is what gold brings!

A distant relative died, and left her three thousand pounds a year. Oh, how delightful it would be, Kitty thought, if she had this income, and nothing more! But for all that I don't think she would have given up her fortune.

The lawsuit was to begin at last. There were times when she longed to fling the property at her dead husband's children. But Oscar Chillingford had hinted at wrong conduct, doubtful mysteries on her part as to the making of the will; and Kitty was not a woman to shrink from having everything exposed and cleared up.

She was in London. It was early spring. An intimate friend persuaded her to go to her house one night. "There would be none but the family there," Kitty was told. And Kitty went, and found herself face to face with Roy Devereux, who had returned unexpectedly, that very day, and had come to visit his cousins.

He avoided speaking to Kitty. There were at least a dozen people in the rooms, all excited over his appearance, so it was easy enough to manage.

Such a changed Roy! So much older, graver; but so handsome, so noble-looking! And there he was, only the length of a room between Kitty and him, and yet as far away from her as if death and the grave had swept between. She realised this the instant his eyes met hers.

She could not go away. She could find no excuse. After awhile there was music; and under its cover Kitty moved away into another room, and Roy entered, not knowing she was there. When he saw her, he turned back. Her pride broke down then. She was not thinking of him as her former lover, only of the days when he had been her friend; their childish games upon the grass; the thousand and one trifles which linked their childish past.

"Won't you speak to me, Roy?" she cried out. "We used to be friends. Won't you speak?"

In spite of her sombre dress, her changed face, in that moment she looked more like the girlish Kitty than she had done for years. Her very attitude was unconsciously the same as that she used to assume when they had quarrelled and she wanted to be forgiven. But the resemblance only made him hard and cruel.

Again her tremulous voice cried:

"Won't you shake hands, Roy?"

"No!" he answered.

"I didn't think you could treat me so!" she sighed. (The very words she used to utter.) "I wonder you can hate me so, if you ever liked me—but you couldn't have done so—you couldn't!"

He strode up and stood before her, cold and white!

"I loved Kitty!" he said; "or what I thought was her! You are Mrs. Chillingford, and I don't know you."

"Oh, Roy—Roy!" she moaned. "And you don't even take the trouble to tell me about Murray."

"He is well—you hear from him."

"So seldom—and he never comes home," sighed Kitty. "Oh, Roy, won't you say anything—won't you try to be glad to see me?"

"Glad to see you?" he cried. "You broke my heart once. Do you want to see if you can't torture me again? Don't hope it. I am not the man you knew. You are dead to me—more, you never existed. If I wished, I could not care about you. I could not love you. I wouldn't marry you if you had the wealth of the world added to your millions."

Kitty rose. She was not angry. But she had got her self-control back—she was stately Mrs. Chillingford again.

"You are right," she said. "You are not the man I used to know, you are a stranger. Permit me to remind you that strangers, in civilised countries, do not speak to a lady in that way."

She reached the door.

"I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed—"I beg your pardon!"

Kitty received his words with a slight inclination of the head and passed on. She went home, and cried herself to sleep, as if she had been a girl still.

As for Roy, he rushed into a violent flirtation with a damsel who was his distant cousin and had pink eyelids, a proof that the young gentleman was not so indifferent to Kitty as he wished to believe.

Within the next fortnight they met quite often. Both were determined not to speak. But they always did. Sometimes Roy said bitter things. Sometimes Kitty was cold and haughty. Sometimes they forgot themselves, and talked about their childish days, and grew interested and pleasant, till some chance word brought them both back to consciousness, and they would part on worse terms than ever.

The weeks flew by. Roy still lingered, still saw Kitty occasionally. He learnt one thing—that he loved her yet, that he was a fool! She cared for him, though—she cared! But marry old Chillingford's millions, live on his money—never! Not if he had had a dozen hearts, and to leave Kitty again must break them all.

The suit dragged its slow length along. It got into court at last. Nothing had been spared Kitty. She was forced to give evidence herself. Oscar Chillingford's lawyer cross-examined her, tortured her till a fiend might have felt pity; but he had none, and Kitty never faltered once.

The last day of the trial came. Kitty had to go. Passing down a crowded street, her carriage was brought to a stop by a press of vehicles. She looked out, and saw Roy Devereux standing on the kerbstone, waiting for an opportunity to cross. He lifted his hat, and was turning away, when her white face suddenly moved him to compassion. He hurried up to the carriage. He took her hand.

"Poor Kitty!" he said, softly. "You pay dearly for it all—very dearly!"

Whiter she could not grow. But a strange light flashed into her eyes and illuminated her whole face. She held his hand fast. He looked at her in wonder.

"You are going away?" she asked.

"I sail to-morrow."

"We shall not meet again, Roy," she said. "Will you do me a favour—a very little one? You needn't be afraid to say 'yes.'"

"I do say it," he answered. "What do you want, Kitty?"

"Come into the court-room," she said. "The decision will be given to-day. You'll not be kept more than an hour."

He drew his hand from hers.

"A most singular request!" he said angrily.

"But you promised! Think, Roy, if it went against me," said Kitty. But she knew her triumph was sure.

"I will go," he said. She made a sign, inviting him to get into her carriage. "Thanks," he replied. "I prefer to walk."

The vehicle drove on. Kitty held a consultation with her chief lawyer, in one of the waiting-rooms. When he led her to her place in the court, she saw Roy Devereux sitting on a bench facing her.

The trial ended. Judgment was pronounced in Kitty's favour. Not only that, but the judge, in summing up the

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case, overwhelmed Oscar Chillingford with the contumely he merited for his conduct from first to last, and bestowed an eloquent tribute upon the defendant.

Friends were hurrying forward to congratulate Kitty. Roy Devereux rose to go, when he was stopped by Kitty's principal counsel getting on his feet, and requesting the attention of the court.

Amid a breathless silence, he stated that his client, knowing in advance that her just claims must be acknowledged, had confided to him a decision, which he was requested to announce then and there. It was, perhaps, a little out of place, regarded from one point of view; in another, it was eminently proper. Mrs. Chillingford had only resisted the ignoble attack upon her, because to have yielded to a compromise, or announce her intentions, would have given evil, suspicious tongues an opportunity of declaring that there had been grounds for the infamous insinuations levelled against her, and that she feared to face the contest.

Everything was clear now. Her vile accuser was shown in his true light. The fortune was Mrs. Chillingford's, as her husband had willed it should be—hers to keep—hers to give—and given it was to be, to the last penny. One half the amount would be divided between the two daughters and the younger son of her late husband; the rest would be placed in the hands of trustees, for the use and benefit of such charitable institutions and purposes as they might hereafter select.

Amid a still unbroken silence he led his client from the court, and as she disappeared, such a shout went up from the crowded room as those old walls had never heard before.

An hour afterwards Kitty was sitting in her boudoir, when the door opened. Supposing it to be a servant, she did not turn her head.

"Kitty, Kitty!"

Roy Devereux was kneeling at her feet.

"Roy!" she murmured.

Then she burst into tears.

"Can you forgive me?" he cried. "Oh, how noble a woman, how grand you are! How can I dare tell you that I love you? Not a moment during all these dreadful years has my love altered. Strive and battle as I might, it lived on. Can you forgive me, Kitty?"

"I can thank you," she answered, looking down into his face with a heavenly smile. "You always told me I had a heart, Roy—you have wakened it at last!"

F. L. Bowe.

THE TWO MISSES BONNEY.

Illustrating how all that Glitters is not Gold.

GERTRUDE BONNEY was pretty, and, as is the case with most pretty girls, she kept herself and everyone else always aware of that fact. Not that she was overbearing and proud, but in a hundred little ways she would remind one that Gertrude Bonney had lovely grey eyes, a straight nose, and a dimpled chin.

When Jack Willet first saw her at a ball he thought he had seen the prettiest woman in the world, and after an introduction had been managed, he proceeded to fall straightway in love with the pretty damsel. After meeting her at a number of social gatherings Mr. Willet called one afternoon.

"Miss Bonney was at home," the maid told him, and he was shown into a long, sunny reception-room. He found it already occupied. A tall young lady in a plain grey gown stood holding his card in her hand.

"Mr. Willet?" she said, in a sweet, low voice.

"I called to see Miss Bonney," replied Jack, fumbling with his gloves.

"I am Miss Bonney," answered the girl in grey, and the smile passed from her face. "You probably wish to see my sister, Miss Gertrude. I will send her to you." And she left the room.

"Is it possible," thought the young man, "that such a pretty girl as Miss Gertrude could have such a—ah—plain sister." And yet her voice was delicious. "Ah—good afternoon, Miss Bonney," as Gertrude Bonney tripped into the room, all smiles and blue muslin.

Mr. Willet called many times at the palatial residence of his divinity, but he never again saw the elder Miss Bonney. By this time he was in the deep waters of love, and as yet he had not contrived to whisper his devotion into the shell-like ear of Miss Gertrude, for with all her innocent glances and confiding ways the little beauty's head was set squarely upon her white shoulders, and she always avoided a confidential *tête-à-tête*. Thus the swift months slipped by, and the Bonneys prepared to move to their country residence. When this news reached Jack he determined to speak with Gertrude of his love for her.

He nervously moved about the dainty room awaiting her coming, and when he heard the swish of skirts outside the door he hurried forward to greet—Miss Rose Bonney.

She handed him a letter; it ran:

"MY DEAR MR. WILLET,—*You are such a good friend of mine that I tell you the good news first. To-morrow will witness the public announcement of my engagement to Mr. Horace Richards, to whom I have been engaged for the past six months. Won't you congratulate me? Trusting you will excuse me for not appearing this afternoon.—Yours sincerely,*

"GERTRUDE BONNEY."

With a groan the young man dropped his hand upon his arm, while dry sobs shook his frame.

"Mr. Willet!" The words were hardly more than a breath, yet they caused the young man to raise his head and look at the speaker.

And he had once called her plain! Her face was wondrously tender and her eyes bright with sympathy. The touch of her slim hand upon his arm sent a thrill of comfort to his soul.

"You must try to bear it, Mr. Willet. I know what Gertrude has written. Do not be too hard on her. She is so pretty, and has been spoilt."

"Forgive me," cried Jack contritely. "When one sees you one wonders how she could be so false." And he left the room.

A month later, business taking Mr. Willet to one of the most squalid localities of the city, he met Miss Rose Bonney coming out of a house, a small basket on her arm.

"Haven't you been away, Miss Bonney?" he inquired.

"Oh, no," replied the girl, brightly. "I could not leave my poor. They need me even more in the summer. And I do not accomplish half what I wish to. It is very hard for one working alone."

It seemed but natural after that that he should meet the elder Miss Bonney on many of her errands of mercy and much help he was to her, too.

Then came a day when he met her with a face expressing happiness and news.

"Miss Bonney," he said, as soon as politeness permitted, "I have unexpectedly come into a huge fortune. Rose, the infatuation which I thought I had for your sister was merely a passing fancy. The affection I hold for you is more than infatuation. It is true, manly love. Don't you think you could learn to love me a little, Rose?"

Whatever the girl's answer was it seemed to please the young man, for he remarked to his pipe late that night: "And I almost missed the real diamond in the glitter of the imagination."

Florence Kesterton.

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The Sealed Packet.

Telling How it Showed a Beautiful Girl the Character of Her Unworthy Lover.

"It was Catherine Rolfe. Yes, Woodbury, some day I intend to marry her."

"Whether she will or no, eh?"

Layton Mowbray coloured.

"Thank you for reminding me that the lady's lips have not yet said yes. But her eyes have said it, and repeated it, a hundred times; those magnificent eyes, for which kingdoms might well be lost!"

He put down his cigar and gazed thoughtfully up the street, whose gay monotony had been so recently broken by the costly sweep of Miss Rolfe's beautiful dress.

Miles Woodbury stifled a half-sigh and turned resolutely to the huge folio on anatomy—dry, and dull, and almost stupid, it seemed to him that day. He looked furtively at Mr. Mowbray, his professional eye taking in at a glance all the fine points of the man's physique. Mr. Mowbray was tall and well-formed, with dark brown hair and blue eyes, aristocratic features, and decidedly the air of a gentleman of fashion. The prestige of a millionaire father, and the ancient atmosphere of "one of the first families," in nowise detracted from his personal advantages.

Whatever had induced him to seek the acquaintance of the struggling young physician was one of the mysteries. They had been together at college—always on speaking terms, but nothing more; the son of a millionaire could have little fellowship with the poor student.

On obtaining his degree, Dr. Woodbury had located himself in London, and here he met again his former acquaintance, Mowbray. The latter was disposed to be friendly, and after awhile it became quite his fashion to drop into Woodbury's sanctum and while away an hour or two almost every day. He was a man of leisure, and after the excitement of the ball, the opera, the concert, had passed away, time hung heavily; and Woodbury was a good fellow—made an excellent listener—so he said to his friends when joked about his less worldly blessed friend.

Dr. Woodbury continued his study of the uninviting volume, and Mowbray, yawningly observing that it was going to rain, buttoned up his overcoat and sauntered away. Woodbury closed the door and drew from his pocket a knot of crimson velvet, studded with a single flash of jet. He looked at it a moment, touched it lightly with his lips, and dropped it upon the flame-red coal in the grate. Just then the door was pushed open and a pale young face, covered with a worn blue shawl, was put inside.

"I fear she is dying, sir! Oh, come quickly!" said the sweet voice of the little girl.

Woodbury started from the reverie in which he was buried to see the new comer.

"Who is dying, my child?"

"My sister Ethel, sir. She has been so bad all night, and baby has cried ever since he woke. Oh, dear, dear! What if Esther should die?"

She was crying softly, the tears falling over the pale cheeks and down on the soft, unbound hair, which the wind had thrown about her face.

The young physician put on his mackintosh—it was raining fast—and followed the guidance of the girl. She led him a long way through narrow streets, growing every moment narrower, and more filthy, until she paused at last in a dark street, into whose evil precincts the pure light of Heaven seemed ashamed to enter.

The room they entered was meagre and gloomy, and scantily furnished. If there had been a fire that day it had departed and left none of its warmth behind. The girl pointed to the still, white figure on the bed.

Woodbury went up and laid his fingers on the cold wrist, which gave back no throb to the touch. For a moment he thought she was dead.

She stirred slightly and half-unclosed her eyes with a moan of pain. Once she had been beautiful, and still she was young; but all that remained of her girlish loveliness was fast whitening into the snowy shadow and mist of death. The golden hair—once the pride and glory of her young beauty—lay in a wild mass of rippling gold on the pillow; the dark lashes of the eyes touched a cheek as destitute of glow as the heart of a marble tombstone. By her side, half-reclining on her breast, its great blue eyes fastened on her face, was a child perhaps two years old; its crimson cheeks and lips contrasting almost fearfully with the dead white of that other face so very near.

"Mamma, mamma," it kept moaning. "Mamma, mamma!"

"Will she die, doctor? My Esther, will she die?" asked the little girl, drawing close to Woodbury's side. He put his arm round her in silent pity, but the eager eyes, expressing so much of hope, forced him to reply:

"My child, your sister will be with God before the dawn of another day. How long has she been ill?"

The sweet, anxious face of the girl grew deadly pale, but she was calm—the serenity of confirmed doubt; she knew she was soon to be sisterless and alone.

"She has been growing feeble for more than a year; but for three weeks she has coughed day and night, and her cheeks have been like the roses I used to gather on the old bush at home. Oh, sir, we used to live in the sweetest little cottage in the beautiful country, and there was a bright river and great green trees, where the birds sang from morning till night, and Esther was gayer than any one of them; that was before *he* came——" She stopped short and burst into tears.

A rumble of carriage-wheels at the door smote the air, and soon the soft rustle of garments in the passage told the physician someone was coming. He turned from the bedside and met the lovely face of Catherine Rolfe. She bowed distantly; he set his stern lips close together and went away

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by himself to the window. Miss Rolfe advanced to the bedside and looked on the still face of the dying girl. A sudden tremor shook her frame beneath the wealth of sables and velvets; she turned quickly to the little girl.

"Elsie, why did you not come for me? How long has she been like this?"

"Indeed, Miss Rolfe, I would have come, but Esther would not let me. She said she could not ask for charity—and you have done so much for us. Oh, madam, do you think Esther will die?"

Miss Rolfe went to the door, dismissed her carriage, threw off her cloak, and took Elsie into her arms, soothing her as best she might with her low, sweet consolations. In the solemn presence of death, there was no remembrance of the pomp and pride of worldly rank. The belle of Society had no scruples in holding to her bosom the child of lowly poverty.

So they sat there in silence through the dark hours, the pitiless rain beating against the window, the blue-eyed babe moaning over its mother, and Esther Armitage slowly drifting out on the shoreless sea. Towards midnight she rallied, opened her mild eyes and gazed round; they fell first on Miss Rolfe. A brilliant smile, making her radiantly beautiful, lit up her face.

"How kind of you!" she said faintly.

Miss Rolfe's fingers closed over hers.

"You are better now, Esther, are you not?"

"I am easier. Dear lady, in a little while I shall know no more pain for ever. My sins forgiven, I shall rest. God is good."

"Yes, and merciful. Esther, is it all well with you?"

"All well. I have no fear; beyond it is light."

Miss Rolfe was weeping softly. Dr. Woodbury drew near the bedside. Esther lay quiet a moment, then she spoke again:

"When I am dead you will find among my few papers, in the little portfolio yonder, a packet addressed to you. It is my simple history. Judge me as you always have, charitably—the dead have a claim to gentle judgment." She paused a moment for breath, then continued: "Everything is peaceful, except my anxiety for my sister and my babe. But I will not doubt. God will provide for them."

Dr. Woodbury came close to the bedside.

"If you will only give your sister to me?" he said timidly. "I am alone in the world; no one to love, no one to love me. She shall be all in all to me."

Esther gazed a moment up into the grave, tender face which leant over her, then she said:

"I do not know your name, but I can trust your eyes; there is truth in them. Take her, and be gentle with her always—dear little Elsie!"

Miss Rolfe was holding the baby; she spoke now, low and sweet:

"I have already told you that Frankie should find a home with me, Esther. Now, in the presence of witnesses, I repeat the promise, and may God deal with me as I deal with your child!"

The pale fingers of the dying mother clasped the rosy, dimpled ones of her babe; her voice sank to a whisper:

"Good-bye, my comforter."

She was dead, even as her lips ceased to move.

* * * * *

Two days afterwards there was a quiet funeral, and Esther Armitage was laid to rest. Dr. Woodbury and Elsie, Miss Rolfe, the baby, and the officiating clergyman, followed the coffin to the grave.

Elsie went home with the doctor; Miss Rolfe took the child away with her. A nurse was already provided, for Miss Rolfe, being an heiress, without parents to fetter her in any way, acted absolutely in the matter. She was engaged for the opera that evening with Mr. Mowbray. A splendid bouquet of white camellias lay there on the table before her—*his* gift, just brought in.

She looked at them, a latent gleam of tenderness in her eyes, half raised them to her lips, blushed and dropped them back again. Then, selecting a spray of the flowers, she twined it in her hair, her thoughts all the time wandering away to the memory of Esther Armitage. She remembered how she had looked the first time she saw her, white and thin, asking for work in a milliner's shop. Miss Rolfe's sympathies had been aroused by the air of subdued suffering hovering over her; she had sought her out and given her sewing at prices which seemed almost fabulous to the poor seamstress. She had pressed benefits upon her with an unsparing hand (for Miss Rolfe, though a woman of fashion, had a noble soul under all the worldly dross), but Esther's exquisite pride refused all charity; she would toil until death, but to beg—never!

Latterly, Miss Rolfe confessed it with shame and distress, she had lost sight of her *protégée*, and knew nothing of her dire extremity, until the night of Esther's death, when an old woman, who lived in the same wretched tenement with her, had informed the lady of her suffering. She had been so much occupied lately with Mr. Mowbray, that she had forgotten the seamstress, remembering her only too late to aid. But she could care for the child; she would care for him; the interest she would feel in its welfare might, in a measure, atone for her forgetfulness of the mother.

Thinking of Esther, Miss Rolfe bethought her of the sealed packet addressed to herself; she had taken it home the night of Esther's death. And with trembling fingers, while she waited for the coming of her lover, she broke the seal fixed by hands now quiet in the grave.

There were several closely-written sheets, and the beautiful woman, sitting there in that luxurious room, with the mellow splendour of amber silk curtains and velvet lounges round her, grew ashen white as she read the contents. The little gold and ormolu clock on the mantel tolled out the hour with its silvery voice—the hour when Mr. Mowbray might be expected to escort Miss Rolfe to the opera. She did not heed it; she was pacing the floor restlessly, torn with emotion, crushing fiercely the silent witness with her hand.

It was over at last; all the struggle was subdued. Lines of stern resolution settled round the scarlet mouth, and the steady light of an unalterable purpose gleamed in her eye. She took the flowers from her hair and threw them down with the drooping camellias.

A few moments later the servant announced Mr. Mowbray. She went down to him calm, cold, and self-possessed; their interview was brief and to the point. She asked his attention while she could read to him the crushed sheets before her; and she read them to him word for word—the pitiful, touching story of Esther Armitage. He listened, and no wonder that he grew pale beneath the fine scorn which displayed itself in every clear intonation of the reader; no wonder his brow flushed and his breath came thick and heavy, for the last confession of Esther Armitage told how Layton Mowbray had secretly married her, and how he had afterwards cruelly deserted her. But, poor soul, she had loved him so dearly that she would not denounce him!

He started up, an impulsive denial quivering to his lips. Miss Rolfe motioned him down.

"Be quiet, Mr. Mowbray! It is useless to add falsehood to the

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list of your sins. Esther Armitage is at rest. For you —whom, Heaven forgive me! I almost loved, whom now I scorn—leave me, and never again dare to come into my presence! I have the pleasure of wishing you a very good evening."

* * * * *

Elsie Armitage was happy with Dr. Woodbury. He rented a small house in the suburbs, and here, with an old woman, to whom he had rendered a service, Elsie's calm life was passed. He taught her from the books he had, and learnt to love her as the one thing left to him in all the world. She went often to see her sister's child, at Miss Rolfe's request; but Dr. Woodbury and Catherine never met, unless by pure accident, and then only ceremonious words passed between them.

Two years elapsed. Woodbury rose rapidly in his profession. Men began to speak of him with respect for his wonderful skill; he was called to the first families, and his way to fortune seemed assured. Miss Rolfe was still unmarried, as greatly admired as ever; but they called her an iceberg, and said that the heart joined to hers would be frozen to stone. Layton Mowbray was in Paris, where rumour said he was making successful suit for the hand of a gay French belle.

Day by day Catherine became more deeply attached to little Frankie Armitage, and the beautiful boy knew no dearer tie than that which united him to his benefactress.

As the summer heat drew on, a malignant fever made its appearance in the city, sweeping off old and young before its tread; and earlier than usual, on the child's account, Catherine prepared to go to her country house. The first of July found her established there, and ten days afterwards Frankie was seized with the dread malady.

Miss Rolfe dispatched a messenger at once for Dr. Woodbury, who arrived by express, but only too late. The first glance showed him that the child must die, and without reserve he told Catherine the truth. At the end of the week little Frankie lay in the great room robed for the grave, and Catherine lay in her darkened chamber, a victim of the same fatal disease that had sapped the life fountains of the child.

From her sick bed Dr. Woodbury returned home, to find Elsie in the grasp of the destroyer, and though he worked and prayed incessantly, nothing availed; she died, her burning hands in his; her half unconscious lips blessing him to the last.

After that he exposed himself recklessly. No fever-stricken house so bad that he shrank to enter it; no toil too hard for him to refuse. Back and forth from Catherine Rolfe's home to the city he journeyed, giving himself time neither to eat nor sleep, until at last the dread crisis was past.

The struggle with Catherine Rolfe was long and painful.

It was over at length; his care and patience were rewarded. He knew that she would live. Feeble and weak as an infant she was, but every day gave her a little more strength, and by the cooler days of September she was able to sit up for an hour or two by the window. Now that she was better, Dr. Woodbury turned resolutely away from her house—the dangerous sweetness of its atmosphere might make him less strong for what was to come in the future. He would destroy, if possible, every tender memory that might come back to him of those days—every sacred breath, and tone, and thrill, must be utterly and for ever annihilated.

Once he had treasured as his greatest prize a knot of crimson velvet that had fallen from Miss Rolfe's hair at a crowded assembly; but he had burnt the souvenir long ago and watched it consume to ashes.

A new existence was opening before him. A German nobleman, whose life he had saved during the prevalence of the fever, desiring to testify his gratitude in a substantial manner, had offered him the post of surgeon in a German hospital, the appointment of which was in his hands; and as the position would be of advantage to a young practitioner, Woodbury resolved to accept it. He called on Miss Rolfe to inform her of his intention, and also to bid her "Good-bye." Gladly would he have gone without this distressing formality, but common courtesy required it of him.

It was a mild day in October; the sweet air luminous with golden particles of sunshine; the leaves of the trees drifting downward, like flocks of tropical birds.

Miss Rolfe sat by the window, toying with a cluster of flowers. She had never been more lovely than she was this moment; her brilliancy had given place to gentleness, and the magnificent hair, which had once adorned her head like a royal crown, was shorn away, leaving a mass of short, clustering curls, like a little child's.

She smiled brightly up into his face and gave him a seat on the divan at her side. There was a painful constraint between them; the conversation drifted into indifferent channels. He was ill-at-ease and nervous; she, puzzled and distant. He rose at last and touched her hand with his cold fingers.

"Miss Rolfe, I shall not be able to see you again before my departure. I must wish you 'Good-bye' now."

She grew pale, rising slowly to her feet.

"Your departure, Dr. Woodbury?"

"Yes. I go to Germany next week."

"Indeed!—to be absent long?"

"For my lifetime, probably."

She crushed the sharp groan that rose to her lips; all the old pride was not yet gone out of her, but her voice was harsh and unnatural.

"Allow me to wish you Godspeed, Dr. Woodbury."

She dropped his hand and turned away. He went out at the door; some irresistible impulse forced him to look back. Miss Rolfe's face was hidden in her hands, and her whole frame shook beneath the flood of emotion that swept over her.

In a moment she was in his arms; everything was forgotten. He only knew that he had loved her for years, that he loved her still, and that his regard was requited. Station, wealth, pride—what were they? He was a man, and she was the one woman of his love.

Dr. Woodbury did not go to Germany. The German nobleman regretted it, but the doctor was happy in refusing. It was better, he thought, to be the husband of Catherine Rolfe, than a great surgeon. So he chose what seemed to him the better.

C. Moore.

HE: "I am fond of you." She: "How well we agree." He: "What, are you fond of me?" She: "Oh, no. Of myself."

MISS TRILL: "I love to hear the birds sing." Jack Downright (warmly): "So do I. They never attempt a piece beyond their ability."

MR. WILLIAMS (Fanny's admirer): "Is your sistah going to the seaside this summah, Tommy?" Tommy: "That all depends on you. I heard ma say that if you and Fanny were engaged before the season opened, there would be no need for her to go."

MR. DREAMSLEIGH: "Yes, darling, clouds may lurk in the dim unknown future, but when with you, dearest, I think of nothing but the present—the happy, the beautiful present!" Loved One: "Yes, George, so do I; but take me with you to buy it—you men have such odd tastes in rings."

"So Marjorie Dobbins is going to be married," said the young man who had been calling on Nellie for two years, and had not declared himself. "Well, I suppose her parents will be sorry to lose her, for parents usually are, aren't they?" "Indeed, I can't say," replied Nellie, "but papa is in the next room, and you might ask him."

HE was a speculator, and for a year past nothing had been coming his way except expenses. Misfortunes never flock by themselves. One day his daughter informed him in a cold and unfeeling manner that if he did not give her a diamond tiara worth at least £150 she would elope with the coachman. 'Come to my arms, my darling child," he exclaimed, as the tears of joy coursed down his wrinkled cheeks; "come to my arms." "Do I get the tiara?" she asked, hesitating ere she accepted his invitation. "Of course not," he smiled delightedly; "you get the coachman. I owe him eight months' wages."

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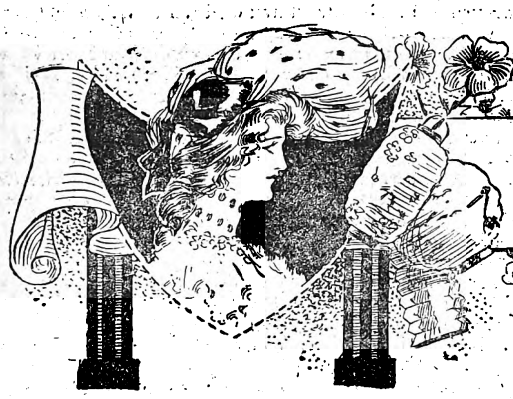

HER IDEAL LOVER.

Telling How He Came to Kitty Willowby Late in Life.

THE gate latch clicked cheerily as it fell from his hand, and the fresh breeze, crossing the rose garden at the left of the lawn, was sweet with the rich fragrance of roses.

The man's step grew more elastic as he left the road and walked up the path. The sweetness of the air in the cool shadow of the trees brought with it new life. He threw back his drooping shoulders, his eyes brightened, and he felt almost strong.

The hall door stood wide open. The vague, nameless charm deepened, and made him buoyant and glad. A small servant with a spotless apron answered his ring.

"Your mistress is expecting me," he began, opening his card-case, when a soft, cheerful voice interrupted him:

"Yes, you are Mr. Lawrence Allen. I received your uncle's telegram. Are you very tired?"

She was standing in the cool hall, a woman somewhat above the medium size, and past her youth. The face was strong, brave, and tender, with dark, steadfast eyes, and softly parted hair.

"Tired? I don't believe I am, Miss Willowby. At least, I don't feel so now." He held his hat in his hand and smiled at her from the doorway.

"And yet you walked—I heard no carriage, and I was expecting one."

She had offered her hand in cordial fashion, and he was thinking how cool and white and strong it was as she smiled up into his face.

"Yes, I was obliged to; there was nothing at the station and it isn't far. You must not consider me as actually an invalid."

"No, indeed," she smiled, "assuredly not. You are far too young for that."

He flushed. Somehow he felt sorry to be young.

"It's the way I look," he said quickly. "I am not so very young; I'm twenty-three."

"Are you?" she said, a little wistful smile showing about her sweet, firm lips, as she looked straight into his blue eyes. "Come in. I think you should rest awhile before you go up to your room. You will have the sitting-room to yourself for an hour or so."

They had come into it now, the cool, home-like place with its soft couches and cosy corners and wide open windows, a restful room with its dark colours and sweet odours and fresh breezes.

"I believe I was tired," he said, sinking down on a couch by the window. "But this is a delightful place, and I must have forgotten. I am glad I came, Miss Willowby; I shall be as happy as a schoolboy here."

She laughed softly. "Thank you," she said simply. "My people feel very much at home."

"Why, do you know I'd forgotten that it is a boarding house? You are not in the least like a landlady." He raised his head from the cushion and looked at her. It was hard to realise that he had not known her before

"Nevertheless, I am one, and there will be no sweets for your dinner, Mr. Allen, unless I go and make something at once. Please make yourself as comfortable as possible, and consider yourself quite at home."

When he was alone he began to look about him. A little table with some needlework on it stood near him. He stretched out his hand, and picked up the silver thimble from the folds of the sewing. It was larger than he had ever seen. How large and strong and white her hands were! Smiling, he fitted the thimble on his own fingers. It was too large for any of them.

"Dora's thimble is such a tiny affair. Her hands are such mites. I wonder what they are good for? Just to flutter about and look pretty, I suppose." He turned the thimble about and read the words, "Dear Kitty," engraved on the wide gold band.

"Kitty. That's a lover's name. People never give it unless a lot of love goes with it. A good many people must love her. I wonder who does specially? Who gave her the name and the thimble? Maybe her sweetheart." And then he laughed. Somehow the idea seemed incongruous. She was not the woman to connect with that sort of thing. "She is like mother, somehow," he mused. "A fellow feels at home when she's about." He set the thimble down and leant back on his cushion, smiling.

Through the window came the scent of the roses. Bees buzzed drowsily, tumbling lazily in and out. A butterfly floated slowly in and lost itself in the shadows across the room. Far away was the slow hum of the town. The yellow head sank more heavily upon the crimson cushion, the blue eyes closed, and Miss Willowby's new invalid boarder was asleep.

On the next day the specialist called upon his new patient in the airy bedroom upstairs. Half-an-hour passed, and the doctor came down and called for Miss Willowby.

"I'm sorry, Miss Kate, to upset any of your plans, but I'll have to have the boy brought down. The stairs won't agree with that spine of his; and we can't shut him up. Won't you let him have this room with the small bedroom beyond?"

They were standing in the sitting-room.

"Gladly, Dr. Spicer, and at once. Is—is he——"

"Of course you've heard how it happened? No? Well, there was a fire, and a child was forgotten, and he went up after it. The boy saved it, too, but he had to jump for his life, and—it's the old story."

But the great doctor said no more, and Miss Kate dared not ask.

Lawrence was delighted when the sitting-room became his own. "For it's the homeliest place I've ever dropped into; and I shall stand a chance of seeing you oftener, Miss Kitty." He looked at her with laughing, daring eyes, as he spoke the name. "I found it on your thimble," he explained penitently, as she looked at him in surprise.

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She was very grave. "People do not usually call me by that name," she said.

"I know, but you are that to the people who love you, Miss Kitty. I should think nearly everybody would be calling you so. Did your—sweetheart give it to you?"

His boyish face was so frank in its half-timid daring that the stern displeasure faded from Miss Willowby's dark eyes, and she laughed brightly.

"Oh, no," she said. "I've never had a sweetheart, and I am thirty."

"I knew you were not that kind; and it's so much better," he said with grave approval.

"I've found life very full of hard work and genuine enjoyment, and there was never time for those things."

She arranged the last of the roses she had brought in, and smiled brightly across them.

"You are not like any woman I have known. Do you know"—and his blue eyes darkened and his voice softened—"that you are the memory of my mother come to life? At first it puzzled me. You see mother died when I was a little fellow, and I do not remember her. But I've always wanted her and loved her. There was no portrait, but a picture of her grew in my mind, and you are like it. You are the living picture."

There were tears in the boy's blue eyes, and Miss Willowby bent over the roses.

Dr. Spicer's new patient became a favourite among Miss Willowby's boarders. Miss Willowby herself found much time to devote to him. Sometimes she read to him, and once in a while he was able to keep her when it was too late for reading.

"You are tired of poor Bobbie Burns and his love songs," he said, as she closed the book and looked out into the growing gloom.

"No; it is only because I cannot see the words. I like the pretty verses. Besides, it is time I was looking after things outside."

"Not yet. You like the verses, and yet you were never in love?"

She laughed in her quiet, bright way. "I did not tell you that, but only that I'd never had a lover;" and a wistful smile lingered about her lips.

"But you are not the sort of woman to—to——"

"I think not," she said decidedly, a proud ring in her voice. "And yet I am able to understand. I dare say my conception of love is very defective, very far short; however, my experience has been entirely satisfactory. But all this is extremely foolish. Have you taken that last medicine? Dr. Spicer said——"

"I know, about the trained nurse. I'm not bad enough for that. But won't you explain what you were saying? Whom have you loved, Miss Kitty?"

"I shall have to defend myself. It was only an ideal—a creature of the imagination."

"I should have said you were the last person to——"

"Dream dreams?" she interrupted. "But once I was a girl, and all girls are dreamers, only sometimes the dreams are spoilt. Mine never was. There was never any time for lovers and love-making, and I was not the sort of girl to attract admirers, in any case. But always there were my dreams, even when I worked hardest for the children. Mother was so frail, and there was so much to be done. She has been at rest only a year; but before that the children were settled in life, and I had only her to work for. It was easier than working for one's self. I loved her so! But that was over, too, at last; and now nobody needs me in any special way. All along there were my lovely dreams. I have never told anyone before. It was too late for—but I have not missed or needed anything, for have I not had my——"

She stopped, a tender light in her soft eyes.

"What?" he asked, leaning forward in the dim light.

"Only my ideal, my dream-lover. He was always young and fair to see, always bonny and good and true, always coming, coming to me." Her voice was almost a whisper now. Her face was transfigured.

Lawrence bent down and touched the fair, strong hand on the window-ledge with his lips.

"Hasn't he come at last? I love you," he said softly.

Instantly she was the calm, practical woman again.

"Of course you do," she said, in a matter-of-fact way. "You are an invalid, and I've tried to be good to you. I'll light your lamps. Mrs. Ellis is leaving by the nine o'clock express. Shall I send her to bid you good-bye?"

In the flood of light she stood cool and collected, waiting for his reply.

"If you please," he stammered, his face crimson, his eyes lowered.

Almost immediately Mrs. Ellis came.

"I wish I could carry a better report to Dora and Uncle Ben," she said, looking gravely at the flushed, boyish face.

"I wish you could, thank you. At least tell them that I am as happy as a lark," he said, laughing confusedly.

"I will. Dora will be coming to see you when the season is a little nearer over, with Uncle Ben."

"Do you really think so? If only she—wouldn't!"

Mrs. Ellis laughed merrily. "Why, you bad boy, you ought to be glad to see your pretty sweetheart. People say it's as good as settled between you three. Ah, there's the carriage, and here's Miss Kate to hurry me off. Hope you'll soon be all right. Good-bye!"

The summer deepened and softened, and autumn was near. Dr. Spicer wished to have his patient out of doors while the sunshine lasted. Nobody could drive like Miss Willowby, whose hands were strong and skilful, and who knew every inch of road for miles and miles.

"I'm sorry they are coming," he said as they drove slowly along. "Dora always manages to spoil things so."

"I dare say she will have plenty of interesting news, coming straight from your own world," Miss Willowby said brightly.

"No, she won't. I say, Miss Kitty, have you forgotten what I told you on the night you read to me? I'm not such a boy as you think. I've had lots of experience, and no end of love affairs. Don't smile that way, please; I am terribly in earnest. Won't you let me be your ideal? Don't I look a little like him? I do love you, honestly; won't you love me? Somehow I believe you do already." And, bending forward, he looked laughingly into her grave eyes. "Let's get married, and then I shall be happy, if I am—not strong. And you love me, don't you? This probably isn't what that ideal has been saying, but it's the best I can do."

She turned her cool, pale face to him, and looked calmly into his eager eyes.

"I have let you say it all now. You won't do it again, will you?" she said slowly.

"I am afraid I shall, dear Kitty," he said miserably. "You are what I've been needing all along. The girls were always unsatisfactory. Why can't I say these things to you?"

"Because I can't help to take care of you, if you persist," she answered quietly.

"Not take care of me? Then I won't be taken care of at all. That's no reason."

"It is wrong. You are simply pleased with my home, and I have been able to make you comfortable. It is a sort of gratitude, and not love."

"You know better. It isn't like you to be so unfair."

But she had stopped at the gate.

Miss Willowby had always carried the invalid his tea, but to-night she was late with it.

"Put it down, please. I'm going to finish what I was saying." She placed the tray on the table, and stood before him.

"Dear Kitty, you know I'm right. Can't you see that I belong to you? I began to feel it when I heard your gate latch click behind me, when I came into the fragrance of your roses, when I looked into your eyes. Oh, the sweetness of it all! You can't help caring for me."

"No," she said quietly, "I cannot."

"Then let me have my way, dear Kitty."

"Have you thought of what you are saying? Don't you

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see how impossible it is? I am not a young woman. Soon I shall be faded and old. You are a boy, with life all before you." Her voice was not quite steady here, but she went on: "Your friends would ridicule the idea."

"As if I were to blame for being a boy! And besides, haven't you been loving a boy all along in that ideal of yours? And haven't I told you that you have always been in my heart? Don't put me off. It's bad enough to have the doctors looking graver every day——"

"Hush. You may be well again."

"They haven't said so."

"But your uncle and Dora! No, it is not to be thought of."

"I have no one to please; answer me!"

"Lawrence, I will answer you five years from to-night. Your uncle will want you to try other doctors, so you will go away. Come to see me when the five years are past, and I will answer you. I shall be five-and-thirty then. In the meantime, do whatever you want to; of course you will not feel bound in any way. Now, that is all. Please do not speak of it again;" and she left him.

Shortly after this Dora came—Dora, with her curly, flaxen hair, brown eyes, and dimpled face. She was pretty as a flower.

Behind the pretty vision came Uncle Ben, an old man with fierce, grizzled side whiskers, and small, fiery eyes.

"Oh, Larry, how ill you look! Oh, have you actually been shut up in this doleful place all the summer? I've had a delightful time. Are you getting worse, Larry?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Dora. Nobody has told me. It may be the way folks get well. Anyhow, I'm quite happy."

"Oh, dear me, don't talk so. Uncle Ben, don't let him! I'm afraid you must be going to die, you know."

Uncle Ben scowled fiercely, and Miss Willowby, laughing in her cheery way, took Dora out.

"Now you know what I meant," Lawrence said to Miss Willowby next morning. "Girls are—unsatisfactory."

"But this is a wonderfully pretty one," she said.

"Pretty—yes, she's that, and nothing more. Do you know, the doctors were graver than ever this morning? Not even Spicer could get up a smile. Of course, you saw them?" He smiled as he stood unsteadily before the small, bright fire that crackled on the hearth. "Dear Kitty, I am surely not doing well. Only think, I—hush, that was my name. He is in the hall. Be still—I will hear!"

With his bright eyes holding her, he listened. The hall door was ajar. Yes, Uncle Ben was speaking in a high, impatient voice.

"Bravery, indeed! And he will find out about the bank failure. The boy is ruined. I tell you, Dora, you must help him. He gladly lost half his fortune securing yours for you. Not engaged? Who cares? It has always been my plan to marry you two, and you said you loved him. Get him to propose now, and marry the boy at once."

Then Dora's voice came to them.

"Oh, well, of course, I loved Larry, but I'm glad he never proposed. He never shall, either. I don't want a poor man for my husband; and what should I want with him, any way, if he is to be helpless and blind?"

Before the cheery fire the unsteady form swayed. Miss Willowby's strong arm lowered it gently to the couch. Lawrence closed his eyes; his face was white.

"Helpless and blind!" he whispered.

"Nothing is certain. They think so. There is always hope."

"How long will it take?"

"It will be gradual; you can bear it."

"Will it take—five years? Because then I shall have you to help me bear it."

Her hot tears splashed on his hand.

"You have me now—always," she said.

His face was illumined. "I can bear it. I need not wait the five years?" he exclaimed, his eyes on her face.

A smile shone in her steadfast eyes.

"Not five hours, unless you will." **Ellen Wycoff.**

Your Editor Chats.

More about "Empire Day."

Tuesday, May 24th, is the eighty-fifth anniversary of the birth of our late Queen and Empress, the beloved Victoria.

In order to commemorate our late Queen's birthday, the organisers of the Fresh Air Fund wish to give to many poor children a monster day's outing in the country later on in the summer. This day will be known as "Empire Day." Won't you subscribe just a small sum for the "Empire Day" Fund? The smallest donation will be thankfully received. Will those who intend that their gifts should be devoted especially to "Empire Day" please note that their offerings should be sent in envelopes addressed to the Hon. Secretary, Fresh Air Fund, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and should have "Empire Day" marked in the top left-hand corner.

A Guinea Won.

I have much pleasure in announcing that I have awarded the guinea I offered in connection with the Love-Problem, "The Test of Ruth Lawson," to A. R. Hayward, 190 Northumberland Avenue, Tottenham, N.

Result of the "Signature" Competition.

No one sent in a correct set of solutions to this competition. One competitor succeeded in sending more correct solutions than the others, three were next bracketed together; two following share the third prize, and sixteen the eight succeeding prizes, as below:

Edward Barnes, 68 Lydford Road, Paddington, W. Prize, £10.

Miss Annie Corbishley, The Elms, Shaw Heath, Stockport.
W. Gibbs, 37 Old Fillebrook Road, Leytonstone, N.E.
C. T. Marshall, 32 Granton Road, Liverpool.
} £1 13s. 4d. each.

W. C. Lee, 160 Shaw Heath, Stockport.
R. Waddington, 17 Langham Road, Blackburn.
} Prize of £2 divided equally.

The following receive 10s. each: J. N. Coombs, 41 Southwater Road, St. Leonards; J. Anderson, 9 Osborne Street, Sherwood, Notts; Miss S. Ogden, St. Peter's Avenue, Knutsford; Miss Ada Lee, 160 Shaw Heath, Stockport; Jas. Lee, 160 Shaw Heath, Stockport; Jas. Angus, Redclyffe, Cardross, N.B.; J. W. Dimaline, 64 Apley Road, Doncaster; F. M. Burd, 23 Hibbert Street, Rusholme, Manchester; Edward Burt, 5 Sidney Terrace, Bellevue Road, Totterdown, Bristol; H. Bell, South Lawn, Bishop's Stortford; L. Halstead, 33 Tennyson Street, Lee Mount, Halifax; H. G. Harris, 22 Foulser Road, Balham, S.W.; W. E. Hughes, 244 Kennington Road, S.E.; S. M. Owens, Peterboro' Avenue, Wycombe; C. J. Ingrey, 25 Ranelagh Grove, Westminster, S.W.; F. W. Rabnott, 117 Sixth Avenue, Manor Park.

The following is the list of correct solutions: 1, J. N. Montgomery; 2, Robert Allinson; 3, W. McGregor; 4, F. P. Knowles; 5, Frank Thos. Way; 6, T. Harker; 7, J. R. Fairhurst; 8, Edward Diven; 9, Geo. A. Nunns; 10, Alf. Redman; 11, W. B. Whitelaw; 12, D. Cooper; 13, Chas. Wiscombe; 14, A. P. Speakman; 15, R. H. Pattinson; 16, F. McGurgan; 17, H. Varenne-Cullevne; 18, G. Margaritis; 19, A. E. Rea; 20, P. Campbell Forbes; 21, J. T. Greenroyd; 22, D. Joseph Schneider; 23, F. Wiles; 24, A. J. Frazer; 25, Thomas R. Brown; 26, Henry Ogden Howcroft; 27, W. G. Andrew; 28, Gwynllyan Wykeham Williams; 29, R. N. Kennedy; 30, Arthur Taylor; 31, C. O. Colchester; 32, Winnie Mouton; 33, Stanley Read; 34, William Newman Yeo; 35, Edward Elford **Your Editor.**

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Our Dinner at Bawlins' . . Lodge. . .

The Tale of a Dinner That Was a Failure, and of a Fortune That Was Won.

All that I remembered of my bachelor uncle, James Bawlins, was, when I was a small boy, seeing him walk out of the house with a black look when my father asked him for a loan of some money. I was then five years old; I am now twenty-five, and newly married. My father had been dead a year, and I had supported him in the latter days, letting the old gentleman potter about the house while I worked at my desk in the bank.

I could not have recognised Uncle James had I seen him after these twenty years. I knew that as many as twenty relatives, men, women, and children, had been visiting him, and, no doubt, smiling upon him, and talking about Brother James, and Cousin James, and Uncle James. For the old gentleman was very rich.

Bawlins' Lodge, his country residence, was situated in the midst of broad lands, and was secluded to a degree that was melancholy.

When the following letter came I was rendered by it a little gleeful and a little bewildered. Fanny, my wife, said it was horribly sarcastic. I stuck to it that Uncle James wished to be reconciled, and intended to remember me in his will. I told Fanny not to make this remark of mine public, lest it should get to his ear, and ruin my expectations.

The letter was as follows:

"*Bawlins' Lodge, April 8th.*

"My Dear Nephew,—*You have never visited your dear, old, rich, mortal uncle. Hadn't you better come up, as well as the rest of his beloved relatives, to see how he is spending the small remnant of his term of existence on earth? Wouldn't you like to see how happy he can be on being perpetually reminded that he is not heirless? Most affectionately yours,*

"James Bawlins."

I sent word to my uncle that I should be most happy to visit him, with my wife, on the Saturday of the following week. I got a few days' leave from the bank, almost at the risk of losing my situation. Fanny trembled when I told her, I laughed.

On the Saturday in question we two were landed from the train at a little station, in the midst of a little village, a hundred miles from London. It was a clear, but very cold, afternoon.

Awaiting us at the station was a lovely carriage and pair, with an old coachman wrapped up in furs.

We were not sorry when the door of that great house—that stone palace—was reached, and we were received into the warmth and glow of the beautiful hall, and thence up to the beautiful drawing-room. For we were chilled; I might say, also, that we were hungry, and that, for my part, I was depicting in my mind a sumptuous feast, to which presently we should be invited. I was not disappointed. We were promptly invited to sit down at a table sumptuously provided.

We had been received at the door and attended to by a man so large and fat, and so red in the face, as to cause me at once to classify him among the few extraordinary personages whom it had been my good fortune in the course of my life to meet.

He lifted upon us the light of his ruddy countenance as though he were the very host himself. A sound like a guttural laugh came now and then from the depths of his fat chest. After he shook my hand, I was afraid to have him shake Fanny's, lest he should hurt her, for he gave mine a vice-like grip. She did scream a little.

The hospitality of his welcome, however, did us both good.

My uncle, or at least any person whom I might have taken for him, did not appear, and we asked no questions, supposing that he would shortly make himself visible.

What we wanted just then was what we were invited to partake of as soon as we should become sufficiently warmed—dinner.

As I have said before, the dinner was sumptuous. The servant, on removing the covers from the dishes, was ordered away, and our fat entertainer rose from his seat at the table, locked the door of the room, and pocketed the key.

"I am your dear, old, rich, mortal uncle," said he, reseating himself at the head of the table, and glancing smilingly from us upon the viands that were huddled together before him—roast beef and roast turkey, vegetables, pastry, coffee, wine, and so on; "and I am most happy to see under my roof, and at my table, too, more of my numerous heirs. Indeed," he continued, while he carved from the meat a rich slice, and put it on a plate, "I am glad to know that I have heirs to whom my fortune may become a blessing."

He put vegetables on the plate, placed the plate before him, poured gravy over all, and then a goodly portion of sauce. I was on the point of reaching out my hand to receive the dish, and pass it to Fanny, when he proceeded to eat from it himself.

"A tender piece of meat," he said, talking on, and at the same time eating like an ogre. "Roast beef ought to be well done. This is just right. It is juicy and nourishing."

"Fanny, I believe, would like a piece of it," I ventured to suggest, wondering at the eccentricity of his behaviour and urged by hunger.

"Beef is the staff of life," he continued, without appearing to notice my hint. "After a little jaunt I don't know its equal. It goes to the right spot, and sets one up again, and puts one in a cheerful mood for the drawing-room of an evening."

"What you say is very true," I said, "and Fanny would like——"

"Here's the wine, now," he said, still not appearing to notice my hint.

He had been gourmandising at the meat until its dimensions were very much reduced. He now reached out his fat hand to a bottle of wine that, with several others, stood on the floor near him. He drew the cork and poured out a glassful, and, nodding his head to us, drank the wine off at a gulp.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "old port! That's the stuff."

Desperate, and a little exasperated, I reached out my hands to carve off a slice from the turkey, that being nearest me. Still talking on, he warded off my hands, and I sank back into my chair again, angry and amazed.

"What does this mean?" I demanded. "Have you invited us here to tantalise us? Come, Fanny"—and I offered my arm to Fanny—"we will go."

He drank off six full glasses, one after the other, within the brief space of time in which Fanny was rising from the table and accompanying me to the door.

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I had forgotten that he had locked the door. I tried to open it, and then we two turned to him. I demanded the key. With his eyes turned to us, he poured out and drank off glass after glass, till he had emptied the first bottle and was drawing upon the second. And still he drank, with his fat, red face turned to us as we stood there.

Returning desperate manners for ill manners, I stalked up to him, and vented my feelings in an outburst of indignation. He rose to his feet, and steadied himself by holding on to the table. His great red face fairly burnt at me.

"I want the key!" I cried; and I seized him, to give emphasis to my demand.

He shook me off, and drank again, and staggered towards Fanny. I sprang between, and he returned to the table, and drank two or three glasses more. Again I tried to slice off a piece of turkey, thinking that Fanny would need something to sustain her till we might reach some resting place away from this inhospitable and outrageous place, if, indeed, we should succeed in escaping thence; for, indeed, the suspicion was creeping into my mind that this uncle of mine was mad, and might end in harming us in some way. He prevented me with a physical strength against which it was vain for me to cope.

"Let us out!" I cried.

"Won't you ever come again?" were the first definite words of recognition of us that this monstrous uncle had yet greeted us with.

The words sounded so rational that I roared back:

"Never, you inhospitable old boor! Give us the key, and let us out!"

He felt in his pocket, and staggered towards the door; but just then there rose from the other side a loud outcry, and then an impatient kicking.

I verily believe that the vast rotundity of my uncle's face, with the exception of his nose, turned pale. He stood still on the floor, and stared at the door.

"Open this door!" was roared from the other side, and then came another volley of kicks.

Finally there was given from the other side a violent push that burst open the door, and there came tumbling in, almost off his feet, a thin, dark old gentleman, followed by two o three servants.

"What's the matter?" demanded the old gentleman. "Who are you?" and, with his eyes glaring, he turned full upon the fat man.

The fat man made no reply.

"He came here ten days ago," explained a servant; "two hours after you left for your journey."

"Who is he, and what is he, and what the dickens is he getting drunk in my house for? Put him out!"

"I am your nearest relative," the fat man said.

"My nearest fiddlesticks! Put the lout out! Put him out! Out with him!"

The fat man sat plump down on the floor. He weighed something like fourteen stone, I should think; or more.

"Roll him out!" shouted the old gentleman. "Now, then," turning to us, "who are you?"

"I am James Bawlins," I said; "this is my wife."

The old gentleman eyed us. Suddenly he turned away, and railed at his servants, who were tugging at the fat man.

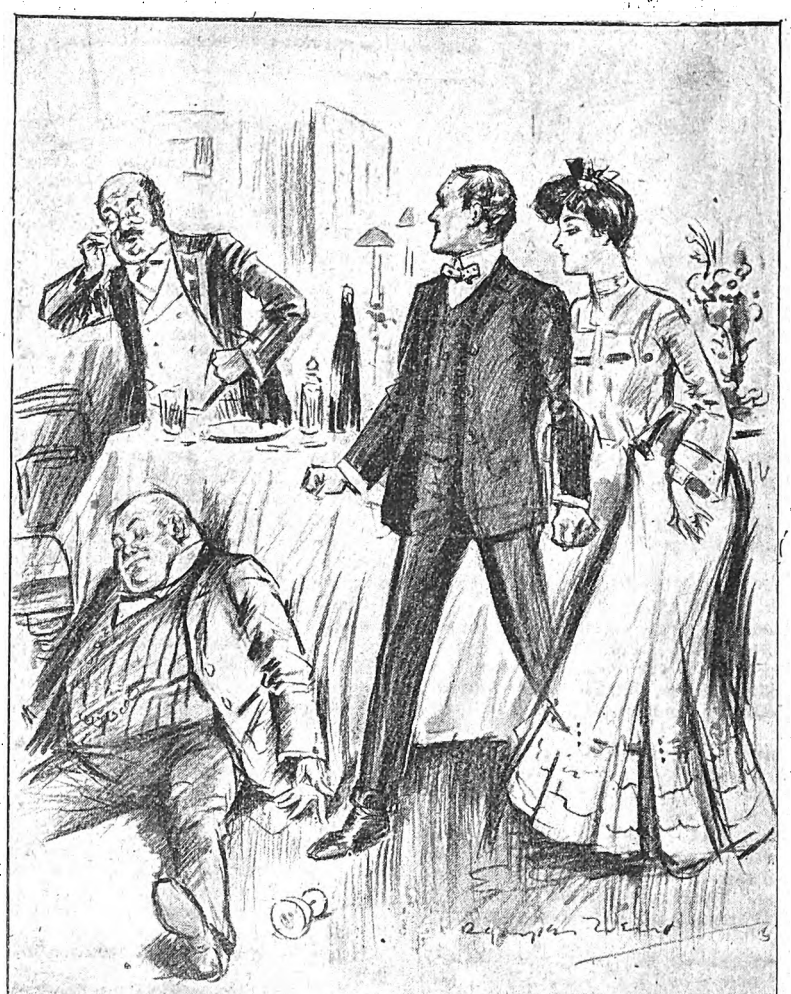
"We are going," I said. "You needn't fear we are not. We thought you invited us here; but there is evidently some mistake. This gourmandiser has played the host, and has prevented us from eating anything, so that we haven't touched a morsel. Did you write that letter?"

I handed him the letter of invitation. He read it.

"No, sir," said he, "I did not write that letter. But stay—I like your spirit; it is the Bawlins spirit; I am proud of it. I like your wife's looks—this is your wife? Stay, stay! I am your uncle! You have never come to see me, rich as I am. You're proud, eh? Well, well, I like that sort of pride. But when you thought I wrote this letter to you, you were willing to forgive my treatment of your father, and to come. I treated him badly, mind—badly. I might have helped him, and I ought to have helped him. My heart was hard."

The upshot of the matter was, that my uncle took Fanny and me into his favour, and our prospects are rosy.

F. Murray.



The fat man sat plump down on the floor. He weighed something like fourteen stone, probably more.

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TOO DEVOTED.

Showing That it is Best to be Contented.

"YES," said Mrs. Cameron, in answer to her friend's remark, "I like him well enough, I suppose."

Mrs. Cameron was just nineteen, a bride of six months, and a lovely, hazel-eyed brunette. She had everything that heart could desire, and consequently wasn't exactly pleased with anything.

Mrs. Cameron liked pink, and Mr. Cameron had furnished her boudoir in rose-colour and silver. She was partial to flowers, and her husband had given a standing order to a florist to keep her wants supplied. She was fond of birds, and three or four gilded cages swung from the ceiling, each one thrilling with delicious melody. In fact, Mrs. Cameron had everything she wanted, and, as previously intimated, was far from satisfied.

"Like him well enough!" repeated Annie Clark, who, having just left school, thought that a young wife who had wedded the man she loved, ought to be extremely happy. "Oh, Rosie! how coldly you speak!"

"Well, I can't help it," said Mrs. Cameron, letting her head fall languidly back on the rose-satin cushions of the low easy-chair on which she sat. "One gets tired of cake and champagne all the time. Sometimes I think I should be happier if Clarence didn't worship me quite so devotedly."

"Oh, Rosie!"

"It's a bore, you know," said the young wife, confidentially. "It would be a relief if he could find fault occasionally. He's too good! Now, Sophie Markham is actually afraid of her husband—a great handsome fellow, with a lovely black silk moustache like an Italian brigand. Oh, it must be charming to be a little afraid of one's husband!"

"Now, Rosie!" cried the astounded Miss Clark, "what nonsense you are talking!"

"I dare say it may seem so to you, child," said Mrs. Cameron, patronisingly. "But if you ever get married——"

"Of course I shall," said pretty Annie, who had not the slightest idea of being an old maid.

"Well, when you are about to get married, don't marry a man who is 'sugar and spice and all that's nice!' It's much too insipid!"

"You'd recommend, on the contrary, 'snaps and snails and puppy dogs' tails,' eh?" laughed Annie, also quoting a nursery rhyme

"Not exactly that; but one does get tired of perpetual honey and sunshine," said unreasonable Rosie, as she reached out her hand for her embroidery. "And now you know you promised to tell me all about Kitty Smith's trousseau."

As it happened, Mrs. Cameron's beautiful drawing-room was separated from her boudoir by portieres. Mr. Cameron, reading his paper, sat on the other side of the draperies, and heard this conversation—an eavesdropper in spite of himself. His cheeks burnt, he bit his lips, and the blood rushed in little tingling, needle-like particles through his whole frame.

So Rosie was getting tired of him! Well, after all, it was better to thoroughly comprehend the whole state of the case. He was too amiable, was he?

Mr. Cameron rose, flung aside the crumpled newspaper, and walked once or twice the length of the rooms.

"I'll see that the fault is corrected," he said to himself with a grim smile. And he went off to business without the usual good-bye kiss in which he generally indulged.

Mrs. Cameron went out shopping in the afternoon, and was detained a little, but it did not worry her in the least.

"Clarence doesn't mind," said she; and so she spent an extra half hour in deciding whether she would have tan or pearl grey for her new kid gloves, and whether she looked better in a hat trimmed with sweet-brier or simple field daisies.

"I'm a little late, I'm afraid," she said, as she entered the dining-room, where her husband was pacing up and down like the proverbial "caged lion" of romance.

"Late, madam! I should say you were!" retorted her husband in a tone which fairly made Mrs. Cameron start. "It's half-past seven, if it's a second. But I suppose you think my time is of no value."

"Clarence!"

"I've borne this long enough," went on the indignant husband. "And I give you fair notice that I shall bear it no longer. Jane!"—to the girl—"bring in the dinner at once, and to-morrow let it be served at seven, punctually, whether your mistress is here or not."

"Yes, sir," said Jane, as she disappeared, grinning, into the kitchen.

Mrs. Cameron sat down, crimson to the very roots of her hair.

"Clarence," she said, with difficulty controlling her voice, "is it necessary to insult me thus before the servants?"

"Yes, madam, it is. If a wife doesn't comprehend her duty, it is high time she should be made to do so. I will trouble you for a cup of coffee."

Mrs. Cameron was mortified, stunned—dazed. She was entirely unused to this style of domestic reproof. Almost before the dessert—with which her husband found plenty of fault, intimating that it would be better if his wife remained at home to attend to household matters a little more, instead of gadding abroad the whole time—the door bell sounded.

"It's dear mamma and Aunt Lizzie come to spend the evening," said Rosie, jumping up.

"Confound them!" roared Mr. Cameron, smiting the table with his fist; "can't I have a quiet evening once in a while?"

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"I—I told them you would take us all to the theatre to-night," hesitated Rosie, the colour coming and going changefully on her face.

"In-deed! May I ask, madam, who authorised you to make that statement?" crisply queried her husband. "Am I a mere puppet in your hands, and am I supposed to have no will or desire of my own?"

"But you will go, won't you, Clarence?" faltered poor Rosie.

"No, madam, I will not," said Mr. Cameron, rising and looking for his hat. "I propose to spend the evening quietly at my club."

He bolted out of the room, nearly falling over his mother-in-law in the passage, and muttering to himself:

"By Jove! if I'd stopped another minute those tears would have conquered me. Poor little Rosie!"

It was past twelve before he returned. Never, in all the experience of their married life, had he been so late before.

"Sitting up, eh?" said he, savagely. "Now, Mrs. Cameron, I mean to put an end, once for all, to this sort of thing."

"I was so anxious about you, Clarence," pleaded poor Rosie.

"Anxious!" sneeringly repeated he. "Do you suppose John Markham allows his wife to sit up for him?"

"Oh, Clarence! I wouldn't have you like John Markham for the world!" exclaimed Rosie, bursting into tears.

"Wouldn't you?" said he, the faintest suspicion of a smile glimmering under the ends of his moustache. "Now, I thought it would be charming to be a little afraid of one's husband, and you know 'sugar and spice and all that's nice' grows insipid.

Mrs. Cameron sprang to her feet.

"Clary!"

"Rosie!"

"Did you hear what I said this morning?"

"I did, Mrs. Cameron, and I thought I would shape my conduct to suit your taste."

"Don't do it any more, Clary," she said, with a quivering lip, and her bright eyes lifted wistfully to his face. "I don't like it; it isn't nice to be afraid of one's husband."

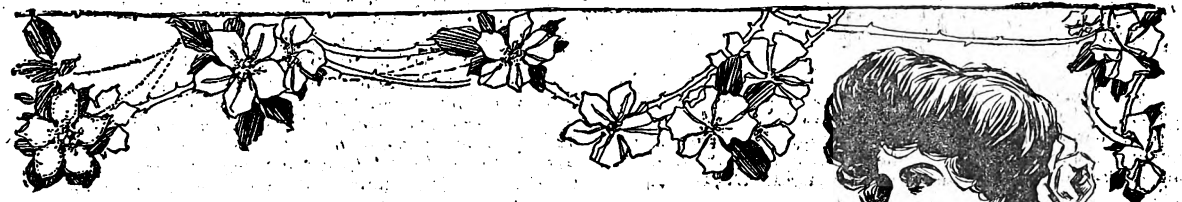
"Just as you please," said her husband, laughing. "I only wanted to adapt myself to your wishes, Rosie."

"But I was such a goose!" cried Rosie. "Dear Clary, I have cried my eyes out to-night trying to make out what could possibly have changed you so. And you were only making believe all the time?"

"Only making believe," he acknowledged.

Then they kissed and made friends after the orthodox fashion, and their honeymoon began over again for the second time. But Rosie made no more complaints about Mr. Cameron being a "too devoted husband."

F. P. Barfoot.



DISILLUSIONED!

Showing How Dr. Stephens Counted His Chickens Before they were Hatched.

People said Dr. Stephens ought to marry. He thought so himself; but hitherto he had been too busy providing means for keeping a wife, to bestow much thought on whom she was to be. He had decided that the lady must have good looks, good means, and be of a good position; but, though several ladies in Perivale fulfilled all these requirements, his choice had not yet fallen on any one of them. And, besides, he was not in the least in love.

It would be imprudent to venture the assertion that Dr. Stephens had always remained indifferent to the pretty and agreeable girls he had met in his wanderings; and being a fairly attractive fellow, as well as Perivale's only medical practitioner, it is safe to say that eyes of every hue had looked upon him with more or less favour.

Oh! yes. He had had his intermittent love affairs. There was Maggie Scott. He had loved her to distraction for two months, when she wore a particularly sweet thing in hats; when the hat went out of fashion, Dr. Stephens' love went with it.

Again, there was Minnie Grey. His heart in this "case" had capitulated to the peculiarly fascinating manner in which the fair damsel lisped. He overheard her speak to her brother once, and——

But these and others were but the idle dreamlets of a day, and Dr. Stephens sighed for the genuine article that wears well. He excused his seeming inconstancy on the plea that love is a lottery, and, if one wishes to win, one must at least play. So he accordingly played battledore with the hearts of the fair eligibles on his list of patients, and kept his eyes open and watched his heart carefully, expecting to experience some day that sudden sense of rapture—that magnificent thrill which, as everybody knows, is the first and true symptom of the proper, and the legitimate, and the all-sufficing love—the love Dr. Stephens sighed for.

"It's all a matter of pulsation," the doctor assured himself. "If you think you're in love, feel your pulse. Cupid's barometer is the thing to go by."

One afternoon, about four o'clock, Dr. Stephens seated himself in his consulting-room, and passed his fingers thoughtfully through his hair, which could not, even in courtesy, be called auburn. He was very weary waiting for that magnificent thrill which he expected to experience some day, and he sighed profoundly as he glanced round the rather dismal room. How uncomfortable and cheerless it was, to be sure; how much it lacked the tender touches of a woman's hand, the charm of a woman's presence. And the little, low arm-chair by the hearth there—when would it be filled by the sweet little form—the unknown but coming somebody—that Dr. Stephens loved to picture in it? How very nice it sounded, to be sure! My—little—wife—wife. My—wee—wife. My——

"A letter, sir."

It was the doctor's servant who broke in upon his reverie.

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He frowned as he lifted the letter carelessly from the table, and opened it slowly. It was very brief, containing only these words:

"*Dovecot House, Tuesday.*

"Dear Sir,—*Please come and see me at once.—Yours truly,*

"Babs Grantley."

"Babs," he repeated. "What a funny name. Something nice about it, too. Some antediluvian spinster, I suppose, whose name is the only nice thing about her. Imperious, too, by George! I heard there were new tenants at Dovecot."

That is what John Stephens, M.D., as he signed himself, said before he saw Miss Barbara Grantley; and when his well-appointed brougham rolled along Perivale's only street, and drew up in the pretty garden in front of Dovecot House, our doctor, all unconscious of his impending fate, complacently jingled a couple of guineas in his trousers pocket, with the agreeable expectation of soon adding a third.

"Doctor Stephens," announced a smiling little maid, in a low voice; and as the doctor advanced with the door closing behind him, it was to see that he was in a prettily-furnished boudoir; while reclining on a couch near the fireplace was a lady, who immediately acknowledged his presence by a charming smile and bow. And then?—at last! Dr. Stephens experienced that magnificent thrill he had been waiting for so long. His heart thumped away, just as it ought to; his legs trembled; he felt a cold shiver up and down his spine; his mouth opened and closed several times in an aimless sort of a way; his pulse—but, in brief, he rapidly experienced every symptom which attends and indicates the existence of the proper, the legitimate, the genuine love. His happiness made him almost dizzy, and he had to seize hold of one of the chairs for support. Yes, this was love; there could not possibly be any mistake about it this time.

Vainly he endeavoured to assume his usual matter-of-fact, professional politeness. His heart beat so fast he could hardly speak.

"My patient, Miss Grantley, I presume. Would you—ah, ha——" he began, advancing towards the couch, with the assistance of the chair backs. (How funny his legs felt, to be sure!)

"Would you—ah, ah——," he repeated, taking Miss Grantley's proffered hand—which little courtesy had the wonderful effect of sending a second edition of that magnificent thrill through Stephens' sensitive system.

"Would you—ah, ha——" he solemnly repeated, determined to have it out this time, "would you allow me to see your pulse, and let me feel your tongue."

Now, Dr. Stephens had not the slightest intention of being amusing, but, to his infinite disgust, he discovered as soon as he spoke that Miss Grantley was greatly amused. She pressed her handkerchief to her face and bit her lips; but after a moment's futile struggle, she laughed outright, and evidently only checked herself when he looked so furious. In consideration for his injured feelings, she assumed an air of mild but preternatural seriousness.

"It—it—isn't my pulse or my tongue," she gravely explained, "it's my ankle, sir, and only a slight sprain."

Dr. Stephens was excessively embarrassed. He was not altogether stupid; and really, when we consider the suddenness of the thing it amply excuses the exhibition of a little foolishness and nervousness. And then to be asked to look at and touch her ankle!—and a very pretty ankle it was, too!

Apologising profusely, the doctor carefully—very carefully—examined the pretty little foot that just peeped out from among the many folds of Bab's skirts; and he vowed—to himself—that he would gladly go on bathing and bandaging his fair subject for ever.

Babs certainly looked nice. She was a small and dainty young lady with bonny, roguish blue eyes, and a wealth of wilful golden hair that frizzled over her brow, and looked as if it had been ruffled by many a sunny summer breeze. Dr. Stephens noticed with keen, observant eye the curling sweep of the long, brown lashes that shaded the delicately-rounded cheek, and, for the first time in his professional career, physical weakness struck him as the most pathetic and attractive aspect under which he had ever studied woman. He took a long time bandaging that little foot, and by the time it was finished he had quite recovered himself. His touch seemed to do her foot good; and Babs, watching the careful manipulation of bandaging, and listening to the pleasant, cheerful voice assuring her that she would be well again in a few weeks, felt that, strange though Dr. Stephens had been on his arrival, she could have no kinder or more skilful physician. Indeed, by the time Dr. Stephens took his departure, she had voted him "quite nice."

* * * * *

Dr. Stephens gave himself a month to accomplish the conquest of Miss Grantley's foot and heart; but before the third week was at an end he had realised that he had undervalued his powers of surgery and fascination. The sprain had certainly surrendered to his skill, and, building his faith on a dozen or so of smiles and glances, he allowed himself to entertain the agreeable belief that her heart had also surrendered to himself? He had often been told that he might choose a wife when and where he liked, and, with consummate conceit, he had lately thought the same thing himself.

Babs always seemed glad to see him, and she was wholly at ease with him. Indeed, she was always so gay and good-humoured that Dr. Stephens glowed and flourished in his own opinion—that opinion being that she was certainly very much in love with him. He would propose to her!

And then he fell into a delightful reverie, and pictured to himself the scene. He would kneel by that little couch by the fireplace and would ask her in tender phrases if she would be his wife. And then he wondered would his darling faint, or would she sink gracefully into his arms and whisper "Dear youth, I will!"

Dressing one evening with the punctilious care born of a long bachelor life, and with many hesitating doubts and fears, Dr. Stephens set out on an all-important visit to Dovecot House—a visit fraught with matrimonial intentions.

With as martial a step as he could command, Dr. Stephens went to Dovecot House, and instantly rang the bell very, very tenderly. He must not, he thought, alarm his little darling.

"I shall find my way, you need not trouble to come with me," he said to the smiling maid whose duty it was to attend to the door and announce arrivals. "Miss Grantley, I presume, is in the same room as usual?"

"Yes, sir; but please, sir, she's engaged just now."

But the doctor did not hear. Slowly, very slowly he went up the soft-carpeted staircase, and paused for a brief moment at the door before entering. His heart had resumed its stentorian thumping; his legs trembled—all, of course, in joyful anticipation of his coming happiness. He softly, very softly, turned the handle and opened the door. But, oh, what did the sight which met his gaze mean?

Standing in the embrasure of the window, with his arm round Babs' waist, was a tall and fair stranger! In his other hand he held a small golden ring, which he was showing to her.

"Isn't it strange, darling?" Dr. Stephens heard this tall, and fair, and unknown somebody say to—Babs, *his* Babs!—"isn't it strange, darling, that within the little circle of this ring there should be so much happiness and love, and hope for you and me? You must always wear it, dear, and, wearing it, remember that our love, like it, is without end. Babs!" he exclaimed, "oh, Babs, my darling!——"

Dr. Stephens did not wait to hear more. Softly, as softly as he had opened it, he closed the door, and slunk down the staircase like a convicted felon. Outside he leant against the garden wall and endeavoured to pull together his shattered energies.

"Shouldn't I just like to dissect that fellow, that's all!" he muttered. "But, no, I wouldn't," he added, in the same breath. "She—she loves him, and, and—that" something."

S. Perry.

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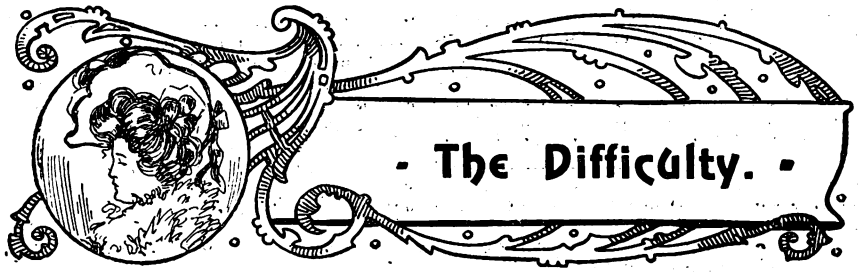

The Difficulty.

"You understand that I expect you to look after my three rooms, sweep and dust, and all that sort of thing?"

"Yes," remarked Mrs. Peterson; "I understand. The rooms suit me perfectly," she went on as they passed downstairs again, "and I shall begin to move to-morrow. It will be so nice to turn round and not always be running into somebody. And now Mr. Peterson's sister is living with us. Well, good-day. The things will begin to come after to-morrow. Good-day."

Theodore Foster stood looking after her a moment; then he went into the empty sitting-room and took the large "Apartments to Let" notice from the front window. He carried it up to his own room. "I hope it will be a long time before I have to see you again," he told it as he put it in his desk.

It was the first time for a month that he had felt really happy. During that time he had tried to get a tenant for his house, but had been unable to find a suitable one. It had been horribly lonely coming home at night to a cold, echoing house. But now he would have the Petersons there, and he looked forward to the day after to-morrow with joy. He used to know Joe Peterson, but he supposed he wouldn't see much of him, as Joe was away from home all the week. There were the children, too. He was fond of children, even if he was an old bachelor. Then he remembered that the children must be nearly grown up by this time. Well, young people were almost as good as children.

It was the next day, while he was out taking his constitutional, that his friend Everson saw him and crossed the street to talk to him. "So you have got the Petersons?" he said, after they had walked some distance together. "Well, there's only one thing about them that you won't like."

"What is that?" questioned Mr. Fos'er.

"Their piano."

"Oh, I don't mind piano practice as some do," said Theodore easily. "In fact, I rather like it."

"You haven't lived with the Petersons yet," said Everson sententiously. "You wait a little. It's a terribly old piano. I could get more music out of a brass kettle and tin pans. It's all out of tune, too; and, worst of all, they keep banging away on it all the time. It's something awful! There are three girls who take lessons, and they keep the old thing going about nine hours a day."

Theodore's face had lengthened during this description. "What makes them keep such an antiquity?" he asked.

"Well, you see, they're rather poor, and they can't afford a new one."

Theodore walked moodily along after his friend had left him. Then suddenly his face brightened. "I can arrange matters all right," he said, and went on more briskly.

The next morning there was considerable grumbling from the two men who moved the Petersons' belongings because Mr. Theodore Foster insisted on helping them.

He was especially troublesome about the placing of the piano. He insisted on having it on the very end of the load, and tied it with his own hands. When the horses started, he trotted along beside it, and they reached the house at the same time.

It was a raw morning, and the men were putting blankets on the horses, when suddenly there came a jangling crash. They hurried to the back of the van and found Theodore looking in horror and dismay at the very badly smashed piano. "It's all my fault" was all he managed to say before a torrent of abuse and oaths loud and deep overwhelmed him.

Theodore went and told Mrs. Peterson about the accident, and after he had gone a loud wail rose from the three girls, but when the household effects were moved in and the Petersons themselves went to their new home, there, in the drawing-room, was a beautiful, brand-new piano awaiting them.

They all stood in the doorway and stared in amazement.

"Mr. Foster had it sent," Aunt Sarah Peterson explained. She had been there attending to that end of the moving. "He said that as it was due to his carelessness that the other was wrecked, he should take the liberty of replacing it by this one."

Maud, the eldest girl, went and tried the instrument. "Isn't it beautiful?" she cried rapturously.

Time went on, and the girls practised diligently. Their aunt also took advantage of the chance to play, so that Theodore had all the music he wanted.

One day Theodore asked Maud to go with him to the piano shop.

"I want you to try them all," he said, "and see if there is one you like better than the one at home."

Maud tried them. "No," she declared, "there isn't one so nice."

"By the way, won't you play that new waltz for me?"

She seated herself at the nearest instrument and began to play. When she had finished she looked round, but Theodore was not beside her as she had supposed. Instead she saw him at the far end of the room, coming towards her with a piece of paper in his hand. When he reached her he passed her the paper. "A birthday present, my dear. I believe it is your birthday to-day."

Maud looked at the paper blankly. Then it dawned upon her that it was a receipt for the piano at home, made out in her name. Maud would never tell her sisters what she did at that moment, but when she came home and told them about it they all declared that Mr. Foster was a "dear."

"Don't you think it would be better for you to go out of doors more, Miss Sarah?" Theodore asked her one day. "I would be greatly honoured if you would accompany me on my daily walks. It is rather tedious going alone."

And so it became the custom for the old bachelor and the maiden aunt to walk out every day together.

But after a year of this Miss Sarah told him one day that she was going away for a six months' visit.

Theodore was filled with consternation at this and begged her to reconsider. He pleaded so earnestly and eloquently that she finally promised to stay away only two weeks, and when she came back to "name the day."

That was the longest walk they had taken, and towards the end of it Theodore said: "My dear, there is something I have wanted to tell you ever since I have known you. It is about the piano."

"I don't think you will have to tell me now," she said. "I have known it all the time. I saw you do it."

"Saw me do it? Do what?"

"Cut the rope."

He stood still and looked at her.

"I was at the window. I had come over to see the things, you know, and saw you take out your knife, step up to the hub of the wheel and cut the rope."

"And you never told?"

"No: you see," she said confusedly, her colour rising, "it flashed upon me at once what you did it for—that old piano was an instrument of torture—and that was the beginning of the—of the end, I think."

"I don't understand what you mean by the end."

She turned a radiant glance upon him. "Why, don't you see—to-day!"

P. Trussler.

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A HAPPY MISTAKE.

Showing how Violet Burroughs Accepted Her Lover.

JACK BARRY walked out of the hotel the picture of physical health and strength. He was handsome, too, and had he been rich the girl who could have refused his proffered hand would have been a curiosity. But, alas! Like most of his comrades he was poor. Not that he cared in the least, as he would have said himself, but he ascribed the one back-handed slap that he had ever received from Dame Fortune to his poverty—that is, to his income of £300 a year and no more. Of course it was a girl that did it. Young cavalry officers take nothing seriously except girls—and unfortunately very few girls take young cavalry officers seriously. It is one thing to flirt and dance with a handsome fellow in a fine uniform, and quite another to marry one and live in comparative poverty.

Jack had fallen in love with a girl almost before the ink on his commission was dry; he had danced attendance on her a whole summer at the seaside, and he had proposed and been quietly but firmly rejected.

The rejection was a terrible blow. He was convinced that the girl was in love with him. He rather thought that he was treating her with unusual fairness by being actually in love with her. She tumbled him off a very lofty perch with a little half-whispered "No." He hardly believed his own ears when she said it. Then he suddenly discovered how much he really did love her. He could not live without her—no, not a day. He meditated suicide all one night, resolved to commit it, unfortunately went to sleep in his chair, woke up with an enormous appetite, ate a good breakfast, and—changed his mind. He concluded that it would be much more romantic, and would make her feel worse, to waste his life and then some day to tell her it was all his fault. Ah! she would understand it all then.

After joining his regiment, however, Jack did not get an opportunity to waste his life. He was ordered abroad, and there was plenty of work to do, and he spent two years away from England, home and beauty. It was a good thing for him. He had no opportunity to spend his income, and therefore was obliged to save it, so that at the end of that time, when he had managed to get a three months' leave of absence, he had a little money and a good deal of common sense. He had developed. Instead of wasting his life, he found that he was full of healthy ambition, and while he could not forget that girl he had grimly resolved to get along without her. He did propose to do one thing, however, and that was to get to England as fast as ever he could, call on her, and let her know how well he was getting along without her. He reached the hotel at noon—he was just leaving the hotel to call on her at night.

She lived in Kensington. It was a delightful September night, with a full moon, and he walked down to the house, repeating on the way, a dozen times or more, the question, "Is Miss Burroughs at home?" so that his voice would not tremble the slightest particle even before the servant. His voice did not tremble either when the critical moment arrived, but he was a little astonished that the servant should usher him into the drawing-room without saying a word or even asking for his card. He was still more astonished to find that there was no light in the room save the stream of moonlight that slanted in at the windows. Astonishment was not the word for the occasion when he saw Violet Burroughs herself leaning on the sill of the window in the moonlight; and he almost gasped when she said in the most matter-of-fact way: "I knew you would come back!"

"Did you?" he exclaimed, sinking uninvited into a chair.

"Yes," she repeated. Then he noticed that she was crying.

"I hope that I don't intrude—perhaps I had better call again?"

She paid no attention to the suggestion, but still looking out of the window said: "Your voice has changed already a great deal."

"Yes, I suppose it has," he answered.

"You said you would be a changed man, but I did not suppose it would affect you so soon," she continued. "Oh, it is dreadful, isn't it?"

"My voice? I did not know that it was. I'll have it trained——"

"How can you jest? You know I mean this affair of ours—your love for me."

"Oh!"

"When you jest you make me feel that you are desperate. You will not commit suicide, will you? Promise me that you won't!"

The conversation was becoming rather rapid. Jack had called for the purpose of saying not a word concerning the old love that he had so manfully buried—for the purpose, too, of letting her see how well he had buried it, and how nicely he was getting along without her after all; and here she was plunging into it herself in a most unladylike manner, and dragging him along with her. More than that, she was rapidly opening the old wounds; and still more, she was resurrecting the old love. Why was she crying? Why did she expect him? How did she even know he was in town?

She must have expected him to call that very evening, else she would not be acting in this—to say the least—highly informal manner. But the thing that pleased him most was the fact that the whole thing was so fresh in her mind. It was possible that even now she might be won by him. He answered her last question.

"I did think of suicide—but I gave the idea up. There is too much in life to live for—there are too many changes

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of luck—too many opportunities to win in the end what was refused in the beginning——"

"Oh, no—no—do not think that you can ever win my love!"

"But, Miss Burroughs, I did not come here to win your love. You may remember that when we parted you assured me that you had a great respect for me, that you hoped you would see me often, in fact—er—I believe you said—er—that you would be a sister to me, or something like that—and I had no intention of compelling you to receive any unwelcome attentions."

"But you love me?"

"Well, I—er—I——"

"You must love me!"

"It shall be just as you say."

"I do not mean that, either. You would not have acted as you did unless you loved me."

"Well, I'll acknowledge"—he was getting just a little tender now—"that I do love you. I've tried to forget you, but I couldn't——"

"You haven't had a very long time to try to forget."

"It has seemed very long indeed to me."

"Yes, it has to me, too. I have been sitting here at this window crying ever since."

Barry nearly jumped. Sitting there crying ever since! Was it possible, or was the girl crazy? He never solved the problem. The girl continued:

"But I do not love you, and no matter what papa and mamma say I will never marry you. I have never told you why. I'll tell you now. I love another."

"Another?"

"Yes, and have for a long time—and I never expect to see him again, for I sent him away, and he may be dead now, poor fellow. I thought it would be fun to reject him, and I really didn't know how much I cared for him—and then I thought he wouldn't take 'No' for an answer. But, oh, he did, and I have been the most miserable girl in the world ever since. I love him—I love him—and he ought to have sense enough to know it!" She broke into sobs, burying her head, a quivering mass of disordered hair, in her hands.

"Then it has always been quite a hopeless case, so far as I am concerned.?"

"Yes."

"Well, let me show you how bravely I can stand it. Let me be a brother to you. Tell me who he is. I'll go to him and bring him back to you. I have an idea that he will be very glad to come, whoever he is."

"No," with a shake of the head, "he is too proud. He will never come back to me."

"Tell me who he is."

"You know him."

"Well?"

"He is Jack Barry, a lieutenant in the 71st Lancers. You remember him at the seaside two years ago?"

Jack pinched himself to discover whether he was really awake or dreaming. He felt like shouting, but concluded that it wouldn't be quite the correct thing. He wanted to laugh with happiness, but he couldn't laugh while she was crying there in the corner. He saw it all now. She thought she was talking to some other fellow whom she had refused just before. Finally he said:

"Yes, I know him very well, but he, too, has changed."

"In what way?" she asked anxiously.

"Well, his voice has changed, too."

"That's nothing. I don't care how he has changed, if he only loves me as he used to."

"He does—and, by-the-way, his voice is very much like mine now."

It was not the words he had used, but the tone of voice in which he had spoken them that gave her woman's intuition the spur. She looked quickly up. He was standing now where she could catch the outlines of his figure. She uttered a little exclamation, reached over to the wall, switched on the electric light, and—well, this is the end of my story.

Thomas Winthrop Hall.

THE NEW "HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT."

This is the Magazine YOU want.

All the month's news is found in the Magazine that YOU want.

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Music and Art, Women and Men, as well as news, are found in the Magazine that YOU want.

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This is the name of the Magazine that contains all this, and more, I mean THE RAPID REVIEW (for busy men, and women as well—and doesn't it sell!).

———

Number four is now on sale, so, before it's too late, be up-to-date and purchase a copy for Sixpence.

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Her Experience.

Miss Greenleaf: "I have just been reading a book called 'How Men Propose.' What is your opinion on that subject?" Miss Yellowleaf: "That they don't."

Sought Advice at Proper Quarters.

He: "I am in love. Will you be my confidante?" She: "Certainly; I am at your service." He: "Well, would you advise me to propose to you?"

For Example.

Miss Flypp (coyly): "Do you believe that it's love that makes the world go round?" Mr. Staylate: "Indeed I do. Notice how soon midnight comes when I spend the evening with you."

His Choice.

"I don't know which is worse," muttered young Blunderheels at the swell reception, retreating to a corner, and wiping his perspiring brow; "but I believe I would rather be run over by a train than step on one."

Tit for Tat.

He (angrily): "Look at this bill. Four pounds for perfumery—for mere odours that fade away for ever." She (calmly): "They've gone to meet the smoke from the eight pounds' worth of cigars you have consumed during the last three months."

Of Course Not.

Little Johnny: "That young man who comes to see you must be pretty poor company. He hasn't any sense of humour." Sister: "Why do you think so?" Little Johnny: "I told him all about the funny way you rush about and bang doors when you get in a temper, and he didn't laugh a bit."

Sounded too Rough.

"Nellie," spoke the youth, with an air of confidence, "only say the word and you and I will sail together on the rough sea of life, bravely buffeting its waves, trimming our sails to meet the adverse winds that——" "Go, Geoffrey, go," interrupted the maiden. "The man who takes me on that journey must offer me a first-class passage on a steamer." Whereupon Geoffrey sailed out of her presence with a decided list to po t.

Settled Matters Easily.

They were at a picnic. "You see," he explained, as he showed her the wish-bone of a chicken at luncheon, "you take hold here and I'll take hold here. Then we must make a wish and pull; and, when it breaks, the one who has the bigger part of it will have his or her wish gratified." "But I don't know what to wish for," she protested. "Oh, you can think of something!" he said. "No, I can't," she replied; "I can't think of anything I want very much." "Well, I'll wish for you!" he exclaimed. "Will you really?" she asked. "Yes." "Well, then, there's no use troubling about the old wish-bone," she interrupted, with a glad smile; "you can have me!"

Cause for Satisfaction.

Ella: "I heard something horrid about you to-day." Stella: "I thought you looked pleased."

Ambiguous.

"How do you like my new hat, George?" "It is the dearest thing of the kind you ever had, love."

An Awkward Admission.

She (encouragingly): "Your step suits mine exactly, Mr. Robinson." He (nervously): "So delighted to hear you say so, Miss Sharpe! I know I'm such a wretched waltzer."

According to Custom.

First Poet: "I wrote Miss Starling a week ago, and sent her my love. I don't know why she has not returned it." Second Poet (absent-mindedly): "Did you inclose stamps for its return?"

He Thought Long and Deeply.

Said the married man who likes to be sympathised with: "My wife is never happy unless she has a grievance." "How happy she must be!" said the pretty girl, and then the married man grew strangely silent.

She was Pleased.

"Just one little kiss," he pleaded. "But only a little one," she said, relenting. "Of course," he replied. "How could I look for a big one from so small a mouth?" And after that he got as many as he wanted.

Rampant Curiosity.

Claribel: "You told me you were never going to write to young Hankinson again." Angie: "He's written me a dozen letters I haven't answered, but in his last one he left a page out, and I had to write and ask him what it was about."

Wanted an Interview.

She: "Ah, Count, you don't know how my love for you distresses my parents. I heard my father say this morning that he would give £10,000 if I could never see you again." The Count: "Ees your fazaire in hees offees now, you sink?"

Revenge, Sweet Revenge.

"No, Harold," said the sweet girl, "I can only be a sister to you." "Well, then," he savagely replied, as he heard a subdued chuckle, "as your brother, I shall claim the privilege of lying under the sofa while you make fools of the other fellows."

Fatal.

"Wasn't it brave of Chollie to rescue that child from drowning in the creek?" "Brave? The water wasn't more than four feet deep anywhere, and Chollie knew it." "Yes, but that was deep enough to utterly ruin the crease in his trousers."

Effectively Told.

Servant: "Oh, miss, that Mr. Borem is coming here again. There's no use telling him you're not at home, for he'll just push past me an' say he'll wait till you come back." Miss Beauty: "Then, for mercy's sake, tell him plainly that I'm engaged. Do it in such a way that he'll have to go." Servant: "Yes, miss." Mr. Borem (a minute later): "Is Miss Beauty at home?" Servant: "Yes, sir, but she is engaged; an' the feller she's engaged to is waitin' in the drawing-room for you with a stick." Mr. Borem went.

A Correct Diagnosis.

George: "Eh, you got engaged last night? Gus, my old, my dear friend, tell me how you did it!" Gus: "Really, I hardly know myself. Couldn't help it; just like falling downstairs. I was on the edge of a proposal, she gave me a push, and there I was—engaged." George: "Well, I haven't had any such experience. Every time I try to start my knees knock together, and my teeth chatter, and my tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth. I've tried a dozen times to pop the question to Miss Horty, and got stuck every time." Gus: "And did she let you stick?" George: "Yes." Gus: "You are courting the wrong girl!"

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BAFFLING A DETECTIVE.

Showing How Edward Meredith almost Fell in Love with a Rogue.

It was a dull, rainy day, towards the end of September—one of those days when earth and sky alike are grey and dreary, and the raindrops pattering against the window sound like human sobs. The clock that hung against the wall pointed to the hour of three in the afternoon; and I was sitting in our little inner office, looking out at the expanse of dull, grey wall that formed my only prospect from the not over-clean window, and thinking. I had read every square inch of type in the newspapers.

I was musing about Gracie Elton, and wondering how long it would be before I should be able to marry her. Dear little Gracie, she was as sweet and as patient as it was in the nature of a woman to be; but I knew it was a hard life for her in that over-crowded milliners' work-room, day after day, and month after month, and I longed to set her free from the monotonous captivity. She was a pretty, blue-eyed girl of twenty, with a dimple in her chin, and the sweetest roses on her cheek that ever inspired the pen of a poet. I was no poet, yet I think I understood and appreciated all her womanly beauty as fully as if my heart's thoughts could shape themselves into verse. And it was of them I was thinking when the door opened, and Mr. Clenner came in.

Mr. Clenner was our "chief"—a dark, silent, little man, with square, stern mouth, and clouded, grey eyes, which appeared almost expressionless when they were turned full upon you, and yet which seemed to see everything at a glance. He sat down beside me.

"Meredith," he said, in a quiet, subdued tone that was natural to him; "didn't you say you were getting tired of doing nothing?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I have something for you to do."

"What is it, sir?"

"Something that will bring you both credit and friends if you manage it skilfully. I had intended to go myself, but circumstances happened untowardly, and I shall send you instead."

Bending his head towards me, and speaking scarcely above a whisper, he told me the special business on which I was to be sent.

There had been, it seems, a series of very skilful forgeries lately committed, with a boldness and audacity that fairly seemed to set the authorities at defiance. For some time he had been in doubt as to the exact perpetrator of the crime; but, after much quiet investigation and casting hither and thither, he had detected the hidden spring—one Perley Mattison—who had skilfully eluded all pursuit, and was now somewhere in hiding in the north of England.

His whereabouts had been ascertained as nearly as possible, and it was for me to go quietly up and apprehend him before he should become aware of our knowledge of all his movements.

I sat listening to all the various details of our plan as they were sketched out by Mr. Clenner. The reward that had been privately offered was high; my heart leapt as I reflected how much nearer it would bring me to Gracie Elton, nor did the enterprise seem particularly difficult to accomplish.

"Do you think you can do it?" Mr. Clenner asked, after the whole thing had been laid before me.

"Yes, sir. When shall I start?"

"Now, within half-an-hour."

"So soon?"

"Yes; why not?"

I could think of no sufficient reason except one, which I did not care to communicate to my superior—the longing wish to see Gracie once more before I started.

"Just as you decide, Mr. Clenner, of course," I said rising. "If I take the night express, I shall be there early in the morning."

"Yes, and that is altogether the best plan. He will not remain long in any one place just at present, depend upon it, and what you have to do must be done at once."

All through the long night journey I mused upon the task that lay before me. The house to which I was directed was quite in the country, about half-a-mile beyond the village of Berwood, and was the residence of Mrs. Mattison, the mother of the audacious forger. If help was needed, I was fully authorised to call for it upon the constabulary authorities at Kerstead; but I expected to need no assistance.

The rosy dawn was just flushing the eastern sky when I alighted, stiff, weary and jaded, from the train.

"Can you direct me to Mrs. Mattison's place?" I asked of the sleepy station-master.

"Mattison—Mrs. Mattison; I don't know her, but I can tell you where she lives. Just you follow the main street of the village out about half-a-mile, and ye'll come to a wood, with a footpath running through it. Get over the stile, follow the footpath, and in a little while ye'll see a yellow house—the last place in the world where you'd expect to see a dwelling. That's where Mrs. Mattison lives."

I thanked my informant and set out at a brisk walk, carrying my travelling-bag in my hand. It was half-an-hour ere I diverged from the main street into a quiet and secluded road, or rather lane. The stile at the end of the footpath through the wood was quickly reached, and the little yellow house—a cream-coloured cottage, literally overgrown with honeysuckles—presently rewarded my search; and as I knocked at the door, a clock somewhere struck the hour of seven.

A decent-looking, elderly woman, in widow's weeds, came to the door.

"Is Mr. Mattison in—Mr. Perley Mattison?"

"No," she answered quickly, with, as I imagined, rather a confused look.

I did not believe her, and asked quietly, "When do you expect him home?"

"Not at present."

Apparently she expected me to go away; but, instead, I slipped into the passage.

"Mother," said a soft voice, at the head of the stairs, "who is it?"

And then, for the first time, I became aware that someone had been watching and listening to our colloquy from the head of the stairs—a young girl, dressed, like the mother, in deep black, with very brilliant eyes, and a profusion of jet-black curls.

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"Someone to see your brother."

She came half-way down the stairs, pushing back her curls with one hand, and looking at me with her wonderful eyes. Even then her beauty struck me as I stood gazing at her.

"Perley is not at home," she said, hurriedly. "He has gone away. We do not know when he will return."

Evidently this mother and daughter were in the secret of Mattison's villainy, and doing their best to screen him from its consequences. My heart bled for both of them; but it was no time to indulge in sentimental pity. Speaking as briefly as I could, I told them it was my duty to compel them to remain where they were while I searched the house.

Mrs. Mattison sat down, pale and trembling. Her daughter coloured high.

"Mother," she said, "why do you stand by and listen to such slanders? It is false! Let this man search the house if he will; my brother is as innocent as I am!"

No opposition was offered to my search. It was entirely fruitless, however; there was nowhere any trace of the missing man. Nevertheless, I resolved to remain there quietly, for a day or two, to see what a little waiting might bring forth.

The same afternoon Clara Mattison came in as I sat by the window, keeping a silent watch on all around.

"Mr. Meredith," she said, softly, "mother thinks I have been rude to you. She says it was not your fault, personally, that you were sent here on such a mistaken errand—and, perhaps, she is right. I am sorry if I have hurt your feelings."

The pretty, penitent way in which she spoke quite won my heart, and a few questions on my part seemed to unlock the hidden recesses of her confidence.

She talked at first shyly, but afterwards, with more assurance, of herself, her absent brother, and her mother, giving me a thousand little family details, which I almost dreaded to hear.

This twilight talk was one of the pleasantest episodes of my by no means universally pleasant life, and I was not a little annoyed when it was broken in upon by the arrival of the constables from Kerstead, who were to watch through the night.

At the sound of their footsteps, Clara rose up and sat down again, confused and frightened.

"Oh, Mr. Meredith, those men——"

"Be easy, Miss Mattison," I said; "you shall in no way be annoyed by them. Your privacy shall not be broken in upon, believe me."

"I know I am silly," faltered Clara; "but, oh, it seems so dreadful!"

My orders to the men were simple and succinct. I stationed them as seemed best to me, and then returned to spend the evening with Miss Mattison. And when I was at length left alone, I could not help thinking—God forgive me—how much more winning and graceful she was than poor Gracie Elton.

At last an answer came to my report to Mr. Clenner. It was short, and to the purpose:

Come back. You are only losing time. If the bird has flown, we must look elsewhere for him.

I read the missive with a pang. Clara Mattison's cheek deepened in colour as I announced my departure to her.

"You have been far kinder than we dared to hope, Mr. Meredith," she said, as I held her hand in mine.

"You will think of me sometimes, Clara?"

The reader will easily perceive from this how our intimacy had progressed. She smiled, hung her head, and, taking a pair of scissors from the table, severed one bright, black curl from the abundant tresses that hung over her forehead.

"Keep this, Mr. Meredith, in memory of me."

Was I foolish to press the jetty ringlet to my lips ere I laid it closely against my heart? Clara evidently thought I was, for she laughed, but did not seem displeased.

Mr. Clenner appeared to be a good deal annoyed when I got back to town—rather an unreasonable thing on his part, for I certainly did all that man could do under the circumstances.

"We have been mistaken all the way through, it seems," he said, biting his lip. "Strange—very strange. I never was mistaken before in my calculations. Well, we must try again."

I went to Gracie Elton's that night. She received me with a sweet, shy gladness of welcome, that should have made me the happiest man in the world; but it did not. Clara Mattison's dark beauty seemed to stand between me and her like a visible barrier. When I took my leave, there were tears in her eyes.

"Gracie, you are crying."

"Because you are changed, Edward. You do not love me as well as you did."

"Gracie, what nonsense!"

I was vexed with her, simply because I knew her accusation was true. But I kissed her once more, and took my leave, moody and dissatisfied.

When I reached the office next morning, Mr. Clenner was not there.

"He went last night to Kerstead," said my fellow-detective.

"To Kerstead?"

I was seriously annoyed. Did Mr. Clenner doubt the accuracy of my reports? Or did he imagine that I was unable to institute a thorough and complete investigation.

"It's very strange," I mused aloud.

Jones laughed.

"Well," he said, "you know Clenner has a strange way of doing things. Depend upon it, he has good reasons for his conduct."

I was sitting at my desk two days subsequently, when the door glided noiselessly open, and Clenner himself entered.

"You are back again, sir? And what luck?"

"The best."

"You don't mean to say you've got him?"

"I do mean to say it, Edward Meredith. I knew I could not be entirely mistaken. Perley Mattison is in the next room—half an hour from now he will be in prison."

"Where did you apprehend him."

"At home in his mother's house."

"But——"

"He was there all the time you remained there. Ned, my boy, you've made a blunder for once; but don't let it happen again."

"What do you mean, sir?"

For reply, he opened the door of the private inner room—his own special sanctum. A slight, boyish figure leant against the window, smoking a cigarette, with black curls tossed back from a marble-white brow, and brilliant eyes. He mockingly inclined his head, as I stared at him, with a motion not unfamiliar to me.

"Clara Mattison!"

"Yes," he said, in a soft, sarcastic voice, "Clara Mattison, or Perley Mattison, or whatever you choose to call me. Many thanks for your politeness, Detective Meredith; and if you would like another lock of hair——"

I turned away, burning scarlet, while Mr. Clenner closed the door.

"Never mind, my boy; it will be a lesson to you," he said, laughing. "He made a very pretty girl, but I am not at all susceptible."

What a double-dyed fool I had been! I had lost the reward—failed in the estimation of my fellow-officers—and behaved like a brute to poor Gracie—and all for what?

I went to Gracie, and told her the whole story; and, to my surprise, the dear, faithful little creature loved me just as well as ever.

"I won't be jealous of Perley Mattison, Edward," she said, smiling, "whatever I might be of his sister. And, dearest, don't be discouraged. I'll wait as long as you please and you will be a second Mr. Clenner yet."

She was determined to look on the bright side of things, this little Gracie of mine! But I felt the mortification none the less keenly; although, as Mr. Clenner said, it would undoubtedly prove a good lesson to me.

Frederick Coomber.

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A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.
The Bottle of Wine.

ALTHOUGH Racksole had now been twice worsted in a contest of wits within the precincts of the Grand Babylon, once by Rocco and once by Jules, he could not fairly blame himself for the present miscarriage of his plans—a miscarriage due to the meddlesomeness of an extraneous person, combined with pure ill-fortune. He did not, therefore, permit the accident to interfere with his sleep that night.

On the following day he sought out Prince Aribert, between whom and himself there now existed a feeling of unmistakable, frank friendship, and disclosed to him the happenings of the previous night, and particularly the tampering with the bottle of Romanée-Conti.

"I believe you dined with Prince Eugen last night?"

"I did. And, curiously enough, we had a bottle of Romanée-Conti, an admirable wine, of which Eugen is passionately fond."

"And you will dine with him to-night?"

"Most probably. To-day will, I fear, be our last day here. Eugen wishes to return to Posen early to-morrow."

"Has it struck you, Prince," said Racksole, "that if Jules had succeeded in poisoning your nephew, he would probably have succeeded also in poisoning you?"

"I had not thought of it," laughed Aribert, "but it would seem so. It appears that so long as he brings down his particular quarry, Jules is careless of anything else that may be accidentally involved in the destruction. However, we need have no fear on that score now. You know the bottle, and you can destroy it at once."

"But I do not propose to destroy it," said Racksole calmly. "If Prince Eugen asks for Romanée-Conti to be served to-night, as he probably will, I propose that that precise bottle shall be served to him—and to you."

"Then you would poison us in spite of ourselves?"

"Scarcely," Racksole smiled. "My notion is to discover the accomplices within the hotel. I have already inquired as to the wine-clerk, Hubbard. Now, does it not occur to you as extraordinary that on this particular day Mr. Hubbard should be ill in bed? Hubbard, I am informed, is suffering from an attack of stomach poisoning, which has supervened during the night. He says that he does not know what can have caused it. His place in the wine cellars will be taken to-day by his assistant, a mere youth, but to all appearances a fairly smart youth. I need not say that we shall keep an eye on that youth."

"One moment," Prince Aribert interrupted. "I do not quite understand how you think the poisoning was to have been effected."

"The bottle is now under examination by an expert, who has instructions to remove as little as possible of the stuff which Jules put on the rim of the mouth of it. It will be secretly replaced in its bin during the day. My idea is that by the mere action of pouring out the wine takes up some of the poison, which I deem to be very strong, and thus becomes fatal as it enters the glass."

"But surely the servant in attendance would wipe the mouth of the bottle?"

"Very carelessly, perhaps. And, moreover, he would be extremely unlikely to wipe off all the stuff; some of it has been ingeniously placed just on the inside edge of the rim. Besides, suppose he forgot to wipe the bottle?"

"Prince Eugen is always served at dinner by Hans. It is an honour which the faithful old fellow reserves for himself."

"But suppose Hans——" Racksole stopped.

"Hans an accomplice! My dear Racksole, the suggestion is wildly impossible."

That night Prince Aribert dined with his august nephew in the superb dining-room of the Royal apartments. Hans served, the dishes being brought to the door by other servants, Aribert found his nephew despondent and taciturn. On the previous day, when, after the futile interview with Sampson Levi, Prince Eugen had despairingly threatened to commit suicide, in such a manner as to make it "look like an accident," Aribert had compelled him to give his word of honour not to do so.

"What wine will your Royal Highness take?" asked old Hans in his soothing tones, when the soup was served.

"Sherry," was Prince Eugen's curt order.

"And Romanée-Conti afterwards?" said Hans. Aribert looked up quickly.

"No, not to-night. I'll try Sillery to-night," said Prince Eugen.

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Eugen's body had slipped limply forward; his arms hung straight and lifeless; his eyes were closed.

"I think I'll have Romanée-Conti, Hans, after all," he said, later. "It suits me better than champagne."

The famous and unsurpassable Burgundy was served with the roast. Old Hans brought it tenderly in its wicker cradle, inserted the corkscrew with mathematical precision, and drew the cork, which he offered for his master's inspection. Eugen nodded, and told him to put it down.

Aribert watched with intense interest. He could not for an instant believe that Hans was not the very soul of fidelity, and yet, despite himself, Racksole's words had caused him a certain uneasiness. At that moment Prince Eugen murmured across the table:

"Aribert, I withdraw my promise. Observe that, I withdraw it."

Aribert shook his head emphatically, without removing his gaze from Hans. The white-haired servant perfunctorily dusted his napkin round the neck of the bottle of Romanée-Conti, and poured out a glass. Aribert trembled from head to foot.

Eugen took up the glass and held it to the light.

"Don't drink it," said Aribert very quietly. "It is poisoned."

"Poisoned!" exclaimed Prince Eugen.

"Poisoned, sire!" exclaimed old Hans, with an air of profound amazement and concern, and he seized the glass.

"Impossible, sire. I myself opened the bottle. No one else has touched it, and the cork was perfect."

"I tell you it is poisoned," Aribert repeated.

"Your Highness will pardon an old man," said Hans, "but to say that this wine is poison is to say that I am a murderer. I will prove to you that it is not poisoned. I will drink it."

And he raised the glass to his trembling lips. In that moment Aribert saw that old Hans, at any rate, was not an accomplice of Jules. Springing up from his seat, he knocked the glass from the aged servitor's hands, and the fragments of it fell with a light tinkling crash partly on the table and partly on the floor. The Prince and the servant gazed at one another in a distressing and terrible silence. There was a slight noise, and Aribert looked aside. He saw that Eugen's body had slipped forward limply over the left arm of his chair; the Prince's arms hung straight and lifeless; his eyes were closed; he was unconscious.

"Hans!" murmured Aribert. "Hans! What is this?"

TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Steam Launch.

Mr. Tom Jackson's notion of making good his escape from the hotel by means of a steam launch was an excellent one, so far as it went, but Theodore Racksole, for his part, did not consider that it went quite far enough. Theodore Racksole opined, with peculiar glee, that he now had a tangible and definite clue for the catching of the Grand Babylon's ex-waiter. He knew nothing of the Port of London, but he happened to know a good deal of the far more complicated, though somewhat smaller, Port of New York, and he felt sure there ought to be no extraordinary difficulty in getting hold of Jules' steam launch. To those who are not thoroughly familiar with it the River Thames and its docks, from London Bridge to Gravesend, seem a vast and uncharted wilderness of craft—a wilderness in which it would be perfectly easy to hide even a three-master successfully. To such people the idea of looking for a small steam launch on the river would be about equivalent to the idea of looking for a needle in a bundle of hay.

But the fact is, there are hundreds of men between St. Katherine's Wharf and Blackwall who literally know the Thames as the suburban householder knows his back-garden—who can recognise thousands of ships and put a name to them at a distance of half a mile, who are informed as to every movement of vessels on the great stream, who know all the captains, all the engineers, all the lightermen, all the pilots, all the licensed watermen and all the unlicensed scoundrels from the Tower to Gravesend, and a lot further. By these experts of the Thames the slightest unusual event on the water is noticed and discussed—a wherry cannot change hands but they will guess shrewdly upon the price paid and the intentions of the new owner with regard to it. They have a habit of watching the river for the mere interest of the sight, and they talk about everything like housewives gathered of an evening round the cottage door. If the first

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mate of a Castle Liner gets the sack they will be able to tell you what he said to the captain, what the old man said to him, and what both said to the Board, and having finished off that affair they will cheerfully turn to discussing whether Bill Stevens sank his barge outside the West India No. 2 by accident or on purpose.

Theodore Racksole had no satisfactory means of identifying the steam launch which carried away Mr. Tom Jackson. The sky had clouded over soon after midnight, and there was also a slight mist, and he had only been able to make out that it was a low craft, about sixty feet long, probably painted black. He had personally kept a watch all through the night on vessels going up-stream, and during the next morning he had a man to take his place who warned him whenever a steam launch went towards Westminster. At noon, after his conversation with Prince Aribert, he went down the river in a hired row-boat as far as the Customs House, and poked about everywhere in search of any vessel which could by any possibility be the one he was in search of. But he found nothing. He was, therefore, tolerably sure that the mysterious launch lay somewhere below the Customs House. At the Customs House stairs he landed, and asked for a very high official—an official inferior only to a Commissioner—whom he had entertained once in New York, and who had met him in London on business at Lloyd's. In the large but dingy office of this great man a long conversation took place—a conversation in which Racksole had to exercise a certain amount of persuasive power, and which ultimately ended in the high official ringing his bell.

"Desire Mr. Hazell—room No. 332—to speak to me," said the official to the boy who answered the summons, and then, turning to Racksole: "I need hardly repeat, my dear Mr. Racksole, that this is strictly unofficial."

"Agreed, of course," said Racksole.

Mr. Hazell entered. He was a young man of about thirty, dressed in blue serge, with a pale, keen face, a brown moustache and a rather handsome brown beard.

"Mr. Hazell," said the high official, "let me introduce you to Mr. Theodore Racksole—you will doubtless be familiar with his name. Mr. Hazell," he went on to Racksole, "is one of our outdoor staff—what we call an examining officer. Just now he is doing night duty. He has a boat on the river and a couple of men, and the right to board and examine any craft whatever. What Mr. Hazell and his crew don't know about the Thames between here and Gravesend isn't knowledge."

"Glad to meet you, sir," said Racksole simply, and they shook hands. Racksole observed with satisfaction that Mr. Hazell was entirely at his ease.

"Now, Hazell," the high official continued, "Mr. Racksole wants you to help in a little private expedition on the river to-night. I will give you a night's leave. I sent for you partly because I thought you would enjoy the affair, and partly because I think I can rely on you to regard it as entirely unofficial, and not to talk about it. You understand? I dare say you will have no cause to regret having obliged Mr. Racksole."

"I think I grasp the situation," said Hazell, with a slight smile.

"And, by-the-way," added the high official, "although the business is unofficial, it might be well if you wore your official overcoat. See?"

"Decidedly," said Hazell; "I should have done so in any case."

"And now, Mr. Hazell," said Racksole, "will you do me the pleasure of lunching with me? If you agree, I should like to lunch at the place you usually frequent."

So it came to pass that Theodore Racksole and George Hazell, outdoor clerk in the Customs, lunched together at "Thomas' Chop House," in the city of London, upon mutton-chops and coffee. The millionaire soon discovered that he had got hold of a keen-witted man and a person of much insight.

"Tell me," said Hazell, when they had reached the cigarette stage, "are the magazine writers anything like correct?"

"What do you mean?" asked Racksole, mystified.

"Well, you're a millionaire—'one of the best,' I believe. One often sees articles on and interviews with millionaires, which describe their private railroad cars, their steam yachts on the Hudson, their marble stables, and so on, and so on. Do you happen to have those things?"

"I have a private car on the New York Central, and I have a two thousand ton schooner-yacht—though it isn't on the Hudson. It happens just now to be on East River. And I am bound to admit that the stables of my uptown place are fitted with marble." Racksole laughed.

"Ah!" said Hazell. "Now I can believe that I am lunching with a millionaire. It's strange how facts like those—unimportant in themselves—appeal to the imagination. You seem to me a real millionaire now. You've given me some personal information; I'll give you some in return. I earn three hundred a year, and perhaps sixty pounds a year extra for overtime. I live by myself in two rooms in Muscovy Court. I've as much money as I need, and I always do exactly what I like outside office. As regards the office, I do as little work as I can, on principle—it's a fight between us and the Commissioners who shall get the best. They try to do us down, and we try to do them down—it's pretty even on the whole. All's fair in war, you know, and there ain't no ten commandments in a Government office."

Racksole laughed. "Can you get off this afternoon?" he asked.

"Certainly," said Howell; "I'll get one of my pals to sign on for me, and then I shall be free."

"Well," said Racksole, "I should like you to come down with me to the Grand Babylon. Then we can talk over my little affair at length. And may we go on your boat? I want to meet your crew."

How Jules is captured will be related in our next number.

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"That will be all right," Hazell remarked. "My two men are the idlest, most soul-less chaps you ever saw. They eat too much, and they have an enormous appetite for beer; but they know the river, and they know their business, and they will do anything within the fair game if they are paid for it, and aren't asked to hurry."

That night, just after dark, Theodore Racksole embarked with his new friend George Hazell in one of the black-painted Customs wherries, manned by a crew of two men—both the latter freemen of the river, a distinction which carries with it certain privileges unfamiliar to the mere landsman. It was a cloudy and oppressive evening, not a star showing to illumine the slow tide, now just past its flood. The vast forms of steamers at anchor—chiefly those of the General Steam Navigation and the Aberdeen Line—heaved themselves high out of the water, straining sluggishly at their mooring buoys. On either side the naked walls of warehouses rose like grey precipices from the stream, holding forth quaint arms of steam-cranes. To the west the Tower Bridge spanned the river with its formidable arch, and above that its suspended footpath—a hundred and fifty feet from earth. Down towards the East and the Pool of London a forest of funnels and masts were dimly outlined against the sinister sky. Huge barges, each steered by a single man at the end of a pair of giant oars, lumbered and swirled downstream at all angles. Occasionally a tug snorted busily past, flashing its red and green signals and dragging an unwieldy tail of barges in its wake. Then a Margate passenger steamer, its electric lights gleaming from every porthole, swerved round to anchor, with its load of two thousand fatigued excursionists. Over everything brooded an air of mystery—a spirit and feeling of strangeness, remoteness, and the inexplicable. As the broad, flat little boat bobbed its way under the shadow of enormous hulks, beneath stretched hawsers, and past buoys covered with green slime, Racksole could scarcely believe that he was in the very heart of London—the most prosaic city in the world. He had a queer idea that almost anything might happen in this seeming waste of waters at this weird hour of ten o'clock. It appeared incredible to him that only a mile or two away people were sitting in theatres applauding farces, and that at Cannon Street Station, a few yards off, other people were calmly taking the train to various highly-respectable suburbs whose names he was gradually learning. He had the uplifting sensation of being in another world which comes to us sometimes amid surroundings violently different from our usual surroundings. The most ordinary noises—of men calling, of a chain running through a slot, of a distant sirene—translated themselves to his ears into terrible and haunting sounds, full of portentous significance. He looked over the side of the boat into the brown water, and asked himself what frightful secrets lay hidden in its depth. Then he put his hand into his hip-pocket and touched the stock of his Colt revolver—that familiar substance comforted him.

The oarsmen had instructions to drop slowly down to the Pool, as the wide reach below the Tower is called. These two men had not been previously informed of the precise object of the expedition, but now that they were safely afloat Hazell judged it expedient to give them some notion of it. "We expect to come across a rather suspicious steam launch," he said. "My friend here is very anxious to get a sight of her, and until he has seen her nothing definite can be done."

"What sort of a craft is she, sir?" asked the stroke oar, a fat-faced man who seemed absolutely incapable of any serious exertion.

"I don't know," Racksole replied; "but as near as I can judge, she's about sixty feet in length, and painted black. I fancy I shall recognise her when I see her."

"Not much to go by, that," exclaimed the other man curtly. But he said no more. He, as well as his mate, had received from Theodore Racksole one English sovereign as a kind of preliminary fee, and an English sovereign will do a lot towards silencing the natural sarcastic tendencies and free speech of a Thames waterman.

"There's one thing I noticed," said Racksole suddenly, "and I forgot to tell you of it, Mr. Hazell. Her screw seemed to move with a rather irregular, lame sort of beat."

Both watermen burst into a laugh.

"Oh," said the fat rower, "I know what you're after, sir—it's Jack Everett's launch, commonly called *Squirm*. She's got a four-bladed propeller, and one blade is broken off short."

"Ay, that's it, sure enough," agreed the man in the bows. "And if it's her you want, I seed her lying up against Cherry Gardens Pier this very morning."

"Let us go to Cherry Gardens Pier by all means, as soon as possible," Racksole said, and the boat swung across stream and then began to creep down by the right bank, feeling its way past wharves, many of which, even at that hour, were still busy with cranes, that descended empty into the bellies of ships and came up full. As the two watermen gingerly manœuvred the boat on the ebbing tide, Hazell explained to the millionaire that the *Squirm* was one of the most notorious craft on the river. It appeared that when anyone had a nefarious or underhand scheme afoot which necessitated river work Everett's launch was always available for a suitable monetary consideration. The *Squirm* had got itself into a thousand scrapes, and out of those scrapes again with safety, if not precisely with honour. The river police kept a watchful eye on it, and the chief marvel about the whole thing was that old Everett, the owner, had never yet been seriously compromised in any illegal escapade. Not once had the officer of the law been able to prove anything definite against the proprietor of the *Squirm*, though several of its quondam hirers were at that very moment in various of His Majesty's prisons throughout the country. Latterly, however, the launch, with its damaged propeller, which Everett consistently refused to have repaired, had acquired an evil reputation, even among evil-doers, and this fraternity had gradually come to abandon it for less easily recognisable craft.

"Your friend, Mr. Tom Jackson," said Hazell to Racksole, "committed an error of discretion when he hired the *Squirm*. A scoundrel of his experience and calibre ought certainly to have known better than that. You cannot fail to get a clue now."

By this time the boat was approaching Cherry Gardens Pier, but unfortunately a thin night-fog had swept over the river, and objects could not be discerned with any clearness beyond a distance of thirty yards. As the Customs boat scraped down past the pier all its occupants strained eyes for a glimpse of the mysterious launch, but nothing could be seen of it. The boat continued to float idly down-stream, the men resting on their oars. Then they narrowly escaped bumping a large Norwegian sailing vessel at anchor with her stem pointing down-stream. This ship they passed on the port side. Just as they got clear of her bowsprit the fat man cried out excitedly, "There's her nose!" and he put the boat about and began to pull back against the tide. And surely the missing *Squirm* was comfortably anchored on the starboard quarter of the Norwegian ship, hidden neatly between the ship and the shore. The men pulled very quietly alongside.

"I'll board her to start with," said Hazell, whispering to Racksole. "I'll make out that I suspect they've got dutiable goods on board, and that will give me a chance to have a good look at her."

Dressed in his official overcoat and peaked cap, he stepped rather jauntily, as Racksole thought, on to the low deck of the launch. "Anyone aboard?" Racksole heard him cry out, and a woman's voice answered. "I'm a Customs examining officer, and I want to search the launch," Hazell shouted, and then disappeared down into the little saloon amidships, and Racksole heard no more. It seemed to the millionaire that Hazell had been gone hours, but at length he returned.

(Another long instalment next week.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Wooing by Strategy.

So, "ALGY," you have fallen in love with a rich young lady in the neighbourhood. You dare not reveal the fact to her, as you are afraid she would instantly reject you. Besides, she has many suitors much better off in the world than yourself, and much more suitable to be her husband. How should I advise you to act in the matter?

* * * * * * *

Poor young men have before now succeeded in attracting rich girls, but not by showing themselves too ardent. I know a young man who succeeded in something like the following fashion:

He used to frequently meet the girl at other people's houses, but instead of always seeking her company, he deliberately avoided her, and paid lavish attentions to other girls far less attractive.

Meanwhile the rich girl came in for compliments and attentions from every other young man. My friend alone seemed to avoid her. In time, needless to say, the girl grew very curious and not a little jealous. Why should this one young man of all others alone avoid her? The result was that, on every possible occasion, the girl tried to attract the young man, never, however, seeming to succeed. His manner whenever he spoke to her was very cool and offhand. At the same time he managed to let the intimate friends of the rich girl know that all the time he was madly in love with her, but dared not show it, as he felt it would be dishonourable to make overtures to a girl whom he could never marry.

These tactics finally succeeded. The girl sought him out more and more, until she forced him to confess. Their engagement was announced not long after, and nobody could accuse the man of having angled for her, seeing that things were the exact reverse.

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The Ways of Courtship.

"HOW," writes "ALFRED," "can I gain the affections of a young lady whom I first knew eight years ago? We were friends then, but I went to live in the country for four years, and our friendship was lost from then until now. I like her very much, and would wish her to be my partner in life. Every time I meet her she always smiles at me, and never fails to speak."

* * * * *

Well, it does not look as though you should have much difficulty in winning her affections. Take advantage of the next time you meet her in the street and enter into conversation. Ask her if she would care to take a walk with you. Avoid putting on the airs of a lover altogether. Just be quite natural, and seem as though you want her companionship. When you have become on these friendly terms you will be able to practise the higher arts of courtship. But you should first serve the apprenticeship of a companion.

Misplaced Chivalry.

"CISSIE," is perplexed. She often travels to town with a young man, and they generally manage to meet at the booking office. He always persists on paying for "CISSIE'S" fare, and first class, and will never hear of her repaying him. Ought "CISSIE" to permit this, or is it etiquette for the young man to pay?

* * * * * * *

It is not only not etiquette, but very impolite of him. He places you under an obligation to him, to which he is not entitled. You should do one of two things. Either get to the booking office before he does, and buy yourself a third-class ticket, or tell the young man with a show of dignity that you positively object to his paying for your ticket, and that it is impolite of him to wish to do it. It would be entirely different if you were travelling as the companion of the man by his invitation, in which case it would be his duty to pay. But as you are travelling on your own account, you should be expected to pay for yourself. There is the young man's side of the question, and I might say a word about it. Perhaps he only pays for you out of a mistaken sense of chivalry. Well, he should avoid meeting you until after you have booked your ticket.

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A Relentless Girl.

"SOME months ago," writes "GUS," "I had an appointment to meet a young lady friend. On the day of the meeting I was taken suddenly ill, and could neither keep the appointment nor write and excuse myself. I was in bed for a week, and was ordered to go for a sea trip on recovering. When I returned, I called on the girl to explain the whole affair, but, though I knew she was in, I was told she was 'not at home.' I wrote and explained matters, but received no reply. When I met her in the street she cut me dead. Now, how can I act under such circumstances?"

* * * * * * *

If, "GUS," it was really not your fault that you did not explain your failure to keep the appointment before—if, in fact, you were really ill, then I think she is behaving in an extraordinary manner. A girl who refuses to accept such an excuse as yours could scarcely be the sort of girl for a young man to think of further cultivating. No doubt at the time she firmly convinced herself that you were offering her a slight. For weeks afterwards, receiving no word from you, she continued to think so, and probably grew to mortally despise and dislike you. When your explanation came it had no effect on her, as her feelings had already developed too strongly. Write once more, explaining the whole facts, and telling her that if she declines to accept them you will take it that she wishes the acquaintance at an end. She may then relent.

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In Her Fiancé's Absence.

"ROSIE B." is engaged to a man who has been abroad for over four years, and yet she has allowed another man to make love to her and kiss her and has promised to marry him. How girls can be so deceitful, is beyond me! If she loves him really better than the man she is engaged to, her only honourable course is to write and tell him that she is tired of waiting for him, and has decided to return all his gifts and letters, asking him to forgive the pain she has caused him. I should advise her to think well, however, before doing this, as a man who persistently makes love to a girl, knowing her to be engaged to another, is guilty of such underhand conduct as proves him to be the sort of man not greatly to be trusted. No wonder she feels dissatisfied at what she has done.

Cynthia

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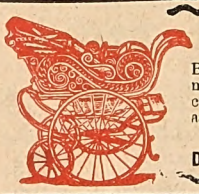

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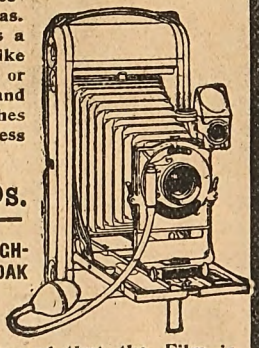

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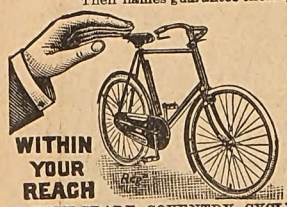

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Short Stories

No. 805.] [One Penny.

Week Ending June 4th, 1904.

ANNETTE.

Telling how she Chose Between her Lovers.

She was swinging on a gate; a most undignified position for a girl who was seventeen years old, and who had just come into possession of an avowed lover.

Her quiet elder sister had met him in the lane a minute before, with the flash of early manhood in his frank blue eyes, and the energy of youth and hope ringing in his quick step.

When she reached the gate, she found the young girl laughing until the tears rolled down her cheeks. She stood and looked at her in amazement.

"Annette, what is the matter?" she demanded.

"What do you think? I'm engaged!"

On hearing the reply, her sister laughed, too, until she could not stand, but sat down on a great stone in the lane, just by the fence.

Annette sprang off the gate then, and came beside her. She wore a pink cambric dress, with a white ruffle at her throat; her lithe, girlish figure; her fair, fresh face, her soft, brown hair, braided down her back, and tears of mirth in her dark eyes, she made a picture.

Janet felt as if she had never really seen her before; she grew sober at once. Seventeen years old, and had a lover! It was nothing to laugh at; it was sad, earnest, real; the child had become a woman.

"There is no use in being serious, for it is altogether too funny!" And the young girl laughed afresh, wiping off the tears on the back of her hand; her handkerchief was in the pocket of her dainty apron, but she seemed to scorn its use for such jolly tears.

"But, my dear—" began Janet solemnly.

"But, my dear!" interrupted Annette, with a fresh burst of merriment.

"You don't seem to realise what you are doing!" continued her elder sister, her voice quivering with anxiety.

"Now, Janet, you can't give me a realising sense of things—you know you never could. This world isn't all catechism and creed. Part of it is a joke; jokes are horribly improper, but I like them, and this is *such* a one!"

"It is a pretty serious joke; when you come to marry you will find it out," was the grave reply.

"Marry! Who ever spoke of marrying, Janet?" And the young girl grew suddenly quiet, wiping the tears off the back of her hand on her apron.

"Why, you did."

"I? No, indeed, Janet, you are mistaken. I said I was engaged," was the earnest protest.

"Engaged—what for?" demanded her sister.

"Fun!" laughed the girl.

Janet looked very serious.

"Does Mark Colton think it is for fun?" she asked.

That set Annette off again; when she could grow sober she said:

"Oh, no, indeed, he was so dreadfully in earnest—that is the funniest part of it. He wanted me to promise to be his for all time and eternity. Did you ever hear of anything so silly? I told him that eternity was a thing which we knew nothing about; that time, as compared with it, was only a point, and that I despised points."

Janet would not even smile.

"So I just agreed to be engaged to him, and he sighed, and made the best of it."

"What will aunt say?"

"When she knows, it will be time enough to speculate on that," was the careless retort. Her elder sister looked disapproving.

"Now, Janet, I know that you are going to marry the minister," said the young girl.

"Why?" and the question was accompanied by a slight blush.

"Because you grow more serious every day, and people in love are always serious."

"Then *you* certainly are not in love," retorted Janet; and rising, opened the gate and led the way up the garden-path to the house—a low-browed, weather-stained farmhouse, with projecting eaves, and brown moss and lichens covering the roof.

They both entered, and Annette ran upstairs to her quaint little room under the rafters.

There was something fine and tender in the girl's nature—she went round the shadow, instead of stepping on it; then she sat down in the window, where the sunlight was the broadest. Most people look best in the shade, but the sunlight always brightened Annette into beauty. She had some tatting in her pocket, and now drew it out, her small brown

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hands weaving the delicate fabric with rapid motion. As she sat thus, something wistful came into her dark, piquant face.

She had known Mark Colton from her very babyhood; his father's and her aunt's farms were separated only by the lane of which we have spoken. He was four years her senior. When children, he had taken her on his shoulder many a time and carried her over the brooks that plentifully watered that pleasant section of country; they had ridden the same horse, she seated behind him; had swung on the same gate; and had done a thousand other things together, through all the slow years of childhood.

Of late they had hunted four-leaved clovers and cut their names in the bark of trees, and hovered about love, not knowing it was there—yet held by those many little acts, so full of poetry and romance. Mark was the first to learn.

When he first came face to face with this fact, he was alone, pruning trees in his father's orchard; the blood surged to the roots of his flaxen hair; he dropped his pruning-knife and started impetuously towards the farmhouse on the other side of the lane. He only went a few steps, though, then turned back, and picking up his knife, went on with his work.

That same day he met Annette, and was so quiet and reserved, that she demanded, in a pet, what he was so cross about; and that night, at a party in the village, she would not look at him, but devoted herself to the other boys, especially the new minister's brother Philip, a pale-faced, interesting youth, who was studying theology.

That was four months ago. The trees in the orchard had blossomed and budded, and now were heavy with fruit; and all that time Mark Colton had kept the secret that he found in his pruning that day.

Since then Annette had not been able to understand him; he had been unreasonable, exacting, cross, she said; and she, because she knew it troubled him, though she hardly comprehended why, was especially kind and merry with Philip, whilst the young student dreamt of her both waking and sleeping.

During three months she never looked at Mark when others were present, and when alone with him, laughed at and slighted everything he said. He bore it all in his patient, manly way, but this day of which we have been telling, took the matter in his own hands, told her his love in an impetuous way, and brought her to the unsatisfactory terms which we have recorded.

The girl was thinking of all this, sitting thus in the sunlight. Suddenly her tatting fell into her lap, and she held her two hands up, and looked at them. Mark had kissed them.

"What a silly boy!"—that was the thought, with a little quivering smile upon her lips that would never have grown into a laugh. Then her aunt Helen's shrill voice rang out from the foot of the stairs:

"Annette! Annette!"

She put her tatting in her pocket, and went to answer the summons. The minister and Philip were coming to tea, and she was wanted.

Janet was moving about in a sort of blissful dream. She wore a white dress, and had a scarlet geranium in her black hair. Twenty-four years seemed terribly old to Annette. She had never supposed Janet would be in love; she thought she was too old. Her quiet elder sister had always been beautiful to her, but she had never seen her so lovely as now.

They came just at tea-time. Annette opened the door for them; she was always bashful with the minister, but everything merry in her nature seemed to develop for Philip. She ushered the minster formally into the drawing-room, and, motioning to Philip, detained him in the hall, and put a bunch of flowers in his buttonhole.

The tea-bell rang almost instantly. Annette's plate was laid beside the minister's, Janet's by Philip's. The minister smiled a trifle at the arrangement. Annette saw the smile, and did not feel so much afraid of him. He looked like Philip, only he had force and vitality.

Aunt Helen did most of the talking. The minister gave polite attention to what she said; but Philip sat and gazed at Annette in a sort of dream, and never heard a word until she came to these:

"They ought to have been plain Jane and Ann, but their mother was a Spanish woman, and insisted on the *ette*; and their father was always so bewitched with her that he had but little sense."

"Does Janet look as her mother did?" asked the minister, smiling into the dark eyes on the opposite side of the table. Annette saw that smile, too, and gave Philip a funny look that capitivated him. Since he was not thinking of either his brother or Janet, he took it all to himself.

"The girls both favour her, only she was deemed handsome," was Aunt Helen's dry retort.

A little later Annette and Philip stood watching Janet and the minister stroll down the lane.

"See, they are in love," whispered the girl, with a smile.

"*They* are going to be married," said Philip, and sighed.

Mark Colton joined them just in time to hear this. For the first time in her life his approach brought a quick blush to Annette's dark cheeks.

Philip saw it, with a bright look on his dreamy face; he thought he had called it forth. Mark thought the same, and his brow clouded. Annette saw the mutual mistake, and a sudden coquetry seized her.

"Mark, *they* are going to be married," she said, accenting the words exactly as Philip had done, and pointing to the retreating figures in the lane.

Philip looked both hurt and embarrassed. The cloud on Mark's brow was instantly dissipated; he caught the upraised hand in his.

"Annette, it is as impolite to point as to whisper," he said.

Philip turned pale. She drew her hand impatiently away. Mark abruptly left them, and went out on the balcony, grieved and troubled. She and Philip stayed in the window, laughing and talking, until the twilight deepened, and the moon and stars came out. Then they also came upon the balcony. Mark paid no attention to their coming. Philip sat down beside him. Annette stood in the doorway.

"See, Philip, how pretty that white rose looks in the moonlight! Can you get it for me?" she said.

He went down the steps for it gladly. The moment he had gone, she whispered in Mark's ear, so close that her long braid of hair fell on his shoulder, "What a silly boy you are!" and took the seat that Philip had vacated. Just then he came back, followed by Janet and the minister, and a few minutes later Mark and Annette went to the gate to watch the brothers out of sight as they took their way to the village.

As they stood thus, Mark took her hand in his, and she did not draw it away. His face was troubled.

"When I took your hand when Philip was here, you were offended; and yet we are engaged. Why?" he asked.

"What is the use of telling all the world?" she replied gaily.

"You mean what's the use of telling Philip?" he retorted. She was silent. He continued:

"When we are married, even Philip will have to know."

"I do not know any one who is going to be married excepting Janet and the minister," she said coolly.

He bade her "Good-night" instantly at that, and she went into the house and up into her own room. She sat down on the edge of her little bed and cried, "I wish I had never seen either of them," in the midst of her tears.

* * * * *

The summer wore away, and the autumn came. Janet and the minister were married, and went to live at the parsonage in the village.

During this time, Mark, Philip, and Annette had lived in a most unhappy, discontented way. Of the three, Annette was the most wretched, for she suffered the continual reproach of an outraged conscience.

All these summer months the young student had lived in an unreal world, dreaming a dream that would never be realised. She knew this, yet did not undeceive him. At first an innate coquetry prompted her to silence, and after that she had not the courage to give him pain. She loved Mark, but Philip

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called forth all the pity in her nature; and pity with some women is almost as strong as love.

The course which she had pursued had wrought a great change in Mark. A slow discontent and jealousy took possession of him; he became sullen and unreasonable. At length one day his unhappiness took form, and shaped itself into a resolve. He was becoming dwarfed and embittered; the manly purpose had gone out of him; he saw it all, realised it all. The girl did not love him as he loved her—probably never would. If he continued as he was now, she would very justly grow to despise him.

His father had long wished him to attend a course of study in a neighbouring town; he would release her, set her free, and go at once.

He acted instantly upon his resolution.

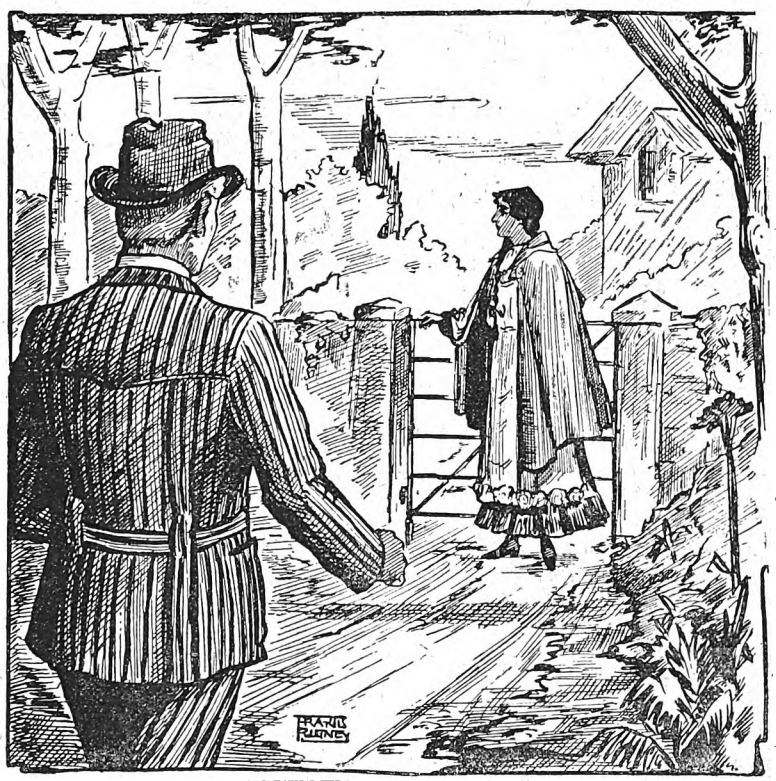
As he went down the lane he saw her standing at the gate, quite where he had told her of his love those months gone by. The lane was bordered by trees, whose foliage was all crimson and gold; she had a scarlet cloak thrown over her shoulders, and looked a part of the autumn. It seemed as if he could not do it, but he did, with the old manly look coming back into his face. Even her lips grew pale.

"You are right, Mark! It is best that we should both be free."

Then she was alone.

He strode down the lane to hide his anguish from what he thought her careless eye, and she sat down on the stone outside the gate where Janet had sat the day she told her she was engaged, and burying her face in her hands, moaned.

When it was known that Mark had gone, the conclusion drawn was this: "Then it is at last decided that Annette is to marry Philip." Philip thought so, too, yet his natural timidity restrained him from learning the truth from the girl's own lips.



As he went down the lane he saw her standing at the gate.

Annette was wretched, she learnt that she loved Mark better than her life; that the days without him were endless and sad. She had never been separated from him before. Sometimes she cried bitterly.

Her disposition had been evenly sweet and joyous; now she became moody.

Aunt Helen noticed the change, and with her keen instinct guessed the secret. She said nothing to Annette, however, for under her stiff ways beat a kind heart.

The minister's wife felt rather than saw the change in the girl. There was something, for all her gay and careless manner, that disquieted her sister

Did she care that Mark had gone away? It hardly seemed possible, she had such a frank, unconcerned way of speaking of him. Did she love Philip? She was very kind to him—too kind; she was gentle, almost pitying, to him.

Philip's was a nature that would always be craving sympathy, a clinging, dependent nature; Annette was strong and self-sustained; one could supply the want of the other; but would Annette always be content to supply? The minister's wife was excessively troubled, and it was the only trouble which she could not take to her husband.

She could not talk to anyone of it; she did not suppose that Aunt Helen had noticed any change in her, and she had not the courage to speak to the young girl herself.

So the winter passed, and the spring, and the summer, and yet Mark did not come. His father advised him to see a bit of the world during his vacation, and he did so.

Then it was another autumn, and a whole year had passed since they had parted. There was bitterness in Annette's heart; he had doubtless forgotten her; why should she not forget him?

It was when this bitterness possessed her that Philip told her of his love, and besought her promise to be his wife.

She was standing at the gate where she had last seen Mark.

Our fates swing on very small pivots. Had she been anywhere else than at the gate, in her present mood, she would have accepted him; as it was, she did the first wise thing that she had done since she first knew him; she asked time to think.

He begged her to promise there and then, with a sudden pallor coming into his face, but she persistently refused, and he turned from her sadly and went away.

She watched him go down the lane as she had Mark a year ago,—watched him coldly, critically; then that dangerous element of pity in her nature asserted itself, and she came outside the gate impetuously, as if to call him back; but her wiser, truer nature restrained her.

"It is my punishment to make him suffer as I do. I would die before I would marry him," she said, and sat down upon the great stone by the fence.

As she sat there, Janet came up the lane, and stood beside her. The unhappiness on the girl's face was so apparent that she yielded to her first impulse, and asked anxiously:

"Annette, my dear child, tell me what is the matter?"

The girl's effort for gaiety was painful.

"Why, Janet, at last I have got a realising sense of things."

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"Tell me about it," said the minister's wife, with her voice full of tenderness.

"There is nothing to tell," was the reply, and Annette rose and led the way to the house.

Aunt Helen stood in the doorway; she had a basket of pippins in her hand, which she had just been gathering.

Annette took one and tried to eat it; she could not—it choked her. She threw it away, went into the house, and up to her own room.

Aunt Helen and the minister's wife looked at each other, and in that moment, for the first time in their lives, each understood the other. Aunt Helen loved Annette "as the apple of her eye," and Janet had only just found it out.

"She cannot do anything. God forbid that she should marry for pity!" she said, and her keen, critical eyes had tears in them.

The next afternoon Philip came into the parsonage with a pale face. Janet had seen him go away, and watched anxiously for his return. She felt instinctively that he had gone to Annette to learn his fate and hers. There was a sudden prayer of thankfulness in her heart when she saw him. They were both saved.

He came into the sitting-room where she was, and threw himself on the sofa. He was restless, and occasionally moaned. He never even saw Janet. She left the room with tears in her eyes.

After an hour had passed she returned. His face was flushed, his eyes bloodshot. She went beside him, and placed her hand on his forehead. He had a hot fever.

"You are not well, Philip," she said gently.

"I? No, I believe not. I think I will go to bed," he said, and went up to his own room.

Annette had seen this ahead of her for a whole year, and now stood there condemned. Her own heart condemned her—hence God, who is greater than our hearts, condemned her, too.

That was her moral attitude, this her actual physical one. She stood in the upper hall, right outside the door, and heard Philip, in sad delirium, tell her trouble, and his, to all who came to his bedside—to Janet and the minister, to the kind old doctor and Aunt Helen. He told it over and over again, sometimes in the very words she had told it to him, for she had accepted it as part of her punishment to let him know of her love for Mark.

At first she suffered bitter shame and mortification in having them all know how she had been slighted; and this soon gave place to anxiety, for the doctor said that Philip's life was very uncertain.

He had not been well all summer—had had a sort of fever in his veins. They assured her repeatedly that this would have been the result at any rate; but she censured herself wholly, and grew thin and pale with dread.

"If he dies," she said, "I have killed him."

Several times she tried to stay in the room, but, although he did not know her, her presence increased his delirium, so she remained in the hall, watching the face of each one who came out, with eyes grown hollow and despairing. In the end they were as anxious for her as for Philip. Even the minister forgave her the sorrow she had caused his brother, in pity for her retribution.

So many days and nights went by, and at last the doctor said to Aunt Helen:

"There are worse things in this world than death. No brain will bear a continual strain of remorse and fear."

Aunt Helen's strong, angular figure quivered. He left her, and went into the hall.

"Annette," he said kindly, but firmly, "you must take this."

She took the powder as submissively as a child. They had placed a sofa in the hall for her. A little later, when Aunt Helen came out, she found her lying on it in a heavy, dreamless sleep. Whilst she was in that sleep Philip passed the crisis and lived.

Several months passed. In that time the young student struggled reluctantly back into health, and went away for a final year in college, and Annette, subdued and saddened by her late bitter experience, stayed very closely at home with Aunt Helen.

Her friends, only knowing half of the story, censured her greatly, setting her down as a cruel flirt and jilt. At first she persistently shunned society, refusing every invitation; but at length her natural pride asserted itself, and she made great efforts to be her old self and take her old place.

So another year went by, and the village was all astir. Mark Colton was expected home, and so was Philip, and there was a round of gaiety planned for their reception. Mrs. Colton opened the season by issuing a great number of invitations. Mark was expected to arrive on a certain morning, and his friends were to meet him in the evening.

Philip was already at the parsonage, and someone had seen him several times walking with Annette in the pleasant lane that separated Aunt Helen's farm from Mr. Colton's. This was told over and over in the village. Of course nobody knew who the *someone* was who had seen this, but each one considered his or her informant perfectly reliable, and that was sufficient. There had been a great deal of wonderment as to whether Annette would dare run the risk of meeting Philp by accepting the invitation, but, of course, this settled the question.

Some of the girls secretly sighed over it; they had hoped Annette would not join in the gaiety. Mark had left on account of Philip, and now both Mark and Philip were back, and in the time that had elapsed Annette, who was always pretty, had bloomed into positive beauty.

Whilst her little world was discussing her probable course of action, Annette was struggling between her heart and her pride. The former begged her to stay at home, the latter sneered at her weakness and taunted her with being afraid to meet one who had not thought of her for two long years.

Aunt Helen never asked her what she intended to do, but Annette saw them both look at her anxiously, and she secretly shed many bitter, mortified tears. So far as walking in the lane was concerned, why, so unreliable was that indefinite someone that the whole thing was a fabrication; she did not even see him until the day of the party. Then he came to the house and waited on the balcony until she came out. Somewhat later, she went into the sitting-room, where Aunt Helen sat knitting. "I have decided to go to-night with Philip," she said.

The spinster pushed up her spectacles and looked at the girl with surprise.

"He is going to be married, and is as happy as can be. I needn't trouble over that any more," she continued, joyfully.

"I never saw a man yet who hadn't a surprising capacity for loving," commented Aunt Helen.

Annette laughed, then grew suddenly grave. "I think, after all, it is well they are so constituted, Aunt Helen," she said, and went up to her room to decide on her toilet.

Everybody was at that first party—old and young, married and single. Even Aunt Helen went, causing a general expression of astonishment by her presence; for she had not been to a party for forty years. She started early, telling Annette that she meant to see the whole thing through, from beginning to end.

Mark stood beside his mother, and more than once found his blue eyes brought directly to meet the keen, critical eyes of the spinster. She did everything from principle, was honest to the backbone; hence she treated him with the coldness and displeasure which she felt. He had always been a favourite with her—hence he was perplexed and troubled by her manner.

When we love we feel a sort of attraction towards anyone who is in the habit of being near the object of our affection. Mark had such a feeling for Aunt Helen, and her rebuff seemed like a shadow of Annette's; for in these years—wonderful fact to record in the history of man!—he had been wholly constant to his first love.

He had heard from his mother of her refusal of Philip, and had begun to think that, perhaps, he had been over-hasty, and to entertain a faint hope of winning her after all.

In courts of law men have often been wrongly condemned on circumstantial evidence. Annette this evening was placed

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in a like position. When she came into the room on Philip's arm everyone considered the matter settled.

Mark grew deathly pale—even his lips were white, and he clutched the back of the chair by which he stood, as if for support.

Philip led her directly to him. She had never looked more lovely; she held out her hand in frank, cordial welcome, the bright crimson mantling her cheek. She had been preparing herself for this all day. He was taken unawares—hence at a disadvantage; and Aunt Helen's shrewd eyes took it all in with a smile breaking up the lines of her face.

Mark shook hands with them both; he tried to be cordial, but failed signally, and the moment they joined the gay crowd that were promenading, he abruptly left his mother to receive the guests, and left the room.

Aunt Helen did everything on principle; she acted according to the rule of her life now, and followed the young man. She found him on the balcony.

"You are not well?" she said.

There was always a pleasant courtesy about Mark. He thanked her for her kindness, saying he would be all right in a minute.

"What made you so unhappy?" she asked.

There is a great deal of power in a direct question. Mark found himself face to face with this one, and did not know how to escape it.

"Aunt Helen," he said, and his voice quivered painfully, "so Annette is going to marry Philip after all?"

"You are very much mistaken! Philip is going to be married, yet not to Annette. But what is it to you whether Annette marries or not?"

In his sudden joy he was wholly off his guard.

"It is so much to me, Aunt Helen, that if my surmise had been correct, I should wish that I were dead!"

"Dear me! It is curious how two ordinarily sensible people can misunderstand each other," commented the spinster drily; and a moment after went back to the drawing-room, with her arm resting stiffly on Mark's.

Mark Colton made a delightful host that evening. Everybody was charmed and enjoyed themselves to the full, excepting Annette, yet she seemed the gayest of the gay; she even danced repeatedly with Mark, and laughed and talked as lightly as if he were a new acquaintance that she was delighted to make. Once or twice after a dance he tried to lead her out on the balcony, but she shivered, saying it was too cold, though there was scarce a chill in the late May evening.

At length he came beside her, and, throwing a shawl of his mother's over her shoulders, said, and there was something teasing in his earnest voice:

"You have no excuse now."

She took his arm instantly, the colour deepening in her cheeks. Just at that moment the music started for a quadrille, so they found the balcony deserted.

When once there, she drew her hand from his arm. For a moment there was an uncomfortable silence; then he said in an embarrassed tone:

"So you are not going to marry Philip after all?"

"I? Oh, no; of course not!" she answered, as if such a thing had never been thought of before.

"Whom are you going to marry, then?" he asked.

She laughed.

"Oh, no one; I'm going to be an old maid, like Aunt Helen."

Philip led her straight to him.

She had been restlessly clasping and unclasping her bracelet. Now it fell to the floor—he picked it up—she held out her hand to take it, but he clasped it round her white wrist himself, and then unclasped it and clasped it again. The crimson flooded her cheeks for an instant, their eyes met, a smile came into his; she looked quickly away.

"Annette, you have tormented me for two years," he said.

"Discipline is healthy," she retorted, with a laugh, though there were tears of joy on her long lashes.

"Am I the only one who has been disciplined?" he asked, with grave eagerness.

"I despise questions," she replied, and dashed the tears away.

"Yet you must answer one now, Annette," he said. "Will you love Mark Colton and be his wife?"

"That is two questions," was the provoking reply.

"One answer will do for both," he said, and bowed his head until he received it.

Annette was among the first to go home. She came with Philip and went with him. The gossips were entirely off the track. Aunt Helen was among the last guests, and Mark made everyone laugh, the spinster heartiest of them all, by coolly kissing her "Good night."

In less than a week everybody knew it, and that autumn, in the little village church, the ceremony was performed by the minister, assisted by Philip, who had just been ordained.

S. Chesnewood.

THE BOYS' LEADER.

"The Paper a Boy Can Take Home."

ONE PENNY WEEKLY.

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Containing the Incident depicted on the Cover.

A Charming Grass Widow.

Telling How She Became So, and What Happened Afterwards.

When Horace Lingard married Doris Dallas all he brought that pretty, vivacious, though quick-tempered, girl was a sheaf of unpaid bills.

Doris was very much in love with the scapegrace—thoughtless, good-humoured young fellow—and that explains everything. For Doris, you see, had a cool £4,000 a year in her own right, while Horace's sole income was a meagre allowance from his father, a retired major.

Young Mrs. Lingard paid her husband's debts without a murmur. She even set aside a sum that ought to have been more than sufficient for her spouse's requirements. But Horace was not satisfied. In spite of his "don't-care-a-hang-about-anything" kind of style, in spite of his appropriating the sum set aside for him by his young wife, every farthing of which he most religiously spent, it galled him to think that he depended so entirely upon his pretty bride. Yet he never attempted reformation. Life was too short to quarrel with one's lot, he argued, especially when it happens to be a rosy one.

Mrs. Dallas, Doris' mother, was not like most mothers-in-law. Immediately after the wedding breakfast she had called Horace aside.

"Horace," said she, "you've an excellent wife, so be good to her. Don't turn away, I'm not going to lecture you. All I want to tell you is that I shall come and stay with you for one day every six months. Newly-married couples don't want mothers-in-law hanging round them, so remember I give you six months' grace. Good-bye."

When the couple returned from their honeymoon, Mrs. Lingard made a suggestion to her husband.

"I've been thinking, dear," she began, "that it must sometimes be unpleasant for you to know that—that—well, that you spend my money instead of your own. No, no! Don't look cross, I have a suggestion. You told me once you had written a few short stories. Suppose you were to rent a room in some nice chambers in Chancery Lane. You could have a big brass place on the door inscribed in large letters: 'Horace Lingard, Author.' Now, haven't you a really clever little wife?"

Horace did recollect one boastful moment when he told the pretty heiress he had written short stories, but he had neglected to state that no editor could be found who would print them.

"But, my dear girl," he replied truthfully, "I can't write stories or articles or anything else for toffee. I should never earn sixpence at it."

"Oh, you silly boy," said Doris, laughing heartily. "No one wants you to. When people say to me, 'What is your husband's profession?' I shall promptly reply, 'Oh, he's an awfully busy man. He's an author, you know.' Some authors, Horace, earn thousands of pounds a year."

"And some earn nothing," added her husband. "But still, the idea's not half bad. Perhaps I shall be able to turn out something decent—if I can settle down."

And at that moment he really meant it, too.

So it was settled. A room was taken, a brass plate was fixed on the door, a brand new typewriter was purchased, which was never used, and the author turned out each morning with the strongest intention to begin work, which usually ended in the consumption of many cigars, chats with innumerable pals, and nothing else.

Doris' mother kept her promise to the letter. She, of course, corresponded regularly with her daughter, but during the whole six months she did not once set foot in the couple's house.

The day for her visit eventually arrived.

"Now, look here, Horace," said Doris one morning, "Mamma has written that she is coming to-day to see us, and I want you to come home by two o'clock. Never mind about that novel you are writing, which has kept you so late at the office recently. Be here to show mamma how dutiful and loving a husband you are."

"All right, dearest," rejoined Horace. "I'll finish up a chapter and come straight home."

"What is the number of the chapter you are writing?" asked the young wife with just a faint tinge of suspicion.

"Oh, well—I couldn't really tell you, my dear, offhand. But I'll be home punctually to the minute, you can rest assured at that."

The "author" departed. His great novel, which was going to take the reading public by storm, except for its title, did not exist.

* * * * * * *

"Yes, mamma," said Doris, "Horace will be certain to be here by two o'clock. He promised me faithfully."

But two o'clock brought him not.

"He's soon got like the rest of them," muttered Mrs. Dallas, hurt at her son-in-law's undutifulness.

"Don't be harsh on him, mamma. Horace may have been detained by important business, or he may even have met with an accident." The young wife brushed her eyes with a dainty silk handkerchief.

But as the hours passed both ladies began to get angry, especially Mrs. Dallas. They were both in a bad temper when at seven o'clock they sat down to dinner alone.

"I'm sure something must have happened to him," exclaimed the young wife for about the fiftieth time.

Mrs. Dallas laughed derisively.

"Don't talk to me of happenings, child," said the older woman sarcastically. "I used to think the same of your father. Business detained him sometimes, but more often something else. I know the sort of happening which keeps young married men away from home when their wives' mothers visit them. His absence is a deliberate insult to me, and considering that I have denied myself the pleasure of seeing my own daughter for six months, it is shameful."

"But, mamma——"

"Don't make any more excuses for him. Your husband is like most other men. He will come home after midnight—intoxicated."

"If he does I will never forgive him."

"Oh, yes, you will, and be as full of excuses for him to-morrow as you are to-day."

"Never. He will not return intoxicated. He has never done so. Why are you so bitter against him?" The young wife burst into a fit of sobbing.

"There, there, my dear, don't cry like that," said her mother, drawing Doris' slim figure to her. "Perhaps I'm wrong in thinking Horace married you merely for your money. Anyway, I'm going to stop the night with you, and if he does come home intoxicated, I'll tell you how to talk to him."

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Now it so happened that the very day Mrs. Dallas had chosen for her visit was Derby day. Heroically putting aside all inclination to see the race for the "blue riband of the Turf," Horace Lingard pursued his way to his Chancery Lane chambers. In the Strand he ran up against Robson, of St. Peter's, an old college chum.

"You're the very chap we want to complete the quartet," said he, after the usual formula of greeting had been gone through. "I'm on my way to meet Baxter and Stevenson—both St. Peter's boys; you know them. We're going to the Derby. You really must come."

"Can't, my boy," said Horace. "Fact is, I'm writing a book. Don't laugh! Yes, a real novel, and I can't spare the time."

The figure of the elegant Robson doubled up with laughter.

"Upon my word, Lingard," he gurgled, "you're a born humourist. You stand there looking as sober as a stuffed toad and tell me you're a hard-working novelist—you, the laziest scoundrel in London. Oh, the impertinence of married youth." Tears were pouring from Robson's eyes.

"Well, it's like this, old chap," returned the abashed Horace, who felt such twitting keenly, "I haven't really begun the book yet. I've been making up my mind to start this past three months. But, I say, I'll come with you and see the boys. What have you been doing lately?"

Thus adroitly changing the conversation, Horace accompanied his friend to a certain Strand restaurant. An hour later the quartet, Horace's feeble refusal being entirely disregarded, commenced their journey to Epsom. At the Derby the gaiety about him, the people he knew, and the champagne he drank with one and the other, drove from his thoughts all remembrance of Doris, her mother, and his promise to be home at two o'clock that day.

Immediately after the great race nothing would please his three companions than that Horace should dine with them at their West End club.

"But, my dear boys," protested Horace's thickened voice. "I can't dine with you in these." He was dressed in a suit of light tweed.

"Oh, that's all right," explained Stevenson. "My diggings are just by the club. We're all going to change there. You can have my spare suit. You're about my figure."

Two o'clock the next morning, Horace, still wearing the borrowed dress suit, but a weary, limp, unsteady Horace, was carried home in a hansom cab.

He ascended the steps leading to his house with exceeding difficulty. Greater trouble was experienced in finding the keyhole, which, when found, refused to open the door at the insertion of a pocket knife. After ten minutes' weary effort Horace was beginning to expostulate when the door was suddenly opened from the inside. Horace staggered into the hall, to be welcomed with stern glances from Mrs. Lingard and her mother.

"Will you be good enough to come into the drawing-room, Mr. Lingard," said his wife, with frigid sarcasm.

"What's the matter?" he asked innocently, and endeavouring to speak naturally. Mrs. Dallas followed him into the room.

"Oh, merely nothing. Allow me to introduce my mother."

"Dear me! Pleased to see you. Won't you sit down. Make yourself at—— Just remembered, my dear. Ought to have come early, of course, but——"

"You ought, sir," interrupted the young wife, coldly. "Perhaps you will tell me how you managed to get into the house to dress, and why you left it without seeing me?"

Horace looked helplessly at his borrowed clothes.

"Upon my honour, my dear," he stammered, "I haven't been home at all!"

"You went out in morning dress?"

"So I did, Doris; so I did. Where did I get these clothes? Bothered if I know. They fit all——"

"Just listen to me, sir, if you are sufficiently sober. Some hours ago I said that if you came home intoxicated I would never forgive you. You have insulted me, you have insulted my mother, and I shall never forgive you." The young wife was almost hysterical.

Both ladies left the room.

Horace awoke next morning with a fearful headache. He had passed the night in an easy chair in the drawing-room.

In the breakfast-room plates were laid for one.

"Where is your mistress?" he asked the maid.

"She breakfasts in her own room, sir."

Horace went upstairs and knocked at his wife's door.

"Well? What is it?" his wife inquired.

"Doris, dear. Are you ill?"

Horace felt very ashamed of his conduct. At an encouraging word from his wife he would have made a clean breast of the previous day's doings.

"Go away. I don't want to see you," replied Doris.

"Let me in, my dear. I'll explain."

Mrs. Lingard had not slept a moment. "Where had her husband obtained that dress suit?" she asked herself a thousand times. Her mother had encouraged her in her suspicions.

"I shall not let you in," she cried. "You have deceived me"—her voice rose to an hysterical pitch—"you've insulted mamma. Go away, and don't come back till you've money of your own to fling away in drunken orgies."

The words struck Horace like the lash of a whip.

"Do you mean what you say?" he asked angrily.

"Certainly I do."

He paused a moment, then he said quite calmly—

"Well, good-bye, then." But his wife made no reply.

Horace Lingard left the house. He did not return that day nor the next. Doris became very uneasy. She was already sorry for the words she had uttered. A week passed, and she became seriously alarmed. She and her mother went to Horace's chambers in Chancery Lane. His room was "To Let." He had paid his rent bill some days previously. Inquiry at his banker's elicited the fact that he had drawn out every penny—his account did not exceed fifty pounds. Major Lingard, his father, had not seen or heard of him.

A month passed without tidings of the runaway. Mrs. Lingard became seriously ill. Three months' stay in the Riviera improved her health, but made her still more anxious for the return of the good-humoured though thoughtless husband.

Heartrending advertisements in the principal newspapers, investigation by "Captain Bertram Lynx, the up-to-date detective," carried on over a period of months and running up a bill which exceeded £200—all efforts were of no avail.

When a year had gone by Mrs. Lingard became somewhat reconciled. As for Mrs. Dallas, who blamed herself for being the cause of the trouble in suggesting to her daughter that she should throw into her husband's face his dependence upon her purse, the really good-hearted old lady tried to atone for the mischief by whirling Doris from one form of excitement and gaiety to another. The grass-widow seemed not to mind. She visited theatres, attended concerts, opened bazaars—every day she was busy at some public or Society function.

Entertainments on behalf of charitable undertakings especially appealed to the pretty Mrs. Lingard, and the stall over which she presided was always certain to bring in large receipts. Perhaps it was due to the mystery which shrouded her husband's sudden disappearance, the reason for which, of course, the world did not know.

It was quite eighteen months after Doris' cruel words had driven her husband from his home when the great flower bazaar was begun at the Albert Hall. It was one of those usual smart affairs, when folk allow themselves to be robbed right and left in "charity's sweet name." The great hall was superbly decorated with flowers, and stalls for the sale of certain blooms were presided over by pretty women who were dressed to represent the flowers they sold.

Mrs. Lingard disposed of bluebells, and was herself dressed to represent this pretty flower. Her fair, perfectly-chiselled features looked out from a bonnet shaped like a bluebell; her rich silk gown was similarly shaped. Indeed she was pro-

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nounced to be the most prettily dressed among dozens of fashionable women attired to represent favourite flowers.

The grass-widow sold her button-holes at ten shillings apiece; her bouquets fetched from two to five guineas. She was in the act of pinning one of these button-holes in the coat of an admiring purchaser on the third evening of the bazaar when her eye was caught by the unkempt, unwashed figure of a man.

She wondered for a moment why they had ever allowed such a ragamuffin into the hall. As a matter of fact, the authorities had resisted the man's invasion, but he had put down his half-a-crown, and in a determined tone had declined to leave.

He was a regular scarecrow. His bowler hat was battered and greasy; his coat was torn and threadbare; his trousers were frayed at the bottoms; his boots were worn at the heel. He had not been shaved for a week, and his face and hands were grimy.

He sauntered slowly along, heedless of the shuddering of fashionable dames or the pointed remarks of well-dressed men.

At the pretty grass-widow's stall he stopped.

"How much for this?" he said, taking the bluebells into his grimy fingers.

"Ten shillings," said the living Bluebell. The pink had left her cheeks.

"I'll take it; please fix it in my coat." Doris' senses were reeling, but she noticed that, despite the scarecrow's clothes, he had the voice of a gentleman.

Mrs. Lingard fastened the button-hole in the man's greasy coat. She tried to avoid looking into his face, but the impulse was too strong for her. A moment later a woman's shriek rang through the building. Doris had fainted.

Immediately the flower stall was surrounded by eager questioners. The disreputable-looking man had been seen by the stall. A search was made for him. He had vanished.

Mrs. Dallas was at her daughter's side when she recovered.

"What is it, darling?" she anxiously inquired.

"Home, mamma; home, at once," was her only reply.

In her own home the grass-widow broke into a fit of passionate sobbing. Her mother left her to have her cry out.

"Tell me, dear," asked Mrs. Dallas, "what it was that alarmed you? Was it that scarecrow who——"

"That scarecrow was—was Horace."

The following day the advertisements again appeared in the agony columns of the newspapers. Yet though many callers and letters were received, no news was gained of the missing husband. Mrs. Lingard kept to her room. Her health gave way. She cried repeatedly for her husband and lover. At last Mrs. Dallas insisted that Doris should go to the theatre. Doris was too weak to resist. She dressed mechanically, and walked to the carriage at her door as if in a dream.

It was a few minutes to eight o'clock, and the Strand was thronged with vehicles. Mrs. Lingard's carriage was compelled to proceed at a walking pace; now and again it stopped. On one of these occasions it paused where the lamps of a public-house threw a strong glare on the pavement. The grass-widow was looking out of the window. Suddenly, before her mother had the least idea of what she was going to do, she flung the door open and was out on the pavement.

And then the public were treated gratis to as dramatic a scene as ever was witnessed in the house of melodrama close at hand.

A woman, in light attire, with bare arms and neck, and diamonds in her hair, had flung herself into the arms of a dirty man on the pavement, and was sobbing as though her heart would break.

The dirty man lifted her up tenderly, half carried her to the carriage, shouted "Home" to the coachman, and took his place beside her.

Mrs. Lingard was the first to speak when the carriage was well on its way back.

"Oh, Horace," she cried, "forgive me those harsh words. I never meant them, really. I love you sincerely. And you, poor boy, have been living all these months in London in poverty."

"Don't reproach yourself, my darling," answered Horace Lingard, for he it was; "it is the best thing that could have happened to me. It has made a man of me. And I'm not poor now, Doris. I've been mining in Western Australia. I could write a cheque for thousands."

"But why," asked Mrs. Dallas, "are you dressed so—so—unconventionally. Why did you come to the flower bazaar?"

"I wanted to see if Doris would cut me, that's all. I wasn't certain, so I followed your cariage to-night. I was going to meet you at the door of the theatre. But, you see, it was quite unnecessary."

"Yes, quite unnecessary, dear Horace," repeated his wife, passing a soft, white arm round his grimy neck. "But you must be a good boy and—and wash yourself when we get home, and we'll live happy ever after, as they do in the story books."

J. G. Jones.

NEARLY A TRAGEDY.

Showing How He Laughs Longest Who Laughs Last.

The old clock standing in the corner of the kitchen had just struck ten, and had then burst out into song, so to speak, of the five old, old tunes which its maker, with perverted ingenuity, had affixed to its internal economy.

"Beautiful old tune," said Mr. Willie Lamb, who was in the humour to be delighted with anything, as the rusty old mechanism, after two or three gasps and rattlings, changed from "The Lass of Richmond Hill" to a pathetic rendering of "Old Dog Tray."

"I am glad you like it—it is quite a family relic," said Miss Amy Marjoribanks, who was sitting on a low stool by his side with her hand resting affectionately in his.

"Ah," murmured the gentleman," "we must try to get a family relic or two when you consent to make me the most foolishly happy of men."

"Foolishly happy!" said the lady archly. "Oh, Willie, you ungallant man! And I'm afraid papa will not give you the chance. I wonder why he is so prejudiced against you?"

"I suppose he thinks my position is not good enough," answered Mr. Lamb despondingly. "I know of nothing else."

"I wonder what would happen if he caught you here?" remarked Miss Amy, her delicate frame convulsed with a shudder.

"Kicks!" said the gentleman grimly.

"Oh, Willie, surely—surely you don't mean that you would kick papa," faltered the lady.

"No, my darling—no; Heaven forbid! I have too much respect for him (and his weight too)," muttered the lover; "but I could hardly expect *him* to exercise such forbearance. He is a very violent man."

"He is a little violent," agreed the dutiful daughter; "but I think it is his wretched health more than anything else."

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"His—" blurted the gentleman, and then stopped suddenly. A mental picture of the invalid in question—stout, ruddy, and with the fabled digestion of the ostrich—rose suddenly before his eyes; but he understood women, and he altered his sentence: "Yes, you are right, my love, as you always are; that must be the cause."

This happy agreement led to several tender passages in which Mr. Lamb shone to much advantage, when the happy couple were suddenly disturbed by the distant grating of a key in a lock. As they listened, horrified beyond all measure, their unwilling ears heard the street door open and shut, after which the house shook and rattled as the invalid wiped his boots on the door-mat.

"Fly!" gasped the terrified Amy.

Mr. Lamb's white, dry lips formed the word:

"Where?"

"Anywhere," said the lady lucidly. Then she seized his arm, and said: "Coal cellar!" And, dragging him to the end of the kitchen, flung open a door, and, pushing him in, hastily closed and locked it. Sounds of stumbling were heard—Mr. Lamb was falling over the coals. Miss Marjoribanks pressed her hands to her bewildered head, and sank into a chair.

"Well," roared Mr. Marjoribanks, in a voice that shook the rafters and Mr. Lamb's terrified soul, as he entered the kitchen; "where's the supper?"

"What supper?" murmured his daughter, who had not yet recovered her presence of mind.

"What supper?" said the astonished old gentleman. "Why, my supper. Come, where is it? Have you taken leave of your senses?"

"Oh, I'll get it in a minute, dear," was the response; "my head aches so that I hardly know what I am doing. Shall I draw you any beer?"

"Shall you draw me any beer?" repeated the irritable old man. "Why, what's the matter with the girl? Have you ever known me to miss my beer yet—eh?"

Supper, except for the unnecessary noise which Mr. Marjoribanks deemed requisite to its proper mastication, proceeded in silence. The unfortunate Amy, snugly ensconced in a cushioned chair, thought of her lover sitting disconsolately on a heap of coals, and had much ado to restrain her tears.

"Ah, that's better," said the old gentleman at length, wiping his mouth on two square yards of red handkerchief, and shifting his chair to the fire.

"Fill my pipe, give me that hassock, and hand down the whisky;" all of which directions having been silently obeyed, he proceeded with great zest to enjoy himself. "Anyone been?" said he suddenly.

"No," said his daughter untruthfully, almost jumping out of her chair.

"Well, just fill my pipe again, and give me a kiss and get to bed."

"I don't want to go yet, dear," she ventured timidly, with a sidelong glance at the cellar-door.

"You don't want to go? But I say you are to go, miss. The idea of a girl your age presuming to contradict her father. I shall have my hands full with you yet, my girl, I can see."

This innocent remark so probed the conscience of the unfortunate Amy that she gave way to tears, and goaded her rather unreasonable parent almost to the verge of fury by dropping a couple in his eye when she kissed him.

Her state of mind when she reached her bedroom was most unenviable, for she saw only too plainly that the hapless Willie would have to pass the night in his uncongenial quarters; Mr. Marjoribanks being in the laudable habit of locking the kitchen-door before retiring, and putting the key in his pocket. The outlook for Willie was not pleasant.

* * *

"You can put your hat on and come out with me," said Mr. Marjoribanks, as they sat at breakfast next morning. "We'll see about that jacket of yours."

His daughter murmured her obligations rather confusedly. She was wondering whether their small domestic would discover Mr. Lamb when she went to replenish the scuttles, and whether she would scream or not? Knowing her to be a nervous girl, she was afraid she would, and the fear made her almost frantic. She knew her father too well to venture to differ from him, or she would have stayed at home and let the prisoner out herself.

"Now," said her father, after they had got some distance on their journey, "you walk on to the shop, my dear; I've got a call to make."

He appeared to be in a high state of merriment over something or other,

"Amy," roared a voice, "have you and that girl gone mad?"

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and ambled down the street with his huge face wreathed in smiles. She had barely reached the shop when he rejoined her, still in the same unusual state of good-humour, and ushered her inside with the air of a man going to buy up the whole stock-in-trade.

"What can I do for you this morning, miss?" inquired a bland shopman, approaching the couple.

"I want a jacket for my little girl," said Mr. Marjoribanks.

This was one of his daughter's greatest trials. He knew about as much of women's clothes and millinery as a tame elephant, but nothing could have persuaded him that his judgment and taste in such matters were little short of exquisite.

He was as bad in one way as a woman, for it took three shopmen about an hour to satisfy him, and then he bought such an extraordinary garment that two ladies who were looking on retired precipitately in a series of suffocating gasps. His daughter, who was brooding over the fate of the unhappy Willie, and whose mind was, therefore, possibly a little bit unhinged, cast but one glance at it, and immediately sat down in violent hysterics.

"And now you must have a hat," said the generous parent, when his daughter had recovered.

His tastes running somewhat high this morning, he purchased a magnificent broad-brimmed covering, almost hidden in feathers and roses, on which huge beetles of the most pronounced brass were presumably feeding.

"You'll astonish the neighbours," said he proudly as they left the shop. "I never saw such a hat before!"

"Nor I," said his daughter, with much feeling.

"Well, you'd better get home now," resumed the old gentleman. "I'm going to call on old Jackson; I shall soon be back."

Miss Marjoribanks needed no second bidding, and flew to the rescue of Mr. Lamb on the wings of the wind. In a very short time she stood panting at the door.

"Dinner ready?" she inquired of the small servant who opened it.

"No, miss; not yet."

"Then you had better go upstairs and lay it at once. Oh, Mary," she continued, in tones she vainly strove to calm, "where's the key of the cellar? I couldn't find it this morn-morning."

"Don't know, miss," said the girl; "I couldn't find it when the men brought the coals."

"Coals!" said her mistress. "What coals?"

"Why, the coals master sent this morning," answered the girl. "Three ton, miss, and it was all the men could do to get them in. They're right up to the cellar-door, and how we are to open it without their falling out, I don't know."

Miss Marjoribanks gave a dreadful scream, and nearly went into hysterics for the second time that morning. Recovering herself by an effort worthy of the occasion, she demanded:

"Where's Willie?"

"Who?" said the small girl in great astonishment.

"Willie—my Willie. Where is he?" said Miss Marjoribanks wildly.

"I don't know anything about your Willie," whimpered the girl, who thought her mistress was going mad. "Do you mean the youngest coal-man, miss?"

"No," said the other, her voice rising to a perfect scream. "A Mr. Lamb, who was shut in here last night. If he's in there now he's dead—oh, he's dead! Run, Mary, and get some men to come and dig him out—perhaps he is yet alive.

While the small girl was absent on her errand of mercy, the unhappy girl was on her knees vainly endeavouring to peer through the cellar keyhole.

"Willie!" she cried; "Willie, speak to me if you can—Willie!"

But no loved voice responded to her fervent appeals, and, moved to desperation, she seized a hatchet and splintered the lock. The door burst wide open, and for a few seconds it rained coal; then, as the dust cleared away, Miss Marjoribanks looked eagerly into the cellar, only to find her glance obstructed by coals piled to the very rafters.

At this moment the small servant returned with a policeman and two dustmen, whom she had secured with a shrewd eye to their shovels.

"Burglar, miss?" inquired the man in blue.

"No, a gentleman—a friend," she answered feverishly; "left in here last night. Oh, make haste and dig him out, for pity's sake!"

The dustmen at once commenced operations, and with the experience born of innumerable dustbins, worked fast and well, the small servant laboured assiduously, the constable was a host in himself, and even Miss Marjoribanks aided in flooding the lower rooms of the house with coal. Half-way through, and no signs of the missing man yet. Dustman No. 1 drew the back of his hand across his mouth, and shook his head despondingly. Dustman No. 2 drew the back of his hand across *his* mouth, and shook *his* head despondingly, and made a remark which referred to the well-known properties of malt liquor as an aid to clearing cellars and finding missing men.

The small servant, fearfully and unwholesomely interested in this tragedy in domestic life, nearly broke her small back in her efforts—and still no Willie Lamb.

The work was at its heaviest, the excitement at its height, when a terrific noise was heard on the stairs, the foot of which was blocked up by a ton and a half of best Silkstone.

"Hush!" said the constable, holding up his hand to command silence. "What was that?"

All at once ceased their labours, and the origin of the noise became apparent. It was a grievously astonished old gentleman venting his wrath, bewilderment, and indignation in the very plainest of old English, and a sudden fear fell upon all.

"Amy!" roared a hoarse voice from the stairs, "have you and that imp of a girl gone mad? What's the matter here?"

And the speaker, leaping over the uneven coals, which scrunched beneath his weight, burst into the kitchen.

"It's poor Willie, papa. He was shut in here last night, and he must be lying dead under these coals."

And the poor girl sobbed bitterly.

Mr. Marjoribanks made two or three great gulps for air, and tugged fiercely at his collar, while his red face worked convulsively. At last he got his breath and turned to his daughter.

"I let him out last night," he said, and paused from sheer incapacity to say another word.

A loud roar went up from the dustmen and the constable, in the midst of which the small servant's shrill snicker was distinctly audible.

"Why didn't you tell me, papa?" asked Amy.

"Because," said her father, shifting uneasily from one leg to the other, and glaring hideously at the grimacing dustmen "because I thought I would give you a lesson and have a joke at the same time; that's why I sent the coals in. But the joke," said the old gentlemen, tugging at his collar again, while his eyes rolled, "doesn't seem to have been quite a success."

"An' there ain't been nobody there all this time?" said the small servant.

"Go and sweep up that coal, you little villain!" said the old gentleman furiously.

"Sweep it up?" exclaimed the damsel. "My word!"

* * * * *

It has since transpired, from information received from the small servant, that the whole of the coal was ultimately restored to its proper quarters, and that Mr. Lamb has never renewed his acquaintance with them, although he has since been a constant visitor at the house. Indeed, the small servant has gone so far as to hint darkly to certain acquaintances that they need not be frightened out of their boots if they should observe a wedding-party leave the house, as she, for one, is quite prepared for it, and, what is more to the purpose, so is Mr. Marjoribanks.

William W. Jameson.

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Telling How a Good Woman's Love Found a True Resting Place.

"Do you really think that's true?" asked Stella, looking up into the dark, earnest face of Colonel Egerton, as he stood beside the piano.

She had been singing a sad, sweet, little love song, and he had been listening to the music of her voice without paying any attention to the words.

"I'm afraid I don't quite know what you mean."

"Why, I mean the words of the love song I've just been singing. Do you think they are true?"

"They are just nonsense. There's no meaning in them at all," said Bobby stoutly.

Stella had not known that he was in the room, and she gave a slight start. Bobby was a dear boy, a kind of cousin near enough to have been a friend and playmate in early days, distant enough to make a flirtation quite a pleasant amusement. Stella was fond of him, but there was no denying that he was at times a bit of a nuisance. At this moment he certainly was.

Stella was in the first raptures of hero-worship, and Randolf Egerton, V.C., was an ideal hero. Handsome, distinguished, clever, he was the very man to win a girl's fancy, and Bobby seemed a most insignificant being beside him.

"What do you think, Colonel Egerton?" she repeated, swinging round on the music-stool to face the two men.

"I think it a pretty song, sweetly sung," he rejoined, smiling

"But do you think a first love is really the strongest? Do you think it would haunt a man all his life and prevent his ever being happy with another woman? Is a man's first love the one real, true passion of his life, or is a later love perhaps the stronger and deeper?"

"Better be a man's last love than his first," put in the incorrigible Bobby. Stella turned on him.

"Bobby, be kind enough not to interrupt. I am not talking to you *at all*."

Bobby's round, boyish face flushed, and he jumped up.

"All right, I'll be off. But the mater asked me to remind you that you are going to drive with her this afternoon."

"I had not forgotten," returned Stella with dignity, and Bobby walked off in a subdued manner.

"You've hurt young French's feelings, I'm afraid," observed Colonel Egerton, looking after the offended youth.

"Oh, it's only Bobby," said Stella carelessly. "He's a dear boy, but he's awfully dense and commonplace."

"Well, he may not be a judge of poetry, but he's a thoroughly good fellow, and you are awfully down on him," remonstrated Egerton.

"Oh, it's only Bobby," Stella repeated. "He doesn't mind. But, Colonel Egerton, what do you think about the song? Can a man's first love spoil his whole life as the song says it does?"

"Ah, I don't know that, Miss French; I hope not."

She was still sitting on the music-stool, her back to the piano. Colonel Egerton bent over her.

"I hope it isn't true," he went on. "Dear, I have learnt to love you very deeply and truly, but you are not my first love."

Stella's cheeks glowed crimson; her big blue eyes glanced up into the dark face so near her own, then fell again.

"Sweetheart, do you care for me a little bit? Shall we try and make each other happy? Say 'Yes,' darling."

Stella said nothing, but she let him draw her into his arms and cover her with kisses in a silence that seemed to give consent.

"Will you tell me about your first love?" she murmured presently. "How long ago is it?"

"My first love affair? Oh, ten years ago. I was twenty-eight, and Alice twenty-two."

"Then she'll be thirty-two now, quite old; so I needn't be jealous of her even if she did come back to try and do mischief," thought Stella, who was just nineteen, and considered thirty old age.

"She and her sister lived with an old aunt, on whose bounty they were entirely dependent. That fact, perhaps, is the key to the situation, for I am certain Alice loved me. But her aunt disapproved of our engagement. I was not very well-off in those days, you see, and Alice had another suitor, a millionaire. One day I got a note from Alice to tell me never to see her again; she had yielded to her aunt's persuasion, and accepted Leigh.

"I simply wouldn't believe it. I went off at once to see her. She was out, the servant said, but I saw her sister, May, who told me that Alice had indeed accepted Leigh. I wrote several times to Alice after that, but had no answer, so at last I gave it up. During the ten years that have passed, I have never heard her name, nor thought twice of her. She is dead to me, and I have never loved any other woman. Little one, will you try to love me, and be as true to me as she was false?"

It was a lovely little face that Stella raised to his in mute reply, and as Egerton kissed the rosy lips so sweetly, innocently offered, he felt well satisfied with his fate.

* * * * *

"Are you expecting many more guests to-day?" asked Stella, nestling down beside Mrs. French, as the two started out for their drive. The girl felt rather guilty and undeserving of her hostess' kindness, for she well knew that the petting she received was solely for Bobby's sake. She certainly had flirted with Bobby, Stella reflected, and his doting mother would no doubt be very angry when she learnt that she and Colonel Egerton were engaged.

"Well, I'm expecting two by the 4.35 train, dear, and I shall drive round by the station to meet them. I am sending to meet the 6.12, of course, for there will be quite a crowd by that train."

"Oh, of course, for the ball," cried Stella joyously. "I do love a ball."

Stella had very pretty ways with elderly people, and was

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a general favourite among them. Mrs. French looked very benevolently at her little cousin.

"I like to see young people enjoying themselves, my dear, and Bobby loves dancing. I hope you have kept him a great many dances?"

"Yes, I have a great many," replied Stella, somewhat gloomily, for as yet her *fiancé* had not asked for a single dance, and she had already given away all her waltzes. Not much more was said until the station was reached.

"Now, Stella, you will see the most beautiful young woman I have ever seen," said Mrs. French. "And what a life she must lead with that sour old aunt of hers, poor soul!"

Miss Chester certainly looked the very quintessence of vinegar, and was by no means gracious even to her hostess, while her niece and her maid were treated with the most undisguised ill-temper. The niece was really lovely, tall, dark, with exquisite colouring and perfect features. Stella could not help thinking that this stately maiden would make a more suitable bride for her soldier-hero than her insignificant little self."

"But he loves *me*," she whispered to herself, and felt comforted. She was not at all jealous of Egerton's former love, but she knew she could be very jealous of any woman he might admire in the future.

She did not happen to be present when Egerton was presented to Miss Chester and her niece, or she might have found food for jealousy at once. Egerton went white to the lips as he bowed and murmured something about having met before and Alice Chester lost her rich bloom, and trembled visibly.

* * * * *

"Why, I do believe I'm the first down."

Stella, fairly-like in her white robes, radiant in youth and happiness, stood looking round the vast empty room.

"No; I'm here," said a voice behind her, and she whisked round at once.

"Oh, it's only Bobby," she cried, disappointed. "But since you are here, I want to ask you something. Let me off the first waltz I am engaged to you for. It's the fifth dance."

Her radiant eyes were raised expectantly to his, and she laughed out like the sudden chiming of bells as she saw the change in his face.

"Oh, how cross you look, Bobby! I never saw you look so before. Don't be cross, Bobby. I never was so happy in all my life, and I mean to enjoy myself to the very utmost to-night. You'll let me off that dance, won't you, Bobby?" She touched his arm coaxingly with her white fan.

"No, I won't," said Bobby savagely. "Why should I? You want to dance it with Egerton, and I can't bear it, Stella." His voice shook, and his boyish face was drawn and white with pain. "You know what you are to me; what you've been to me from a tiny child; you know how I love you——"

"Hush, Bobby," Stella broke in. "Oh, I mustn't let you go on. I'm sorry, dear, so sorry. I like you so much; I—almost—love you, but—but—Bobby, I've told no one else, but I'll tell you. Colonel Egerton and I are engaged."

"Engaged, are you? Well," and Bobby gulped down something in his throat, "I hope you'll be happy, and that Egerton loves you even half as much as—I—do."

Stella had promised several dances to different members of the house-party, and did her duty bravely, though her heart longed for her lover. She saw nothing of him. He was not dancing, nor even in the ballroom, and she felt vaguely unhappy.

Bobby came up to her.

"Our dance, I think," he said resolutely.

"Oh, Bobby, dear, I don't want to dance. Can't we sit it out?" she said appealingly.

He saw that her lovely eyes were full of tears, and took her to a quiet nook in the conservatory.

"Let me get you a glass of wine, Stella," he said anxiously.

"Some water, please," and she leant back and closed her eyes wearily.

She was only half conscious when the sound of someone near roused her. She was completely hidden by some plants, and before she could make her presence known, Egerton's voice, low but distinct, came to her ears:

"I have granted you this interview, Miss Chester," he said sternly, "as you have asked it in the name of justice, but you can have nothing to explain. The play was played out ten years ago. I was certainly astonished to find you still Miss Chester, and I own that I am agitated at meeting again the woman I—once—so dearly—loved."

His voice faltered. Stella made an effort to break the spell that seemed to hold her and move away, but she was powerless.

"My sister is dead," began Miss Chester abruptly. "She died three years ago, and she made me promise if ever I met you again, that I would repeat to you her death-bed confession. And this is it: Mr. Leigh promised her a sum of money large enough to make her independent for life if she could bring about my marriage with him. We were miserable with our aunt, and she thought, poor May, that it would be better for me to marry a rich man than a poor one."

She paused, but there was no answer except the hurried breathing of the man at her side.

"Go on," he said hoarsely, after a moment.

"May could imitate almost any handwriting. She wrote to you as if from me, dismissing you. I had a letter, apparently from you, giving me up. She intercepted some letters on each side, and the thing was done. She could separate us—yes—but she could not make me marry any other man. And that, Colonel Egerton, is why I am Alice Chester to this day."

She rose, and with a slight bow, was moving away, but in an instant he had sprung up and caught her to his breast. Gone were the ten years of contempt and hatred, gone all recollection of the little girl for whom that very afternoon he had professed affection. He only knew that his old sweetheart was in his arms again, and that love and trust were his once more.

"Alice, my own, my darling," he cried passionately, "say that you are still my own, that you love me still!"

"Hush, hush!" she said, with a startled look round, "you forget there may be people near. Come, take me to my aunt, and tell her—tell her what you please."

They were gone, and Stella sat on, in a kind of stupor. Egerton had actually forgotten her very existence.

It was thus that Bobby found her a few minutes later, when he returned with a small assortment of refreshments. Setting the tray carefully on a seat near, he scrutinised the girl's face.

"Stella," he said in some alarm, "what's the matter? You look so queer and white. Shall I fetch Egerton?"

"No, I wouldn't do that," she returned with forced composure, "you might find some difficulty in recalling me to his remembrance. He has just found out how he was tricked into losing the girl he loved many years ago, and it's all made up. He's going to marry her and he's forgotten all about me."

To Bobby's consternation, Stella burst into tears.

"Stella, don't cry, darling. You're breaking my heart. What am I to do, dearest! I'll do anything you like, only don't cry." And here Bobby fairly took her in his arms, and comforted her as in the days gone by he had consoled her for a lost doll.

Stella made no resistance.

"I feel such a silly," she sobbed. "Why, I was engaged to him, and he's forgotten all about it. I don't care a bit for him now, but I don't like being made a fool of."

"Never mind, darling, nobody knows anything at all about it except me, and I'm nobody; only Bobby, you know."

Stella's sobs ceased, and she rested her bright head on his shoulder in a confiding way that emboldened him to go on.

"Look here, darling, I'm not a V.C., or anybody distinguished, and goodness knows I'm not a beauty, but I do love you with all my heart. Could you put up with me, sweetheart? Will you marry me, Stella? That is, if you're quite sure you don't love Egerton still."

Stella raised her head quickly, and her eyes sparkled through her tears.

"I'm quite sure I don't love him any more. I'm quite sure that in all the world I love—only Bobby."

Vera Serkoff.

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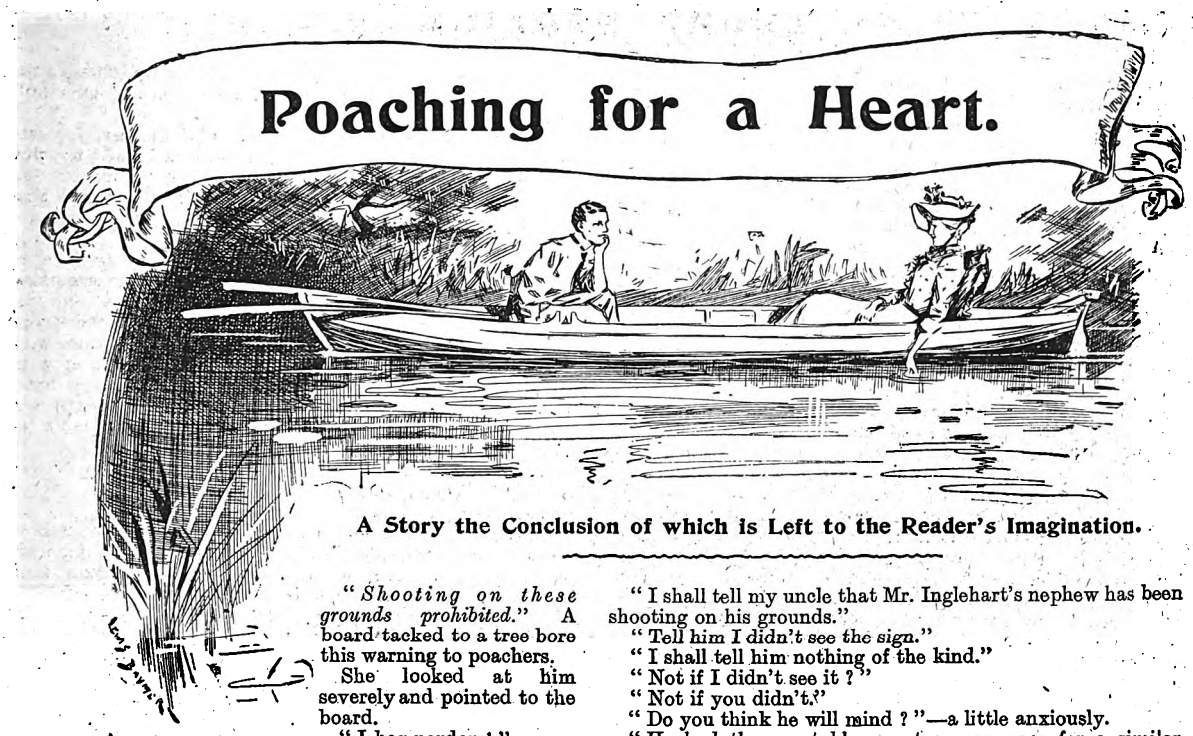
Poaching for a Heart.



A Story the Conclusion of which is Left to the Reader's Imagination.

"*Shooting on these grounds prohibited.*" A board tacked to a tree bore this warning to poachers.

She looked at him severely and pointed to the board.

"I beg pardon!"

He lifted his cap and stared at her. He had shot into a covey of birds from an adjoining field, and then leapt the fence to get the game.

"You are careless with your gun," she said.

Though startled, she was angry. He dropped the butt of his gun to the ground, and continued to stare as he might have stared at an apparition—a lovely one. An apparition might have disconcerted him more, for his look was bold. She flushed indignantly.

"You are insolent!" her glance said, as plainly as speech could have done.

"I am distressed!" he exclaimed, pausing between the words, as if speech were difficult.

"Indeed!" with a look that should have withered him, but it did not.

"You were in no danger, but I am sorry to have frightened you."

"I am not frightened."

"Oh, that relieves me."

His cool impudence exasperated her, yet his open-eyed astonishment was ludicrous. His eye did not leave her face for an instant. Was she really so beautiful that this rustic gaped in wonder? The thought softened her.

"You are not concerned about the trespass?"

"I did not see the warning."

She did not doubt that he had seen it a hundred times. She looked straight at him, partly wondering how he could tell such a story, partly thinking how handsome the sunburnt fellow was.

"Who are you, sir?"

She did not note his curious smile.

"Mr. Inglehart's nephew, Tom," he replied, with significant emphasis.

She looked no wiser.

"Mr. Inglehart lives across the valley," he added.

A farmer, was her thought. No doubt this lazy fellow lived on his bounty. Though tanned, he had not the look of a field-hand. He was a habitual poacher, she did not doubt. He wore a hunting-cap and jacket, both the worse for briers and wear; and his age might have been three-and-twenty.

"I shall tell my uncle that Mr. Inglehart's nephew has been shooting on his grounds."

"Tell him I didn't see the sign."

"I shall tell him nothing of the kind."

"Not if I didn't see it?"

"Not if you didn't."

"Do you think he will mind?"—a little anxiously.

"He had the constable arrest a man once for a similar offence."

This was a fib, pure and simple—not inexcusable, though. The fellow needed the lesson; besides, it was not certain that some culprit had not been arraigned during the ten years this weather-beaten board had given warning to poachers.

"I will give you half the birds; I suppose that will make it right?"

"I don't suppose it will! I wouldn't touch one of them. See how the poor things bleed and writhe! Others went away wounded, to suffer and die more slowly. You ought to be ashamed of your cruelty!"

His swarthy face coloured; he eyed her keenly and in surprise; then, all of a sudden, his countenance fell; he glanced ruefully at the fluttering birds.

"I suppose you do not eat birds, nor wear feathers in your hat?"—a little sullenly.

Then she coloured—deeply, too; his glance rested maliciously on the rich plume in her hat.

"Why do you stand there?" she asked impatiently, and a little disconcerted.

"Pardon me; may I tell you?" with an audacious smile.

She looked at him quickly, intently; then averted her face, a little scared. A suspicion darted across her mind—a suspicion, nothing more. In a moment it vanished, and she was angry again: yet not very angry, nor long so. The absurdity of his manner upset her temper. There was no mistaking the admiring glances of the young countryman; his admiration was as honest, too, as it was bold.

Being modest and not over-vain, she accepted this view of her charms with some grains of allowance. She knew that she had fair cheeks and dimples, brown eyes, and a dainty waist, and that people stared at her. Now, this man stared, not for want of manners, but because he could not help it. On him she had made a genuine impression. She half-wondered what the foolish youth wanted to say, but she cut him short:

"Why don't you take the birds and go?"

"I am in no hurry; they won't expect me home much before dinner-time."

"I don't like to be stared at; I came here to gather flowers. Please go."

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"I am good at gathering flowers myself; let me help you over the fence!"

In the meadow across the fence was a large pond of water-lilies; and, beyond, a wooded rocky slope, a-bloom with wild flowers.

She was uncertain whether to rebuke him with a show of greater severity for his audacity, or to accept his proffered services. She glanced at the high stone wall and at the tempting flowers, then doubtfully at him. She remembered that her uncle knew Mr. Inglehart—an old resident of the neighbourhood, of course—and this was Mr. Inglehart's nephew. His appearance was in his favour, and the water-lilies had tempted her before. They were beyond her reach, nor was it easy to get over the stone wall unaided. Should she cast aside conventionalities? He looked only a simple countryman! And she doted on water-lilies!

He read her mind.

"I got my sister a big lot of lilies yesterday."

"How did you get them?"—with interest.

"I waded."

Whether this were true or not, it settled the matter. She put out her little hand; he took it, showed her projecting stones on which she could put first one foot, then the other; by means of these and his assistance, she was speedily on the top of the wall; then he sprang over, and helped her down on the other side.

He found a shallow place in the pond, and threw in some boulders to stand on; she sat on the grass under a tree while he got the water-lilies—a great armful, more than she could carry; then he ran round the pond to the hill-side, and brought as many more flowers from there: ivy-blossoms, wild honeysuckle, sweetbrier, and a great variety beside—all of them pretty, some very sweet. She gave him a grateful look, and he sat down beside her to arrange them.

"You spoke of your sister"—suddenly—"where is she?"

"At my uncle's."

"You both live there?"

His face lighted as with an inspiration.

"At present—yes. Would you like to see her? Perhaps you find it dull in these parts."

"You think me a stranger?"

"I shouldn't think you lived here."

"Why?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Do I look different from the country-people—from your sister, for instance?"

"I don't think she is like most people."

"You may be partial."

"You ought to see her!"

"How old is your sister?"

"Nineteen. I should like you to meet her. I could bring her here to-morrow, if you would come"—eagerly.

"Oh, she might come to my uncle's—Mr. Wayne's."

"This is a nice place." His fine eyes looked beseeching. "She comes here often," he added quickly; "it is such a pretty spot, and there are so many flowers."

She laughed softly. The slanting shadows crept over the meadows; the sun dipped behind the hills; the breeze scarcely stirred the leaves and clover-blossoms; the lull and mellow fragrance of closing day fell upon wood and field. The pair sorted the flowers, and she listened to his talk, forgetting that he was a stranger.

There is a snare in the green fields and woods, the blue skies and scented air of the country; I warn my young readers to beware of it. The young lady came to her sober self with a start and a look of dismay. The sky was tinged with twilight. What a fool she had been for having had anything to say to this man! She scowled at him, as if he were to blame. She grew confused; and, in her confusion, she did not know what they had talked about, what he had said, what she had said, or why she had stayed so long.

"I will walk home with you, if you will allow me," he ventured to say.

She declined the offer rather haughtily. He helped her over the fence, then put the big bunch of flowers in her arms.

"You need not expect me to-morrow," she said, turning away.

"My sister will be disappointed. I hope I have not offended you?"

She paused and glanced up at him, as he sat on the fence. He looked hurt. She had promised to meet his sister; this she remembered, and it was about all she did remember. Why should she change her mind so soon? She ought not to have promised!

"I think you need not expect me," she said slowly, looking straight at him, and turned away.

He watched her till she was out of sight, hoping that she might look back; but she did not.

It was nearly dusk when the young lady reached the farm-house. No notice was taken of this, however, as she was often out late in the orchard and meadows near the house. By degrees her conversation with the young stranger came back to her. She slipped into the house and upstairs to her own room, there to think it all over. At first it came distinctly, she was so confused; after a while it came vividly. Now she burnt with anger, now with vexation, that she should have so forgotten herself as to talk to this stranger. But she recalled his handsome appearance, his kindly grey eyes, his broad brow, his fine, smiling mouth almost hidden by the brown moustache, his clean-cut nose and chin, and finally his easy, unembarrassed manner. She would find out all about him.

And she said to her uncle:

"I saw a man shooting in your fields this afternoon."

"Who was the man, dear?"

"How should I know, uncle?"—dropping her eyes.

"Was he a young man?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Lord Inglehart, I expect. He's the best shot in the county."

She was silent a moment, then said:

"Who is Lord Inglehart, uncle?"

"The most popular man hereabouts, my dear, and the Lord of the Manor of Foxberry. He is on a visit to his uncle."

"John, I saw his sister to-day. You wouldn't know her," remarked Mrs. Wayne.

"Likely not; it's been nearly three years since she was here."

"Three in October. What a slim and weakly thing she was! I never saw any living thing alter so. She's the finest looking girl I ever saw. I dare say you won't believe it's she when you see her; I didn't, till she asked about you and everything about the place. She makes me think of Helen, only she's dark and half a head taller."

Helen smiled demurely.

"And a great deal more beautiful, auntie?"

"Now, that couldn't be, my child," returned the old lady, with a fond glance at her niece.

"Is she coming over?" questioned the uncle.

"Yes. I told her about Helen; and she said she would be glad to see her; she'll be great company for her."

Our heroine would doubtless have learnt much more about the Inglehart family; but at this moment a man ran in and said that a favourite horse had been hurt. The old couple hurried away, and Helen was left alone with her reflections.

The reader perhaps will be greatly surprised when I say that Helen decided, next day, to keep her appointment.

I do not know myself why she went. She may have kept the appointment on account of Tom's sister, feeling that she ought not to disappoint her. She may have planned a pleasant surprise for the old people, intending to bring her home with her, letting Tom go where he wished. If this was the case, however, she was disappointed. Tom came; his sister did not.

She was angry, very angry.

"Where is your sister?" she demanded.

"She is at home with a sprained ankle,"

The fence was between them; he rested his elbows and chin on the top stone.

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"You are making fun of me!" she exclaimed vehemently.

He stared at her like a simpleton, as she turned abruptly.

"One moment, I beg! My sister met with a serious accident. Besides the sprained ankle, she is bruised and scarcely able to be up. She was very sorry she couldn't come."

She paused, flashing upon him a look of severity and distrust.

He had pushed his cap back from his brow. His face was perfectly frank and honest, and strikingly handsome; she had not had a good view of his features before. The easy pose of his shapely head and the composure of his features were striking.

"My sister sent you a letter."

He drew a letter from his pocket, and held it towards her. She hesitated, and asked:

"Why didn't you give it to me at once?"

"I ought to have done so. Sister says I am always doing the wrong thing. Won't you please take it now?"

She still hung back, though relenting a little.

"Lottie could hardly write, her arm was so painful," he added.

She took the letter and broke the seal, drawing out a dainty perfumed sheet, written all over, with four postscripts. Helen smiled while reading it; then she glanced at him with a smile, but frowned immediately.

"Tell your sister I shall be very glad to see her, and hope she may soon be able to come."

She was going.

"One word, please!"

"I have stayed too long already. I did wrong to meet you here, to speak to you, or have anything to do with a stranger. Good day, sir."

"May I come with my sister?"

She paused to say:

"I—I do not know you."

"I shall come with my sister!" he said.

"I think it better you should not."

She was gone.

Yesterday she would have asked any number of questions about Tom Inglehart, or any member of the family; asked a little slyly, perhaps, because she had been imprudent, yet she would have asked them. But for the accident to the horse, and a lack of subsequent opportunity, she would have gone to bed on the previous night, knowing all about all the Ingleharts.

To-day her cheeks burnt, her heart palpitated; she started when she saw her aunt in the carriage drive; paled when the kindly old uncle crossed the lawn. She ran up to her room, locked herself in, lay down on the bed, and cried.

Several days went by, but no word came from the Ingleharts. Helen never mentioned the Inglehart name. Her moods were fitful; she started when she heard the tramp of horses or sudden footsteps. She wondered how his sister looked; whether the sister had got well; why she did not come; whether she would come at all, or had gone away. Sometimes Helen hoped she had gone, or would go without coming; again she felt an unaccountable desire to see her, yet dreaded her coming.

One day his sister came. How like him she was! The same smiling mouth, turned up at the corners; his broad, low brow, his deep, tender eyes; tall, dark, beautiful!

A bronzed, broad-shouldered man, clad in a riding suit, stood beside her, bowing and smiling. He was a young man, self-possessed and handsome.

Mrs. Wayne introduced his sister to Helen as Lady Inglehart, who said:

"Miss Blake, my brother Tom."

Did her eyes deceive her? Her head went round. What were they saying?

The next day he called again; she had gone to the village. He went there, too, but missed her. During the next three days he tramped the woods and fields, entered the Wayne inclosures, invaded the orchard, shadowed the house and premises, hoping to get a glimpse of her.

To detail the state of his mind, his efforts to see Helen during the next ten days would unduly lengthen this story. He persevered, however, and one day he stood before her so suddenly, that he might have dropped from the sky.

"You have been unkind!" he stammered.

"You deceived me!" she said.

She was all ice and dignity.

"Can't you forgive me?"

"I ought not even to speak to you. I thought you were a plain countryman. I took you for another person, and you did not undeceive me. Now go, if you please!"

"I told you I was Mr. Inglehart's nephew," he said. "But I did not tell any falsehood. Had I told you who I was, you would have gone away. I loved you then—I love you now! Ah, if you knew how well, you would not have the heart to frown on me. I ask but little of you—a very little now: your smile and your forgiveness!"

She ought to have been startled and angry at this bold and hasty avowal. She was neither; but, if she softened within, there was no betrayal in her manner.

"I do not think I shall ever like you," she said slowly. "Let us end this interview!" She was going, but he caught her hands.

"Put me on probation!" the rude fellow cried.

The reader sees how this story must end. Why should I go on?

Mabel Varney.

Your Editor Chats.

Men or Women?

"Do you believe," writes a Newcastle correspondent, who signs himself "L. M.," "that men write more readable short stories than women do?"

No, I don't, "L.M." That is to say, I think that a lady is quite as capable of writing a good, interesting short story as a man is. In fact, women excel in tales of a pathetic type. On the other hand, men seem to have the power of writing a humorous story in a better vein. Regular readers of this paper will have noticed that there are usually quite as many tales in a number from the pens of ladies as there are from those of the sterner sex. I can assure "L. M." that there are no fewer women aspiring to literary fame than there are men.

Next Week's Cover.

IT may interest my readers to know that next week's cover will not illustrate an incident from a story, but it will be a strikingly pretty pictorial one. Look out for it in the newsagents' windows and on the bookstalls.

"Kindly Spare a Trifle."

How often have you seen or heard spoken the above words? Many and many a score of times, I have no doubt. But never have you heard the words in connection with a more deserving institution than Pearson's "Fresh Air Fund," which is doing its level best to cheer the hearts of the poor children of the slums by giving them a day in the country.

The costs of the railway journey and the required food for one whole day necessitate an expenditure of ninepence on each child; that is what I want you to bear in mind. If you contribute ninepence you know you are giving one grateful child a much-needed day in the green fields and open air. All the expenses of management are borne by the promoters.

Subscriptions should be sent to the Honorary Secretary, "Fresh Air Fund," Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., who will send collecting forms to any who would care for them.

Your Editor.

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The Spitfire.

The Tale of a Terrible Temptation.

"I'm afraid I've been a terrible trouble to you of late, dear."

There was a little pathetic note in Cora's musical voice as she uttered the words.

"Don't talk nonsense!" replied her sister, putting down the coffee-pot with no gentle hand. "I hate to listen to such rubbish! You've been ill, and we've had to make the best of it, that's all, and there's an end of the matter!"

Cora sighed. There was little sympathy in the reply. And yet the invalid instinctively felt that her sister's brusqueness was merely surface deep.

"All right, dear," she said gently. "I won't offend again. But you've been very good to me, Hilda. I only wish we could have contrived to keep out of debt."

"Debt!" exclaimed her sister sharply, yet with an alert glance at Cora's pale face. "Who said we were in debt?"

Cora smiled.

"I did," she replied. "I know only too well that my illness has plunged you into difficulties, and——"

But Hilda stopped her with a gesture.

"Then let me tell you," she said decisively, "that we are in nobody's debt. So don't worry your head any more over things that do not exist. I've seen you fretting for days about something. I suppose this is the explanation?"

She stirred her coffee vigorously and looked questioningly across at her sister. Cora nodded guiltily.

"I couldn't help it, dear," she admitted. "But you can't have paid everything out of your salary. The doctor's bill itself must have been a heavy one. And—and it is not over yet."

Her voice ended in a little tremulous shake. Hilda's white teeth met the red line of her curved lip. She was not the sort of girl to display feeling.

"I've settled everything," she affirmed doggedly. I—I've been doing a little extra work at the office, and made it up that way. But that's my business, not yours. All you have to do is to get well and set to work yourself. Your book is nearly finished. Not that *that* will do any good, for publishers are slippery people and difficult to hook. So don't count on that. And, anyhow, the book can wait. As I said just now, what you have to do is to get well."

She rose and pushed her chair away.

"I'm off now," she said, as she pinned on her hat. "I hope the day won't drag with you. Good-bye. And don't be so silly as to continue a speculation that has positively no foundation."

She stooped to kiss her sister, and the latter put her thin arms impulsively about her neck.

"Good-bye, sis," she said caressingly. "It's a great weight off my mind to hear you say we are in no debt. I'm afraid I *was* fretting about it. And I can't make out how you've contrived to manage. Oh, dear, what should I do without you?"

The tears were in her eyes as she kissed Hilda's cheek. But the latter disengaged the clinging arms, and, once more bidding her good-bye, went downstairs and out into the street.

Once outside she walked quickly, as though the fever of her thoughts communicated its influence to her feet. The journey to the office was not a short one, but even a twopenny 'bus was a luxury nowadays in which she dared not indulge. Her salary, as such salaries go, was not a small one. But her sister's illness had drained her resources and left her, despite her dogmatic assertions to the contrary, irretrievably and hopelessly in debt.

The more she considered their position, the more heart-breaking it became to the struggling girl. And yet, cost what it would, the difficulty must be overcome before her sister could become aware of its existence.

There was a frown on her dark face as she hurried along the busy thoroughfares. Yet she held her head erect and gazed straight before her, as though defying the world to crush her, as it seemed likely to do, by this most sordid of all earthly burdens—debt. For she was proud to a degree. Patience, resignation, fortitude, were not virtues likely to weigh with Hilda Gray. Fate and Fortune might harass her at every turn, but, right to the very end, she would defy them all, and then—grow desperate.

And she was even now reaching the limit of defiance and turning the corner into that other and dreaded path that leads no one knows whither. She had been brusque with her sister—almost domineering—yet she loved her with an infinite tenderness—a tenderness so deep and real that she dared not allow it utterance. It was kinder to appear cross rather than betray the truth—the bitter, heart-breaking truth—that she was in debt. Her very love for her sister demanded that she should keep *that* from her, whatever happened.

And yet—how was she to conceal it? Those dreadful bills would soon come pouring in, and then—— She dared not think of it. Cora's illness had been a serious one, and she was even now liable to a dangerous relapse. The doctor had said as much when he had ordered her to be kept quite and free from the smallest worry or anxiety. The frown deepened on Hilda's dark face as she thought of it. She *must* find some way to pay off those horrible debts. But how could she get the money?

Her brow had not cleared when she entered the office. But the small, delicately-shaped head was even higher than usual, and, as the door of the private office closed behind her, and she took her place at the typewriter, the general opinion of the clerks in the outer office was that "Spitfire seemed more than commonly unapproachable to-day." She had been secretly dubbed "Spitfire" from the first day of her coming. One or two had attempted to scrape acquaintance with her, but her replies were so short and her manner so coldly aggressive that no one attempted it twice. She was there, she said, for business, not for gossip, and the clerks took the hint.

Even in the inner office her manner was far from attractive. Her employers were both young men, who treated her with respect and consideration. But she appeared not to notice this, much less allow herself to be touched by it. She took her instructions both from Lionel and Victor Leighton, though, as Lionel, the elder brother, undertook the bulk of

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the firm's correspondence, she came into more frequent contact with him than with Victor. Lionel Leighton was a man of two or three and thirty, with clear grey eyes, a firm, square chin, and a look of quiet dignity and reserve. He was abnormally fond of the study of character, and in Hilda Gray he had great opportunities for indulging this *penchant*. And the result? Well, we shall see.

Slowly the day wore on. Listening to the clear, decisive voice of Lionel Leighton as he dictated the outgoing correspondence, typing with a rapidity that astonished even herself, yet always thinking, thinking of those dreaded debts and the still greater dread of their coming to the knowledge of her sister, whom she, with all her brusqueness, loved so dearly.

Swiftly she took the note, but she had been detected by Lionel Leighton.

Lionel watched her with new interest. Something in the troubled yet defiant face of the girl touched him strangely. Some secret, he could see, was eating out her heart — a secret which, despite the proud poise of her small head, was none the less potent in its hidden bitterness. He tried in vain to divine its cause. That she and her sister were orphans, he knew well enough, but of that sister's recent illness he had not been told.

So, unable to fathom the trouble which he knew to be there, he could only watch and wait until a favourable opportunity gave him the chance of asking her if he could be of service to her. But before that opportunity came, an incident occurred that sent a chill to his very soul, and, with it, the knowledge that, almost unknown to himself, he had loved this proud, defiant girl who told no one her difficulties and asked the sympathy of none.

It was early in the afternoon. Victor, the younger brother, was still at lunch, and the two were alone. Lionel was busy over a calculation in one of [the firm's private ledgers. Presently he closed the book, and, turning to some papers that lay before him, spoke mechanically to the girl at her machine.

"Miss Gray," he said, "would you mind replacing this ledger in the safe? It is open, I think."

Hilda was accustomed to carry the smaller books to and from the safe when not otherwise employed, and she rose to comply with the request. Lionel immediately became immersed in his work. Taking up the ledger, Hilda went up to the safe and opened the heavy door. As she replaced the book in its accustomed position her eye fell on a small fixed cash-box in one corner of the safe.

She knew quite well what was in there. It was the custom of the firm to keep a little ready money in case of emergency, and the amount never varied. Nearly two years' experience had taught her the habits of the firm by whom she was employed. At the bottom of the cash-box lay the sum of thirty pounds in gold, and above this one twenty pound, three ten pound, and four five pound Bank of England notes. There *had* been an emergency once, when Victor suddenly wanted a sum of fifty pounds after closing hours at the bank, and ever since that occasion he had adopted the present means of avoiding a recurrence of the inconvenience arising therefrom. It all rose up in the girl's mind now as she quietly slipped the ledger back in its place. All in a moment the temptation surged within her to take the means at her command.

Never before had she felt how fierce and almost irresistible is the voice of the tempter, when to yield means freedom from further anxiety. Alas, she did not pause to consider what that other anxiety would be—the anxiety that springs from wrong-doing.

Lionel was absorbed in his papers. Once again the temptation surged within her.

For a moment or two she struggled to free herself, and then, alas! it overwhelmed her. The lid was not locked.

Lifting it quietly, and with one swift glance behind her, she drew forth one of the white, crisp notes and hid it in her chatelaine. Then, with heaving bosom and kindling cheeks, she went back to her seat.

But the soft rustle of the note had reached the ear of Lionel Leighton. Raising his head, he had just been in time to witness the lowering of the lid of the cash-box, and a horrible dread of what had occurred entered his heart. But he controlled himself with an effort and again brought his eyes back to the papers before him. But he could not work now. She —a thief! The thought cut him to the heart. What must he do? He could not accuse her. And yet—why not? And then he knew the truth. He loved her. The thought that she was a thief tortured him and would not let him rest. He picked up a letter and turned to her.

"I want a letter written," he said in a strange, husky voice,

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and Hilda prepared to type the required communication.

And as she worked he watched her, marvelling at the change, and reading the signs of shame and guilt in the heightened colour of her cheek and the nervous twitching of her fingers. But that was not all. For the first time since he had known her the proud, defiant little head had lost its erectness. When the letter was finished he sent her into the general office to search for some past correspondence.

As soon as the door had closed behind her, he slipped to the safe and examined the contents of the cash-box. The twenty pound note was not there. With a heavy heart he returned to his seat and tried to think. Oh, why had she not told him she needed money? What was he to do? If Victor went to the safe, he would discover the loss—and then! The thought made him shiver.

Hilda came back with the letters in her hand, but he scarcely noticed her. And then an idea came to him—an idea that swiftly merged into a resolve.

If he loved her, he must save her. Taking out his private cheque-book, he drew a cheque for twenty pounds, payable to bearer. Then he locked the safe, put on his hat, and drove round to the bank. When he returned, Hilda was still alone in the office. There were traces of tears in her dark eyes, and he sent her again into the general office on some pretext. Then swiftly he unlocked the safe, opened the cash box, and placed a new twenty pound note within. He had barely reached his seat when his brother returned, and the business of the day was resumed.

All that afternoon Hilda sat at her table, suffering the torments of remorse. Had Lionel left the safe open while he went to the bank she would have replaced the note. But, once taken, she could not draw back, and the guilt and shame of what she had done tortured her almost beyond endurance. To confess would mean open disgrace, perhaps—perhaps a prison cell! And then—her sister! She dared not even think of it. The shock would kill Cora. Poor Cora! And so the day wore on till once more the clerks filed out and the day's work drew to a close. Victor was the first to leave. Ten minutes later Lionel put on his hat and prepared to depart. As he passed the girl he paused and looked gravely down into her face.

"Miss Gray," he said, "you have not been yourself to-day. Is anything the matter? Believe me, I would do anything—anything in my power to help you. Can't you trust me?"

His voice was deep, resonant and rich, with a note of earnest sympathy underlying it. For one moment the girl wavered. A wild desire to confess her guilt before it was too late flashed through the tormented brain. But the awful possibilities of exposure recurred to her, and she answered doggedly, though her dark face twitched with nervous pain:

"Thank you. I need no help."

Lionel sighed and went quietly out of the office. Hilda dropped her head upon her hands and great tearless sobs rose in her throat. But she controlled herself with a great effort The thing was done now, and must be got through with. Hurrying out, she cashed the note and made a tour of her creditors, paying their bills one by one. It was late when she reached the little flat in which she and Cora lived, and of the twenty-pound note but three pounds remained. Cora looked up as she entered.

"You're late, dear," she said. "More overtime?"

Hilda nodded and began bustling about, tidying the little room. She spoke little, and Cora watched her attentively. And then, for the first time, she noticed that Hilda's cheeks were paler than of old and that the slim figure was thin, Constant attention on her sick sister, together with the ever-accumulating anxiety as to their needs, had told on Hilda's vigorous constitution. And now that other trouble was hitherto added to the list, and the shame of it was crushing her very soul. But she bore up. Week after week went by. Cora grew strong again and finished her book—the novel in which all her hopes had been centred. And she had sent it to a firm of publishers. Day by day she waited eagerly for their reply, hoping and fearing alternately. And day by day the anxious, tortured look on her sister's dark face deepened, though Cora saw it not. The girl was bewildered. Twice Victor had looked through the cash-box in the great safe, yet he had made no comment. Was it possible he could have overlooked the missing note? She could not account for it. Mechanically she performed her daily duties, strung up to the highest pitch of nervous apprehension. And when each night she returned to her home it was to pass a sleepless night tormented with the fear of what the morrow might bring.

And then two things happened. Cora's book was accepted. The publishers had made her a handsome offer for its purchase and praised the work she had done. Money was now theirs in plenty, and Cora's heart beat high with exultation.

But a new shadow was soon to fall. Poor overwrought Hilda found herself unable to rise from her bed one morning. There was a deep red flush on her cheeks and a strange light in her dark eyes. The doctor was sent for and pronounced her to be suffering from an attack of brain fever.

Cora dispatched a note to Leighton Brothers, acquainting them with the circumstance, and, in reply, came a kindly note from Lionel, expressing his sympathy and intimating that her place would remain open until her recovery. As it chanced to be the first of the month, he inclosed Hilda's salary, and begged her to accept a few flowers which he would send later on. Hilda flushed as she read the note, and when the flowers arrived, turned away from them with a gesture of mute distress.

And then that terrible delirium that so often accompanies brain fever set in, and the sick girl began to talk of things that made her sister reel as though a sudden blow had been dealt her. But she remained quite still. With a patience touching to witness, she nursed the invalid girl back to health. And all through those five long weeks not a day went by that did not bring some kindly offering from Lionel Leighton.

Then Hilda began to mend and was able to leave her bed and sit in a chair by the window of their little sitting-room.

One day a letter arrived at the office of Leighton Brothers, marked "Private." Opening it, Lionel read aloud the following request:—

"Gentlemen,—*Can you make it convenient to call upon us some time to-day? My sister and I have something to communicate to you, the nature of which is as grave as it is important. Faithfully yours,* "Cora Gray."

A puzzled look came into Victor's face as he listened, but upon that of Lionel rested an expression of distress. What that letter portended he knew but too well. He must do something to avoid it. Yet what could he do? Cora, too, was in the secret. The next to know would be his brother. His brows contracted at the thought. Was there no way out? All day long he pondered, and towards the close of the afternoon the two brothers made their way to the flat where Hilda and her sister resided. Cora's face was very pale as she preceded them into the room where Hilda was sitting. At the first glance Victor seemed fascinated by Cora's gentle and refined face. From time to time, and in spite of the, to him, strangeness and incomprehensibility of the conversation, his eyes wandered back to her face. Lionel watched him and marvelled. As soon as all were seated and the brothers had made their usual solicitous inquiries as to the invalid's progress Hilda, whose dark face had grown suddenly white, began to speak.

"I have something to tell you," she said. "A few months ago my sister was ill. We ran heavily into debt. I did my best, but there was no help for it. My sister began to fret about it, and I knew the anxiety would impede her recovery. One day I stood at the safe in the private office. Mr. Lionel was in the office, and he was very busy. I knew where you kept the notes, and—and I took one. It was for twenty pounds, and with it I paid all our debts. But the thought of it has tormented me day and night. In my delirium I revealed the truth and my sister heard it. It is now our duty to repay the money, after which I am ready to suffer whatever punishment you deem just."

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Cora took a little packet from the mantelpiece and counted out twenty sovereigns upon the table. Victor looked from one to the other in blank astonishment.

"My dear Miss Gray," he said, in utter bewilderment, "I cannot for the life of me comprehend what you are saying. Why, it is scarcely three weeks since I had occasion to use the hundred pounds we keep in the safe, and I assure you the precise sum was there. I don't understand. You say my brother was in the office when you took the money?" And he turned to Lionel in mute amazement.

But Lionel was looking straight into Hilda's dark eyes. His face was calm, yet with an expression of wondrous sympathy in the clear grey eyes.

"Miss Gray," he said gently, "did it never occur to you that this delusion may have been the first symptom of the malady from which, for upwards of five weeks, you have suffered? I know something of these things, and, believe me, this is the correct explanation of the otherwise astonishing statement you have just made. The firm has lost no money. My brother would quickly have discovered it if we had. It is all a delusion, which, in order to get well again, you must endeavour to forget as speedily as possible."

It was now Hilda's turn to look bewildered.

"But our debts were all paid!" she persisted. "I have the receipted bills to prove it."

Lionel smiled. There was something very convincing and masterful in his treatment of the matter.

"That is not remarkable," he said. "Most honest people pay their debts. Believe me, you have been the victim of some hideous hallucination. If there were the least grain of truth in your statement we should have discovered it long ago. Now let the matter rest. It is absurd to talk of it any more." And he pushed the money back to Cora Gray.

For a moment or two there was silence in the little room. But it was clear that both Victor Leighton and Cora Gray had accepted Lionel's view of the matter without question. Hilda, however, was slow to believe it. The remembrance was too real, the shame too keen. Yet if her story were true, how came it that no discovery followed the theft of the note? The more she debated the question, the more hopelessly involved did she become, and finally she gave it up in very despair.

Presently Cora and Victor left the room together. Victor was anxious to ask the girl what she thought of her sister's recovery. This new development had shattered their recent hopes. And Lionel was left alone with Hilda. Going up to her, he stood quietly by her chair.

"Hilda," he said, "I wonder if you could care for me? You are so difficult to approach." And he smiled down at her with a twinkle in his deep grey eyes. "Even the clerks call you 'Spitfire.' But I have studied you from the first day of your coming into our office. And I have learnt to love you very dearly."

There was a sudden suspicious flash in Hilda's dark eyes as she lifted them to his face.

"Is *that* the reason you covered up my sin?" she asked fiercely.

Upon his answer depended hers, and Lionel knew it.

"I covered up no sin," he said decisively. "You must forget the delusion as soon as ever you can."

"It is not a delusion!" The words came fiercely.

"It *is* a delusion."

His tone was calm, and he looked her squarely in the face. With a little sigh, Hilda let her eyes fall before his, and he lifted one thin hand to his lips.

"Hilda," he pleaded, "don't say no to me, dear. Say you will be my wife. Trust me."

The fierceness was gone now. Even the old defiance seemed to have deserted her. The voice of her own heart was crying aloud:

"I love him—yes, I love him!"

She did not resist when he lifted her in his arms and kissed her.

"Now make haste and get well," he said tenderly. "You will come to me soon, won't you?"

And she promised him.

And six months later Lionel heard the news, for which he was quite prepared, that his brother Victor had proposed to, and been accepted by, Hilda's blue-eyed sister Cora. The day that witnessed their double wedding was bright and sunny, and to this day Lionel persists in affirming that people with brain fever sometimes begin by deluding themselves into the belief that they have stolen something which does not belong to them.

Walter J. Mowbray.

A Little Interloper.

Telling How She Wasn't in the Way at All.

Betty was making cakes.

Anything more absolutely bewitching than Betty engaged in domestic labours cannot be imagined. A dainty white apron covered her blue serge frock, the sleeves of her bodice were pushed up to her shoulders, revealing snowy, rounded arms, her cheeks were flushed to a lovely rose in her earnestness, and her pretty eyes shone with the joy of success as she turned and tossed the dainty bits of pastry.

"I do love cooking," she cried gleefully. "It's delicious. I feel just like Ruth Pinch making the beef-steak pudding in 'Martin Chuzzlewit,' you know, Diana. Only there is no John Westlock to come in and see me."

"It's to be hoped not," somewhat gloomily responded her cousin, who was watching operations with disfavour, while, at the same time, she deftly trussed a fowl. "Considering you've sent out our one and only domestic for more eggs—and what you want with them is beyond me—it is to be hoped that no John Westlock or John Anybody will call till she gets back."

"Why not?" retorted Betty, dropping the last cake into its place, and beginning to strip the dough from her fingers. "I should open the door, disguised as Martha. Why, there's a knock at this very moment. I'll go, Di."

"It's most likely someone for father, and he's out. I'll go and see. You ridiculous girl," for Betty had snatched up Martha's cap, and was pinning it firmly on her brown curls; "do you really think that you look like a general servant in that cap and apron? You look like a maid on the stage or in private theatricals. Don't go."

But Betty had dashed out of the kitchen, her high heels going pitter-patter down the passage, and in another moment she had opened the door.

"Is your master at home?" asked a man's voice, and, to Diana's indignant horror, she heard her cousin make

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demure response in the affirmative, imitating the absent Martha's voice.

"Yes, sir. Please come this way."

There was a sound of feet in the hall, of opening and shutting a door, and then Betty danced in, bubbling over with pretty, girlish mirth.

"You little wretch," cried Diana, "what do you mean? That was Dr. Hartley's voice I heard. He wants to see father, not me."

"I know it," giggled Betty. "He asked for my master, so you see I do look just like a proper housemaid."

"He's so short-sighted as to be almost blind. But why did you bring the poor old man in? I shall have to go and tell him that father is out."

"Because there was a young man with him," promptly rejoined Betty; "a nice young man; a—listen, Diana," impressively—"a most charming young man. Now, just trot into the drawing-room and say the maid was mistaken, for uncle is out. Then I shall come in, and you shall introduce that dear young man to me. I saw him in church on Sunday. He looked hard at you, I noticed, and then even harder and more admiringly at me," concluded Betty modestly.

Diana's clear pallor suddenly changed to carnation colour, and she turned angrily aside.

"I suppose I must make the best of it," she said unwillingly, "and go and explain. You had better put those cakes in the oven at once or they'll be as heavy as lead."

"Then the boys may eat them," said Betty heartlessly. "Diana, I shall change my dress, and they won't recognise me, will they?"

"Dr. Hartley may not, as he's nearly blind and all but stone deaf, but Geoffrey Musgrave's eyesight and hearing being perfect, I don't see how he can possibly help recognising you. I advise you not to come in."

And Diana walked away with her head in the air.

When Mrs. Saville wrote to her brother-in-law, begging him to take charge of her only child for the winter while she went to India, the kindly rector was perfectly willing to comply.

Diana was not altogether delighted. She had reigned in the old rectory ever since her mother's death, and did not at all relish the idea of another girl coming to possibly share her dominion over father, brothers, curates, and parish. Besides, Mrs. Saville had not taken the smallest notice of them for many years, and Diana resented her aunt's making a convenience of them.

Nor were her young brothers better pleased. What, they demanded, were they to do with a stuck-up, fine lady? However, Mr. Tracy had made up his mind, and, accordingly, Betty came, saw, and conquered. From the Rector himself to his youngest boy, from the curates to the organist, everyone with whom Betty came in contact, fell in love with her, and even Diana, who had looked upon her as an interloper, could not resist her charm.

She was very pretty; a slim little thing with a sweet, innocent, baby face, big, wondering brown eyes, a pink-and-white complexion, and a mass of nut-brown curls.

Diana was taller than her cousin, and had more regular beauty of feature, but her face lacked colour and animation. Her eyes were lovely, a clear, dark grey, and she had quantities of soft dark hair, without curl or wave in it.

She looked very dignified as she greeted her unlooked-for guests.

"I am sorry my cousin misled you," she went on uncompromisingly. "My father is out, and will not be home until late."

"That was your cousin, Miss Saville, who opened the door, wasn't it?" asked Geoffrey Musgrave eagerly.

"Yes," answered Diana, with a queer little pain at her heart. "The maid is out, so Betty went to the door, and put on Martha's cap for fun. You wanted my father?"

"We did; on some business," replied Dr. Hartley ponderously, "and, as he is not here, we will no longer detain you."

Geoffrey's looks plainly indicated a desire to remain, but for once Diana felt inhospitable, and even betrayed an inclination to hustle her visitors out. While Dr. Hartley, however, was still apologising and explaining, the door opened, and Betty appeared; Betty, radiant in a white silk blouse, with a knot of blue ribbon in front and another among her brown curls; Betty with laughter in her sunny eyes and on her rosy mouth.

Diana introduced the visitors with unwonted austerity of manner, adding hastily:

"As father is not at home, they are just going."

But Geoffrey rebelled.

"Dr. Hartley is just going," he corrected mildly. "He has business to attend to, but as I have none, I will remain and have tea and a chat with you. Why, I've seen nothing of you since I came back from Paris, except that peep in church. Miss Saville, intercede for me. Your hard-hearted cousin wants to turn me out."

"You *shall* stay," Betty assured him, with gentle friendliness, while Diana conducted the old doctor to the door. "Sit down and make yourself at home, and I will protect you. You shall have tea presently, and the most delicious cakes you ever tasted. I made them myself, and they are quite delightful."

"I don't know about that," observed Diana, returning from the hall, and joining the other two, who already, to her jaundiced eye, appeared to be deep in a flirtation. "Unless you put those cakes in the oven before you came in, I don't expect they will be eatable."

"But I *did* put them in the oven," triumphed Betty, "and Martha had come in and promised to attend to them, so they'll be all right. Let's have tea soon, Di, there's a darling, for I'm perfectly ravenous."

If Betty had calculated on Diana retiring to superintend the tea-making and leaving her free to enjoy her flirtation with Geoffrey, her calculations were correct. After a little more conversation, Diana went away to order tea, and if more than one hot tear splashed down on the tea-tray she was daintily arranging, there was no one to notice it.

She had felt rather sore over Betty's prompt adoption into the family. It had been hard to see her father lavishing the tenderness which had always been so specially hers upon this little interloper, and she had resented the hearty affection with which her young brothers soon came to regard their cousin. But the secession of Geoffrey Musgrave was the bitterest drop in her cup of woes. Geoffrey had been her own special friend since the day the fourteen-year-old schoolboy had found the little maiden, barely eight years old, asleep on her mother's grave, and had carried her to Musgrave Hall, to be petted and comforted by his parents.

Diana went back to the drawing-room, followed by Martha with the tea. The cakes turned out a success, done to a turn, and light as a feather.

"The most delicious cakes I ever tasted," solemnly pronounced Geoffrey, stretching out his hand for another. "Miss Saville, you are a genius."

"You are a greedy, grasping person," cried Betty gaily, snatching away the plate. "Why, you have had *seven* already. Diana, do have another before they are all gone."

Diana was doing her best to be bright and cheerful, but she was not very successful, and the two laughed and chattered together as if they had been old friends. Her heart swelled within her as she watched Geoffrey's admiring glances at her cousin, and heard his ringing laugh at Betty's nonsense. She had never been able to amuse him like that, she thought bitterly, and the dull pain at her heart grew more intense.

* * * * *

"You are going to help us with the church decorations, I hope, Betty?"

Before Betty could answer her uncle, a chorus of intreaties burst out.

"Oh, do, Betty; it will be such fun," cried her boy cousins simultaneously.

"Miss Saville has such taste that her help will be most valuable," added one of the curates, who had dropped in, ostensibly to consult his rector on some parish business, really to look languishingly at Betty.

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"If Miss Saville would but take directions of the whole, her taste would insure the decorations this year being an undoubted success," chimed in the other curate, who had come unprovided with any reason for his visit except the obvious one—to worship Betty.

"And the flowers sent by Mrs. Musgrave,' of Musgrave Hall, are so exquisitely beautiful that only Miss Saville's fingers are worthy to arrange them," observed the first curate, with a fatuous smile, and his head cocked sentimentally on one side.

Diana felt a wild inclination to box the ears of both curates, but, restraining herself nobly, she merely suggested that they had better begin early next day, so as to complete the decorations, if possible, by daylight. If Betty chose to help, they would finish all the sooner.

Accordingly, the cousins set out for church almost directly after breakfast on the following morning.

Diana and Betty were the only young girls present. Two old maids and a middle-aged widow were the only other ladies who had put in an appearance, and they worked steadily on, while Betty flitted about like a will-o'-the-wisp, carrying in her train all the men helpers, including Geoffrey Musgrave.

Diana felt so thoroughly out in the cold that she retired into a dark corner and fashioned yards of evergreen rope-work in resentful dignity.

It was growing dark when most of the workers began to think of lunch, and very soon nobody was left except Betty, Geoffrey, and Diana. The two former were busily at work on the same wreath, and eagerly conversing as they worked. In the silence that followed the exit of the boys, Diana caught one or two sentences.

"Now you have made me betray myself," cried Diana. "Go away, you *interloper!*"

"But, mother—I don't know what mother will say," said Betty.

"You leave your mother to *me*," returned Geoffrey, in his masterful way. "She won't refuse *me*. But the question is this—is your love strong enough to brave all obstacles? Is it real, true love, or——"

Diana knocked down a pile of prayer-books, and went into a fit of coughing. She could not be guilty of eavesdropping.

* * * * *

An imperative tap sounded on Diana's door.

"Come in," she called.

Betty entered, radiant, in floating robes of the softest pale blue.

"How sweet you look, Diana," she exclaimed; "I like you best in white."

"Do you?" coldly returned her cousin. "Can I do anything for you?"

"I only came for a little chat," said Betty. "But you look so pale and sad, dear. Is there anything wrong?"

"Nothing," answered Diana, in rather a choked voice. "I've never seen that frock before. It's very pretty, but isn't it rather grand for home wear?"

"Geoffrey is coming this evening," murmured Betty, with a lovely blush and down-cast eyes, "and—and perhaps—someone else."

"Geoffrey—you dress for Geoffrey?" cried Diana. "Oh, Betty, why need you have taken him from me? You have so much; why take *all* from me? I don't so much mind father and the boys, and I don't care at all for the curates, but, Geoffrey—if you had not come, he would have loved me. And now you have made me betray myself. Oh, go away—go away, you—you—you *interloper!*"

Betty stood petrified.

"Good gracious!" she ejaculated, after a pause. "Diana, you surely don't think——"

"Think? I *know*," broke in Diana passionately. "I heard you—talking—you and Geoffrey—in the church. Oh, go away! Haven't you humiliated me enough? Go away."

And Betty went.

Diana appeared at dinner, composed and dignified as ever, and only Betty, glancing furtively at her cousin now and then, noticed the pale cheeks and faint redness round the eyes. Betty herself was restless and disturbed in manner, and after the rector had retired to his study, and the boys had dispersed to their own pursuits, she flitted about the drawing-room in a nervous way that highly irritated Diana.

A little later Betty ran across the room with outstretched hands to meet Geoffrey Musgrave, who had just entered. Diana retreated behind some curtains.

A second later Geoffrey parted the curtains.

"Are you here, Diana? That's right; I want a talk with you."

"But where's Betty?" asked Diana.

"Betty is settling matters with Clifford," replied Geoffrey.

"Clifford!" repeated Diana faintly.

"Yes, Clifford Musgrave, my cousin, you know. It seems that he and Betty were engaged, but her mother managed to separate them, and bring about a misunderstanding. Poor old Cliff hasn't much money, you see, and Betty's mother didn't like the marriage, so she packed the poor girl off here to keep her out of Cliff's way. Betty confided in me, and I undertook to clear matters up. I've done it, and now, Diana, I want to do the same with my own affairs. Why have you been so cold to me lately?"

"I thought—Betty—you seemed," faltered Diana.

"You were jealous, in fact. That must mean that you love me a little bit. Darling, say you love me."

And Diana said it.

Eva Prosser.

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A Mercenary Wooing.

Showing How Dane Provyn Sought to Retrieve his Fortune, and what came of the Attempt.

"THAT is a pleasant piece of intelligence, certainly!" observed the elder man, Mark Provyn. His tone was quiet, but there was much bitterness in it. "So it comes to this, Dane—the business is as good as smashed up, all in two years."

"I am sorry to say that you have stated the fact exactly," responded the younger man, Dane Provyn, who was nearly twenty-four. His answer was given flippantly.

"I am fifteen years your senior," continued his brother. "I worked that business up from nothing; I thought that I could give you a chance, for I always liked you, although you were a kind of scapegrace. I left some of my money in it, feeling that it would help you, and believing that the interest on that money and on my other investments would just enable me to live very quietly for the remainder of a life that is not likely to be long. And now, when this complaint is getting a firmer hold on me and is steadily incapacitating me, you come to tell me that the business is gone to the dogs."

"To the creditors," interposed Dane suavely. "It is not very polite to call them dogs; they wouldn't like it, I'm sure, if they heard you."

"I worked for the money like a horse; you have spent or wasted it like an ass," cried the elder, losing his self-possession for the time.

His cheeks became flushed with anger. "I tell you what it is, Dane," he went on warmly; "you owe it to me to return that money to me—my share, I mean—and if you have any single spark of manliness in you, if you have not become so soddened with your own selfishness, you will see to it that the creditors are paid in full and that *I* am paid in full also, thus relieving my name from any stigma and myself from poverty at a time when I most need to have a small competence."

Mark Provyn's face was glowing now. He half rose from his chair, but fell back again with a great sigh. Raising his hand, he waved it towards the door. "Leave me now; I can't bear the sight of your callous face just now. Come to me to-morrow, when you have had time to think over what you have done," he cried.

Dane was on the point of uttering another flippant remark, but some unaccountable feeling took possession of him and the words died away on his lips. Bother the man! Why did he go on in that strain? If the business could—that is, if he, Dane, was to be expected to—— Somehow, he couldn't find the excuse which he wished for in order to shield himself. He wished to pose as an injured individual, but he did not see his way to assume that *role*, even in his own mind. Confound things! For almost the first time in his life he felt uncomfortable with a sense of guilt. He surveyed his brother, whose face betrayed pain; he understood that Mark had had one of those sharp attacks, and he experienced a sensation of dejection.

"Look here, Mark, old fellow!" he began remorsefully. "I'm awfully sorry, but I don't see how it could have been averted. Anyhow, it's done. So now I must see what else I can do. There is enough to pay all the creditors twenty shillings in every pound, so that needn't lie on your mind; but there won't be any for you and me when they are all paid. I wish I knew what to do. I wish some heiress would fall in love with me and no questions asked; that would be an easy way to the top of Fortune Hill, and I don't see much chance of my ever getting there by any other road. Yes, yes," he added, as his brother moved one arm impatiently; "I'll go now."

Mark's expression changed as Dane moved towards the door; those last words of his careless brother had aroused an idea.

"What about Miss Royston?" he articulated faintly. "You ought to stand a good chance there. Think of it. Try it."

Dane Provyn started, hestitated a moment, and then turned and walked back to his brother.

"I believe there's something in that, by Jove!" he said slowly. "I *will* think about it. Good night."

In another minute he was in the street, and half an hour later he was in his own lodgings, but exactly how he got there he could not have explained, for his mind had been full of his brother's suggestion and the thought to which it gave rise.

"Mark is right," he agreed, as he threw himself heavily into a chair. "In the circumstances, I ought to stand a good chance. And she will be worth a mint of money when the old fellow retires from this vale of tribulation. I had the good luck to pull him away from the front of a 'bus that would probably have knocked him down and spoilt his appearance, so he would be charmed to have me for a son-in-law—perhaps! I expect he is on the look-out for a titled husband for her, but she is possibly romantic and would fall in love with her father's heroic rescuer. I flatter myself that I am good-looking, although I have nothing else that is good about me."

He rose and surveyed himself in the glass. It was no exaggeration to say that he was good-looking; and the face,

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to any student of human nature, was a guarantee that there was nothing really bad about him. He was indolent, selfish—though not so selfish as his brother had described him—and careless of consequences; he was the kind of man who might develop into a criminal, but who might also be easily roused to take a proper view of his surroundings and become a hard-working citizen and a credit to society.

"Yes, I'll try it," he decided. "I am convinced that I should make her, or any other girl, a thoroughly good husband, while Miss Royston will, no doubt, prove an agreeable life-partner. If she doesn't, I shall travel for a month or two at a time and leave her to her papa."

* * * * *

The energy displayed by Dane Provyn during the next few days in his efforts to obtain an invitation to the country residence of Sir Charles Royston, Alderman and sometime Lord Mayor, was a proof that he had something in him which, if directed into the right channel, would take him a long way up Fortune Hill. At the time of the rescue he had treated the affair in his usual careless manner, instead of improving the acquaintance, as so many other people would have done. He quickly and skilfully repaired that blunder now, and his diplomacy met with a prompt reward.

His business was in the hands of a receiver who was acting for the creditors, so that he could afford to go away for a week; he did not go to see his brother, but contented himself with a few lines of scrawl which set forth briefly how matters (public and private) were progressing.

"According to the old saying, Fortune favours the brave," mused Dane Provyn, as he steamed along in the fast train to Rixdale. "I am not so certain about that; I should be inclined to say that Fortune favours the bold—well, yes, the impudent. But there, I needn't worry myself about the accuracy or otherwise of old sayings. It is sufficient for me that Fortune is favouring me, and that there is every probability of my becoming the son-in-law of Sir Charles Royston. Why, I may even be an Alderman and a Lord Mayor one day myself! Who knows?"

Sir Charles Royston was a pompous personage, who insisted upon the due observance of formality in anything appertaining to himself, although he was not so particular about it when it concerned other people. He had been Lord Mayor during an unimportant year, and had just by an effort obtained a knighthood; but he thought he had been scantily treated and was still of opinion that a grateful Sovereign would make up the deficiency, and create him a baronet as soon as the facts were made known.. Dane Provyn understood him to be one of those who would make their sons address him as "Sir Charles" in private life, rather than call him by the more affectionate term "dad" or "father"; therefore, as the worthy Alderman had no sons, it was most probable that even his daughter would have to call him "Sir Charles."

"Daughters sometimes manage to get the right side of fathers," thought Dane meditatively, "so I may hear her address him very familiarly, but I must not be surprised if I find that the utmost formality exists."

Rixdale Hall was a large mansion situated in a lovely part of the county and surrounded by an estate of considerable extent. Dane's eyes sparkled as he rode up to the house in the carriage placed at his disposal by his host; he felt something akin to a choking sensation at the thought that he might become the owner of this domain.

"If I don't succeed in captivating that girl, I'll—I'll——" Dane stopped for lack of ideas. "I shall deserve to be punched!" he concluded helplessly.

He wondered if Sir Charles would welcome him at the front door, but his host did not appear, and his daughter was also invisible. He was conducted to his room and informed that Sir Charles would see him in the library when he had made himself comfortable.

Dane did not hurry over his toilet. If Sir Charles was not demonstrative, neither would he be; if he took things coolly, it might teach the worthy Alderman that he was entertaining someone who had a good opinion of himself, and Sir Charles would be impressed. It was therefore more than half-an-hour later before Dane Provyn was ushered into the library.

"I am pleased to see you," was Sir Charles' pompous welcome. "You did me a service, young man, and I do not forget such things."

The condescending tone jarred on Dane's feelings. Most people would have called it a "great service" to have been saved from such peril; moreover, although he said that he did not forget such things, Sir Charles had not shown any strong disposition to remember this "thing."

However, Dane had a game to play, so he swallowed his resentment and accepted the proffered hand with a dignified air and suitable reply. The truth was that the young man had seen another figure which sent a curious thrill through him.

"I must introduce you to Miss Royston," said the host in his usual stiff manner. "Mr. Dane Provyn, my dear, who rendered me a—— Yes, I'm sure Miss Royston is—er—delighted to see you, Mr. Provyn!"

In the inmost recesses of his heart Dane fervently hoped that she was, and he could heartily reciprocate the compliment. Miss Royston was about his own age, full of womanliness and grace, with a sweet face that indicated both gentleness and resolution. She was the kind of woman who would lead a man to put forth all that was best in him and induce him to strive for the highest positions which his mental, moral and physical gifts fitted him to hold.

The greeting between them was formal, but there was a hidden warmth in it that was quite spontaneous.

"What a sweet creature she is," thought Dane, as he conducted her into the dining-room.

Somehow, he felt a little ashamed of himself and his mercenary motives, but his case was desperate and he crushed the sentiment.

"And what an old pig to insist that she shall call him by his title!" Dane had noticed that she always addressed him as "Sir Charles."

The dinner would have been a quiet, not to say dismal, affair had it not been for Miss Royston. The host kept up a conversation at first, but it flagged, and then the fact dawned upon Dane that his host was not especially pleased at having to entertain the young fellow.

After dinner Sir Charles excused himself on the ground of having still some business to attend to in connection with the county politics, and he left Dane and Miss Royston together.

"He is an unmannerly lout," muttered Dane. "He is the sort of man who would think the greatest service was rewarded if he handed you a £5 note, and who prefer to discharge their obligations by parting with money which they do not value because they have so much. You have given them something, so to put it, and they reward you by bestowing upon you what is nothing to them and they want to see it in big type in the papers.

"However, he is playing into my hands, for he is leaving me a clear field so far as his daughter is concerned. I wonder if he will refuse his consent? H'm, that would be awkward. No, I don't think he will; he doesn't care what she does, he thinks only of himself."

Dane passed a delightful time with his companion, and he flattered himself

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that he had already made an impression on her by the time they separated for the night. And as to himself? Dane shrugged his shoulders and did not attempt to answer the thought.

Sir Charles Royston did just what was demanded of him as a host and no more. Whenever he could find an excuse for getting out of Dane's society, he took advantage of it. Miss Bessie Royston—for Dane discovered that her name was Bessie—endeavoured unobtrusively to make up for Sir Charles' delinquencies, and so it came about that they were constantly together and the time passed very agreeably for the young man.

How pleasant were the strolls about the estate, the rides in the surrounding country, the hours spent in the old mansion together. Dane made good use of his time and wondered that the Alderman did not perceive the danger of leaving the two so frequently alone; he was making good progress and mentally resolved that he would propose before he quitted Rixdale Hall.

"It is turning out most fortunately," murmured Dane, with a light laugh. "She is the sweetest woman a man could hope to wed; she is growing fond of me—I'm positive of it—and I'm falling in love with her. Who could help it? I don't feel that I am good enough for her, but that girl would make an angel of any fellow, she is so good herself! Dane, you're a lucky dog!"

"Who is Miss Jessie Royston?" asked Dane on the fifth morning, and it was Bessie Royston to whom he addressed the inquiry. "I heard the name this morning for the first time, and I thought that it was a mistake, and that the man should have said Bessie, but it proved to be Jessie."

"Oh, that is my cousin!" cried Miss Royston, with a smile. "Our names sound rather alike, but here we usually distinguish between daughter and niece by calling me Miss Royston while my cousin is called Miss Jessie. She is younger than I, you see; she is not twenty!"

"That is one way to distinguish between you," laughed Dane. "But I wonder that Sir Charles did not have you called Miss Bessie and his niece addressed as Miss Royston."

"Well," she began, with a queer smile; but she could not continue, for Dane's glance was so ardent that she was compelled to drop her eyes.

"Do you know," he said, taking her hand in his, "that I should like to have the right to call you Bessie?"

She raised her eyes swiftly and as quickly lowered them; her bosom heaved and a slight flush stole over her cheeks. They were in a secluded corner of the flower garden, whither she had conducted him in order to show him some new specimens. They were side by side, but he drew round so that they faced one another. The time had come when he must secure this prize; he had a double motive in winning her now, for she had become dear to him and she was an heiress.

"Bessie, dear! I may call you that, may I not? You have become very precious to me. I wonder if you could ever learn to care for me as I care for you?"

She gazed at him with eyes full of love; he was startled at the depth of affection which he saw in them. She uttered no word, but that look was enough and he took her in his arms and kissed her passionately.

"I don't deserve this happiness, dear!" he cried, and he was conscious that he was speaking the unvarnished truth; he did not deserve it, for he was a worthless money-seeker, a careless ne'er-do-well. "I will try to be worthy of you, dear. But," he hesitated, "I ought not to take you from here, I fear! I am poor; I have nothing to offer you, for the business which I had is about to be broken up." His better nature was prevailing and he was making a confession. "And you are rich! What will your—Sir Charles say?"

He had been on the point of saying "your father," but he had checked himself; it seemed incongruous to call him that when his very daughter always spoke of him as "Sir Charles!"

Dane was looking far away as he spoke, for he was thinking with regret of his own careless life, his neglect of his business, and of his despicable plan in obtaining the invitation to Rixdale Hall. He was recalled to himself by Bessie's next remark.

"You are mistaken, Dane—I am not rich, and Sir Charles will regret my leaving here only because I have been useful to him and have thus repaid him for the money he spent on my education and upbringing after my mother, his sister, died.

"I am poor, too, Dane, but if we have one another to work for, we shall be happy and we shall succeed. I know that there are great and good qualities in you, and you will climb the ladder. But I do not mind if you do not realise your ambitions and mine, for we shall be happy together and we shall know that we have tried, that we have done our best. Oh, Dane, I am so happy!"

Dane Provyn heard all this like one in a trance. What did it mean? She was not Sir Charles Royston's daughter and heiress, but a penniless and dependent niece! What egregious blunder had he made? What an ass he had been. By some strange prank of Fate, he had allied himself to one as poor as himself, instead of to an heiress. He was stunned for the moment, and again it was Bessie's voice that recalled his wandering mind—Bessie's voice with a trace of anxiety in it that made him feel despicable.

"What is it, Dane? Are you ill? You have grown quite pale!"

He kissed her. "It is nothing; I shall be all right in a moment," he replied, assuming a cheerful, loving tone. "Let us sit down a while, and you can tell me about yourself, about Sir Charles and his daughter."

Bessie was radiantly happy in her new-found love. She explained the relationship again, and showed Dane a miniature photo of her cousin, the heiress.

Dane looked at it curiously; it was the insipid face of a vain girl, it was the countenance of a girl at whom he would scarcely have condescended to glance for her own sake alone. He contrasted this giddy girl with the sweet, helpful, hopeful woman by his side, and his heart gave a great bound.

Bessie loved him; he would marry her and together they would work and he would strive to repair the faults he had committed. He surprised Bessie in the midst of some remarks, to which he was paying no heed, by kissing her passionately.

"I will do my best to make you happy, dear, and you will encourage me to work. Let us go and tell Sir Charles."

Sir Charles Royston was not displeased; in fact, he was rather glad that his niece would soon be leaving him. He had an uneasy suspicion that Bessie monopolised the attention of certain guests in the season, and he wanted his daughter to do that. He gave them a kind of frigid paternal blessing, coupled with a hint that they had nothing to expect from him, and then dismissed the subject.

Dane left the following day by a train that started fifteen minutes before the arrival of that which was conveying Sir Charles' daughter to her father's country seat. He presented himself to his brother two days later.

"Well, Dane, how are things progressing?" asked Mark gloomily. "And the heiress? When is the wedding to take place?"

"The wedding will take place within three months, Mark," replied Dane quietly. "But the future Mrs. Dane Provyn is not an heiress; she is as poor as I am, and I am glad of it now. She will be more to me than a fortune would have been as you shall see, Mark. I am going to work hard at the firm, and I think that in three months I shall have altered the condition of things to such an extent that the creditors will consent to withdraw the receiver and I shall go on straight. You don't believe it, of course?"

Mark scanned the younger man's countenance narrowly; there was quite a new light in it.

"Yes, I do believe it," he said earnestly. "That girl, whoever she is, has done much for you already; with a fortune you would have done worse than you did at first, but with her you will make your mark."

Mark was right. Sir Charles did exceedingly little for them, but Dane is at the head of a firm which is making rapid headway, and is attracting general attention. He says it is all due to his partner, and most people are at a loss to understand this allusion.

F. Brewster.

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The Reformation of Dick Carstairs.

"WHAT is the matter with Frances?" I asked, looking across the room to where my little friend sat, pale and dejected, holding languid converse with one of her mother's guests.

"Frances is a headstrong, undutiful child," replied Mrs. Lacy with sudden energy. "She looks the picture of misery, doesn't she? It's all because I won't sanction her marriage with Dick Carstairs."

"They are very fond of each other, I know; but, of course, Dick is—well, rather fast. Yet the influence of a good, sweet girl might reform him."

"Well, I'm not going to sacrifice my only daughter on the offchance of being able to reform Dick Carstairs," remarked Mrs. Lacy with just indignation. "Frances has no father or brother to defend her, and as I am responsible for her, I don't intend her to marry a fast man. Surely, Lady Mary, you don't think a girl ought to marry with the object of reforming her husband."

"My reason is entirely with you, dear Mrs. Lacy," I hastened to assure her, "but I am very much afraid—you know how fond I am of girls and lovers—that my sympathies are with the young couple."

I think Frances had a good idea which way my sympathies were likely to run, for next day she came to lunch, and very soon started the subject of her woes. Dick adored her, she informed me, and he had said that when once she was his wife he would break off with all his wild companions, never touch cards, and never go near a racecourse.

"Mother is so hard," she complained, with tears in her eyes. "She won't believe in Dick. She doesn't believe he'd reform if he were married. She says a girl ought to marry a man who doesn't need reforming. Dearest Lady Mary, I know you feel for me. Isn't it the holiest mission a girl can undertake?"

"To reform Dick Carstairs? Well, I don't quite know, but talk of angels and you hear the rustling of their wings. What sends you here, Mr. Carstairs? From your guilty looks at each other, young people, I am of the opinion that there has been collusion here. Now this won't do. I can't allow you to meet at my house in defiance of Mrs. Lacy's wishes. Frances, I'm ashamed of you."

Dick Carstairs was by no means without good qualities, but he had been his own master from a very early age, and his easy good nature had brought him under the influence of some very fast men, whose example had led poor Dick into a most undesirable way of life.

He was devotedly in love with Frances, and protested that she would be his salvation. He pointed out that she was of age, and therefore need not pay any attention to her mother's prohibition, but I was glad to hear little Frances declare that she would never marry without her mother's consent.

"And she will never give it," added Dick gloomily.

"I do not know that," I put in. "After all, Dick, you must admit that there are reasons why an affectionate mother should hesitate about intrusting her one pretty little daughter to your care."

"But with Frances as my wife I would become as steady a fellow as could be wished for."

"Why not become steady before marriage? I never could advise a girl to marry in the hope of reforming her husband; but if you will pledge your honour to try to throw off every bad habit and every undesirable associate, I will exert all my influence with Mrs. Lacy, to get her to consent to your engagement."

Frances looked radiant, and Dick brightened up. He was ready to promise anything if only the hope of gaining his little sweetheart were not taken from him.

I had a hard task to win over Mrs. Lacy.

"All very well," she said, "and I daresay Mr. Carstairs has all the good qualities you say he has, but I know what kind of life he leads, and never will I allow my darling little girl to marry a man in hopes of reforming him."

"I quite agree with you; but suppose he reforms before marriage. Forgive my persistency, but I am so truly interested in Frances, and I know to part her from Dick will break her heart."

"And to be the wife of a gambler, and an idle, aimless, wild fellow, would break her heart also. He will promise anything now, but when he has attained his end, he will be just as wild and reckless as ever."

"But if you were to put him on a year's probation," I urged, "you would see how far he may be trusted. If you refuse all hope, he will go utterly to the dogs, and poor little Frances will break her heart. Let them become engaged on the understanding that if Dick reforms, breaks off all his bad habits, and becomes steady, the marriage shall take place just as soon as you are convinced you can safely sanction it."

Mrs. Lacy sat for some moments deep in thought.

"My one idea is to do what is best for my child," she began at last, "and, candidly, I do not think Dick Carstairs will make her a good husband. Yet, on the other hand, a longer acquaintance with him may open her eyes as to his true character, also he may tire of being always on his good behaviour, and may withdraw from the affair.

"On the whole I think I can't do better than yield to your suggestion. We will see how things are in a year."

The immediate results of Mrs. Lacy's consent to the engagement were most encouraging. Frances beamed with joy, and her sweet little face grew rosy and plump again. Dick grew steady, and became as manly and straightforward a young fellow as the most rigid of mothers-in-law could desire.

At the end of a year Mrs. Lacy was obliged to own that the reformation of Dick Carstairs was complete, and that she no longer feared to intrust her treasure—her treasured daughter—to him.

The other day, five years after the marriage of Frances and Dick, Mrs. Lacy said to me:

"I owe my happiness and that of my dear children to you. Had I not taken your advice, my daughter would have been a soured, disappointed old maid, and Dick would have gone entirely to the bad, instead of being, as they are now, the happiest couple and the best children that ever lived.

"It is safer to get a man to reform before marriage than to marry him first and try reforming him afterwards."

S. V.

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He Bored Her.

He: "Oh, I have a splendid story to tell you. I don't think I ever told it to you before." She: "Is it really a good story?" He: "Indeed it is." She (wearily): "Then you haven't told it to me before."

No Competitors.

Johnnie Masher (to the young brother of his best girl): "So Miss Ella is your eldest sister. Who comes after her?" Little Tommy: "Nobody comes after her; but pa says the first one that does can have her."

Suspicious.

Mr. Jones: "Oh, yes, I met Dick Bachellor, and told him all about the baby." Mrs. Jones: "Did he listen patiently?" Mr. Jones: "Very; he listened so patiently that I was afraid at first he wanted to borrow some money."

A Matter of Economy.

"I woo thee in the moonlight," sang the lover to his girl, who was gazing fondly on him from the basement. "It's much cheaper than the gaslight," sang her father, the old churl, who was taking observations from the basement.

His Hope.

"My dear," said Mrs. Henpeck, "I'm positive that our George is thinking seriously of matrimony." "Well, I only hope so," returned Henpeck with unusual spirit; "I wouldn't want any boy of mine to be so unfortunate as to regard it as a joke."

Complimentary.

Romeo: "But how did you induce your father to give his consent? You know you told me he was deeply opposed to actors?" Juliet: "I know; but when I told him it was you, he said perhaps it might not be so bad—that you weren't much of an actor."

Wouldn't Suit Him.

"She said her heart wasn't hers to give me." "What did you do?" "I took my hat and went." "You are an idiot. She meant that you already had her heart." "Do you think it? Well, it's all right, anyway. I never could get along with a girl who can't talk common sense."

A Pretty Riddle.

"Did you ever hear the alphabetical conundrum, Angelina?" "No, Augustus, what is it?" "It is: When will there be only twenty-five letters in the alphabet?" "Oh, I never could guess that!" "It's when U and I are made one, my darling." "What a nice conundrum it is, Augustus!"

Another Romance Spoilt.

Miss Oldgirl (coyly): "I had a strange dream the other night, Mr. Junior. I dreamt—only think!—that you and I were married, and on our honeymoon. You don't know how real it seemed. Did you ever dream such a thing?" Mr. Junior (firmly): "No, Miss Oldgirl, I did not. In fact, I haven't had the nightmare for a good many years."

Candid.

"How many fellows have called on your sister this week?" "Five." "That doesn't include me, does it?" "Oh, no. Sister says you don't count."

To Try His Capabilities,

The poet and the editor were playing tennis, and the latter was beaten. "You serve well, but you cannot return," said the poet. "Can't I?" asked the editor. "Send me a poem and see."

No Cause for Complaint.

Father: "He'd make a model husband. I don't see what fault you can find with him." Daughter: "That's just the trouble. Think of the disadvantage I should have in case we quarrelled."

They Were Unnatural.

Artist: "Oh! you think the background's 'beastly,' do you? Perhaps the cattle are 'beastly' too, though I flatter myself——" Friendly Artist: "Oh, no, my dear fellow! That's just what they are not."

She Had Stopped it.

Father (upstairs): "What time is it down there?" Fannie (down in the sitting-room): "Just ten by the clock, papa." Father: "All right. Don't forget to start the clock again when the young man leaves."

He was a Sour old Bachelor.

"I found a four-leaved clover this morning. There is an old saying that the finder will be married within a year." "Indeed! I was under the impression that the finding of a four-leaved clover was an omen of good luck."

An Improvement.

"Father," confessed the callow youth, "I have married her. We are two souls with but a single thought." "Well, you've gained something. A single thought isn't so many, but it is one more than I ever knew you to have before."

The Honeymoon is Over.

"No one comes to see me," said she wearily, "like they did before I was married." "Speaking of that fact," said he, "I used to call on you seven evenings in the week at that time. But I am as badly off as you. I now have nowhere to go."

A Good Reason.

Lover: "And so your mother does not believe in long engagements? I am delighted." Miss De Broker: "Yes, mamma says ever so many girls' fathers have failed during long engagements, and the poor things never got married at all."

She Never Tried.

He: "Miss Kitty, I've heard it said that a kiss without a moustache is like an egg without salt. Is that so?" She: "Well, really, I don't know—I can't tell—for in all my life I never——" He: "Now, now, Miss Kitty!" She: "Never ate an egg without salt."

No Alternative.

First Guest: "Awful bore, isn't it?" Second Guest: "Dull as a funeral. I knew it would be." First Guest: "You knew it? Then why did you come?" Second Guest: "Had to. My wife heard that the formula for writing regrets had changed and she couldn't find out what the new style was. So she sent an acceptance."

Then He Proposed.

They had looked soulfully into each other's eyes for some time, but somehow he didn't seem to come to the point. Then suddenly he made a discovery. "You have your mother's beautiful eyes," he said. She felt that the time had come to play her trump card. "I have also," she said, "my father's lovely cheque book." Inside of thirty minutes their engagement was announced.

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A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Night Chase and the Mudlark.

"CAN'T find anything," Hazell said, as he jumped into the boat, and then privately to Racksole: "There's a woman on board. Looks as if she might coincide with your description of Miss Spencer. Steam's up, but there's no engineer. I asked where the engineer was, and she inquired what business that was of mine, and requested me to get through with my own business and clear off. Seems rather a smart sort. I poked my nose into everything, but I saw no sign of anyone else. Perhaps we'd better pull away and lie near for a bit, just to see if anything queer occurs."

"You're quite sure he isn't on board?" Racksole asked.

"Quite," said Hazell positively; "I know how to search a vessel. See this," and he handed to Racksole a sort of steel skewer, about two feet long, with a wooden handle. "That," he said, "is one of the Customs' aids to searching."

"I suppose it wouldn't do to go on board and carry off the lady?" Racksole suggested doubtfully.

"Well," Hazell began, with equal doubtfulness, "as for that——"

"Where's 'e orf?" It was the man in the bows who interrupted Hazell. Following the direction of the man's finger, both Hazell and Racksole saw with more or less distinctness a dinghy slip away from the forefoot of the Norwegian vessel and disappear down-stream into the mist.

"It's Jules, I'll swear," cried Racksole. "After him, men. Ten pounds a-piece if we overtake him!"

"Lay down to it now, boys!" said Hazell, and the heavy Customs boat shot out in pursuit.

"This is going to be a lark," Racksole remarked.

"Depends on what you call a lark," said Hazell; "it's not much of a lark tearing down midstream like this in a fog. You never know when you mayn't be in kingdom come with all these barges knocking around. I expect that chap hid in the dinghy when he first caught sight of us, and then slipped his painter as soon as I'd gone.

The boat was moving at a rapid pace with the tide. Steering was a matter of luck and instinct more than anything else. Every now and then Hazell, who held the lines, was obliged to jerk the boat's head sharply round to avoid a barge or an anchored vessel. It seemed to Racksole that vessels were anchored all over the stream. He looked about him anxiously, but for a long time he could see nothing but mist and vague nautical forms. Then suddenly he said, quietly enough, "We're on the right road; I can see him ahead. We're gaining on him." In another minute the dinghy was plainly visible, not twenty yards away, and the sculler—sculling frantically now—was unmistakably Jules—Jules in a light tweed suit and a bowler hat.

"You were right," Hazell said; "this is a lark. I believe I'm getting quite excited. It's more exciting than playing the trombone in an orchestra. I'll run him down, eh?—and then we can drag the chap in from the water."

Racksole nodded, but at that moment a barge, with her red sails set, stood out of the fog clean across the bows of the Customs boat, which narrowly escaped instant destruction. When they got clear, and the usual interchange of calm, nonchalant swearing was over, the dinghy was barely to be discerned in the mist, and the fat man was breathing in such a manner that his sighs might almost have been heard on the banks. Racksole wanted violently to do something, but there was nothing to do; he could only sit supine by Hazell's side in the stern-sheets. Gradually they began again to overtake the dinghy, whose one-man crew was evidently tiring. As they came up, hand over fist, the dinghy's nose swerved aside, and the tiny craft passed down a water-lane between two anchored mineral barges, which lay black and deserted about fifty yards from the Surrey shore. "To starboard," said Racksole. "No, man!" Hazell replied; "we can't get through there. He's bound to come out below; it's only a feint. I'll keep our nose straight ahead."

And they went on, the fat man pounding away, with a face which glistened even in the thick gloom. It was an empty dinghy which emerged from between the two barges and went drifting and revolving down towards Greenwich.

The fat man gasped a word to his comrade, and the Customs boat stopped dead.

"'E's all right," said the man in the bows. "If it's 'im you want, 'e's on one o' them barges, so you've only got to step on and take 'im orf."

"That's all," said a voice out of the depth of the nearest barge, and it was the voice of Jules, otherwise known as Mr. Tom Jackson.

"'Ear 'im?" said the fat man, smiling. "'E's a good

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un, 'e is. But if I was you, Mr. Hazell, or you, sir, I shouldn't step on to that barge so quick as all that."

They backed the boat under the stern of the nearest barge and gazed upwards.

"It's all right," said Racksole to Hazell; "I've got a revolver. How can I clamber up there?"

"Yes, I dare say you've got a revolver all right," Hazell replied sharply. "But you mustn't use it. There mustn't be any noise. We should have the river police down on us in a twinkling if there were a revolver shot, and it would be the ruin of me. If an inquiry were held the Commissioners wouldn't take any official notice of the fact that my superior officer had put me on to this job, and I should be requested to leave the service."

"Have no fear on that score," said Racksole. "I shall, of course, take all responsibility."

"It wouldn't matter how much responsibility you took," Hazell retorted; "you couldn't put me back into the service, and my career would be at an end."

"But there are other careers," said Racksole, who was really anxious to lame his ex-waiter by means of a judiciously-aimed bullet. "There are other careers."

"The Customs is my career," said Hazell, "so let's have no shooting. We'll wait about a bit; he can't escape. You can have my skewer if you like"—and he gave Racksole his searching instrument. "And you can do what you please, provided you do it neatly and don't make a row over it."

For a few moments the four men were passive in the boat, surrounded by swirling mist, with black water beneath them, and towering above them a half-loaded barge with a desperate and resourceful man on board. Suddenly the mist parted and shrivelled away in patches, as though before the breath of some monster. The sky was visible; it was a clear sky, and the moon was shining. The transformation was just one of those meteorological quick-changes which happen most frequently on a great river.

"That's a sight better," said the fat man. At the same moment a head appeared over the edge of the barge. It was Jules' face—dark, sinister, and leering.

"Is it Mr. Racksole in that boat?" he inquired calmly; "because, if so, let Mr. Racksole step up. Mr. Racksole has caught me, and he can have me for the asking. Here I am." He stood up to his full height on the barge, tall against the night sky, and all the occupants of the boat could see that he held firmly clasped in his right hand a short dagger. "Now, Mr. Racksole, you've been after me for a long time," he continued; "here I am. Why don't you step up? If you haven't got the pluck yourself, persuade someone else to step up in your place—the same fair treatment will be accorded to all." And Jules laughed a low, penetrating laugh.

He was in the midst of this laugh when he lurched suddenly forward.

"What'r' you doing of aboard my barge?" Off you goes!" It was a boy's small, shrill voice that sounded in the night. A ragged boy's small form had appeared silently behind Jules, and two small arms with a vicious shove precipitated him into the water. He fell with a fine gurgling splash. It was at once obvious that swimming was not among Jules' accomplishments. He floundered wildly and sank. When he reappeared he was dragged into the Customs boat. Rope was produced, and in a minute or two the man lay ignominiously bound in the bottom of the boat. With the aid of a mud-lark—a mere barge boy, who probably had no more right on the barge than Jules himself—Racksole had won his game. For the first time for several weeks the millionaire experienced a sensation of equanimity and satisfaction. He leant over the prostrate form of Jules, Hazell's professional skewer in his hand.

"What are you going to do with him now?" asked Hazell.

"We'll row up to the landing steps in front of the Grand Babylon. He shall be well lodged at my hotel, I promise him."

Jules spoke no word.

Before Racksole parted company with the Customs man that night Jules had been safely transported into the Grand Babylon Hotel and the two watermen had received their £10 apiece.

"You will sleep here?" said the millionaire to Mr. George Hazell. "It is late."

"With pleasure," said Hazell. The next morning he found a sumptuous breakfast awaiting him, and in his table-napkin was a Bank of England note for a hundred pounds. But, though he did not hear of them till much later, many things had happened before Hazell consumed that sumptuous breakfast.

Jules was pushed violently off the barge into the river.

TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Confession of Mr. Tom Jackson.

It happened that the small bedroom occupied by Jules during the years when he was head-waiter at the Grand Babylon had remained empty since his sudden dismissal by Theodore Racksole. No other head-waiter had been formally appointed in his place; and, indeed, the absence of one man—even the unique Jules—could scarcely have been noticed in the enormous staff of a place like the Grand Babylon. The functions of a head-waiter are generally more ornamental, spectacular, and morally impressive than useful, and it was so at the great hotel on the Embankment. Racksole accordingly had the excellent idea of transporting his prisoner, with as much secrecy as possible, to this empty bedroom. There proved to be no difficulty in doing so; Jules showed himself perfectly amenable to a show of superior force. Racksole took upstairs with him an old commissionaire who had been attached to the outdoor service of the hotel for many years—a grey-haired man, wiry as a terrier and strong as a mastiff. Entering the bedroom with Jules, whose hands were bound, he told the commissionaire to remain outside the door. Jules' bedroom was quite an ordinary apartment, though perhaps slightly superior to the usual accommodation provided for servants in the caravanserais of the West End. It was about fourteen feet by twelve.

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It was furnished with a bedstead, a small wardrobe, a small washstand and dressing-table, and two chairs. There were two hooks behind the door, a strip of carpet by the bed, and some cheap ornaments on the iron mantelpiece. There was also one electric light. The window was a little square one, high up from the floor, and it looked on the inner quadrangle. The room was on the top storey—the eighth—and from it you had a view sheer to the ground. Twenty feet below ran a narrow cornice about a foot wide; three feet or so above the window another and wider cornice jutted out, and above that was the high, steep roof of the hotel, though you could not see it from the window. As Racksole examined the window and the outlook, he said to himself that Jules could not escape by that exit, at any rate. He gave a glance up the chimney, and saw that the flue was far too small to admit a man's body.

Then he called in the commissionaire, and together they bound Jules firmly to the bedstead, allowing him, however, to lie down. All the while the captive never opened his mouth—merely smiled a smile of disdain. Finally Racksole removed the ornaments, the carpet, the chairs, and the hooks, and wrenched away the switch of the electric light. Then he and the commissionaire left the room, and Racksole locked the door on the outside and put the key in his pocket.

"You will keep watch here," he said to the commissionaire, "through the night. You can sit on this chair. Don't go to sleep. If you hear the slightest noise in the room blow your cab-whistle; I will arrange to answer the signal. If there is no noise do nothing whatever. I don't want this talked about, you understand. I shall trust you; you can trust me."

"But the servants will see me here when they get up to-morrow," said the commissionaire, with a faint smile, "and they will be pretty certain to ask what I'm doing of up here. What shall I say to 'em?"

"You've been a soldier, haven't you?" asked Racksole.

"I've seen three campaigns, sir," was the reply, and, with a gesture of pardonable pride, the grey-haired fellow pointed to the medals on his breast.

"Well, supposing you were on sentry duty and some meddlesome person in camp asked you what you were doing—what should you say?"

"I should tell him to clear off or take the consequences, and pretty quick, too."

"Do that to-morrow morning, then, if necessary," said Racksole, and departed.

It was then about one o'clock a.m. The millionaire retired to bed—not his own bed, but a bed on the seventh storey. He did not, however, sleep very long. Shortly after dawn he was wideawake, and thinking busily about Jules. He was, indeed, very curious to know Jules' story, and he determined, if the thing could be done at all, by persuasion or otherwise, to extract it from him. With a man of Theodore Racksole's temperament there is no time like the present, and at six o'clock, as the bright morning sun brought gaiety into the window, he dressed and went upstairs again to the eighth storey. The commissionaire sat stolid but alert on his chair, and, at the sight of his master, rose and saluted.

"Anything happened?" Racksole asked.

"Nothing, sir."

"Servants say anything?"

"Only a dozen or so of 'em are up yet, sir. One of 'em asked what I was playing at, and so I told her I was looking after a bull bitch and a litter of pups that you was very particular about, sir."

"Good," said Racksole, as he unlocked the door and entered the room. All was exactly as he had left it, except that Jules, who had been lying on his back, had somehow turned over and was now lying on his face. He gazed silently, scowling at the millionaire. Racksole greeted him and ostentatiously took a revolver from his hip-pocket and laid it on the dressing-table. Then he seated himself on the dressing-table by the side of the revolver, his legs dangling an inch or two above the floor.

"I want to have a talk to you, Jackson," he began.

IF YOU ARE ILL

you should at once make up your mind to be well again. To do this you should determine whether your ailment springs

FROM INDIGESTION

and whether among the pains and distress that afflicts you, any of the following symptoms appear:

Dull Headache—Low Fever—
Yellowish Eyes and Skin—
Slimy Mouth and Tongue—
Loss of Appetite—
Hunger, with Fear of Food—
Languid Feeling by Day and
Sleeplessness at Night—
General Bodily Weakness—
Heavy Feeling in the Limbs—
Little Interest in Life
And its Affairs.

MOTHER SEIGEL'S SYRUP.

"For three years I suffered all the pains and distress resulting from indigestion, and often wished, in my misery, that I was dead: Eight years have passed since Mother Seigel's Syrup put new life into me and restored me to health, and I have had no return of the complaint." Mrs. E. Elwen, 3 Russel Street, Bishop Auckland, Feb. 19th, 1904.

"It may interest you to know that since sending you my testimony in 1897, to the value of Mother Seigel's Syrup, I have continued to enjoy good health. When I think how I suffered for many years I am sorry I did not know of that great remedy sooner. Nothing did me any good but Mother Seigel's Syrup—that cured me, and I shall always feel grateful." Thomas Anderton, 50 Mill Lane, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Feb. 15th, 1904. If it has done so much for thousands like these, it

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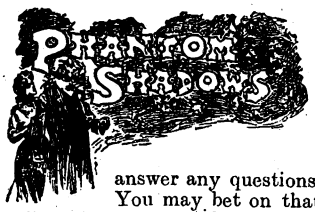

"You can talk to me as much as you like," said Jules. "I sha'n't interfere, you may bet on that."

"I should like you to answer some questions."

"That's different," said Jules. "I'm not going to answer any questions while I'm tied up like this. You may bet on that, too."

"It will pay you to be reasonable," said Racksole.

"I'm not going to answer any questions while I'm tied up."

"I'll unfasten your legs, if you like," Racksole suggested politely; "then you can sit up. It's no use you pretending you've been uncomfortable, because I know you haven't. I calculate you've been treated very handsomely, my son. There you are!" and he loosened the lower extremities of the prisoner from their bonds. "Now, I repeat, you may as well be reasonable. You may as well admit that you've been fairly beaten in the game and act accordingly. I was determined to beat you, by myself, without the police, and I've done it."

"You've done yourself," retorted Jules. "You've gone against the law. If you'd had any sense you wouldn't have meddled; you'd have left everything to the police. They'd have muddled about for a year or two, and then done nothing. Who's going to tell the police now? Are you? Are you going to give me up to 'em, and say, 'Here, I've caught him for you'? If you do they'll ask you to explain several things, and then you'll look foolish. One crime doesn't excuse another, and you'll find that out."

With unerring insight, Jules had perceived exactly the difficulty of Racksole's position, and it was certainly a difficulty which Racksole did not attempt to minimise to himself. He knew well that it would have to be faced. He did not, however, allow Jules to guess his thoughts.

"Meanwhile," he said calmly to the other, "you're here and my prisoner. You've committed a variegated assortment of crimes, and among them is murder. You are due to be hanged. You know that. There is no reason why I should call in the police at all. It will be perfectly easy for me to finish you off, as you deserve, myself. I shall only be carrying out justice, and robbing the hangman of his fee. Precisely as I brought you into the hotel, I can take you out again. A few days ago you borrowed or stole a steam yacht at Ostend. What you have done with it I don't know, nor do I care. But I strongly suspect that my daughter had a narrow escape from being murdered on your steam yacht. Now I have a steam yacht of my own. Suppose I use it as you used yours! Suppose I smuggle you on to it, steam out to sea, and then ask you to step off it into the ocean one night. Such things have been done. Such things will be done again. If I acted so, I should, at least, have the satisfaction of knowing that I had relieved society of the incubus of a scoundrel."

"But you won't," Jules murmured.

"No," said Racksole steadily, "I won't—if you behave yourself this morning. But I swear to you that if you don't I will never rest till you are dead, police or no police. You don't know Theodore Racksole."

"I believe you mean it," Jules exclaimed, with an air of surprised interest, as though he had discovered something of importance.

"I believe I do," Racksole resumed. "Now listen. At the best, you will be given up to the police. At the worst, I shall deal with you myself. With the police you may have a chance—you may get off with twenty years' penal servitude, because, though it is absolutely certain that you murdered Reginald Dimmock, it would be a little difficult to prove the case against you. But with me you would have no chance whatever. I have a few questions to put to you, and it will depend on how you answer them whether I give you up to the police or take the law into my own hands. And let me tell you that the latter course would be much simpler for me. And I would take it, too, did I not feel that you were a very clever and exceptional man, did I not have a sort of sneaking admiration for your detestable skill and ingenuity."

"You think, then, that I am clever?" said Jules. "You are right. I am. I should have been much too clever for you if luck had not been against me. You owe your victory, not to skill, but to luck."

"That is what the vanquished always say. Waterloo was a bit of pure luck for the English, no doubt, but it was Waterloo all the same."

Jules yawned elaborately. "What do you want to know?" he inquired, with politeness.

"First and foremost, I want to know the names of your accomplices inside this hotel."

"I have no more," said Jules. "Rocco was the last."

"Don't begin by lying to me. If you had no accomplice, how did you contrive that one particular bottle of Romanée-Conti should be served to his Highness Prince Eugen?"

"Then you discovered that in time, did you?" said Jules. "I was afraid so. Let me explain that that needed no accomplice. The bottle was topmost in the bin, and naturally it would be taken. Moreover, I left it sticking out a little further than the rest."

"You did not arrange that Hubbard should be taken ill?"

"I had no idea," said Jules, "that the excellent Hubbard was not enjoying his accustomed health."

"Tell me," said Racksole, "who or what is the origin of your vendetta against the life of Prince Eugen?"

"I had no vendetta against the life of Prince Eugen," said Jules, "at least, not to begin with. I merely undertook, for a consideration, to see that Prince Eugen did not have an interview with a certain Mr. Sampson Levi in London before a certain date, that was all. It seemed simple enough. I had been engaged in far more complicated transactions before. I was convinced that I could manage it, with the help of Rocco and Em—and Miss Spencer."

"Is that woman your wife?"

"She would like to be," he sneered. "Please don't interrupt. I had completed my arrangements, when you so inconsiderately bought the hotel. I don't mind admitting now that from the very moment when you came across me that night in the corridor I was secretly afraid of you, though I scarcely admitted the fact even to myself then. I thought it safer to shift the scene of our operations to Ostend. I had meant to deal with Prince Eugen in this hotel, but I decided, then, to intercept him on the Continent, and I dispatched Miss Spencer with some instructions. Troubles never come singly, and it happened just then that fool Dimmock, who had been in the swim with us, chose to prove refractory. The slightest hitch would have upset everything, and I was obliged to—to clear him off the scene. He wanted to back out—he had a bad attack of conscience, and violent measures were essential. I regret his untimely decease, but he brought it on himself. Well, everything was going serenely when you and your brilliant daughter, apparently determined to meddle, turned up again among us at Ostend. Only twenty-four hours, however, had to elapse before the date which had been mentioned to me by my employers. I kept poor little Eugen for the allotted time, and then you managed to get hold of him. I do not deny that you scored there, though, according to my original instructions, you scored too late. The time had passed, and, so far as I knew, it didn't matter a pin whether Prince Eugen saw Mr. Sampson Levi or not. But my employers were still uneasy. They were uneasy even after little Eugen had lain ill in Ostend for several weeks. It appears that they feared that even at that date an interview between Prince Eugen and Mr. Sampson Levi might work harm to them. So they applied to me again. This time they wanted Prince Eugen to be—er—finished off entirely. They offered high terms."

"What terms?"

"I had received fifty thousand pounds for the first job, of which Rocco had half. Rocco was also to be made a member of a certain famous European Order, if things went straight. That was what he coveted far more than the money—the vain fellow! For the second job I was offered a hundred thousand. A tolerably large sum. I regret that I have not been able to earn it."

(Another long instalment next week.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Conversation for Lovers.

"HAROLD" is rather a talkative young man, but when in the presence of his beloved finds it very difficult to speak at all for long periods. Whether it is that he has nothing to say, he doesn't know. What is he to do to remove this defect?

* * * * * * *

Well, "HAROLD," I think you very likely make the common mistake amongst sweethearting couples in assuming that you must only talk about yourselves and your feelings when together, while when in other people's presence you would converse on general subjects. Perhaps the topic is easily exhausted so far as you both are concerned, hence your long silences.

* * * * * * *

As a matter of fact, your sweetheart should be one who opens your mind more than anyone else, and these silences rather suggest that you have not very much in common, or you would not find conversation so difficult. When next with her, try talking just as though she were an ordinary girl, and not your beloved, though there is no reason why you should not accompany your remarks with a squeeze, to show that you have not suddenly grown cold. I rather suspect that these silent love attachments have not very much solid basis, for those who are about to unite their lives should certainly have some interests in common beside themselves. Try talking on every subject you know anything about, and she must surely find something in which she is interested.

Paint and Powder.

"MADGE" tells me she is desperately in love with a very well-known actor. This infatuation has been discovered by some of her friends, who tell her that it is immodest and unwomanly for a girl to fall in love with those far beyond her station.

* * * * * * *

Certainly, "MADGE," you do not deserve such cruel names. It is not unnatural that a powerful actor like the one you mention should have made you spell-bound. But do not delude yourself with any hope that such an affair can lead to anything. Why not be content, like many others, to worship him as a hero? After all, it is probably only his stage-self you are in love with. As a man, quite possibly he would cease to exercise any such a spell.

* * * * * * *

You will soon grow out of this infatuation, as you are only eighteen, and in a year or two will no doubt meet the right man in real life. Meanwhile, why not cure your present distraction by going and seeing as many other actors as possible? You will, by this means, see that there are many other men on the stage equally splendid, and realise that falling in love with them, "in the paint and powder," is just as foolish as losing your heart to a hero in a novel, or, for that matter, a statue.

Lottie's Friendship.

"LOTTIE" is a candid girl. She admits that her temperament is really hateful. While one day she is on the best of terms with Dolly, her particular friend, the next she becomes simply horrid. Now, Dolly has begun to get a little tired of this, and has told "LOTTIE" sorrowfully that she fears their friendship cannot continue unless "LOTTIE" tries to be nicer to her.

* * * * * * *

I think "LOTTIE" had better, in her own interest, take Dolly's suggestion seriously—at any rate, for the time being. I know quite what kind of girl she is, and think the best cure would be for her to learn to value a friend by experiencing what alienation really means. Let "LOTTIE" and Dolly not meet each other for a month, and if, at the end of that time, they find they miss each other, they will come together as a matter of course, and perhaps "LOTTIE" will have then learnt to be more careful of the little restraints necessary in preserving one's attachments.

A Sudden Change.

"H. B." has been keeping company with a girl for four years, their ages being respectively twenty-one and nineteen. All of a sudden she asked him to cease writing to her, and after that said she wished him to give her up, not, however, assigning any reason. He has since seen a good deal of her, but thinks her views have changed as regards his suit.

* * * * * * *

Well, "H. B.," a girl's ideas often undergo a great change in four years, and you should not be very much surprised if there has been some modification in her early liking for you. I don't wish to discourage you, but her attitude may be explained by the fact that, while she is still fond of your friendship, she no longer thinks of you as a sweetheart. Ask her definitely to tell you the truth, and, if it is as I surmise, face it like a man.

* * * * * * *

I am always ready to sympathise with real disappointments and troubles in love. But for a young man of twenty-one, with his future to carve out for himself, to allow his thoughts to be distracted and his whole life confused out of a speculative wonder as to whether this or that girl loves, or merely likes him, or a dozen other small questions, is not to be encouraged. If she does not love you any longer, cease worrying about it, and spend your time trying to get on in the world.

Love or Money.

"FIDO" was once a groom, but is now a publican with means. When a groom a young lady with whom he walked out disdained his suit because of his poverty. Now that he is better off she has discovered she loves him. But meanwhile he has taken up with another damsel, who it appears always loved him.

* * * * * * *

I think you should obey your own feelings in this matter. Whom do you love the better—the girl who thought you were not good enough for her until you got your present position, or the girl who loved you all along? You should certainly marry the one you really love, and agree to let bygones be bygones. At the same time, the young lady who only began to think of you as a husband when you improved your finances would seem to be rather a worldly individual, and if I had the settlement of the matter, I should be strongly inclined to seal the union between you and the other one, whose love for you would appear to be the more enduring. But if it is the first one you love, don't hesitate to take her back to your bosom, if you can do it without breaking anyone's heart.

Cynthia

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No. 806. Week ending June 11, 1904.] [PRICE ONE PENNY.

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SHORT STORIES

No. 806.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending June 11th, 1904.

A SUMMER HOLIDAY.

Relating the Events That Happened Therein.

GRACE and I were inseparable friends. We were "two daughters of one race"—that is to say, cousins in the third degree; but there the likeness ended, for, as Tennyson puts it, "she was the fairer in the face," and rich, while I was only a poor little insignificant nursery-governess. It was a wonder to me how a creature so divinely made could so love plain little me; but, as I said before, we were inseparable.

We were both orphans; her father died, leaving all his large fortune to his only child. My parents died, leaving me an empty pocket, but too proud a heart to live—as she implored me to—on her ample means.

A great and unexpected pleasure had come to me that summer of which I write. Grace's aunt on her father's side had written her to come and spend a summer in her country home, and had told her to take me also.

I, whom the very sight of a mound of sweet-scented hay almost sent crazy, and to whom the dream of strolling through country lanes, filling my hands full of flowers, and my heart full of love to the Giver of so much beauty, was as a dream of Paradise—I was invited to spend a summer in the country.

We started, Grace and I. I noticed how everyone turned and looked at the stately figure in its dainty dress; and in my love I said:

"Queen Grace, how beautiful you are!"

Softly laughing, she touched my cheek with her finger.

"Wait till three months from now, when this pale, thin cheek has rounded out, and see who will be beautiful then."

Mrs. Rogers' carriage, an old-fashioned country vehicle, awaited us at the station, and there, holding the door open was the most handsome young man I have ever seen.

He helped us in, and then clambered to his seat.

As soon as the wheels were in motion, and we could talk without being heard, I asked Grace if she had noticed what a handsome face our driver had. Grace looked at me a little surprised for a moment and then, with a comical expression in her dark eyes, lectured me thus:

"Dot, you romantic, foolish child! You are so infatuated with the country that the glamour extends over everything you see, I verily believe. Why, Phil is only a fair specimen of a country youth; you'll see plenty of them before you go home."

When we reached the house I almost screamed with delight. It was a low, long building, built of stone and covered with ivy, which grew and twined around every quaint, lattice-framed window. At the door stood Mrs. Rogers' housekeeper; but no hospitable lady was there, ready to greet her guests with cordial welcome.

"Why, Betsy, where's auntie?" asked Grace as we alighted.

Then Betsy informed us that Mrs. Rogers had been called suddenly away to nurse a friend through a severe illness, who, living all alone, had no one to care for her.

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"She told me to tell you, Miss Grace, to make yourselves at home, and do and have everything you wish, and in a week she hopes to be back."

And so we found ourselves, two young girls, mistresses of a great place, with permission to do just what we chose for a week.

The next morning we set out after breakfast to take a long ramble—a "tour of discovery," Grace called it. We walked soberly along for a time, but the exhilarating country air fired my blood, and I proposed a race.

Grace, that tree—who'll reach it first?" And off we started.

We must have looked very odd, running at the top of our speed, and Grace particularly so; for her luxuriant hair came loose and fell in a heavy, gleaming shower all over her radiant face.

Just then a pony trap rolled along, and leaning back in it as if weary, while the coachman drove, was a gentleman.

He turned as he passed, and favoured us with a glance from the blackest eyes set in the whitest face I ever saw.

"Oh, Dot! this is dreadful! Look at my hair!" said Grace.

With my aid she soon fastened it up, and we resumed our walk, and continued it more quietly.

When we reached home we described the pony trap to Betsy.

"Oh, yes, that's Mr. Ralph Ogden. Your aunt knows him, Miss Grace. He bought the Waverley place last spring, and has been there ever since. He is a great invalid, and leads a lonely life, I should think."

"Poor young man! How sad it must be to have ill-health," said Grace; while I thought how lovely she looked with compassion in her sweet eyes.

In the afternoon we were all ready for anything that might turn up, and who should come to the sitting-room door but Phil, to know if we would like a ride. So we started. We chatted along together for a while, and then a deep voice chimed in the conversation.

The haughty little head beside me erected itself a trifle more haughtily. But I replied, for I liked the handsome, manly young fellow from the very first, and why was I to feel above him simply because he wore rough clothes and worked on a farm? Of course, it was different with Grace. We soon were engaged in an animated conversation. I felt no small degree of amazement at his versatile power of expression on any of the topics, some of which I acknowledged I mischievously touched upon to try him.

Before a great while Grace's hauteur vanished, and then it would have been hard to find three gayer, more joyous young people.

That night in our room Grace made the discovery that she had lost her comb, a pretty thing of pearl and tortoise-shell.

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We saw a good deal of Philip after that first day, and Betsy looked on with a pleased though rather odd smile, I thought, as we came in time after time from frolics in the barn or fields, and she saw Phil leave us at the door.

It was three days after the race in which Grace lost her comb, when we were surprised to see that same pony trap roll through the farm-gate up to the door. Betsy brought a little package to our room, and it was explained.

It was the lost comb, and with it a note which ran thus :

"LADIES,—*Excuse the liberty I take in addressing you. The inclosed comb was found by my man on Tuesday afternoon. As I met two young ladies this morning very near the place where it was found, I presumed it must belong to one of them. In conclusion, let me say that if at any time you would like to ramble through my grounds, you may do so with no fear of intrusion.—Yours respectfully,*

"RALPH OGDEN."

We had often looked with longing eyes into the exquisitely laid out grounds, and so we made up our minds to avail ourselves of the permission just received.

"Ah!" thought I, "here is the romance I always expected would come to Grace. This young man will meet her, fall in love, get well, and so forth, and so forth."

And already I beheld my queen, robed in white, standing before the altar. I stopped there with a little internal laugh at my own folishness.

To return to my story. We started the next day, and, after a time, found ourselves walking through fairy-land. What a bewilderment of beauty each step revealed! Circles of many-hued flowers, with fountains playing in their fragrant midst. Here and there a laughing Flora or a gay Terpsichore, peeped in snowy marble from the background of vivid green. Finally, quite tired out with admiring, we seated ourselves on a tempting rustic seat.

"What a pity such a charming place hasn't more people to enjoy it? Mr. Ogden should have a wife. Don't you think so, Dot?"

I did not answer, but motioned Grace to be still, for, looking round, I had seen a pitiful sight. Behind the clump of trees near which we sat was swung a hammock very near the ground. In it lay Mr. Ogden. His right leg seemed to be in some kind of bandage, to which was attached a weight. I was again struck by his extreme pallor, and, even with his eyes closed—for he was asleep—by the expression of pain and suffering on his face.

By this time Grace had seen the reason of my motion, and we stood for a moment in silence, then turned and retraced our steps. It seemed very sad to us, buoyant with life and health, to see one with so much to enjoy marking the moments only by the pain they brought.

So the week passed, and Monday brought Mrs. Rogers back again.

I loved her at once as I saw how she took my darling in her arms, first held her off to admire her, and then kissed her again and again.

"And this is the Dot I have heard so much of? My dear, I feel as if I knew you already."

I noticed what a bright, merry twinkle the kind eyes had in them, and knew our good times had only begun. Of course, it soon was told how we had spent our time and all about everything. When I told her how very kind Phil had been, and how many pleasures we had enjoyed through him, Mrs. Rogers' face fairly beamed.

"There! I knew when I told Phil to see to you how well he would do it!"

It was not often I had seen Queen Grace blush, but as I glanced at her then, for some unaccountable reason, her face was rosy red to the little ear tips.

Then we told the incident of the comb. We found Mrs. Rogers was well acquainted with Mr. Ogden, and we learnt the cause of his isolation and delicate health.

He and his mother had been living in London the previous winter. They were all in all to each other, her husband being dead and he the only child. There broke out an awful fire in their house one cold, windy night, and all that human aid could do failed to check the fell destroyer. Wakened out of a deep sleep by the terrible cry of "Fire!" the son's first thought was of his mother. Springing from his bed, he rushed into the hall, only to be driven back by the mingled smoke and flame. Again he attempted to gain his mother's room, and succeeded. By that time a ladder was up to the window, and voices below clamoured for him to hasten, for his life was in danger.

With his now unconscious burden in his arms, he began to descend, when, with a great crash, and amid cries of horror, the ladder broke, and precipitated them to the ground below. Mrs. Ogden never wakened from her merciful unconsciousness, and for weeks her son lay between life and death.

"He will never have the use of his right leg," said Mrs. Rogers, as we sat listening with suspended breath, "although the doctors think after a time he will be able to walk without pain, with the aid of a crutch."

Now our hostess had returned, the time flew more rapidly than ever. She introduced us to the girls of the neighbourhood; sweet, modest country girls, with that innate refinement that stamps the lady in town or country.

We finally became acquainted with Mr. Ogden. Some time after we first met him Grace's aunt gave a garden-party. Mr. Ogden was invited, but of course we never thought for a moment he would come. There could not be much pleasure in such an affair to one in his delicate health.

So we thought, but he did come.

Grace looked more like a queen than ever; and as we sat together I noticed Mr. Ogden's eyes seemed to have a persistent habit of wandering our way.

I never did see so much enjoyment in anyone's face as shone in Mr. Ogden's as he watched the merry games in which Philip—not in his working suit to-day—and Grace were always leaders. I sat by him for a long while, doing my little best to entertain him, and being most splendidly entertained instead. He told me of his travels in sunny Italy and vine-clad France, and then of the stern beauties of the snow-capped peaks of Switzerland; and I, who had never been out of England, listened, if not "open-mouthed," very near it.

Never had I seen my calm Grace so wildly, fitfully gay as she was all that day; and I was startled that night to awake and hear her sobbing violently. Alarmed, I asked what was the matter. Then lying cheek to cheek in the darkness, Grace confessed to me that she had lost her heart.

"And, oh, Dot," she whispered, "I have something to tell you—no one knows it but auntie—I am betrothed, and not to the one I love. He was a cousin of my father's, and, of course, the same relation to auntie. When papa died, he made me promise solemnly that I would keep true to the agreement he made with the young man's father, that when their children grew up they should marry. He said he would die happier, knowing my future was secure, and I wouldn't be married for my fortune."

"Where is he, Grace?" I asked.

"He is abroad. I never saw him, Dot, for when he visited my father and stated his willingness to carry out his parent's wishes, I was at school."

"But, darling, if you don't love him, will you marry him?"

She turned wearily and kissed me.

"Dot, I never broke my word, and I never will."

It did not occur to me to ask Grace who it was she loved, for of course I knew. There was only one, in my eyes, who was noble enough in rank, wealth, and qualities of mind and heart to mate with my darling. Long after she had fallen asleep, I was conscious of a dull pain at my own heart. We had both of us seen a great deal of Mr. Ogden, and I had grown to find his friendship very sweet.

"Does being married change one's feelings for one's friends I wonder?" was my last thought as I, too, fell asleep.

Then came the climax to all the wonderful days of that wonderful summer. The following afternoon Mrs. Rogers

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came and told me that Mr. Ogden wanted to see me in the library.

"To see me? Are you sure it isn't Grace?" I asked.

"Quite sure," she answered; and I went down, speculating much in my mind what he could want of me. Before I quite got to the door I thought I knew.

He, too, wanted to make a confidante of me, and to tell me of his love for my friend.

Smiling to myself at the idea, I went in.

He stood awaiting me, leaning on his crutches.

"Oh, Mr. Ogden, don't stand!" I cried, and hastened to wheel an easy chair towards him.

A slight frown passed over his face.

"Miss Dot, indeed it causes me scarcely any pain to use my limb now; it is growing rapidly better."

But he sat down, and I took a seat near him. It was nearer than I should have supposed, for before I knew what was happening, I found myself drawn close to his side, and completely incircled by his arms. And these were the words I heard:

"Oh, my little darling! My precious little one! Don't you know how madly I love you?"

Aghast, I drew myself away, although it was bliss to stay there, for, oh, what I then felt never comes twice in a lifetime; and I knew it was love. Still, I drew myself away.

His beautiful, pale face flushed as he let me go, and said in an infinitely sad tone:

"Can it be possible that it wasn't love I have seen looking at me from those bonny brown eyes?"

Then I faltered out that I thought it was Grace he loved; and, as I spoke, an overwhelming sense of pain at the thought of what my darling had told me, and of the grief she must suffer, caused me to break down, and, hiding my face, burst into a passion of tears.

How he comforted me I cannot tell, but I was comforted; and whether it was disloyal or not, I couldn't help it. When he asked me again, I told him all he wanted to know—how I loved him, and him only, passionately, entirely.

I must have looked like a guilty thing when, after he had gone, I went into the room where Grace and her aunt were. Mrs. Rogers said, as I came in:

"Well, dear, are we to congratulate you or not?"

I stole a shamefaced look at Grace, and there she stood, dimpling and smiling at my confusion. With a sudden rush I sprang to her arms, and was clasped to her heart. I saw I had made a mistake, and it wasn't my Ralph whom she loved.

Afterwards I would have been as happy as a mortal could be if it hadn't been for Grace, who, after the first joy for me was over, became very quiet again.

Ralph took us all over my future home. (It didn't seem possible to imagine little me amid such magnificence.) In his room he showed me a sketch of a lovely face, and I knew directly who it was, for it was a copy of his own.

Mrs. Rogers had persisted in my being married from her house, and as Ralph wished it to be so soon, it was arranged that I was not to return to town until I was a bride. The day was drawing very near, and as I sat singing lightly over my sewing, Grace suddenly rushed into the room, and, handing me a letter, sank on the floor by my side all in a heap. It was from Mr. Leith (her betrothed), and he was coming to claim his promised bride that evening.

"Dot," she said, with her face hidden on my lap, "do you know who it is that I love?"

Now, since I knew it wasn't Ralph, I had often wondered who had won Grace's heart, and had made up my mind it must be someone in her fashionable town circle whom I had never met. My surprise may be imagined when, on replying that I didn't know, she said it was Philip.

"Queen Grace, you in love with a farmer boy!"

I did not intend to wound, but Grace sprang to her feet with flashing eyes.

"Dot, I am disappointed in you. Cannot a man be a farmer and a gentleman?"

Then the fury died out of her eyes, and she sank down again to her old position.

"Yes, it is Philip—noble Philip," with a loving intonation of the name, "and he loves me; but I am bound by my promise."

In the room in which we were was a deep recess, curtained away from the rest of the apartment by heavy damask draperies. Just then the curtains parted, and Philip sprang out. He darted to my side and raised my darling up in his strong arms.

"Ah, Grace, my own, I can carry on this cruel farce no longer. I, whom you have called Philip Port, am Philip Leith, and you are my promised bride."

My darling's dark eyes dilated as they looked up into his face for a moment, and the white lids closed.

It was the best thing that could have happened. I called Mrs. Rogers, and she comprehended things at a glance, and in our anxious ministrations to Grace we all became our natural selves again.

When Grace came to, everything was explained.

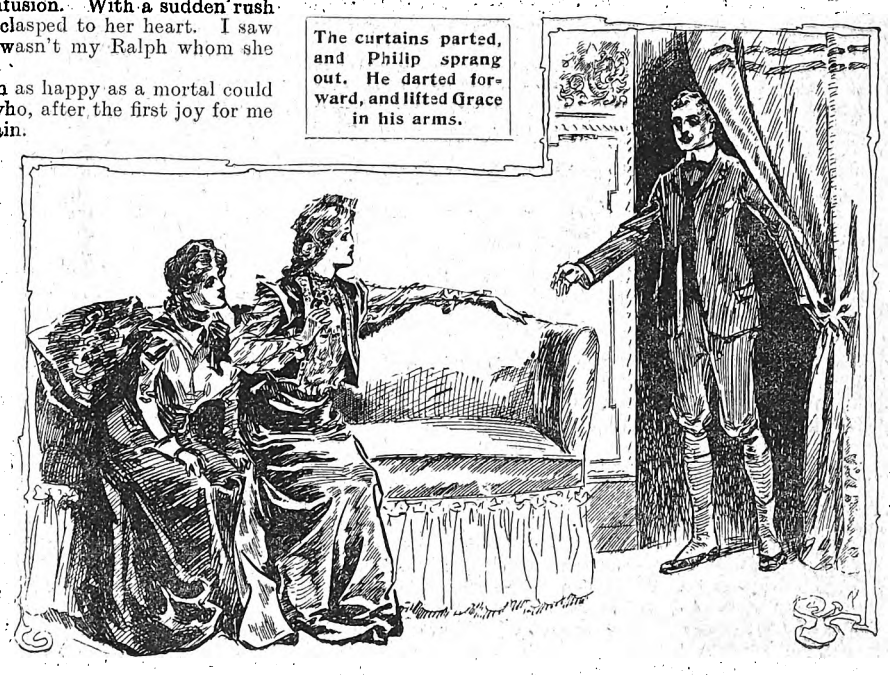
It was a plot arranged between Philip and Mrs. Rogers.

He did not wish to marry without love, and her invitation to us and the sudden call away were all a deep-laid conspiracy to bring the two together more effectually.

How it succeeded has been seen, and all I have to tell is that that wonderful summer in the country ended in two weddings, and four young people emerged from the rose-spectacled land of courtship into the broad sunshine of wedded bliss.

Philip and Grace built a beautiful home near us, and we are as inseparable as ever.

Lucy Jennings.



The curtains parted, and Philip sprang out. He darted forward, and lifted Grace in his arms.

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A Game of Cross . . . . Purposes.

Telling of a Man's First and Only Love.

It is the old story I am about to tell; that story to which, thank Heaven! people never tire of listening, any more than we do of seeing the buds swell, and the leaves unfolding, and the world made young again by the coming of Spring—the story, to which as we listen our youth comes back, and once more the flowers bloom, and the skies are blue, and our hearts are beating joyously, and it is May.

I am not young now; nor is the day on which I am soberly writing this little record of a long past period, a balmy one of Spring, or anything like it. And yet May comes freshly back to me as I recall that day of which I am going to speak.

A lark was singing far up in the blue sky, a few sheep were pasturing in the green distance, and a tall figure, dressed in grey, with a gun on its arm, and one or two dogs frisking round it, was coming leisurely along the sea-wall. I had been fully intent, but the minute before, upon the sketch of the old boat I was making; but now I felt nothing but the beating of my heart, and saw nothing but Mark Sutherland coming, with his dogs playing round him.

The little picture was never finished, for at the instant that I became conscious of the advancing figure, I dropped my brush, and hopelessly ruined my canvas by a great smear of Vandyke-brown. It was never finished, no—but I have it still.

He was a long way off when I first saw him, and yet it seemed almost the next instant that he was standing beside me, speaking. My heart had not left off beating, and I could feel the colour hot in my face as I looked up, but my fiery little terrier took exception to his dogs, and flew at them with tumultuous disapproval, taking his attention off me for the moment.

When this little fracas was quieted, he put down his gun on the bank, made his retrievers lie beside it, and sat down himself by me.

"Have you had good sport?" I asked, by way of saying something—anything.

"No," he answered; "but I can't complain; I didn't expect any. I came out here because I thought I should see you, and I wanted to tell you a piece of news, and ask you a question."

"News is a precious commodity, indeed, in these wilds; but please remember my Scottish blood, in expecting an answer to the question."

He did not seem to be attending to what I said; he had taken up one of my brushes and was absently playing with it, but he threw it down the next minute, and said softly:

"Hester, I have got an appointment that I have been trying for, and I shall leave for Australia next month—there's my news."

My heart that had been beating so wildly seemed to stand suddenly still, and drop down—down. The water and the green marsh rocked, blended hazily into each other and the sky; and then a voice that sounded dim and far off, but was my own, too, said: "It is good news, I suppose."

"Good news! Well, yes, I hope so."

He stopped a minute here. His voice was a very deep one, for he was a big, full-chested man; but when he spoke again it had a soft undertone in it, that used to ring in my ears afterwards—it does now.

"I thought it good news this morning, for without it I could not think of a wife. That troubled me little enough till lately—till, ah! till I knew you, Hester. My dear, I think you have guessed my question."

Guessed it! Ah! yes. But my face was down upon my hands; he could not hear the cry that was stifling in my heart, and he went on gently, pitilessly:

"But I shall not get an answer to it. Well, then, Hester, will you marry me? Will you go with me to Australia?"

I did not answer—I could not. Ah! those who have had deliberately to kill their own happiness, to raise up themselves the barrier that shuts them out from hope, and love, and life, will know how hard it is—will pity me.

"Will you be my wife, and go with me to Australia?"

"I cannot." And no wonder he made a sudden movement of surprise, for I, myself, wondered to hear the hoarse passion of my own voice.

"You cannot! What a fool I have been, then. I thought—I hoped—Hester, is it possible that you have not known what I have been thinking of all this time?"

Known what he had been thinking about? Ah! the life, and light, and joy of those moments when I had dared to hope that I did. Ah! the anguish of feeling now that they had all been in vain!

"Look at me, Hester. I don't think I understand you, my dear," he said patiently and gently. "You say you cannot be my wife, and yet—tell me you cannot love me, and I am answered at once."

He put his arm over my shoulder as I leant forward, with my face buried in my lap, and whispered:

"I think you love me, Hester."

"Oh, I do, Mark, I do!" I cried, lifting my head; "but I cannot marry you—I shall have to give you up."

"Give me up, my dear love!" and he held me closer.

"I cannot go to Australia."

"Why not?" And he looked half-amazed, half-amused.

I could not bear the glance of his kind, dark eyes. I shrank away from his arm, and said:

"I canno' leave Milly."

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To my own thinking, I had pronounced our doom now; but Mark Sutherland only laughed, and said:

"Well, then, you shall not; Miss Milly shall go, too."

"Ah! if that could only be; but Milly would die in Australia. We came back to England from Australia because the climate was killing her."

"And you will not leave her?"

"I promised mamma, before she died, that I never would; that if I married it should not separate us; that my home should be Milly's till she did not need it," I answered, faltering under something in the look of his face that was new to me. Up to this time I had been thinking of myself; now I was reminded that I was giving pain to him.

He was silent two or three minutes, looking away into the distance. He had taken his hand from my shoulder.

"Well, Hester," said he presently, gravely, not unkindly—but, ah! as it seemed to me, very coldly, "you have simply to choose between your sister and myself. You are the best judge of your sister's claims upon you; of my own, I will only say that I love you. I never thought nor cared much about women till I saw you, so I am not likely to change my liking or to forget it, and if you had married me—but I will not try and plead my cause against your sister's. It is for you to decide, and for me to abide by your decision."

I looked desperately up to the smiling, blue heavens, at the calm stream flowing on its tranquil path to the sea, and prayed, with a prayer so passionate that it seemed like a loud demand, that I might not be forced into slaying with my own hands the young happiness of my life.

"I cannot and will not do it," I said in my heart; yet, knowing the while that I could, and must

Then Mark spoke again.

"Would you like a little time to consider the matter? I need not leave the Hollies till to-morrow evening, or, perhaps, the next day."

"No," I answered—with or without my own will, I never knew. "I know what I must do. I cannot leave Milly."

"And Milly cannot go. That decides it, then. Well, I have nothing to say; I am the last man in the world to try to persuade anyone against his judgment." He rose deliberately, but did not go, for I sat still. "Are you going home?" he asked, after a minute. "Hester, don't look so sad; you are feeling for me—don't do that. I should like to think of you when I am over the seas, as happy as I would have tried to have made you. Think of me sometimes as a friend. I don't expect to forget you, Hester. Good-bye."

His hand, as he held it out, shook over so slightly, but it held mine in a firm pressure for an instant. Then he let it drop, stooped and picked up his gun, whistled his dogs round him, and strode away again without once turning to look back.

Milly and I were orphans. Our father and mother had both died in Australia, and we were sent home to the care of our sole relation, my father's only sister, an elderly maiden lady, living in a kind of lady-like poverty at a dull little village in Hampshire. Aunt Maggie died when I was seventeen and Milly twelve, leaving to us the little cottage that had been her home and ours, with everything it contained; no very valuable bequest, but all the poor soul had to leave; and here Milly and I—not heiresses, no, but not destitute either—continued to live with the dear old servant, who had been our aunt's faithful friend and companion, and our own kind and affectionate nurse ever since, fatherless and motherless, we had returned from Australia.

There were not many people to visit at Wincham; the rector, the doctor, and the Sutherland family comprised them. I think we were most intimate at the Hollies; for the children there were Milly's contemporaries, and her sworn admirers and friends. I first saw Mark Sutherland at the Hollies; he was Mr. Sutherland's cousin, and I had heard of him often before I saw him. He had led a wild, adventurous kind of life, wandering all over the world for his simple pleasure, I suppose, since I never heard that he had any other object in doing so. I had formed my idea of him, to be sure; the reality was not in the least like it. No, quite otherwise; and yet, after the first five minutes, I would not have changed the real man for the ideal, for worlds.

Do not suppose that I speculated much upon Mark's character in these days; such as he was I loved him, dearly loved him; ah, he would never know how dearly, for had I not given him up?

As one in a dream I went home; as in a dream I crawled slowly up the steep, winding lawn to our cottage; saw Milly hanging on the garden-gate watching for me, come flying out on to the lawn to meet me, all her golden hair streaming straight out behind her, heard her call me, scold me for being late; my own voice answering her; saw and heard all the familiar sights and sounds of every-day life, as we do sometimes in dreams, all made strange and perplexing by some dreadful sense of pain and trouble.

"Hetty," said Milly, as we sat at tea, "you're not eating anything; you look pale and glum; you've sat out in the sun till it has made you ill. I shall not allow it to occur again, mind that."

It pleased Milly to play the elder sister, and I was always content that the little one should do what pleased her. She was my darling, the one thing that my solitary life gave me to love till I saw Mark; I had set up my idol long ago, but it was going to cost me dear.

I remember that the child was in more than usually high spirits on that evening, that she teased me to talk to her, sing to her, and finally flew up to bed in a childish fit of anger because I could do neither one nor the other.

At any other time I should have gone after her, coaxed and caressed her into good temper; but now, with a feeling of relief that she was gone, I sat at the window, staring out into the dark, scented night, and counted the cost of my sacrifice.

Long, long, I sat there; long after the moon had risen, had set, and the stars began to grow pale before that streak of grey light in the east.

I thought of Mark, of what I had done, of what I had given up, till I was nearly mad. I hope that I was mad, for when I stood up and closed the window before going up to my room, I had said to myself that I would write to Mark Sutherland when morning came, and tell him that I had chosen once more between the two I loved, and chosen differently. Therefore I hope that I was mad, but I went upstairs quite resolved and quiet; I undressed without even once glancing towards the bed where my little sister lay; I meant to lie down on my pillow without doing so; but oh! I could not say my prayers and yet leave Milly without the kiss I always gave her before I slept.

So I went up to the bed and looked down upon what had for years been my sole earthly treasure. The child looked pale in the cold, grey dawn; her golden hair was tossed wildly back from her face, and covered the pillow; and while I stood still and gazed, my madness dying away, my old self coming back, she stirred in her sleep; two great tears

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welled out from the closed eyes, and with a sob she murmured: "Hetty."

Then I knelt down in the grey dawning, and thanked God that my madness has passed, and prayed that as He had given me strength to make the sacrifice, so He would help me never to repent it.

I did not see Mark Sutherland again; but the next time Milly went up to the Hollies, she told me, on her return, "that he had left the Hollies, gone away to Australia, and was never coming back again." My heart echoed the words, but I drew Milly to me and kissed her, and tried to be patient and to forget.

I could not forget; my nature was tenacious of what it had once taken hold upon, and the course of our lives was too uniform and monotonous to permit change and variety to have their usual influence. I scarcely knew, after Mark went away, how the days and years glided by, their course was so unmarked, and everything seemed so unchanged. At first I used to shrink and shiver at the chance mention of Mark Sutherland's name at the Hollies; that passed, and I pined to hear of him with a weary, anxious longing seldom satisfied.

They ceased to speak of him after a while, as people do of a long absent friend, and by degrees it seemed as if he were only remembered in one poor woman's heart, who almost came to think of him, too, as if he had been removed by death. So that, when one day Milly came back from the Hollies, and said, as she untied her hat and threw it down: "Hester, guess; who in the world do you think came to the Hollies last night?" not even my thoughts suggested the right person.

"No, no," said Milly, as I named one or two; "no; who but that cousin Mark who went away to Australia years ago! I was a mere child at the time, but I remembered him instantly—a compliment he did not return, by-the-way; though when he heard who I was, he asked after you."

Years ago, was it, since Mark went away? No! as Milly spoke, it seemed only yesterday; the joy, the sorrow, the old pain, so freshly new, were throbbing so wildly once more at my heart. He had not quite forgotten me then; but did he remember me as I remembered him?

"I do believe you have forgotten all about him," Milly went on; "and, let me tell you, I wonder at that, for I remember he used to seem fond of talking to you, Hetty. and he is a kind of man that women may be proud of attracting, none the less because he cares very little, I should say, for women in general."

"Really, Milly, dear, you seem to have studied Mr. Sutherland very closely, considering this may be called your first acquaintance with him."

She laughed, blushed, and threw back her beautiful golden hair.

"No, I don't know that I have; he devoted himself to me a good deal this evening, and I couldn't help forming my opinion, you know. There is to be a croquet-party to-morrow at the Hollies, and Mr. Sutherland made me promise to come up, and to bring you, if you would come; but I told him beforehand that I knew you would not, knowing your dislike to that delectable means for the promotion of flirting."

And after this it happened that Milly went nearly every day up to the Hollies; while I, who had long ago ceased to care for any companionship beside my sister's, sat at home longing with a feverish longing to see Mark Sutherland once more, and yet dreading, with a sickening dread, to meet the careless, estranged glance of the dark eyes that had looked into mine once, full of love.

It seemed that Mark not infrequently accompanied Milly part of the way home, but he never came near enough to our cottage for me to catch even the most distant glimpse of him, and my little sister had somehow ceased to talk of him after the first. So, though I still knew he stayed at the Hollies, he might almost have been across the wide ocean, as far as I was concerned. And yet—oh, no!—the sense of his presence seemed borne to me upon every breath of the sweet summer air that floated into my room. I could not sleep at night, nor rest calmly by day; and often, while Milly was with her friends, I used to wander out, scarce heeding where I went, impatient only of rest.

One day, when this terrible yearning was strong upon me, I took my sketching materials from force of habit, and set out to walk to a pretty wood some distance away.

The cool, green fragrance of the leafy shadows was grateful after the glaring sunshine, and I sat down to rest where it felt coolest. But a sudden sound of laughter and merry voices close at hand startled me, and not waiting to see who the speakers were, I got up and fled swiftly down the darkest and most tangled of the paths that branched away into the heart of the wood.

I soon left the merry voices far behind me, and, slackening my walk, I wandered on, dreamy and absorbed as ever till, suddenly turning into another path, I saw what caused me to stand still and forget everything but what my eyes looked upon. Mark Sutherland! Yes, Mark, older, darker, thinner, but Mark himself. Ah, how the picture of a day that had passed, all floated before me as I saw the downward bend of his stately head to look into the face beside him—the face that looked up again into his with those candid eyes, and a smile on the soft, parted lips.

The smile seemed to reflect itself upon Mark's grave face for an instant, and then he took up a little hand lying on his arm, and kissed it tenderly.

I looked no longer. I crept away; stricken with a dumb anguish, a dreadful, sullen despair, I crept away and went home. For I knew the candid blue eyes, and the sweet smile, and the floating golden hair; and they were my sister Milly's.

Oh! Had I not done enough? Had I not sacrificed enough? Was my cup not yet so full but that this bitter drop must be added to its overflow?

So I cried in my anguish, and it was long before better thoughts came to me, or that, coming, I could hold them firmly and take comfort. But by-and-bye I rose up from where I had flung myself down, and sat by the window to watch for Milly. She came along presently in the quiet evening light, and I looked at her with eyes freshly opened. I had never yet ceased to think of her as a child; I realised in one minute now that the child was a woman. I looked at the beautiful, fresh, young face, and involuntarily glanced at the reflection of my own in the mirror opposite. I never could have been in my best days what Milly was; and now—I turned away with a sigh from the image of that faded woman, with pale lips and weary, dark eyes.

Milly came in the next instant, threw off her hat, and, coming up beside me, took my face between her two soft hands, looked into it tenderly for a minute, then kissed me, and sat down with her arms round me.

"Hetty, my dear, I have something to tell you," she began, with a strange tremble in her voice, though she was smiling, too; "a wonderful thing. I don't think you would ever guess it, or I should say 'Guess'!"

"And what if I am cleverer than you give me credit for, and do guess it, Milly, dear?" I asked, pressing the little one close to my throbbing heart.

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"You never could; and yet—how your heart is beating!" she said, looking up at me timidly—"I believe you really know." Then, sinking her face down to my shoulder once more, she added, almost in a whisper: "Hester, he told me to ask you whether you would see him to-morrow?"

"'He' means Mr. Sutherland, of course!"

"Of course, Hester; do you mean to say yes?" asked Milly, stealing another of those timid glances at me.

"My 'yes' will go with yours, Milly, dear."

"God bless you, Hester!—my darling, my dear, dear sister," cried Milly fervently; and for a long while we were both silent. Nor, indeed, did she mention Mr. Sutherland's name again, nor return in any way to the subject, till about the middle of the next day, when she suddenly sprang up from her place by the window, and, glancing at me with a vivid blush and smile, ran out of the room, and I heard her fly upstairs.

Then I knew who was coming, and I sat still, because to move would have been out of my power. So, when he entered the room, I sat, and though I held out my hand and tried to utter a greeting, I knew that my lips only murmured inarticulately. He looked at me as he held my hand in a momentary grasp, and I thought there were both pain and a shocked surprise in his face—then he began:

"I have not come unexpectedly, I hope? Milly promised to ask you—to tell you——"

"She did tell me; I expected you," I strove to say, and, I hope, said it quietly.

"Did you guess why I wanted to see you?" he asked, with that directness of speech I remembered so well.

"Yes, I even went so far as that," I answered, and smiled. Oh! what a wintry smile, if it did not belie my heart.

"Of course, I could only have one purpose in asking to see you again," he went on quickly—"but, ah! Hester, what will you say to me this time?"

"What does Milly say?"

"Milly, always Milly still! But, Hester, it is for you to answer me first," he said; and abruptly walking from his position on the hearth, he came and sat down by me.

"Hester—I must call you so—did your sister tell you what I said to her yesterday?"

"She let me infer it."

"Infer—how absurd. Nothing like plain speaking to express a plain meaning," he broke out, rather impetuously. "But you are so cold and unlike your old self, Hester, that I could almost take it for an answer to what I came to ask. Did Milly tell you that yesterday—for I have grown to love the little girl dearly—Hester! Hester! What have I said? What is the matter?"

I hated, despised myself for the weakness, but the mortal struggle of yesterday was not done yet. I could not hear this man, whom I had loved so long, so deeply, avow to my face his transferred affection to my sister, and be unmoved. Involuntarily I grasped the arm of my chair for support, for my very life seemed fading from me in the struggle. He bent over me, he lifted my faint head on to his broad breast, but I shrank from him feebly.

"It is nothing. I am often faint. I am quite well again. You were saying—yes, go on, Mr. Sutherland."

"I was saying—ah! Hester—I think I need not go on—you are so changed, my dear," he said, looking down at me with sorrowful perplexity. "Well, well, Milly led me on to hope; but I ought to have known better. You never cared for me in the beginning, as I did for you."

"Surely, surely, that bygone ought to be a bygone now!" I cried out bitterly.

"If you say that, it ought indeed," he answered, turning from me; "but I told you then, Hester, that I should never forget you; and from something Milly said, and your remaining unmarried, I was wild enough to dream—to hope——".

Something—a light that dazzled my poor eyes—was breaking in upon me as he spoke.

"Mark!" said I, "what did you come here to-day to ask me?"

"The same question that I asked eight years ago, Hester. I have done with Australia; I am no longer a poor man, and I want the woman I always loved. Hester, is this really true? Is she to be mine at last?"

For a long, long time, I think, after this, we forgot the existence of anyone else beside ourselves. Then I told Mark the little game of cross-purposes we had been playing. His incredulous wonder that I could imagine he had ever thought of anyone but me, touched me to the heart.

"Poor Milly," he said; "so you would have put her off with the reversion of a heart. No, when she marries, may she be what you are, Hester—her husband's 'first love and his last.'"

Hilda Campbell.

A STATEMENT OF GREAT IMPORTANCE TO YOU IS MADE ON PAGE 751.

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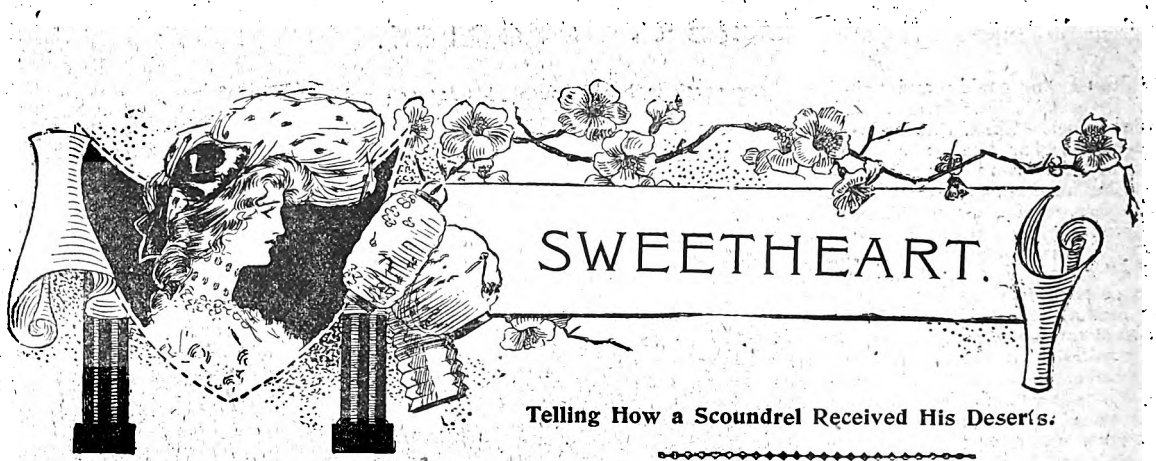

SWEETHEART.

Telling How a Scoundrel Received His Deserts.

"SWEETHEART!"

There was no reply. Burly, broad-shouldered John Percival turned to his newly-wedded second wife with a smile.

"We are a little early," he said, "and she is probably smartening herself up for your benefit, dear."

Mrs. Percival smiled in return. She was a pretty, bright-faced girl of little more than twenty with whom John Percival had fallen in love, and whom he had, in his sturdy, impressive fashion, wooed, proposed to, married, and all in six weeks. The deed was characteristic of the man. Yorkshire to the backbone, though a Londoner by choice of residence, he did not hold with hesitation. So when he met Helen Meredith he said to himself: "That is my future wife," and perhaps his bluff and yet courtly persistence somewhat precipitated matters. He would not take "No" for an answer, and Helen, perforce, dominated by his stronger will, said "Yes" almost before she had made up her mind. So they were married.

"Sweetheart!" cried John Percival again.

"Coming, daddy dear!" was the reply, and down the stairs of The Grange came a girl who to Helen Percival seemed a vision of beauty. She felt she had never seen so lovely a child. And yet "Sweetheart" was eighteen. A slim, slender form, a perfect face, set in a cloud of golden hair, two pretty hands held out in welcome to the newcomer, and yet withal a queenly dignity of carriage that added a charm to the picture.

Helen Percival ran to the foot of the staircase and clasped the hands held out to her.

"You lovely child!" she exclaimed. John Percival gave a big sigh of relief. He had been wondering how "Sweetheart" would accept her new mother. One glance at her face dispelled all his doubts and fears in an instant. Helen Percival was pressing her lips to the rosy cheek, flushed with happiness and anticipation.

"You pretty child!" she murmured. "I had been afraid of meeting you, dear. How foolish of me! Why, we are more like sisters. And yet you are so little and dainty. You are like a bit of Dresden china."

Sweetheart laughed—such a musical ripple of merriment.

"Oh, mother!" was all she said. But the words and the tone brought the tears to Helen Percival's eyes.

"Daddy! She is so pretty, she made me nearly forget you!" And in another moment Sweetheart was clasped in John Percival's arms, clinging to him, kissing his cheeks, his brown beard, his resolute mouth in an ecstasy of gladness.

"Oh, Daddy, how could I?" she said, with a half-tearful smile at her new mother. It was a happier homecoming than any one of the three had dreamt of.

* * * * * * *

Sweetheart's mother had died when she was a year old, and her father had remained a widower for seventeen years. To tell the truth, he had never once met with anyone to put in his dead wife's place until Fate brought him Helen Meredith. Without even consulting the daughter, who was the light of his life, he married Helen Meredith. And his heart beat with an unspeakable joy when he found that his daughter and his newly-wedded wife were attractive to each other. He had, of course, written to Sweetheart to tell her of his marriage, but circumstances had prevented any previous introduction. John Percival met Helen Meredith abroad, his business would not allow of his return home even for a couple of days until its conclusion. Hence the strange meeting.

But John Percival was content. His beloved daughter and his beautiful second wife, the two dearest in the world to him, were friends.

During the next month even more could be said. Sweetheart and her new mother were almost inseparable. The former honestly loved Helen, and the latter both loved and admired her new daughter.

"I can't understand you not ever having had a lover," said Sweetheart's mother one day.

"But ——," began Sweetheart, and then she paused with a blush that made her look prettier than ever. The touch of colour did not go unobserved by Helen. She had been desirous, eager even, of winning her daughter's confidence as she had won her love—that was assured, and this was an opening.

"Ah!" said Helen Percival, gently, "then there is someone?"

"Mother, I dare not tell you," cried Sweetheart. "Oh, it is all so like a dream!"

The girl, though but a few years younger than the woman to whom she spoke, dropped on her knees beside her, and hid her cheeks in the shelter of the ready arms that crept about her slight form.

"Sweetheart, dear, tell me when you will. I shall not play the part of stepmother-dragoness, I promise you faithfully, if he is worthy of you."

Sweetheart clung to her even yet more closely and tenderly.

"I think," she said, with tears in her voice, "you must be my own mother come back to earth, only much younger!"

Helen Percival's heart beat with affection for the girl who spoke to her so lovingly. To be loved was to her a new, strange thing. Her own childhood had been spent among strangers, and had been loveless, almost comfortless. And now she had dropped from those clouds—the dingy surroundings of a cheerless garrison town in Kent—into this dear sunshine—a husband's devotion and a daughter's love, and the confidence she knew would come.

She laid her arms yet more closely round Sweetheart, and kissed her upturned mouth.

"Tell me when you like, dearie," she said softly. "I only want you to feel you can trust me."

Sweetheart's only reply was a long sigh of content.

* * * * * * *

The new Mrs. Percival soon became very popular in Westhampton circles. And this was all the more strange, because Westhampton was rather apt to look askance upon a newcomer into their midst to whom they had not been properly

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introduced, and who had not entered their "social pale" without first having given evidence of the very highest credentials. This is the way of some small country towns; but in the case of Westhampton Helen Percival carried all before her. Before they met her, Westhampton "society" thought "Who is she?" After it was "How charming she is," and John Percival noted with deep pride the success his pretty wife was making, and his heart filled with honest devotion to her. But the sweetest thing in his life was the thought that his daughter and his wife were so closely linked.

"I have two sweethearts now," he went on to say, with a big, cheery laugh.

"Wait until Captain Dale comes back!" one day said a mutual friend at whose house John Percival had called in order to accompany his wife and daughter home.

"What do you mean, Mrs. Drew?" questioned Helen Percival. But a glance was sufficient to show her a certain tell-tale colour on Sweetheart's face, and she said no more.

"Wait and see, Mrs. Percival," said her hostess, with a smile at Sweetheart.

"Captain Dale is a very good fellow," exclaimed John Percival stoutly. Sweetheart glanced shyly at her father, and Helen, watching her, guessed. This Captain Dale was the "someone."

"He is coming back next week," pursued Mrs. Drew; "and without doubt will call on you, dear Mrs. Percival."

There was a hidden meaning in this remark which Helen Percival was ready to notice.

"If he is a friend of my husband's, he will be most welcome," she said. And Mrs. Drew felt somehow that she had been snubbed, though how she could not have said for the life of her. But Helen Percival was, to use rather a common phrase, "taken aback"; she had spoken in haste, with a strange whirl of memories throbbing in her brain. The name Dale was so familiar. And Captain Dale, too! She was not sorry when it was time to go home. Could there be two of them?

"Who is this Captain Dale?" she asked her husband later on. John Percival laughed.

"Oh, a good sort!" he said; "has been a bit rackety, like most soldiers, but will settle down when he's once married and done for. He's very much in love with Sweetheart, and——"

"And you like him?" questioned Helen.

"Yes, I do," answered bluff John; "though he's not the sort of man I should have thought our Sweetheart would have been attracted by. All heart and no——"

But he broke off short here. Helen Percival had sunk into a chair, half fainting. Captain Dale was forgotten in a moment. John rang the bell for Helen's maid, fussed over Helen, until he made her worse, and finally left her lying down in her own room, with Sweetheart in attendance, and went into his own den to smoke.

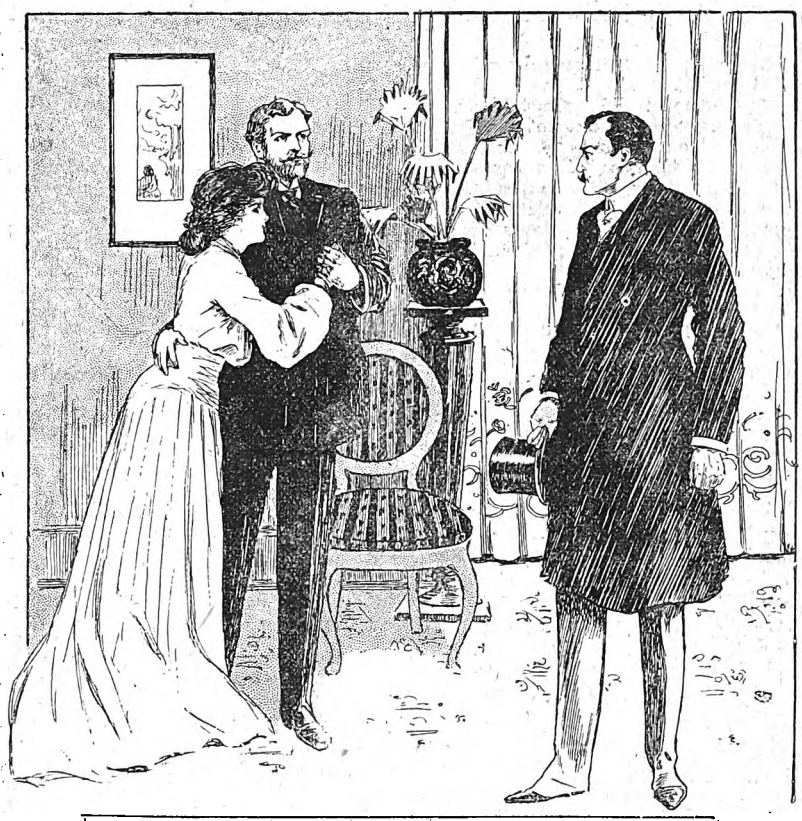
"It is the same man—it is the same man!"

So ran Helen Percival's thoughts, and when she questioned Sweetheart a little she knew she was right. There was but one Captain Dale.

"And you care for him?"

"Indeed I do, mother," was Sweetheart's reply. But she could not understand why Helen sighed.

"I shall be so glad to see him," she murmured. "Now go, Sweetheart. I am better now and I am going to lie down for an hour and sleep."



Helen Percival turned to her husband, whose arms were about her waist in a moment.

Sweetheart kissed her stepmother tenderly and went. But sleep would not be wooed. That same strange phrase kept Helen Percival awake.

"It is the same man—the same man!"

* * * * * * *

It was then that Helen Percival made her great mistake. If she had only told her husband all, it would have saved the three people much pain and heartache. But after long deliberation she resolved to wait, and trust to chance. And when, some ten days later, she came face to face with Captain Dale, she knew she had done wrong. But then it was too late.

She took his hand in hers without the least sign of recognition of him, and, in the usual polite phrases, made him welcome. It would be very hard to say which was the greater, her perplexity or his astonishment. But he took the cue from her, and was quick enough to assume an imperturbability which he was very far from feeling. Sweetheart noticed nothing. It was her mother's "at home" day and there were many other visitors to be talked to.

"I must see you alone," said Horace Dale, in a whisper, looking round him cautiously.

"There is not the least necessity."

Helen Percival drew herself up proudly.

"But——"

"Excuse me, but I see my husband beckoning me!" And Helen moved away with a bow.

Captain Dale looked after her with an unpleasant expression on his usually handsome face.

"I wonder if she has told. If she has, it will spoil everything. She will set the girl against me, and I shall lose old Percival's money."

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And Captain Horace Dale muttered a not very polite expletive between his teeth.

"What's wrong?" inquired a voice by his side.

"Hullo, Vernon."

"Just come in. I hear Mrs. Percival is——"

"Yes, very pretty, but not my style," said Captain Dale; and turned on his heel. Frank Vernon stared at him for a moment, and then broke into a quiet laugh.

"I always knew you were a cad, Dale," he said to himself, "and not fit to black Miss Percival's shoes; and now I think so more than ever, and she loves him; won't throw a word at me, and I worship the very ground she walks on. This is a miserable world!"

Poor Frank Vernon! Until Captain Dale had come along, Sweetheart Percival had smiled on him, accepted his roses and violets, and had lifted him into the seventh heaven of delight by preferring him to all her other admirers, and Frank had simply fallen headlong in love with her fresh, sweet beauty, and had flattered himself that one day he might—— Then came Horace Dale, and all in a moment every castle Frank had built was shattered. Poor Frank!

"Confound him!" he muttered; "he's so good-looking—no wonder she prefers him to a plain, ordinary outsider like me!"

* * * * *

That afternoon was a sort of dream to Helen Percival. She scarcely knew how she got through it. To meet Horace Dale again, like this; the man she had once been engaged to. How bitterly she regretted not having told her husband! And now the man she had been affianced to was in love with her own step-daughter!

Captain Horace Dale was scarcely more happy.

"Will she tell?" he kept thinking. But it was not of the engagement he was thinking, but of the reason why Helen Meredith had broken it off. And when he thought of this, Horace Dale felt like going into a rage of fury and desperation.

"I must see her, and find out what she means to do. If she tells all, it means ruin for me, and—Sweetheart will——"

In vain he stamped up and down his room, trying to think what to do. He did not know what Helen meant to do or say! And to add to his misery, which, let me say, he fully deserved, he went down to his club one night, and, in a reckless mood, lost considerably more than he was able to pay at baccarat. The money he contrived to raise the next day, somehow, but it did not increase his good temper to have to pay it. He reviled his ill-luck, and tried to forget. But he could not.

And Sweetheart? She, too, was unhappy. Helen did not like her lover, and would not talk to her about his perfections, his charming manner and his handsome face. There had come a cloud between Sweetheart and her "mother," and Horace Dale had brought it. And the cloud grew and grew until even John Percival noticed it. He, little dreaming of the cause, bantered both in his bluff way, until one day Sweetheart ran off to her own room in tears, and so astonished him, that he felt almost angry with Helen. And thence grew a certain restraint between husband and wife, which made the former uncomfortable, and the latter very unhappy. And Captain Horace Dale was to blame for it all.

But Nemesis was only waiting. Her opportunity came when Captain Dale's did. He had striven to gain a few minutes alone with Helen Percival in order to find out her intentions. Did she mean to betray him? Fate gave him this opportunity in due course. He called one afternoon, and found Helen alone.

"I have been waiting for this," he said, after the usual formal greeting. "What do you intend to do, Helen?"

"My name is Mrs. Percival, if you please, Captain Dale," replied Helen, with ever so slight an accent upon Horace Dale's title. He winced—because he knew what it meant.

"Is it to be war or peace between us?" he went on. "No, do not speak for a moment. Hear me first!"

Helen sat down with a face as expressionless as that of a statue of stone.

"What do you intend to do? You know how I love Sweetheart; and I think she cares for me. Do you mean to come between us or not? If the former, then I shall know what to do. If the latter, I can return you something you might not care for your husband to see."

Helen Percival half rose from her seat.

"What is that?" she demanded.

"I thought," cried Horace Dale, "that I had something interesting to tell you when we were alone. Don't you remember certain letters written by you to me, long ago?"

"Schoolgirl epistles like those!"

"And," said Horace Dale, "all undated!"

"And I thought you were a man of honour when I wrote them. I thought I loved you."

"Yes, and you threw me over!"

"You know why"—coldly.

"Yes, but your husband won't when he reads them. He will believe that it was because he was a richer man than I was."

Helen Percival drew herself up to her full height.

"Tell him," she exclaimed, "and I will tell him what and who you are, Captain Dale." Again the accent made him wince, but he hid it with a forced laugh.

"Well, is it war or peace? Help me to win Sweetheart, and I return you these." He took a packet of letters from his breast as he spoke. "Set her against me, and I hand these to your husband."

"Who prefers to take them on the spot, please!" said a deep voice.

John Percival stood in the doorway.

"I have only heard the last few words of this most interesting interview. Will you kindly explain matters to me a little more fully?"

Helen Percival turned to her husband, whose arm was about her waist in a moment.

"Now, then, sir; will you speak first, or shall my wife?" Then Horace Dale knew that he had played and lost. He opened his mouth to speak but the words refused to come.

"Let me speak, John," implored Helen Percival; "oh, if only I had told you long ago! When I was a girl of sixteen, this man fascinated me. I thought him a hero, a man of honour. I wrote him foolish letters, the love letters of a silly girl."

"Go on."

"He threatens that unless I aid him in his wooing of Sweetheart, to show the letters to you. I was engaged to him, when quite by chance I found out what he really was, a gambler and a cheat. How could I dare to help his suit with Sweetheart, knowing this?"

"It is not true!" said Dale.

"It is the truth! Look at him. He dare not deny that he was turned out of his regiment for cheating at cards. He was compelled by his colonel to send in his resignation."

"Oh!"

It was a strange cry, the wail of a wounded animal, and it came from the anteroom.

John Percival turned and threw back the curtains. Sweetheart Percival lay, like a stricken thing, upon the floor, with her curly head buried in the cushions of an armchair.

Helen slipped out of her husband's arms, and ran to her, drew her to her arms, and held her like a child to her bosom. With womanly instinct she divined what had happened. Sweetheart had overheard all the truth.

John Percival let the curtain fall to hide the scene. Then he turned to Horace Dale.

"Do you see that, you cur?" he said, in a tense whisper; "that's your handiwork! Are you not proud of it? Now give me those letters and go."

The ex-captain handed him the packet.

"Now go, and never let me set eyes on your face again! Proof!—I want no proof of your villainy. I can see it in your face."

And Horace Dale went—for ever. Strange to say, he met Frank Vernon on the doorstep as he left the house, a circumstance which, when he heard of a certain event long after—which he did by glancing at an English paper in a distant land—seemed almost prophetic

Clifton Bingham

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GOOD FOR EVIL.

Telling of a Secret Marriage and of the Events That Followed.

"Be my wife, Norma; do not let us wait on and on for ever, with no hope of your aunt's consent. She has no legal right to control you anyway, as you are twenty-one. Let us go over to the next town and be quietly married. I have a special license. For my uncle has sent for me to come to him; and as he is all alone in the world, I cannot refuse to remain with him for the last few months—it may be even less—that he will be spared. But I shrink from going away, Norma, and leaving you al one to the tender mercies of Mrs. Kavanagh. She is your dead father's only sister, but she treats you as she would not dare to treat a servant. Marry me, Norma, and, come what may, at least your bondage will be ended."

Richard Travers stooped and kissed the pale cheek of the fair, blue-eyed girl at his side.

She tried to smile, but the sweet lips would not be forced into such an exhibition, and instead she broke down and sobbed upon his breast.

"Oh, Dick! Dick! How can I let you go?" she cried. "For you are all the sunshine in my life! Aunt Emma is a real tyrant over me, and Lena is worse. And, Dick, I am afraid—I suspect that Lena likes you a little!"

His handsome face flushed, but he laughed lightly. Ah, Richard Travers knew more than he chose to tell! For Lena Kavanagh had acknowledged her affection for him only the night before, and he had told her gently but firmly that he did not care for her; that there was but one woman in this world for whom he cared, and that was her cousin, Norma Andrews.

And Dick had not forgotten the baleful look in Lena's big black eyes as he made this imprudent confession.

Perhaps this was secretly the real reason why he urged Norma to marry him before he went away, though they must keep the marriage a secret until he should return to claim her.

It was not a difficult task to convince Norma, and at last she gave him he promise. The next day he obtained permission to take Norma out for a drive, and they drove to a neighbouring town, where a clergyman Dick knew was awaiting them to perform the ceremony.

And so, when Dick Travers drove back to the old Kavanagh house, it was his wife who sat at his side in the trap—his own little wife!

He kissed the sweet red lips as he lifted her from the vehicle.

"God bless my wife!" he whispered softly.

Nobody suspected what had taken place.

Dick left the following day for a neighbouring city to remain with his dying relative, a rich old bachelor.

Hardly a week had elapsed, when Mrs. Kavanagh pompously announced that old Travers had expressed a desire to see Lena once more before he died. The Kavanaghs and the Travers were remotely connected by marriage.

"I shall send her over at once," said Lena's mother.

So Lena went, and the days drifted by and grew into weeks; still she did not return.

"Old Travers is getting better since Lena's arrival!" Mrs. Kavanagh exclaimed.

But one thing troubled poor Norma sorely. Letters from Dick Travers—her husband—had ceased to arrive, and although she wrote regularly, her letters failed to elicit a response. And none of the correspondence between them had contained the slightest reference to the secret marriage.

Norma would have had trouble in proving the fact, had she wished to do so, for Dick had taken possession of the certificate of marriage, and the clergyman who had performed the ceremony had gone away to parts unknown.

Time passed, and at last the blow fell upon poor Norma. One morning Mrs. Kavanagh received a letter from her daughter which seemed to cause her great satisfaction and delight.

"Well, Lena has done well," she cried, eagerly. "She has married Richard Travers, and, of course, all the Travers fortune will be hers now. It is true I do not fancy her marrying away from home, but under the circumstances I can forgive her anything! Lena is a dear girl, and beautiful, too," added the fond mother complacently, "and she deserves to do well. I shall go to visit her in a short time. She invites me cordially, and says I must forgive her for her hasty marriage. I am only too pleased to hear of her good fortune."

To Mrs. Kavanagh's surprise and disgust, Norma rose and left the room in silence. Mrs. Kavanagh tossed her head.

"Umph! Spiteful thing! She is jealous. But Norma Andrews was never like other girls. I am glad dear Lena is not like her in any way!"

Mrs. Kavanagh was somewhat startled when her niece made her appearance the next day and demanded money with which to take a short journey. Mrs. Kavanagh lifted her hands in horror.

"Where are you going? And what earthly business can you have running about the country all alone? Private business? You? I don't believe that you have any at all!"

"I am going, all the same, Aunt Emma," returned the clear, cold voice, "and you shall defray my travelling expenses. My father left money in your hands for me, and I know it."

Mrs. Kavanagh fell back, pale to the very lips, her eyes full of a wild terror, which convinced Norma that her random shot had told, and that it was as she had long suspected. She had not been left in Mrs. Kavanagh's care destitute.

"I merely ask enough of my own money to pay my own way to Dayton," the girl went on firmly.

"Dayton! In the name of goodness what takes you there?"

Norma's pale face grew a shade paler.

"That is my affair," she answered quietly.

So Norma set out on her dreary journey to Dayton—to her false husband.

"He could not marry Lena Kavanagh while I am his wife," the poor girl murmured as the train sped along.

She reached Dayton at last, and went straight to the handsome home of Dick Travers' uncle. Ringing the bell, she was shown into a drawing-room, into the presence of Lena and old Mr. Travers, who lay upon a sofa, and—yes, Dick Travers himself. He started to his feet with a cry of joy.

"Norma, my darling!" he cried, kissing her before the others. "What has been the matter? I have not heard a word from you for weeks, and I was half mad with anxiety, and was on the point of going back to you, but my uncle had another attack, and——"

"Dick, tell me what it all means?" she whispered. "Aunt Kavanagh says that Lena is married to—to——"

"Uncle Richard Travers. Yes, my darling," he added in an undertone. "She did that so that she might claim the Travers' fortune, and prevent you and me from inheriting it; and she did not know until just now, when Uncle Richard was telling her, that he had already made me his heir, and the fortune is mine and yours, my loved one."

Norma was speedily presented to the old man, and, save for Lena's sulkiness over the downfall of her mad scheme, all were contented and happy.

The old man did not long survive. His property reverted to his nephew, but Dick and Norma generously shared it with the Kavanaghs, although they did not deserve it.

"Evil for evil is beast-like, evil for good is demon-like, but good for evil is Christ-like."

E. Burke Collins.

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NURSE GRAY'S ORDEAL.

Relating how a Sinner was Saved.

"WHAT do you think of the case, doctor?" asked Roger Cleveland, walking with short, quick strides about the room.

"It is serious—there is no disguising that, but not alarming," returned old Dr. Mallin gravely. "At least not yet," he corrected. "I must confess that this continuation of listlessness and irritability is not a reassuring symptom, but I fancy that we shall get over that. I am, however, of opinion that your wife should have a night nurse as well as a day nurse."

"You mean that she requires constant attention during the night as well as during the day; that it is not sufficient for the day nurse to sleep close at hand during the night?" asked Cleveland, with a swift glance at the medico.

"That is just it!" declared the doctor. "I find that Nurse Downes is being worn out; and, moreover, your wife appears occasionally to be worse in the morning. I attribute this last circumstance to the fact that the nurse is unable to wait on her as much as she ought to. No, I am confident that we must have another nurse, and I think I have exactly the one to suit the position!"

He was a well-meaning old gentleman, was Dr. Mallin; one of those diffident individuals who scarcely ever say a thing confidently, but introduce it by "I think." Yet he was a fairly clever man, and was looked up to in his profession.

Roger Cleveland stopped in his peregrinations across the carpet, and cast a sharp glance at the doctor, who, however, was staring at the carpet in thought. Cleveland swung on his heel and stared out of the window. There was a silence for nearly three minutes, when Dr. Mallin said: "I suppose you have no objection?"

"Objection?" echoed Cleveland with a start. "No, of course, I haven't!" he went on more composedly. "Please do anything and everything to restore dear Adela to health, and you will earn my eternal gratitude, Dr. Mallin! This long-drawn illness is making me a martyr to nerves! And you think that you have found a suitable nurse? Who is she? If I may speak plainly, doctor, I think that the present nurse is not so patient and forbearing as—she might be. And if you have to bring another into the house, it should be some meek creature——"

"I know, I know!" interrupted Dr. Mallin. "I think that the present nurse will do for daylight, and I can bring, I think, one of the sweetest creatures in the world to act as night nurse. I'll see to it at once, and, if possible, have her here to-night. Then we'll hope for better things!"

The medical gentleman took his leave a moment later, and, as soon as he had completed his round of visits, he sent a note to a nursing home; the letter was addressed to the matron, who, after perusing it, sent a message to Nurse Gray.

The nurse in question quickly reported herself in the matron's room. She was a young woman of three-and-twenty, with a slight, graceful figure, and a face that was grave for it's owner's years. It was not sad by any means, although there were traces of suffering; and those who knew Nurse Gray were aware that she could be very animated and mirthful. A superior woman, and one to be trusted, was the verdict of most people who came in contact with her.

"Lucy," said the matron, addressing her familiarly, "I have a note from Dr. Mallin; he wants a night attendant and asks me to send you if it is in any way possible. It is fortunate that I can spare you, for I always like to help old Dr. Mallin. It is to take charge of a sick woman, Mrs. Cleveland, and it may be a matter of some weeks. He wants you to take up the duties this evening; it is out Sydenham way."

"Very well," returned Nurse Gray, with a smile that transformed her grave countenance into a vision of loveliness. "Dr. Mallin is a good old gentleman, and I shall be pleased to go. I am glad that he shows such confidence in me!"

"That's right!" remarked the matron approvingly. "Let me see, you will——" And then they drifted into details which are of no interest to us.

The footman who opened the door to Dr. Mallin and Nurse Gray that evening told his fellow servants that the latter was the very ideal of a woman intended by Nature to help the sick and suffering; at least, that is what he meant, although he used different language. The doctor escorted his companion to the room adjoining that in which his patient lay, where she was introduced to the other attendant, and to Mr. Cleveland's housekeeper.

Dr. Mallin had some final instructions to give, and Lucy Gray had to be shown her room by the housekeeper, but in half-an-hour the two nurses were comparing notes, and Lucy was waiting to be introduced to Mrs. Cleveland before going on duty. The patient was asleep, and it was not wise that a new-comer should meet her gaze without preparation.

"I am afraid you will find her rather tiresome, dear!" observed Nurse Downes commiseratingly. "I have had a rare time of it, and I am thankful to get some relief. No, I can't say she is *very* ill, but she doesn't mend, and that is what is puzzling Dr. Mallin. I expect that he will want to consult another practitioner shortly. Mr. Cleveland is a nice man, and pays every attention to his wife."

"You look tired!" said Lucy Gray sympathetically. "I wish she would wake up, so that you could introduce me; then you could go to bed."

"Nurse!"

The voice came faintly from the adjoining room, and its tone was peevish. The call was followed by the tinkling of a small bell, which Nurse Gray rightly conjectured to be the signal usually employed by the invalid. The costumed attendants entered the room quietly.

"Oh, there you are!" said the invalid in the same irritable tone. "You sleep so soundly at night; I am sure I might die before you would hear!"

Nurse Downes soothed her skilfully, and then continued: "You will not have to call loudly again, for Dr. Mallin has engaged a night nurse, and she is here, waiting to see you. I am sure you will like her! Everyone does!"

Nurse Gray stepped silently forward, a compassionate smile on her lips

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"You must let me do that for you, Mrs. Cleveland," she said gently, stepping forward quickly as Downes was about to raise the pillow a little, and performing the task with the utmost gentleness. "That is better, isn't it?"

"I don't know!" was the reply, uttered in that grudging style common to invalids who recognise a fact but do not like to admit its truth. "Give me something to drink, nurse!"

Lucy Gray motioned to the day nurse to retire, which Downes did very willingly, and then she assumed the duties in the most matter-of-fact fashion. Mrs. Cleveland made no demur; she was already beginning to like Nurse Gray. Shortly afterwards, the invalid fell into another uneasy sleep and Lucy prepared to keep vigil through the long night.

Mrs. Cleveland awakened several times during the next two hours, but Nurse Gray soothed her; there was something so refreshing, so tranquillising, in Nurse Gray's presence and touch!

"I think I shall like you," observed Mrs. Cleveland, as she closed her eyes and tried to settle into a good sleep. This was just before midnight. "You are better than Nurse Downes!"

"I am sure I shall like waiting on you!" said Nurse Gray decisively. And indeed it was true, for Lucy had taken quite a fancy to this simple woman, whose nature she quickly judged to be confiding and gentle.

"I am sure that she must be a dear little wife to her husband!" thought Nurse Gray, gazing at her sleeping patient reflectively. "Illness has spoilt her temper temporarily, but I am convinced that she is a good, simple, loving creature. I wonder if Mr. Cleveland is in town? I have an idea that she will sleep well to-night, and that the rest of my watch will be peaceful!"

She seated herself once more and took up a book of poems; but her vigil was to be interrupted by a dramatic incident which she did not in the least suspect.

It was past midnight. Lucy Gray looked up as the door opened and a man stepped into the room.

"I am Mr. Cleveland," he said softly. "How is she? You are the new nurse?"

Lucy Gray had risen to answer the first question, but she let the book of poems fall to the floor as she drew back, half in surprise and half in fear, and uttered one word in a barely audible voice—

"Ray!"

Cleveland started as though he had been stung; he bent forward to scrutinise the nurse in the dim light, and then he cried:

"*You!* How do you come here?"

"I was engaged by Dr. Mallin. I did not know!" stammered Nurse Gray. "You have changed your name!"

"Yes!" he replied shortly. "It was a condition to the—the inheritance of property belonging to my wife. So we are thrown together again!"

Nurse Gray could not trust herself to speak for a few seconds, and in that brief space there flashed through her mind the main incidents of her life of four years ago. She had loved Ray Chester; he had wooed her, and had vowed that he loved her. She had been so happy! She had sometimes dreaded even the fulness of that happiness, which had seemed too great for her to hope to enjoy, and her forebodings had been realised. Ray had taken offence at—at nothing! She, Lucy Gray, could find no excuse for him, much as she loved him. He had forsaken her, and rumour had said that it was so that he could marry for money! She had been ill, and then she had lost trace of him; he had married and passed out of her ken.

She had tried to forget, and had devoted herself to nursing. And now she was face to face with the man who had forsaken her!

Lucy glanced up at him when her thoughts had brought her back to the present, and she saw a gleam of admiration in his eye. Nerving herself, she spoke calmly.

"Mr. Cleveland, your wife is sleeping quietly. In my professional capacity I must ask you to withdraw. We have buried the past!"

He shrank from her, retreated towards the door, and passed out of the room. Lucy tottered to the chair and sank into it with a choked sob.

The night was long for Nurse Gray, and when she was relieved in the morning, her companion in the task of watching Mrs. Cleveland remarked on her swollen and reddened eyes.

"Whatever is the matter?" asked Nurse Downes in astonishment.

"A frightful headache!" responded Lucy brokenly. "It is most unfortunate! I must lie down!"

She remained in bed till the evening, when she arose and had a short walk before going on duty again. She felt calm now; the effect of the tearing open of the old wound was passing away. She felt that she could meet Ray now without emotion, but she hoped that he would not come!

He did come, however. It was a custom which he intended to maintain while his wife was so ill; he could not rest unless he had just one look at her before retiring.

Lucy Gray recognised that she must suffer this nocturnal visit, but she could avoid him during the day. He came each night, and expressed his gratitude that Mrs. Cleveland had shown a slight improvement since Nurse Gray had assumed her duties. He was affectionate towards his wife on the one occasion, at midnight, when she awoke as he entered, and Lucy tried to explain and reconcile his vows to her of long

She saw Ray standing at the table, pouring some powder into the contents of the glass!

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ago, his glances of admiration for her now, and his conduct towards his wife, which was in every way indicative of affection.

Lucy Gray gradually lost her fear of meeting Cleveland; she felt sure of herself, and she ventured to take walks during the lovely afternoons in the spacious grounds of Palatia Villa, as Mrs. Cleveland had whimsically named her residence. It was nearly a fortnight since she had entered the house as nurse, and it was a gratification to her to know that the invalid was slowly shaking off the illness which had kept her so low for a length of time that puzzled the doctor.

She was humming gaily, looking at the flowers and drinking in the balmy air, when a shadow crossed her path and Ray Cleveland barred her further progress. It was not till that instant that she noticed whither she had strayed; they were in a secluded part of the garden farthest from the house.

"I would that I could be so happy!" he cried, with enforced calmness, that masked almost uncontrollable passion.

"I think that you can afford to be happy now, Mr. Cleveland, for your wife is making excellent progress and is practically out of danger!" replied Nurse Gray, with assumed ease.

"That will not bring me the happiness which I am seeking!" he cried vehemently, coming a step nearer to her. "I am bound to one who is no companion for me, whom I do not love!"

"Ray! Mr. Cleveland! Surely you do not mean that!" she cried, in horror. "Why did you marry her? Why do you show such affection? Is that all false?"

"Yes," he answered recklessly. "She is fond of me; would you have me break her heart? So I make pretence! I do——"

"Oh, stop, stop!" cried Lucy Gray piteously, wringing her hands in despair. "You must not tell me this! You must go to her. You married her and you must do your duty."

"Yes, I will try to do my duty," he answered fiercely. "Have I not shown you that I am doing it, even to the extent of acting a lie? I have never loved but one woman!" he added significantly, as he turned on his heel and left her.

On returning to the house, Nurse Gray learnt that Mrs. Cleveland was not so well; there had apparently been a slight relapse. She went to her own room to prepare for an earlier turn than usual, as it might be necessary to help Nurse Downes before her own turn actually came. This proved to be correct, and she was summoned to the sick room, where she found Dr. Mallin.

"Very strange," muttered the doctor, with a puzzled air. "Something has upset her, Nurse Gray," he continued, in a whisper; "she has been asking for you to come and take Nurse Downes' place, and she says it is not because of any dislike, but because she has something to say to you. I'm half afraid that her head is becoming seriously affected. The brain——"

And, at that point, the good doctor forgot that he was speaking to anyone and moved away, mumbling to himself in deep thought.

Nurse Downes, glad of a rest after a particularly tiring day, but feeling rather hurt at Mrs. Cleveland's leaning towards Nurse Gray, went off duty and Dr. Mallin soon afterwards left, on the understanding that he should be immediately summoned if required. Lucy tried to compose her patient; this agitation was most detrimental, and Dr. Mallin warned the nurs before he left that she must try her utmost to compose the invalid. He was afraid to administer a drug at that juncture.

"Nurse," said the invalid woman feverishly, as soon as they were alone, "do you think that my husband loves me, or does he love someone else? You have been good to me, and I like you. Tell me!"

It was a most unreasonable request, but it was the whim of an invalid. To Lucy it was a terrible inquiry; her blood appeared to run cold in her veins, and she skilfully hid her horror-stricken face by pretending to arrange the pillow.

"You do not answer. Oh, is that because you think it is true?" The words came like a groan from the patient.

"I think you are ill and are worrying yourself with foolish fancies, as all sick people are apt to do!" replied Lucy briskly, and evading the question. "Now, rest easy. Is it that which has upset you? Why do you ask?" she inquired, as a sudden fear seized her.

"My husband has always been kind to me," said Mrs. Cleveland, "but I have at times thought that he—he might have loved another. Yet I tried to think I was foolish, and that he did really marry me for myself and not for my money. He has been good. I have seen him come into this room at night, stepping softly so as not to wake Nurse Downes, and he has with his own hands put some soothing powder into the medicine. He came this morning, while Nurse Downes was away; he thought I was asleep, and he mixed some medicine for me. It must have been that! I liked to watch him from my almost closed eyelids; it is pleasant to me to see how tenderly he cares for me. But while I was watching him this morning, I heard him breathe the name 'Lucy,' and that nearly killed me. It revived some of my old fears. Oh, nurse, I should die if he ceased to love me!"

"Which, of course, he will never do!" cried Nurse Gray, with an attempt at cheerfulness, although she was sick with a horrible suspicion. "Go to sleep now, and forget this nightmare!"

"You think it is not true, then?" pleaded the sick woman, seeking for a crumb of comfort from the woman who knew that it was true, but dared not tell her.

"I say that you are suffering from nightmare!" was the evasive answer.

Mrs. Cleveland was comforted, but from time to time she asked questions which taxed Lucy's ingenuity to the utmost.

"I am telling falsehoods in fact, if not in words!" murmured Nurse Gray, in agonised tones. "But how can I tell her? And, perhaps, what he said to me this afternoon is not true! Married for money! Oh, Heaven, is that the explanation of his conduct towards me four years ago? And these night visits, what do they mean?"

Lucy shivered with terror; she could not bring herself to believe that the man she had loved—ah, the man she still loved—was so base.

It was about eleven o'clock when Mrs. Cleveland sank into a deep slumber, for which Nurse Gray was thankful. It was a sign of amelioration. She retired to a chair at the farther end of the room, and took up her book of poems. She tried to read, but her thoughts would not follow the printed page; her head was throbbing, her eyes were heavy with the emotional strain to which she had been subjected. Gradually they closed. Nurse Gray was sleeping on duty!

She dreamt that she was again passing through that scene in the garden; she felt Ray's presence near her, he came to her and spoke with passion, he seized her in his arms and showered kisses on her. She tried to cry aloud, but her voice was still. This climax awakened her with a start, and she softly breathed a sigh of relief on finding that it was but a dream.

She glanced instinctively towards the bed, and her eyes

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dilated at what she saw. Ray was standing over the little table by the foot of the bed; he was bending over a glass, a paper of some chemical preparation in his right hand, and he was pouring that powder into the contents of the glass!

In spite of herself, Lucy felt that her terrible suspicions were confirmed. Rising noiselessly, she glided forward, and seized his hand. The guilty man stifled a cry of mingled astonishment and fear.

"What are you doing?" she asked sternly. "Is *that* the cause of your wife's prolonged illness? Have you done that at night, while Nurse Downes was sleeping in the next room, before I came? Did you do that this morning?"

He remained silent for a time, regarding his stern accuser with glowing eyes.

"Yes," he said defiantly. "And what then? Lucy, you have discovered my secret, and now I will speak plainly. I am tired of this woman; I married her for money, forsaking you for that purpose. But I have always loved you; and during the past few months I have been carrying out a plan that would free me and give me the chance of marrying you! I believed that I could make you forgive my past conduct if I came to you free, and you would have known nothing! And, now?"

"That hope is past! You are a would-be murderer, and the love I once bore you is dead."

He regarded her with a look in which despair, longing, and rage were blended. Suddenly he grasped her wrist with a violence that nearly made her cry out with pain.

"That hope is not past!" he hissed, bending near her so that his words should reach her ears without disturbing the repose of his wife. "I *will* possess you—I *must!* And if you do not come to me willingly, I will force you! See! In that glass is a deadly poison that will to-night complete the work that was begun weeks ago—with the object of permitting me to approach you. If you will promise to marry me, all will be well, but if you refuse, I will swear that I caught you in the act of poisoning my wife through jealousy! Do you understand? The world will readily believe my story when our past history is known! What could be more natural, in the eyes of the public, than that you should be consumed with jealousy at my treatment of you and my wife's marriage? Jealousy and revenge! Come, will you swear to be mine?"

Nurse Gray saw the awful dilemma; she realised the truth of his assertion. She felt a sentiment of loathing, yet this was tempered by pity. How low he was falling, her sometime lover! She could not say, even to herself, that he had already fallen low; her charitable, loving nature saw hope of redemption up to the last moment of existence. She mastered her emotion, and spoke gently:

"Ray," she said softly—so softly and tenderly, but like a mother speaking to an erring child. "Ray, you are forgetting. Awake to your better self. Think of the bitter wrong you would do to that loving, confiding creature; think of the wrong you would do to me. If you have a spark of affection left for me, then do as I say. Ray, I am calling you by the old name for the last time, Ray! Think of the old days, before the greed of gold possessed you; think of the prayers your dead mother taught you. Remember, and turn from the path of wickedness before it is too late! Do this for me, and for her!"

His eyes were compelled to seek hers by some invisible force; he could not help himself. And the goodness he read in them shamed him into his better self. It was as if some mysterious kind of electricity or magnetism was crushing down all the evil within him and bringing forth all the good.

"I will!" he said slowly. "You have saved me!"

She held out her hand and he grasped it; it was a compact, so sacred that it bound him for all time. He walked unsteadily from the room, after one glance at the still peacefully sleeping woman whose life had been in such danger.

Nurse Gray threw the glass of medicine away, and destroyed all traces of the attempt on Mrs. Cleveland's life.

And Mrs. Cleveland improved more and more rapidly; she declared that it was due to Nurse Gray's good treatment, but there was more truth in that remark than the sick woman imagined.

Lucy Gray quitted Palatia Villa two weeks later; the invalid was sufficiently well to do without a special night nurse. She desired to retain Nurse Gray, but the latter dreaded a breakdown, and was reluctantly allowed to go.

Nurse Gray occasionally hears from Mrs. Cleveland, who always says that she is very happy and cannot explain why she thought that her husband's affection was waning. "He is more affectionate than ever," she wrote in one letter; "surely no wife was ever more fortunate."

"I am so glad, for *his* sake," murmured Nurse Gray through her tears, as she folded the letter and locked it in her trunk.

L. Lingen.

YOUR EDITOR CHATS

AN INTERESTING ANNOUNCEMENT.

I HAVE this week an important statement to make. For some time past I have recognised the fact that a large proportion of my readers are anxious to include in this publication, first, a complete novelette, and, secondly, a certain amount of fact. This matter has for a considerable period had my careful consideration, and a change in the contents of the paper has now been decided upon.

With the change of contents will come a change of appearance and general make-up. There will be no outside wrapper with a coloured picture on it, but the whole of the number will be devoted to reading matter. There will be a complete novelette and half-a-dozen short stories, in addition to which there will be a number of excellent articles and two new features.

But those old favourite features, "IN CONFIDENCE," and "YOUR EDITOR CHATS," will be continued.

This change of contents, of course, makes the title a misnomer, and it has therefore been decided to change the name from *Short Stories* to **SMITH'S WEEKLY**.

The last number of the paper under the old title and appearance will be the the next one, that dated June 18th. The first number of the paper under the new title and appearance will be that dated June 25th and ready for sale on Tuesday, June 21st.

A large amount of money is being spent on advertising this new issue, and the demand for the first number will be a very large one. You should therefore take the precaution to-day to order a copy to be reserved for you.

Next week I shall give you full particulars of

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CUPID'S TRIUMPH.

Telling of a Strange Wooing.

It was sunset when Paul de Beauville drew rein in front of the iron gates. He knew that he had reached his journey's end, for, at the foot of the hill, an old woman had informed him that the great house he saw above, through the trees, was Grantham Manor, and that he would find entrance to the grounds at the top of the ascent.

He had been born in France, and had always lived there; but, some twenty years before, an elder sister had married an Englishman. She had often invited him to come and see her, but no opportunity had presented itself until now.

And now, as he rode up the avenue, he remembered how many years it had been since he had seen her. Why, she was sixty, an old woman, and he was himself forty, almost an old man! Then, in addition to her, he would probably meet his cousin Ralph, his sister's son, and a Miss Osborne, of whom recent letters had spoken, his sister's ward, a relative of her husband's. What were they all like?

Suddenly he heard a step, and looking up from his reverie, saw a young lady, so lovely, that he had a hasty thought, imaginative as he was, that he had met a Dryad, or some sort of beautiful woodland spirit. He stopped his horse, lifted his hat, sprang to the ground, and stood there in a maze. But the lady, who was much the less embarrassed of the two, moved forward a step, and said, in excellent French:

"It is Monsieur de Beauville, I am sure. Madame Grantham will be charmed. It is such a pity Ralph is away. But you will be very welcome."

The sound of his own language, so prettily spoken, added to Paul's bewilderment. He was too thoroughbred to attempt any personal compliment; but he thanked the speaker for her welcome; and every word and glance was full of an exquisite courtesy, which very few women could have resisted.

Then he began to ask news of his sister; to profess regret at his nephew's absence; and to utter some skilfully-roundabout remark, which might cause his hearer to vouchsafe the information that he sought. She took the hint.

"I am your sister's ward, Miss Constance Osborne," she said, smiling, "and will walk back to the house with you. My cousin is not very well; and if the servants should tell her too abruptly of your arrival, she might get one of her nervous headaches."

"Thank you very much," he replied, thinking how this thoughtfulness for an aged woman added to the speaker's other charms.

It was still quite a distance to the house, and by the time they came to the broad lawn, which swept away in front of the mansion, they had talked of Paul's voyage, of his sister, of Ralph, and the beauty of the scenery; and Constance had discovered that the newcomer spoke English, and spoke so perfectly, that she felt ashamed of having addressed him in French. So she persisted in talking in her own language, rather to his disappointment, for the accents of his native tongue sounded singularly sweet to his ear, when uttered by her lips.

Miss Osborne called a servant to take his horse, and De Beauville walked slowly up and down the verandah, while she herself went to prepare Madame Grantham for his arrival. It was not very long before she returned, saying, eagerly "Come, please come! Madame was not startled—she guessed almost at once that it was you."

In her pleasant excitement, she seemed to grow each instant more beautiful. She passed swiftly up the broad staircase, and Paul followed. They reached a door, at the furthest end of the long corridor. Constance opened it, motioned him to enter, and disappeared.

Looking down the soft dimness of the chamber, Paul saw a stately, white-haired lady rising to meet him, and heard her voice call, gladly:

"Brother, oh, brother!"

Then they were in one another's arms, and, for a season, Paul forgot everything else in the joy of their re-union. After awhile, Madame, herself, noticed Constance's absence.

"Always the dearest, most thoughtful girl in the world," she said. "She is like a daughter to me, Paul."

Just then Miss Osborne appeared.

"Cousin," she said, to Madame Grantham, "I have told them to hurry supper. I hoped monsieur would be hungry, after his ride; and I thought perhaps you would like to have the supper served here, as you cannot go downstairs this evening."

For a couple of days Madame Grantham was still obliged to keep her chamber; after that she was quite herself again. Paul found her charming; but he perceived plainly, in spite of her gentleness and sweetness—her even caressing manners—that she had a strong will, and had evidently always ruled supreme over every person who came within her orbit.

The days floated by to Paul like an enchanted dream. Constance Osborne was a new revelation to him. He had never met anyone so bright, so witty, and yet so womanly before. More than four weeks went by, and now the time for Ralph Grantham's return was at hand.

I have no space to speak of Ralph. But Paul heard his name incessantly, from morning till night. The young man's mother, the servants, the visitors, even Miss Osborne herself, all seemed to consider Ralph the pivot upon which the world turned. Ralph and Ralph's future, Ralph's likes and dislikes, appeared to be of more importance than the rise and fall of empires and dynasties.

A portrait of him, taken a few months before, showed Paul that he was a very handsome young fellow; but even at twenty-two the face exhibited much of the decision and will which were his mother's chief characteristics, and he reflected that if ever the wishes of the pair should clash, the result might be sad to both.

Paul said something of the kind one day to Constance, and discovered that the same idea had often alarmed her. She spoke of her absent cousin with a freedom which prevented any fancy rising in her listener's mind that she cared for him, except in a sisterly way. So De Beauville drifted on in his beautiful dream; for of course you perceive that he had fallen in love with the girl on the instant that she appeared before him, in the depths of the wood, like some creature of a higher order than a mere mortal.

One of Paul's countrymen often came to the Manor. Léon Duval was a fine young fellow, clever and handsome; but old Madame did not like his frequent rides out to Grantham, and when he had gone, one day, she spoke to her brother.

"You see, Paul," she said, "Constance is a beauty and an heiress—one can't tell what folly the young man might get into his head."

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"Why, it would be sheer impertinence on his part!" cried Paul, alarmed at once.

"And if he gets in earnest, he might suffer," rejoined she. "That is why I mention it; there is no fear for Constance——"

"Oh!" ejaculated Paul, for his sister had paused abruptly, as if leaving her sentence unfinished; and he wondered what she meant.

"I have said nothing to you about my hopes and plans," she continued, laughing pleasantly. "Men are so clumsy—excuse me—they always let out things; and I was afraid you might startle my darling little girl by betraying that you knew——"

"Startle Con—startle Miss Osborne! What do you mean?" he asked, as she broke off to finish her laugh, while she tapped his arm affectionately with her pretty white hand.

"Yes! Well, I'll tell you my secret," she continued. "Ralph may be here any day now, and I want you to know about everything."

"Yes," Paul echoed, confused by an odd ringing in his ears. Luckily he had seated himself with his back to the window; it was already deep twilight, so his face remained lost in the shadows.

"Constance is to marry Ralph," old Madame went on, with a determined ring in her voice, as if Destiny were speaking through her lips.

"Are they engaged?" De Beauvillo asked.

"She is just a year younger than he," pursued old Madame. "By her father's will she does not attain her majority until twenty-five. If she married without my consent, she could not touch her money—oh, my cousin was a very sensible man! But there was no need to restrain Constance—the dearest girl—why, Paul, she never opposed me in her life! Ralph is a little headstrong sometimes—but she—oh, never!"

"And—and it is quite settled?" De Beauville heard himself ask, in a slow, calm voice.

"Settled? Why, I just told you—I meant it when they were children!" Again Fate seemed to speak. "She has loved him all her life—how could she help it, indeed?" And now a thrill of arrogant motherly pride quickened old Madame's determined utterance.

De Beauville grasped the arm of his chair firmly with one hand, but sat still, though the ringing in his ears was as loud as the swell of a tornado now, and he grew icy cold from head to foot.

"I'll tell you everything," pursued Madame, with a laughing amiability, which gave her listener a passing spasm of cold anger. "As I said, Ralph has one fault—he is headstrong! You may imagine I kept my plans to myself; but not long before you came I spoke to Ralph—do you know, just because I did, the absurd boy began to talk about regarding Constance as a sister——"

"Ah!" Paul broke in. But she did not hear.

"Of course, I did not argue. I knew he loved her without knowing it—why, I intended them to love each other! So I showed him that I was displeased; there was that business to attend to in London—I sent him off at once."

"And—and—now he——"

But Paul was not required to finish the question he found so difficult.

"Oh, he writes vaguely, but I can see that absence has taught him," cried Madame. "He has learnt that, as usual, the old mother had seen clearly what was for his happiness. Yes, yes—his last letter shows me that he intends to propose to Constance as soon as he gets back; I shall have the wedding this autumn."

"And you are sure that Miss Osborne——"

"Bless me, Paul, do you suppose I am blind?" Madame broke in, a little irritably. "She has loved him all her life."

There was a pause, then Monsieur de Beauville said:

"In that case I congratulate you—and the young people, too."

"You good brother! I knew you would be pleased!" At this moment the butler announced supper. Paul de Beauville showed a power of self-control that would have been natural enough in a woman, however young, but which was surprising in a man, especially one whose heart had just received a wound so terrible.

He went to the table; he talked; he was composed as usual. Somehow, old Madame got thinking of the tone in which Paul had said the words, "young people." Was there a little feeling of regret that such happiness as theirs could never come near him? Why should it not? was Madame's reflection, and presently a new plan suggested itself to her. Why should not Paul marry? Good gracious, she knew the exact person for him! That bewitching little widow friend of hers. The very match for Paul! She would invite Angela Carroll to pay her a visit. She won-

She tore open the letter, read the first page, and gave a little cry.

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dered she had not thought of it before. But that vexatious, darling Ralph had kept her mind so busy. Why, Paul had been greatly struck with Angela's picture; he was just in the mood to listen to her project, and the alliance would be so suitable.

According to her habit, Constance went with Madame to her room when bed-time came. The old lady burst out at once.

"Paul ought to marry," said she.

Miss Osborne dropped into the nearest chair and sat staring at her relative in silence.

"Yes; I have an idea. I shall invite Angela Carroll here next month. Paul quite raved over her picture. I do believe he has got the fancy in his head; in fact——"

In came the waiting-maid, and the conversation ended.

Constance Osborne scarcely passed a more tranquil night than Paul de Beauville himself, and he did not even attempt the pretence of going to bed until daylight. But old Madame slept the sleep of the just, after unintentionally hurting the pair she loved, as cruelly as people usually do their friends, when they consider themselves elected to act the part of Destiny.

Three days elapsed. Three wretched days to Paul de Beauville; restless and dreary to Constance; at first, full of pleasant excitement to old Madame, then she began to have her troubles, for Ralph neither came nor wrote.

On the third afternoon, Paul told Miss Osborne that if his nephew did not arrive that evening, he would himself start for London the next morning. He and Constance had kept aloof from one another during these days; he saw how pale and heavy-eyed she looked; he understood how hard her part was, not only to be obliged to conceal her anxiety and suffering, but to encourage and guard the poor mother.

Old Madame had gone to lie down. She was sure Ralph would come that night, she said. She had suddenly passed from a despondent mood to a hopeful one, and when she said "sure," she assumed a voice that was as the voice of Fate.

Constance and Paul had chanced to encounter each other on the verandah. While he was telling her what he proposed to do, a horseman appeared in the avenue.

"Is it Ralph?" cried Paul, straining his eyes to get a better view.

"No," said Constance. "Oh! can something have happened?"

She hurried down the steps. Paul followed. The man rode up, and, touching his hat, said:

"I have a letter for Miss Osborne."

"From whom?" she asked.

"Mr. Grantham, ma'am."

Constance took the missive. Paul saw her turn so deathly white that he stepped forward and put her hand in his arm. She thanked him by a slight movement of the head, turned to the man, and said quietly:

"Take your horse to the stables; then go to the servants' hall, and get something to eat."

The messenger departed. Paul led Constance up to the steps, and put her in a chair.

"Something terrible has happened!" she whispered. "I have had a presentiment——"

She paused, tore open the letter, read the first page, gave a little cry, and fell back in her chair.

"In Heaven's name, what is it?" exclaimed Paul. "Is he hurt—ill?"

"Hush!" she broke in. "Oh, he is married!"

Paul did not speak; he could not. She must be left alone a little: yet she must not think he suspected what this news was to her. He said something about getting her a glass of water, and hurried away, and stayed as long as he dared.

When he returned, he found that she had gone indoors. She was seated in one of the drawing-rooms; she called him as he passed. He entered and stood beside her. She was very white, and her eyes had a strange, dilated look, like fright. He made her drink some water; then she gasped:

"How shall we tell his mother? She will never forgive this—never!"

Here was safety for Paul. Old Madame's share in the trouble was easy to talk about.

"No wonder you are overcome, thinking of her," he replied. "But what does the wretched boy say?"

She put the letter in his hands.

"This was inside," she said, holding up a second epistle. "It is for her. But I am to tell her what he has done, before I give it to her to read."

Paul's first reflection was an oath against the fiendish cruelty of the man who, knowing this girl loved him, should choose her as the recipient of his confidence; nay, even add to his heartlessness by making her the medium of communicating his treachery to his mother. For the instant, Paul hoped the man might live and die with that mother's malediction on his head.

Then he read the letter, which was clearly, frankly written, though evidently by a person in a state of intense excitement. But, from first to last, it ignored the fact that Constance could have any personal concern in the matter.

This was the story. Early in the spring, while in town, Ralph had made the acquaintance of Evelyn Thorne, the sister and ward of a man whose family had, almost for generations, been the enemies of all the Granthams.

And the two young people had fallen in love, and had managed to meet often, until Evelyn was obliged to accompany her brother to Scotland. When Ralph reached there, in September, he contrived to see her again. At last a servant betrayed them to the brother. Evelyn was shut up a prisoner in their house near the town.

At length she succeeded in sending a letter to Ralph, telling him that, on the next evening, she was to be forced to marry one of her brother's friends—a man noted for his vices and evil life.

Ralph at this went to work, and succeeded in carrying her off only a few hours before the time set for the wedding ceremony.

He married her at once, and on the next morning dispatched his messenger with the letters for Constance Osborne.

Paul finished the perusal of the letter, and then glanced down at Constance, who sat pale and tearless before him.

"Help me—advise me!" she exclaimed. "Oh, how am I to tell his mother?"

Before Paul could speak, there was the rustle of a woman's garments just behind them. Both turned, and saw old Madame tottering backwards and forwards, one hand pressed hard against her heart, her face seamed and convulsed with agony.

"My boy is dead!" she groaned, in an awful voice. "My boy is dead!"

"No, no!" they called at once.

"You are lying to me!" she shrieked. "Oh——"

"Sister, sister, listen!" Paul broke in. He must tell her, no matter how, else she would go mad. "He is alive—he is well—but married!"

His hearer staggered back. Constance and De Beauville started towards her. She pushed them away, sat down in a chair, turned towards them a face as rigid as if she had been suddenly changed to stone, and muttered:

"I am an old woman, but I did not know I had grown childish. Speak, one of you, for I did not understand!"

"Sister, it is true—here is his letter."

Old Madame shivered. The spasm passed in an instant; then she sat more erect than before.

"Read the letter," was all she said.

Paul read it, as well as his choked voice would permit. His sister listened, mute, motionless to the close. Then she looked up, and a dreadful ghost of a smile crossed her lips, as she said:

"You see I was right—my son is dead!"

The first thought in the minds of both her listeners was that the shock had turned her brain; but her next words showed their error.

"Ralph Grantham is Evelyn Thorne's husband now—I have no child left in the world!"

"Don't say it—don't!" cried Constance, with a sudden

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burst of tears. "Monsieur, speak—implore her! Don't say a word yet, cousin—wait—reflect—see, here is Ralph's letter to you! Oh, read it—do read it, cousin—cousin!"

She fell at old Madame's feet, embracing her knees, pleading; and Paul added his intreaties. For a time Madame did not even seem to hear their voices. Her glazed eyes were fixed on vacancy.

"Get up, Constance," she said, at length. "Paul, give me your arm—I will go to my room."

They accompanied her in silence. When they had reached her door, Paul said:

"You must lie down——"

"I must do my duty," she interrupted. "I have done it all my life—I shall not falter now."

She sent the pair away. They did not dare to expostulate further.

In the evening Madame sent for her brother, and showed him a letter, which she had written. It gave Ralph the control of a large income, but forbade him her house.

"The fortune is mine while I live," she said; "but I never did a mean thing yet—I am too old to begin. He has wealth, a wife—let him be happy, if he can—but I have no longer a son."

She requested Paul to have the letter sent. But, after holding a consultation with Constance, he decided to keep it back for the present. Paul wrote to his nephew, in the meantime, that his mother was very angry, but had no intention of injuring him pecuniarily. Constance wrote, too, but what she wrote De Beauville did not know. For two days old Madame bore up, and would not allow Ralph's name to be mentioned; but on the third she was seized with a chill, such as sometimes precedes paralysis. They put her to bed, and sent for the doctor immediately, but for nearly a fortnight she was dangerously ill. One night, when the chill and sinking fit came on, she believed herself dying. The mother's heart, in this crisis, asserted its supremacy; arrogance and pride and hate were forgotten; she permitted Ralph to be sent for; but she did not, even then, consent to receive his wife.

From that hour she began to mend. Constance and Paul feared she might retract her permission; but she did not; she did not even mention her son's name again.

Several days passed before Ralph could reach the Manor. On the afternoon when he might be expected, Madame had herself dressed, and assisted down the stairs into the great drawing-room. She took her seat in the arm-chair which she usually occupied, near one of the windows; opened a book on the table beside her; and there she waited. Constance and Paul went in and out. She answered if they spoke, not otherwise; sometimes she affected to read; but they saw that she never turned the page. Once she dropped into a doze—called, suddenly, "Ralph, my Ralph!" Then she awakened, glanced angrily at the pair, who were watching her, and said, "I fell asleep—I don't remember what I was dreaming. Go, both of you, and walk on the terrace. I have kept you indoors too much."

When the two were beyond her hearing, Constance said, in a rather frightened tone:

"I laid Ralph's letter on the table by her—I am sure she will read it now."

They left her alone for nearly an hour. When they went back they could see that she had been weeping, and the letter had disappeared; but she did not speak of it. She was more calm than her two companions. She talked of the weather, the autumn work to be done upon the farms, any trifle which made conversation.

Presently the tramp of horses' hoofs became audible. Constance darted to the window. Paul followed. Old Madame did not stir.

"His wife is with him," whispered Constance. "Oh, what will she say?"

Her aunt's voice startled them.

"Did you say Evelyn Thorne was with him?" she called. "Then go, one of you, and say——"

"No, no!" moaned Constance.

"Listen," Paul said, more sternly than she had ever heard him speak; "remember what your heart craved, when you believed death was near. Be true to yourself, not to pride."

His sister did not reply. For a moment she covered her face with one hand, then let it drop to her side, only signing to Constance, who had made a movement as if to go, to remain.

Paul stood behind his sister's chair, leaning his arm on the back. Constance was stooping over old Madame, her face full of intreaties she dared not utter. Suddenly the door from the entrance-hall opened, and Ralph Grantham appeared, leading by the hand a girl so exquisitely lovely, so delicate, so shrinking, so timid, with such a necessity for protection, such powers of gratitude therefore expressed in face and attitude, looking, too, so young and child-like, that Nemesis herself must have softened towards the frightened creature.

The pair came slowly up the great room. Still Madame did not stir, but sat stony and inexorable. Constance leant over her, in pleading silence. Paul de Beauville looked at his nephew, and again a fiery wrath rose in his soul, as he felt Constance's arm, which unconsciously touched his, tremble convulsively, and reflected that Ralph had won happiness by breaking her heart.

There was something terrible in the silence. The poor little bride looked as if she would drop, in spite of her husband's presence and sympathy. Half way up the room Ralph stopped.

"Mother," he called, in a voice through which, eager and pleading as it was, rang the pride and will old Madame had bequeathed to him, "I have brought your daughter, to ask pardon for your son—you will not refuse her!"

"Mother!" he called again.

This time old Madame's proud head sank; her right hand stretched itself slowly out in the welcome she had no voice to speak; and in another second Ralph's arms were about her neck, and Evelyn was folded to her heart.

* * * * *

When sunset came, Paul de Beauville wandered away through the depths of the great garden, which stretched to the left of the house. He came to a rustic arbour, and, feeling tired, after the varied emotions of the day, paused there to rest. As he entered he found himself face to face with Constance Osborne, weeping bitterly.

He hurried towards her, crying:

"Constance, Constance, I think I shall go back to France."

She answered, but with hastily averted head:

"You told me so yesterday! Aunt will be sorry."

"But I did not tell you why—I must now! I love you—I love you! Oh, Constance, wouldn't it be easier to go with me than to live here to suffer at the sight of their happiness? I would be so good to you, so tender to you—Constance! Dearest, will you be my wife?"

She smiled at him through her tears, and answered:

"I will be your wife—because I love you and I never dreamt of caring for any other man."

So, when Paul got sane enough for explanations to be made, it came out that Constance had long known of old Madame's intentions to marry her to Ralph, and had dreaded that, sooner or later, the refusal, which she must give, would alienate the old lady from her for ever.

The next day Madame Grantham could distract her thoughts long enough from Ralph and his wife, whom the mother already adored, to listen to Paul's story, but not understanding that he had already told his secret to Constance, she said:

"The poor girl will not listen to you; her hurt is too keen. Oh, what a selfish old woman I am. I have been so happy with my bad boy and his pretty bird, that I forgot!"

Then Paul succeeded in making her comprehend that Constance had only cared for Ralph as a brother; that she loved him—Paul.

"How do you know?" demanded old Madame.

"She told me so."

"Like your impudence to speak to her before you had my permission!" said Madame, smiling.

Philip Marchant.

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BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

The Story of a Mixed Engagement.

"I BELIEVE I've made about the worst muddle that any fellow could be guilty of!" groaned Cecil Raynes disconsolately, as the train pulled up at the Victoria terminus and he prepared to alight. "I really don't see how I am to face them all. When a man is practically engaged to two girls at once, what *is* he to do?"

That was certainly a poser, and Cecil did not attempt to answer it. He alighted from the compartment with his rug, which he handed to the servant who was awaiting his arrival.

"Look here, Greaves, you can see after my luggage and take it home on a cab!" he said to the man. "I'll walk. I feel a bit stiff after that journey."

The well-trained man-servant had some difficulty in repressing a look of astonishment on hearing that not over-energetic young man complain of stiffness after a journey of eighty minutes' duration. However, he looked after the luggage, and, when he had got it under his eye, his master left him and strode away.

It was one of those few occasions when Cecil Raynes indulged in a quick walk; he had something on his mind—two *fiancées*, as he told himself with a grim smile—and he wanted to walk it off!

"Of course, everybody regards it as a settled thing between Joan and I," he muttered as he hurried along. "She and her father are in town on purpose to meet me, and I have left Croxham in order to meet them. Why? Because my mother, her father, Joan herself, and everybody else, expect that a proposal and an acceptance will be announced almost at once! And, on the top of all that I've fallen head-over-ears in love with another girl!"

The hard expression faded from his handsome countenance and was replaced by a smile of infinite love and tenderness, and his thoughts turned to Croxham and Madge Culford. The slender form, the pretty head, with its lovely brown hair, the beautiful face lit up by a sweet smile, and the soft glow of those trustful eyes!

It was true that he was not actually engaged to either Joan or Madge, but he was correct in saying that he was practically bound to both. He felt bound to Joan because it was a society matter, everyone expected it, and would say hard things about him and her if it did not become an accomplished fact.

He was bound to Madge by that indefinable something that needs no formal ratification in words. He knew that she loved him, although he had not asked her; he loved her, and she could not fail to perceive that. In fact, it was clear that she had unconsciously and tacitly accepted his love, or she would never have flushed so when—— Oh, it needed no explanation, no investigation, it was certain!

Now, if he proposed to Joan, it would break Madge's heart, and he himself could not be happy, although he liked Joan very, very much. And if he married Madge, what of Joan? He would bring ignominy upon her and would cause her much pain, for he thought she was fond of him, and he had really believed that he was in love with her. That meeting with Madge had awakened him to a knowledge of the truth.

"Cecil," said his mother severely, "how much longer are you going to dilly-dally about in this fashion? For the last week you and Joan have been thrown in one another's society; you know the object—you both understand quite well what all the world is waiting for, you are not children!—yet there is not the least sign! What are you thinking about?"

"Are you sure that Joan desires it, mother?" he asked evasively.

"What nonsense!" cried Mrs. Raynes angrily. "There has never been any question about it! Lord Miston regards it as an act of poetic justice. His side of the family owes a good deal to ours; Joan and you are the last in each line; they have money, and we have scarcely anything; and, to crown all, you saved his life when he was seized with the cramp while bathing! What more is there to say?"

"It seems to me," remarked Cecil slowly, "that there is no question of love in all this. You don't study whether we love each other or not!"

"Fiddlesticks!" declared Mrs. Raynes impatiently. "Love is all very well for poets to rave about, and it makes a good plot for a novelist, but in practice you do not take it into account."

"Nevertheless," said Cecil quietly, "*I* should like to take it into account! It seems to me that married life would be all the happier if it were tinged with love!"

"And who says that Joan does not love you?" queried Mrs. Raynes artfully. She saw the drift of his remarks and she was skilful enough to checkmate him. "I am sure that Joan is very much in love with you, and I say most distinctly that your conduct is unworthy of you and absolutely unfair to her. Now, my dear boy," she added persuasively, seeing that the shot had gone home, "promise me that you will propose to Joan without delay."

Cecil was stung to the quick by his mother's words, as she knew he would be. He was the soul of honour, and the idea that he was acting unfairly to Joan was bitter to him. Madge and he had fallen in love; it was mutual, and they must both suffer. Alas!

"I promise you that I will propose to her if she gives me the chance, mother!" he said, with a set expression on his face. "Of course, I can't force myself upon her at any moment, but I will do it as soon as ever I get the chance! I promise that, and the marriage shall take place as soon as Joan wishes!"

"Thank you, Cecil! I was sure that you would listen to reason," murmured Mrs. Raynes, rising from her seat and going towards him. "I am so happy!"

He stooped and kissed her cheek, and she walked majes-

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tically from the drawing-room leaving Cecil to his own reflections.

"If the mater and Joan are happy, I suppose it doesn't matter about me. Poor Madge! I wonder if Lord Miston would use his influence, after marriage, to get me attached to some dangerous mission in the interior of Africa or elsewhere? Somewhere where the yellow fever takes you off quick. Yet—that wouldn't be fair to my cousin. Here, I had better go to her and get it over!"

Joan was not exactly Cecil's cousin; they were related, but more distantly than cousinship, although they always spoke of one another as "cousin."

While Cecil was riding towards the town residence of Lord Miston, that worthy gentleman was catechising his daughter on the same subject as that on which the young fellow had been heckled by his mother.

"I won't have it!" Lord Miston was saying almost at the very moment that Cecil hailed the cab. "You are evading the proposal for some reason or another, Joan. I'm sure that Cecil Raynes would have proposed before this. Mind, I won't have any more of this young Westcott! He hasn't a penny to bless himself with, and you are to marry Raynes. He saved my life, and it's quite the proper thing, for family reasons, that you should marry him. And as to Westcott, I'll get the Foreign Secretary to have him sent out to some dangerous——"

"No, no, father!" burst forth Joan hastily. Something like a sob came from her throat. "You won't do that. Promise me that you won't do that, father!"

"Then promise me that you will not evade Cecil that you will accept him when he proposes, and——"

"I will accept him if he asks me!" said Joan submissively. "I will go now and make ready to receive him!"

Cecil Raynes entered the room in which he had been informed he would find Joan; he entered it with the air of determination one may see on the countenance of a man who has resolved to carry out a disagreeable piece of work. He found Joan reading; she appeared perfectly self-possessed, and there was no trace of a tremor in her dainty hand as she held it out in greeting. He was conscious that his own was not so steady.

"Joan," he said, after the usual common-places had been exchanged—they always called each other by their Christian names—"I have come here on purpose to tell you——"

"I thought you had," she interrupted quickly, yet without any unseemly haste, and her look was quite demure.

He was staggered. He understood that Joan had been waiting for the proposal, and perhaps he was foolish to expect that it would be such a momentous matter to her as it would have been to Madge, but this nonchalance disconcerted him. He had thought that his cousin was really very attractive when he entered; he had a great liking for her in a way; but this airiness of manner was not agreeable. It was too much like buying and selling!

Like a flash all these things passed through his mind; then he pictured the scene if Madge had been the woman!

Oh, Madge, Madge! His soul cried out in silent agony. How different it would have been! How the lovely face would have flushed, the trustful, liquid eyes would have first glanced lovingly at him, and then drooped before his ardent gaze. How she would have placed her hand in his, and——

"You are a long time telling it, Cecil, although you did come on purpose." Joan's voice broke his reverie, and brought him to his surroundings with a confused start.

"Cecil," continued the girl, a twinkle appearing in the hazel eyes, although she showed, for the first time, some trace of uneasiness, "you have come to propose to me, haven't you? Well, don't!" she added, as the young fellow nodded in mute surprise at the way in which she asked the question. "I don't wish you to!"

"But everybody expects me to!" he cried. "They will say all kinds of unkind things, and——"

"And what will *you* say?" inquired the girl, looking at him now with more freedom. "You didn't say anything about yourself! Confess, Cecil, that you will not be much upset! Who is the lady who has filled your mind for the whole week that you have been in London, and, I suppose, for at least a part of the time you were away at Croxham?"

They gazed straight into one another's eyes for a second, then a smile appeared on Joan's face—a smile that broadened into a merry laugh. It forced a smile from Cecil, despite his perplexity.

"Who told you, Joan?" he demanded at length.

"You did, Cecil! Oh, no, not with words, but by your demeanour! My dear cousin, surely you do a woman's wit small credit if you think that I could not perceive that you had lost your heart somewhere else!"

"It doesn't matter!" he remarked doggedly, evading her question. "We are supposed to get married, you and I, and there's no help for it. I won't treat you shabbily, and nothing formal has taken place between Madge Culford and me—how could there? I am not certain that she thinks anything of me."

"You are not to ask me to marry you, remember that!" she cried, as he was about to continue.

"I promised the mater that I would if I got the chance, so——"

"You haven't had the chance!" she retorted quickly. "I won't give you the chance, for after what has transpired, no gentleman would force his proposal on a lady. So you are cleared in your mother's eyes!"

"And you?" he asked.

"I? Oh, I promised that I would accept you if you asked me to marry you, but you haven't asked me, have you? Of course, our people will be dreadfully upset, but we cannot help that! Now you are free to go to Miss Madge Culford,

"Father," said Joan, "there is some mistake, we are not engaged."

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whose acquaintance I shall be happy to make, and I——" She stopped abruptly. She had risen and he rose also, taking her hand.

"Yes, Joan, and you?" he inquired tenderly. He thought that she was giving him his freedom at a great cost to herself now; he had just awakened to the notion that she had been acting a wrong part during this interview. "What of you, Joan?"

"It doesn't hurt a mite!" she said frankly, and he knew by the steady gaze of the hazel eyes that she was not deceiving him. "I am glad of it!"

"That's all right!" he said with a sigh of relief. "I began to feel afraid!"

"You needn't!" she observed drily. "I like you ever so much as a relative, but as a husband you do not especially attract me! There! I hope you won't think me too bold."

"How are we to tell our respective and respected parents?" he queried jestingly. He felt so much easier now.

"I will tell dad, and you must arrange with Mrs. Raynes, naturally!" explained Joan.

"No, that is not fair to you, Joan!" he replied firmly. "You have done all the plucky work till now; you took it upon yourself to—to prevent our mutual unhappiness, so I must beard your father. I say, Joan, I wish there were a fourth party; there are three of us—you, Madge and I—but you deserve the love of a good man, and I heartily wish that the fourth party were in existence, for your sake!"

"He is, Cecil!" she responded quietly, and for the first time her eyes dropped before her cousin's gaze.

"Hurrah, I'm so glad!" cried Cecil in altogether boyish exuberance. It was the finishing stroke to all his fears. In his excitement he caught her by the waist and kissed her cheek as though she were his sister.

And at that psychological moment the door opened and Lord Miston looked in. "Good!" he ejaculated, his face radiant with smiles. "I *am* pleased!" He closed the door precipitately, fearing to further disturb the lovers.

"Oh, I say, this is awkward!" cried Cecil blankly. "He thinks we are engaged, Joan! I must go and straighten the whole thing out! You stay here, but tell me the name of the fortunate man, Joan! I've told my secret."

"John Westcott!" she answered, her face flushing. She looked shyly at her cousin, and Cecil observed the contrast and recognised its cause.

"It makes all the difference when a girl is in love or not!" he thought. "I can imagine that she would act just like Madge in similar circumstances."

"What name did you say?" he enquired suddenly. He had lost the full sound through his preoccupation at the change in Joan't bearing.

"John Wetscott!" she replied again, just as shyly. "He is rather differently circumstanced than we, and father will not hear of him. He insisted on my marrying you, and said that if I didn't mind he would see if John could not be forced to go on some dangerous diplomatic mission! Oh, I hope he will not carry out that dreadful threat!"

Dangerous mission! How the coincidence smote Cecil's heart! And how distressed she was!

"See here, Joan!" he said with determination. "You have helped me, and I'll see if I cannot help you. Somehow there are persons who fail to see that marriage with love is so much better than marriage without it, and just for the sake of family convenience. *We* do not think so, and we must try to make others see our cases in the same light as we do. They must not try to force us to see things as they do; *they* will not have to bear the pain of the unhappiness into which they would thrust us!"

He was about to leave her in order to beard the lion, but she would accompany him. As they entered Lord Miston's study, he came forward to greet them with, "May you be happy, my children!"

"Father, there is some mistake," said Joan tremulously, before Cecil could speak. "We are not engaged."

"It is quite correct, sir, I assure you," said Cecil blandly. "I admit that you have cause to think that—that I had proposed to your daughter, but I hadn't. I was treating her as if she were my sister, you see. I was so pleased with the information she had just given me. It fitted in so nicely with what I had told her."

"Perhaps you will be good enough to explain!" gasped Lord Miston sinking into a chair. "Explain, if you are sane enough, you two."

This was not encouraging, but Cecil was not abashed. In a few cool, collected sentences, he explained.

"I know that you wished us to make a match of it, sir, chiefly because I was fortunate enough to save your life. You considered that you owed me something?"

"Yes!" gurgled Lord Miston, red with anger and disappointment.

"Well, sir, you wished me to make your daughter happy, didn't you? I am sorry to say that events have proved that I couldn't! So I propose, with your consent, to transfer the debt which you consider you owe me, to my friend, Mr. John Westcott, with whom I went to school some years ago. I ask that as a favour, sir!"

Lord Miston stared at one, then at the other; Cecil's demeanour was bold, Joan's was pleading. Something in her face reminded the old peer of her mother's at a time when he was courting her, before he achieved such success and gained a life peerage. The red colour died away gradually, and at length he spoke.

"Very good! I am disappointed, but if you are all happy I suppose I must consent! Joan, come here, my dear! Perhaps I have been a little thoughtless for your future, instead of taking, as I imagined, the right course! Bring Westcott here, and——"

The remainder of the sentence was lost, for Joan threw herself upon him with a glad cry and kissed him passionately.

Cecil slipped away, leaving father and daughter to enjoy their new-found felicity. He had to face his own respected parent, and the task was not nearly so pleasant. Mrs. Raynes was too majestic to give way to hysterics, but she came very near that condition. She upbraided Cecil for losing a fortune through a silly whim about being in love, and finally swept from the room, trembling with vexation.

On the following morning, however, she changed her mood; she received a letter from Lord Miston, offering Cecil a partnership in his large business.

"I intend to share my fortune between your son and my daughter," so ran a sentence in the old man's letter. "I wished, like you, that they would make it possible to keep that fortune intact in the family, but as they do not care to carry out our wishes, they must be content to lose half, each of them, eh?"

"He's a brick!" cried Cecil. "But I don't want to take the money from Joan!"

"Here is a note from Joan inclosed in her father's letter," said Mrs. Raynes. "After saying a lot of nice things about me and you and a Miss Culford, she says that she knows what her father is doing, and, if you don't accept, she will make her own share over to Miss Culford, of Croxham, as soon as she is Mrs. Cecil Raynes.

"It seems to me, Cecil, that you had better make your arrangements at Croxham, and then bring Miss Culford to town in order to introduce me to my future daughter!"

Geo. Day.

A Knowledge of One's Character

is of great importance nowadays. It enables one to know so many things of which one would otherwise be ignorant. For instance, all unmarried persons like to know whether they are suited to marry, and married persons wish to know other things which they could never know unless they had their characters told. Everyone desirous of obtaining this valuable knowledge should send a specimen of his or her handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope, to RANBE, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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. . THE . .
UNCOMMITTED CRIME.

Telling of the Temptation that Came to Dr. Nevil Holland.

"I FEEL as nervous as a kitten! But I should not like any of my patients to overhear that remark, or they might doubt my skill."

The young surgeon laughed at these words, uttered half-audibly in the privacy of his own room. He was giving the finishing touch to his attire, prior to making his way to the residence of his old college chum, whither he was bound in order to stake his future happiness on a woman's word!

Dr. Nevil Holland, although a young man, had gained a reputation as a surgeon which entitled him to take a high place in the profession, and honours were coming to him with a rapidity that made many of his less clever brethren envy him.

Most people agreed that, although Dr. Holland showed outward geniality and sympathy with suffering, he was in reality a man without the least trace of sentimental weakness, a man with nerves of iron. He was looked upon as a man whose only love was for his profession, a man who would not be touched by any woman's tenderness.

Yet this was the man who stood surveying himself nervously in the mirror. Some of the opinions concerning himself had filtered through to Dr. Holland, and he had smiled grimly and had felt pleased; but all the old scorn for the ways of women had been banished by the appearance of Winifred Marston!

Miss Marston was in the service of his chum's wife, as companion and secretary. Mr. Scarr was often away, and, as he had no children, his wife felt lonely; she had engaged Miss Marston as companion, and the two ladies agreed very well. Holland, visiting his friend during a somewhat lengthy sojourn at home, had seen Winnie Marston and had met his fate.

The love that sprang into being at the first meeting deepened with every passing day, till Nevil Holland told himself that he could not live without Winnie Marston; he must place his life's happiness at her disposal. What was reputation, honour in his profession, or wealth, if she were not with him to share it?

For a whole week he had watched for an opportunity to obtain an interview with her alone, and this evening the opportunity was offered to him. Scarr and his wife were going out; Miss Marston would be at home alone. Nevil Holland resolved that he would ask her to be his wife that evening, and when Mr. and Mrs. Scarr returned, he would, so he hoped, be able to announce that Miss Marston had agreed to become Mrs. Nevil Holland. He felt full of elation as he drove to Scarr's house in a hansom, but there was an occasional strange misgiving in his heart that worried him.

As he had anticipated, Miss Marston was alone. She welcomed him with that sweet smile that had something of sadness in it, and he told himself that he would soon be able to drive away that trace of sorrow, and make that lovely face look radiant always and for ever.

"I have come for a little music, Miss Marston," he said, with courtly politeness. "It is always so soothing, and you play so exquisitely. Ah!" he added, as she looked quickly up at him, "you entertain the popular notion that I have no heart!"

A slight flush tinged her cheeks, and she was conscious of appearing confused.

"I do not think that I have held the popular delusion exactly," Dr. Holland, she answered hesitatingly. "I should say that you have sufficient strength of character to make you forget everything, everything but your duty, when you are engaged in a difficult case, but at other times you are like other men."

She went towards the piano in order to comply with his request, but he stopped her.

"I would rather not have the music now, Miss Marston," he said, fixing his keen, grey eyes upon hers with an intense gaze that stirred her heart to its inmost depths. "You are the only one who has properly understood me, and it will do me more good to talk to you than to listen to the music.

"I wish to talk to you, Miss Marston! I will confess all and say that I have come here with that very purpose. Winnie!" he cried passionately, seizing her hands and holding them in a tight clasp, "I love you, I love you, and I have come to ask you to be my wife!"

He vaguely noticed the shrinking, frightened expression that crossed her features at this passionate appeal, but he attributed it to the suddenness of his outburst. He leant forward eagerly, as if to catch the lowly-uttered response which he wished to hear; but she liberated herself from his

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grasp with a cry of surprise and fear that struck him like a death-knell, and moved away from him.

"No, no! Oh, Dr. Holland, don't ask me! I cannot! It is impossible!"

Her breath was coming in quick gasps, her bosom was heaving, a strange light shone in her eyes. He passed his hand over his forehead and stared dumbly at her.

"Let me tell you," she cried quickly. "I owe it to you to tell you that which I have kept a secret from all. Oh, I did not think that you—you were in love with me! It never occurred to me, because——"

She stopped abruptly.

"Don't tell me that it is impossible!" he pleaded, as if dreading to hear her explanation. "Give me some hope. How can I be happy without you? One day, even if it be years hence, I may hope to possess you? That hope, slight as it may be, will give me something to work for."

The terrible earnestness of the man's love was apparent in every line of his face, in his attitude of supplication, in the tone of his voice. Winnie Marston shuddered.

"Don't," she pleaded in her turn. "I cannot love you, for I love another. I love—my husband! I am married!"

He stared at her in wonderment. She continued hastily, in a hard, dry tone, that betokened the intensity of her emotion:

"I was married about four-and-a-half years ago to Charles Procter; I loved him with all my soul, and I love him still. We had a brief period of happiness, and then a terrible calamity fell upon us. My husband was charged with fraud; he was prosecuted, the evidence was black against him, and he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment at the Central Criminal Court. I was the only one who believed in his innocence.

"I was left to earn my own living, while he was working as a common thief in prison. I succeeded in obtaining a situation, but I had to resume my maiden name, for no one would have engaged the wife of Charles Procter, the felon, the man whose crime was, to all appearances, proved beyond a doubt.

"I could write to my husband, I could see him once in three months, and I could receive a letter from him at stated intervals. I had to do that in secret. I arranged to have his letters sent to a small shop where letters are received for a small fee, and I gave them no clue to my whereabouts, lest the worthy shopkeeper should prattle and my secret become known.

"Thus our lives were passed for sixteen months; he had been well-behaved, and hoped to be let out on ticket-of-leave at the expiration of eighteen months. At that time my mistress decided to go abroad for a year, and I had to decide whether I would go with her or give up my situation and wait in England for my husband's release. I decided to go with her. I must live, and he must live when he came out, and it would be better for me to retain the position and so help him with money while he tried to obtain a livelihood and tried also to establish his innocence."

She ceased speaking for a few minutes; the recollection of that terrible time was too painful. Dr. Holland regarded her as one in a dream; he saw his happiness slipping from him, and his soul rebelled against the blackness of the future.

"I left word with the shopkeeper that letters intended for me should be re-addressed to me, in another envelope, to the Poste Restante of the Continental city to which I was going; I gave him a shilling in advance to repay him many-fold for the expense. I determined to write to my husband when the privileged time arrived, at the end of another month. I went abroad, caught a chill, and fell ill. My illness developed and for weeks my life was despaired of. My mistress sent me to a hospital, and I was alone.

"When I recovered, my first thought was for my husband, I applied at the Poste Restante, but there was no letter for me. I had implored the doctors to make inquiries during intervals of consciousness and they had ignored what I said, ascribing it to a disordered mental condition. I returned to England, hoping to trace my husband by the odious ticket-of-leave; but to my mingled joy and sorrow, I found that my husband's innocence had been proved immediately after his release by the confession of the real culprit, who had committed suicide, so my husband had not been compelled to report himself, and that trace was lost.

"Charles had received a recompense from the Government, and with that he had set off in search of me; I learnt so much from the proprietor of the shop to which my letters had been addressed; he was a new owner, the other having sold the business to him. I have not heard of my husband since, but I cannot think that we shall be separated for ever."

Separated for ever! The phrase struck the two in different ways, and to Nevil Holland it suggested that Charles Procter might be dead. If so, then Winnie would gradually be consoled, especially when the consolation was offered by a devoted lover, and—— Why not? Women, like men, can love twice. It was the uncertainty that kept Charles Procter's memory alive in this way.

"I will help you to discover your husband, Miss Marston," he said hoarsely, and he meant it. "Forgive me for having intruded my protestations of love upon you."

She was sorry for him, and she held out her hand in sympathy.

"I am sorry that—that it hurt you so!" she said simply.

He was glad to note the sympathy in her voice and manner—sympathy develops into love when there is no barrier.

"If I could discover where he is!" he muttered as he went home. And he little dreamt that Fate was to throw Charles Procter in his path, and the temptation to which he would soon be subject!

He went to the hospital in the morning, and he was informed that a fresh surgical case was waiting for him. No. 15, in Marcus Ward, was suffering from a complaint that would need an operation, and had been brought to the hospital for the purpose. No. 15 would, according to the usual practice in such cases, have a few days to "get his strength up" before receiving surgical treatment.

Holland went to see the patient, who was seated on the locker by the side of his bed. It took the surgeon a very little while to grasp the facts of the case, with the aid of data already supplied from outside, and he decided that four days would be sufficient preliminary treatment.

"Is it dangerous, doctor?" asked the patient anxiously.

"Well," smiled the doctor, "I suppose there is danger in everything outside the normal course of things, even in a cold, but this operation is one of those which I should call absolutely safe! It requires skill, that is all, and I'll undertake to say that you will be well and strong again in four weeks from now!"

"Thank you, sir!" said the man gratefully. "I am not afraid for myself, but—it would upset something else!"

He seemed as if he would have liked the surgeon to ask him what that something else was, but Holland was the professional surgeon again, and he said nothing. When he had time to think of outside affairs his mind was full of Winnie Marston.

Each visit to the Marcus Ward during the next three days caused Dr. Nevil Holland to take more interest in his new patient. On the third day, as he was leaving, he told the man that when he went to bed that night, he would remain there till noon on the following day, when the operation would be performed. Once more the patient asked his question, with an anxious expression in his eyes:

"Will it be dangerous, doctor?"

"Not at all!" was the prompt reply. "Now," he added in a more kindly tone, "don't upset yourself, or that will retard your convalescence!"

"I'll try to be cheerful, doctor, but it means a lot to me! This illness has already delayed me a long time! I must find her!"

"Whom?" asked Dr. Nevill Holland, turning quickly.

"My wife," said the patient simply. "Ah, doctor, it's a sad story! I don't suppose you want to know anything about it?"

"What's your name?" inquired Dr. Holland.

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It had never occurred to him to inquire about the man's name. He might have learnt it with the greatest ease, but the patient was simply No. 15 to him.

"Charles Procter!" came the astounding reply, and Dr. Holland started violently.

"You can tell me your story when you are better!" he remarked as calmly as possible. His face was a shade paler than usual. "You mustn't excite yourself by worry. I'll speak to the nurse and tell her to look after you!"

So Fate had given Charles Procter into his hands! If that man were out of the way, Winnie would be his! The thought haunted him all that day, he could not drive it from him! And, as it was so persistent, he harboured it, black as it was!

What a little thing it would be—just a slip of the instrument, and Charles Procter would be a dead man! Nobody would suspect that it was not an ordinary risk of an operation! No one would think of blaming him; he was so clever that the death of a patient while under his care would be regarded as merely one more proof of the real uncertainty of those things which are considered certain!

Then his better self gained possession of him for a brief space, and he thought of going at once to Winnie and making the facts known to her; he even tried to imagine the joy of reunion!

Reunion! That meant misery for him, and he would have to go through life with the bitter knowledge that Charles Procter possessed the one woman whom he had ever loved, whom he could ever love!

He wiped the beads of agony from his brow as he paced his room feverishly. Could he endure it? Then the small voice of the tempter came to him again. *Why* should he endure it? If Procter died, it would be oblivion and he would not suffer; while Winnie, having had her husband's identity made known to her, would grieve and recover. He, Nevil Holland, would pose as the man who had exerted all possible human skill to save her husband! He could tell her that he had refrained from telling her at once where her husband was, for the reason that it was better to await the result of the operation! He could even try to bring them together for the last few moments of Procter's existence!

Why not? Only a slight slip of the knife, and nobody would know! Why not? Why not? He shuddered, shut his eyes as if to keep the terrible thought from him, and took a small dose of a sedative in order to insure sleep!

* * * * *

So the unexpected had happened and the patient had sunk under the operation! Charles Procter had died before Winnie could get to him, and Nevil Holland had played the part of sympathetic friend and consoler.

"A year ago to-day!" said Nevil Holland to himself, and he started at the sound of the opening of the door. "Winnie has been my wife for a month! It was rather soon, but I pressed her and she yielded!"

Dr. Nevil Holland's marriage had been an event, and everybody imagined that he was supremely happy. Only Nevil Holland himself knew the truth. The figure of Charles Procter was ever before him!

At first he had been happy, for his iron will had crushed down all recollection of that terrible deed; but this will power decreased, and he found it impossible to thrust from him the face of the man who had stood between Winnie and him!

"And he is standing between us now!" cried Nevil, clasping his hands till the nails almost cut the flesh. "Wherever and whenever she is with me, *he* comes between. Her face and form change; they melt like a dissolving view and his face and form take the place of hers!"

He laughed mirthlessly and went off to a consultation. Luckily for him, his old coolness seemed to return when he was engaged professionally; but it was the only time he had free from the haunting shadow of Charles Procter.

As the days passed, the haunting vision grew more real; not only did Winnie's figure change into that of the man he had killed, but her voice altered and became Procter's. Nevil tried to shake off the horrible nightmare; he knew well enough that the vision was not a reality, he told himself over and over again that it was due to his nerves and that he was growing frightened without cause; but it was of no avail. He could not rid himself of the incubus.

He tried drugs and sought the society of others. He gave large parties—what a charming hostess Winnie made!—and he accepted invitations eagerly. A change of surroundings might do it!

He dreaded to look at his wife, feared to listen to her voice. He knew that in her stead he would see and hear Charles Procter, the man who had suffered imprisonment so unjustly and who had been foully done to death and so robbed of the happiness of reunion.

The haggard appearance of the celebrated surgeon began to attract attention; people said that he was getting run down, and Holland realised that he must go away and discontinue his professional duties for a while or people would not trust him. That meant ruin!

Dr. and Mrs. Holland gave a large party as a kind of farewell, prior to taking a long cruise in the Mediterranean. Many notabilities were there; Nevil felt a great pride in the fact that he was so honoured, but another sentiment surged upwards and drowned the other. If they only knew! How they would shrink from him and call in the police.

He heard Winnie speak; she was addressing him. She laughed, and then the laugh altered in tone, and it was the mocking laugh of Charles Procter! His former patient stood before him; he could see the face and figure plainly, and there was an accusing finger levelled at Dr. Nevil Holland!

With a hoarse cry, the surgeon seized a knife that was lying near and, raising it aloft, dashed at his enemy. He felt his arm gripped, there was a terrible struggle, a din of voices! With a shriek of desperation, Dr. Holland made an effort to release himself from the grasp of iron that held his wrist, and——

* * * * *

Dr. Nevil Holland shivered and looked around in bewilderment. He was standing by his own bedside in his pyjamas. Great beads of perspiration stood on his face; his body was damp with sweat.

What had happened? Had he killed Winnie in his attack on the visionary Procter? Had he been kept in confinement during an attack of brain fever following the assault? His eye fell on a calendar hanging on the wall; the date told him that the whole of that terrible experience had been but the dream of a night!

In four hours he would have to perform the operation, and he vowed that it should be successful!

"I love the woman, and I will prove my love by restoring her husband to her!" he said.

He did so, and thanked Heaven that he had been saved from a terrible crime. And the future does not seem so black as he fancied, for he finds happiness in his profession and in the fact that he was able to bring happiness to the woman he loved so dearly.

Leslie Grant.

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A Cordial Intreaty.

"When I want to borrow a sovereign I never go to a friend," said Jenkins, as though he were throwing out a suggestion. "Ah, well," replied Jones, extending his hand, "let us be friends!"

She Couldn't Understand Why.

"I love the sea," remarked the modern young man to the girl as they sat on the beach gazing out over the restless waves. "I don't see why," she responded earnestly, as she looked squarely at him, "it hasn't got any money."

No Objection.

She: "Albert, I have come to the conclusion that I love George better than I love you, and——" He: "What about the engagement ring I gave you to wear?" She: "Oh, that's all right. George says he won't object to my wearing it."

He Seemed too Faithful.

Miss Uglymug (an heiress): "Mr. Cashunter, you are the first man who ever kissed me in my life. Do you believe me when I tell you this?" Her Affianced: "Believe you! Well, I should say so." And now the engagement is declared off.

Quite a Lot of Money.

Loving Wife: "Now that you are ruined, James, I will disclose my secret. For years I have been saving up, and now" (pouring a shower of sovereigns into his hat) "this may tide you over." Husband: "Oh, my darling, how did you manage to do it?" Wife: "Easily enough. Every time you spoke cruelly to me I put sixpence into a box."

Would Have Her Own Way.

Mrs. Enpeck: "I think, Henry, that our daughter has made a very satisfactory marriage, and that she will succeed very well in the management of her husband." Henry Enpeck: "Why do you think so?" Mrs. Enpeck: "I overheard her talking to him this morning, and she got him to agree to a proposition like this: 'If you will do as I want, I promise to do the same.'"

He Felt Sure.

"Just think of it, Willie! Both your maiden aunts are coming to make us a visit to-morrow, and cook has just left." "Can't you get them to postpone their visit?" "It's too late." "And what do you propose to do?" "Why, I suppose I'll have to put on an apron and do the cooking myself." "Will you? Then you needn't worry any more. They won't stay long."

Diplomatic.

Wife: "You were intoxicated last night, John. What did you mean by taking more wine after I had told you you'd had enough?" Husband: "You know—er—you looked so sweet, dear, that I was so delighted—er—when I saw *two of you*, that—er—I was tempted to take a little more to see if I might see *three* of you, don'tcherknow!" Wife: "Well, you foolish boy, don't do it again, that's all!"

No More to be Admired.

Hilda: "I think, Horace, we had better move to another hotel." Horace: "Why, Hilda, we are delightfully situated." Hilda: "I know, but the people here have seen all my dresses!"

Both Had Changed.

Amanda: "Do you remember ten years ago when you confessed your love for me, how cruelly I refused you? I'm older now, and think differently." Algernon: "Well—er—so do I."

She Objected Also.

The One: "I thought you intended to marry Miss Coldcash?" The Other: "I thought so, too; but her family objected." The One: "What did Miss Coldcash say?" The Other: "Oh, she's one of the family, you know."

Self Evident.

"Although I have granted you this interview," said the pompous new office-holder, "I don't want people to think I'm in the habit of talking for publication." "They won't," replied the reporter, "when they see these remarks in print."

Considerate Son.

"Bertie," said his mother threateningly to the incorrigible, "I am going to tell your father to whip you when he comes home to-night." "Please don't, mamma," replied Bertie penitently; "papa is always so tired when he comes home!"

Willing to Inquire.

Master: "What! both want a holiday to-morrow? I can't spare you both at once. Annie, you can have to-morrow and John the next day." John: "Thank you, sir, but we wanted to get married, and I'm afraid, sir, it can't be done that way, but I'll inquire."

An Easy Matter.

"And are you really going up to London to find your daughter, Margaret?" said the minister to an old parishioner. "Why, how will you ever discover her in that big place?" "Oh, that will be quite easy," was the answer; "Jenny always had her head out of the window when she was at home."

Any Little Thing.

"Oh, Ernest, dear, I have a little favour I'd like to ask you before you go to town to-day," said Mrs. Homely the other morning, as her husband was putting on his overcoat. "Well, what is it?" "I wish you would just help Lizzie to move the piano out of the sitting-room and get down those bookcases. And I want the couch carried out of the room into the garden, where it can be thoroughly dusted. And then, if you'll just lend a hand in getting the carpet on the line, and help Susan to beat it, and take down those large pictures on the sitting-room wall, and carry them out, so that all the dust can be brushed off the back, and—well, if he hasn't gone! That's just like a man! Ask him to do any little thing about the house, and he flies off as if a mad bull were after him! I never saw anything like it!"

He Saw the Point.

"I am glad your name is Mary," said Mr. Slowcoach to his sweetheart, whom he had been courting for several years. "Why so?" "Because I was reading to-day, and came across a line which said: 'Mary is the sweetest name that woman ever bore.'" "That is poetically expressed. I've heard my father say it to my mother, whose name is Mary. It is from some poet, isn't it?" "I believe so." "But I've also heard my father say that there was even a sweeter name than Mary." "I think he must have been mistaken," said the lover, as he tenderly pressed his sweetheart's hand. "No, I do not think he was mistaken." "What was the other name?" A beautiful blush suffused the charming maiden's cheek, the silken lashes fell and veiled the lovely eyes, and in a tone as soft as the whisperings of an Æolian harp she murmured: "Wife." The cards are out.

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A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Examination of Jules by the Millionaire.

"Do you mean to tell me," asked Racksole, horror-struck by this calm confession, in spite of his previous knowledge, "that you were offered a hundred thousand pounds to poison Prince Eugen?"

"You put it rather crudely," said Jules in reply. "I prefer to say that I was offered a hundred thousand pounds if Prince Eugen should die within a reasonable time."

"And who were your vile employers?"

"That, honestly, I do not know."

"You know, I suppose, who paid you the first fifty thousand pounds, and who promised you the hundred thousand?"

"Well," said Jules, "I know vaguely. I know that he came *viâ* Vienna from—er—Bosnia. My impression was that the affair had some bearing, direct or indirect, on the projected marriage of the King of Bosnia. He is a young monarch, scarcely out of political leading-strings, as it were, and doubtless his Ministers thought that they had better arrange his marriage for him. They tried last year, and failed because the Princess whom they had in mind had cast her sparkling eyes on another prince. That Prince happened to be Prince Eugen of Posen. The Ministers of the King of Bosnia knew exactly the circumstances of Prince Eugen. They knew that he could not marry without liquidating his debts, and they knew that he could only liquidate his debts through this Jew, Sampson Levi. Unfortunately for me, they ultimately wanted to make too sure of Prince Eugen. They were afraid he might after all arrange his marriage without the aid of Mr. Sampson Levi, and so—well, you know the rest. It's a pity that the poor little innocent King of Bosnia can't have the Princess of his Ministers' choice."

"Then you think that the King himself had no part in this abominable crime?"

"I think decidedly not."

"I am glad of that," said Racksole simply. "And now, the name of your immediate employer."

"He was merely an agent. He called himself Sleszak—S-l-e-s-z-a-k. But I imagine that that wasn't his real name. I don't know his real name. An old man, he often used to be found at the Hotel Ritz, Paris.

"Mr. Sleszak and I will meet," said Racksole.

"Not in this world," said Jules quickly. "He is dead. I heard only last night—just before our little tussle."

There was a silence.

"It is well," said Racksole at length. "Prince Eugen lives, despite all plots. After all, justice is done."

"Mr. Racksole is here, but he can see no one, miss." The words came from behind the door, and the voice was the commissionaire's. Racksole started up, and went towards the door.

"Nonsense," was the curt reply, in feminine tones. "Move aside instantly."

The door opened and Nella entered. There were tears in her eyes.

"Oh! dad," she exclaimed, "I've only just heard you were in the hotel. We looked for you everywhere. Come at once, Prince Eugen is dying——" Then she saw the man sitting on the bed, and stopped.

Later, when Jules was alone again, he remarked to himself, "I may get that hundred thousand."

TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The State Bedroom Once More.

WHEN, immediately after the episode of the bottle of Romanée-Conti in the State dining-room, Prince Aribert and old Hans found that Prince Eugen had sunk in an unconscious heap over his chair, both the former thought, at the first instant, that Eugen must have already tasted the poisoned wine. But a moment's reflection showed that this was not possible. If the Hereditary Prince of Posen were dying or dead, his condition was due to some other agency than the Romanée-Conti. Aribert bent over him, and a powerful odour from the man's lips at once disclosed the cause of the disaster; it was the odour of laudanum. Indeed, the smell of that sinister drug seemed now to float heavily over the whole table. Across Aribert's mind there flashed then the true explanation. Prince Eugen, taking advantage of Aribert's attention being momentarily diverted, and yielding to a sudden impulse of despair, had decided to poison himself, and had carried out his intention on the spot. The laudanum must have been already in his pocket, and this fact went to prove that the unfortunate Prince had previously contem-

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plated such a proceeding, even after his definite promise. Aribert remembered now with painful vividness his nephew's words: "I withdraw my promise. Observe that—I withdraw it." It must have been instantly after the utterance of that formal withdrawal that Eugen attempted to destroy himself.

"It's laudanum, Hans," Aribert exclaimed, rather helplessly.

"Surely his Highness has not taken poison?" said Hans. "It is impossible!"

"I fear it is only too possible," said the other. "It's laudanum. What are we to do? Quick, man!"

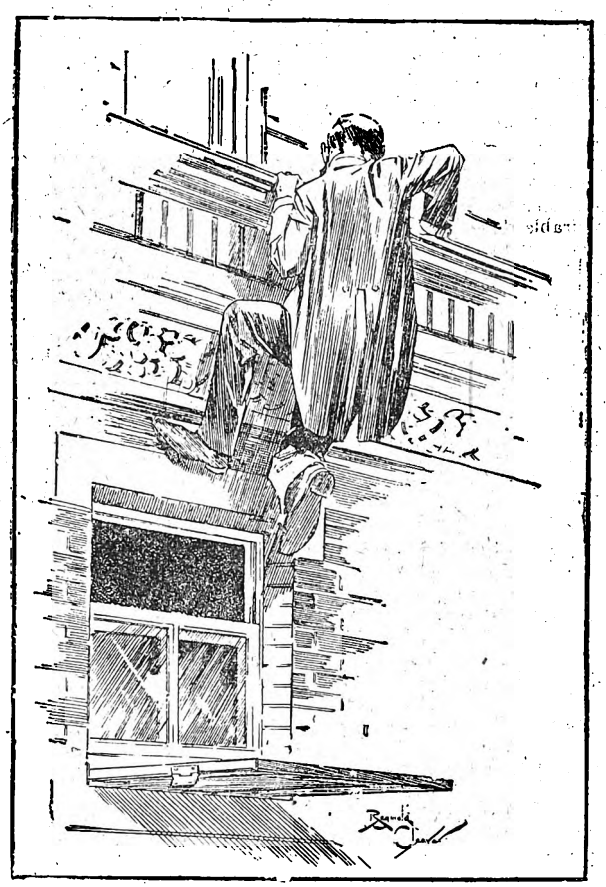
"His Highness must be roused, Prince. He must have an emetic. We had better carry him to the bedroom."

They did, and laid him on the great bed; and then Aribert mixed an emetic of mustard and water, and administered it, but without any effect. The sufferer lay motionless, with every muscle relaxed. His skin was ice-cold to the touch, and the eyelids, half-drawn, showed that the pupils were painfully contracted.

"Go out, and send for a doctor, Hans. Say that Prince Eugen has been suddenly taken ill, but that it isn't serious. The truth must never be known."

"He must be roused, sire," Hans said again, as he hurried from the room.

Aribert lifted his nephew from the bed, shook him, pinched him, flicked him cruelly, shouted at him, dragged him about, but to no avail. At length he desisted, from mere physical fatigue, and laid the Prince back again on the bed. Every minute that elapsed seemed an hour. Alone with the unconscious organism in the silence of the great, stately chamber, under the cold, yellow glare of the electric lights, Aribert became a prey to the most despairing thoughts. The tragedy of his nephew's career forced itself upon him, and it occurred to him that an early and shameful death had all along been inevitable for this good-natured, weak-purposed, unhappy child of a historic throne. A little good fortune, and his character, so evenly balanced between right and wrong, might have followed the proper path, and Eugen might have figured at any rate with dignity on the European stage. But now it appeared that all was over, the last stroke played. And in this disaster Aribert saw the ruin of his own hopes. For Aribert would have to occupy his nephew's throne, and he felt instinctively that Nature had not cut him out for a throne. By a natural impulse he inwardly rebelled against the prospect of monarchy. Monarchy meant so much for which he knew himself to be entirely unfitted. It meant a political marriage, which means a forced marriage, a union against inclination. And then what of Nella—Nella!



How Jules endeavoured to make his escape will be related in our next number.

Hans returned. "I have sent for the nearest doctor, and also for a specialist," he said.

"Good," said Aribert. "I hope they will hurry." Then he sat down and wrote a card. "Take this yourself to Miss Racksole. If she is out of the hotel, ascertain where she is and follow her. Understand, it is of the first importance."

Hans bowed, and departed for the second time, and Aribert was alone again. He gazed at Eugen, and made another frantic attempt to raise him from the deadly stupor, but it was useless. He walked away to the window; through the open casement he could hear the tinkle of passing hansoms on the Embankment below, whistles of door-keepers, and the hoot of the steam-tugs on the river. The world went on as usual, it appeared. It was an absurd world. He desired nothing better than to abandon his princely title, and live as a plain man, the husband of the finest woman on earth. But now! Pah! How selfish he was, to be thinking of himself when Eugen lay dying. Yet—Nella!

The door opened, and a man entered, who was obviously the doctor. A few curt questions, and he had grasped the essentials of the case. "Oblige me by ringing the bell, Prince. I shall want some hot water, and an able-bodied man and a nurse."

"Who wants a nurse?" said a voice, and Nella came quietly in. "I am a nurse," she added to the doctor, "and at your orders."

The next two hours were a struggle between life and death. The first doctor, a specialist who followed him, Nella, Prince Aribert, and old Hans formed, as it were, a league to save the dying man. None else in the hotel knew the real seriousness of the case. When a Prince falls ill, and especially by his own act, the precise truth is not issued broadcast to the universe. According to official intelligence, a Prince is never seriously ill until he is dead. Such is statecraft.

The worst feature of Prince Eugen's case was that emetics proved futile. Neither of the doctors could explain their failure, but it was only too apparent. The league was reduced to helplessness. At last the great specialist from Manchester Square gave it out that there was no chance for Prince Eugen unless the natural vigour of his constitution should prove capable of throwing off the poison unaided by scientific assistance, as a drunkard can sleep off his potion. Everything had been tried, even to artificial respiration and the injection of hot coffee. Having emitted this pronouncement, the great specialist from Manchester Square left. It was one o'clock in the morning. By one of those strange and futile coincidences which sometimes startle us by their subtle significance, the specialist met Theodore Racksole and his captive as they were entering the hotel. Neither had the least suspicion of the other's business.

In the State bedroom the small group of watchers surrounded the bed. The slow minutes filed away in dreary procession. Another hour passed. Then the figure on the bed, hitherto so motionless, twitched and moved; the lips parted.

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"There is hope," said the doctor, and administered a stimulant which was handed to him by Nella.

In a quarter of an hour the patient had regained consciousness. For the ten thousandth time in the history of medicine a sound constitution had accomplished a miracle impossible to the accumulated medical skill of centuries.

In due course the doctor left, saying that Prince Eugen was "on the high road to recovery," and promising to come again within a few hours. Morning had dawned. Nella drew the great curtains, and let in a flood of sunlight. Old Hans, overcome by fatigue, dozed in a chair in a far corner of the room. The reaction had been too much for him. Nella and Prince Aribert looked at each other. They had not exchanged a word about themselves, yet each knew what the other had been thinking. They clasped hands with a perfect understanding. Their brief love-making had been of the silent kind, and it was silent now. No word was uttered. A shadow had passed from over them, but only their eyes expressed relief and joy.

"Aribert." The faint call came from the bed. Aribert went to the bedside, while Nella remained near the window.

"What is it, Eugen?" he said. "You are better now."

"You think so?" murmured the other. "I want you to forgive me for all this, Aribert. I must have caused you an intolerable trouble. I did it so clumsily; that is what annoys me. Laudanum was a feeble expedient; but I could think of nothing else, and I daren't ask anyone for advice. I was obliged to go out and buy the stuff for myself. It was all very awkward. But, thank goodness, it has not been ineffectual."

"What do you mean, Eugen? You are better. In a day or so you will be perfectly recovered."

"I am dying," said Eugen quietly. "Do not be deceived. I die because I wish to die. It is bound to be so. I know by the feel of my heart. In a few hours it will be over. The throne of Posen will be yours, Aribert. You will fill it more worthily than I have done. Don't let them know over there that I poisoned myself. Swear Hans to secrecy; swear the doctors to secrecy; and breathe no word yourself. I have been a fool, but I do not wish it to be known that I was also a coward. Perhaps it is not cowardice; perhaps it is courage, after all—courage to cut the knot. I could not have survived the disgrace of any revelations, Aribert, and revelations would have been sure to come. I have made a fool of myself, but I am ready to pay for it. We of Posen—we always pay—everything except our debts. Ah! those debts! Had it not been for those I could have faced her who was to have been my wife, to have shared my throne. I could have hidden my past, and begun again. With her help I really could have begun again. But Fate has been against me—always! always! By-the-way, what was that plot against me, Aribert? I forget, I forget."

His eyes closed. There was a sudden noise. Old Hans had slipped from his chair to the floor. He picked himself up, dazed, and crept shamefacedly out of the room.

Aribert took his nephew's hand.

"Nonsense, Eugen! You are dreaming. You will be all right soon. Pull yourself together."

"All because of a million," the sick man moaned. "One miserable million of English pounds. The national debt of Posen is fifty millions, and I, the Prince of Posen, couldn't borrow one. If I could have got it, I might have held my head up again. Good-bye, Aribert. Who is that girl?"

Aribert looked up. Nella was standing silent at the foot of the bed, her eyes moist. She came round to the bedside, and put her hand on the patient's heart. Scarcely could she feel its pulsation, and to Aribert her eyes expressed a sudden despair.

At that moment Hans re-entered the room and beckoned to her.

"I have heard that Herr Racksole has returned to the hotel," he whispered, "and that he has captured that man Jules, whom they say is such a villain."

Several times during the night Nella had inquired for her father, but could gain no knowledge of his whereabouts.

Notes Worth Noticing.

FOR STOUT READERS ONLY.

1. No physical condition is so distressing as abnormal stoutness, especially when accompanied, as it generally is, by weakness, depression, and indifferent health.

2. Stout persons without number have seriously jeopardised health and become debilitated through the rash means they have employed to regain a good figure. The remedies (so called) which they have used have perhaps involved a famine diet, sweating, and drugging with poisonous minerals. These are worse than useless; for if they have the effect of temporarily reducing weight, it is only by a wasting, injurious process.

3. When the constitution is not ruined by such drastic methods, the fat will always develop anew as soon as they are abandoned.

4. It is the worst thing possible to try and continue such methods for any lengthy period. The consequences are very much worse than the disease.

5. What is required is a remedy that will increase strength and nerve force all the time it is absorbing and eliminating the superfluous and diseased fatty deposits from the system.

6. The dangerous fatty layers that cling to the vital organs —the heart and liver—and impede their action must be got rid of for the sake of health, and the excessive subcutaneous fat must be dispersed for the sake of comeliness.

7. "Antipon," the great permanent cure for corpulence, performs this duty with absolute certainty, and at the same time, by its grand tonic action, rapidly reinvigorates the whole system.

8. "Antipon" acts with marvellous rapidity. Within the first day and night of taking it "Antipon" will effect a reduction amounting to 8oz. to 3lb., according to circumstances. Then day by day there is a sure and steady loss of weight until correct proportions and normal weight call for the cessation of the doses.

9. There need be no apprehension lest the fat should re-accumulate. Ordinary prudence will maintain the perfect conditions of health and symmetry re-acquired by this admirable remedy.

10. "Antipon" improves the appetite and promotes digestion, and the extra food taken, which must be of the wholesomest quality, is naturally the source of increased strength and vitality.

11. "Antipon" is entirely harmless, and would not hurt an infant. It is of agreeable flavour and appearance (like a rich red wine), and contains nothing of a mineral nature.

12. "Antipon" is sold by chemists, stores, etc., in bottles, price 2s. 6d. and 4s. 6d., from stock or on order; or, should difficulties arise, may be had (on remitting price) post free, privately packed, direct from the sole manufacturers, the "Antipon" Company, 13 Buckingham Street, Strand, London, W.C.

WARM PRAISE FROM THE PRESS

ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS.

"'Antipon' not only speedily absorbs and throws out of the system all superabundant adipose matter, but increases strength and vitality."

THE LADY'S PICTORIAL.

"To reduce superabundant fat is of vital importance. The wonderful new fat absorbent known as 'Antipon' performs this work promptly, safely, and with permanent effect. It goes to the very root of the evil; the cure is complete and permanent."

METHODIST RECORDER.

"It is satisfactory to know that the new cure, 'Antipon,' is the practical result of a specialist's researches and discoveries, so that reliance can be placed upon its efficacy"

PENNY ILLUSTRATED PAPER.

"In 'Antipon,' the great new permanent cure for corpulence, the world is made richer by a marvellous discovery."

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Now, at half-past six in the morning, a rumour had mysteriously spread among the servants of the hotel about the happenings of the night before. How it had originated no one could have determined, but it had originated.

"Where is my father?" Nella asked of Hans.

He shrugged his shoulders, and pointed upwards. "Somewhere at the top, they say."

Nella almost ran out of the room. Her interruption of the interview between Jules and Theodore Racksole has already been described. As she came downstairs with her father she said again: "Prince Eugen is dying—but I think you can save him."

"I," exclaimed Theodore.

"Yes," she repeated positively. "I will tell you what I want you to do and you must do it."

TWENTY-NINTH CHAPTER.

Theodore is Called to the Rescue.

As Nella passed downstairs from the top storey with her father—the lifts had not yet begun to work—she drew him into her own room, and closed the door.

"What's this all about?" he asked, somewhat mystified, and even alarmed by the extreme seriousness of her face.

"Dad," the girl began, "you are very rich, aren't you?—very, very rich?" She smiled anxiously, timidly. He did not remember to have seen that expression on her face before. He wanted to make a facetious reply, but checked himself.

"Yes," he said, "I am. You ought to know that by this time."

"How soon could you realise a million pounds?"

"A million—what?" he cried. Even he was staggered by her calm reference to this gigantic sum. "What on earth are you driving at?"

"'A million pounds,' I said. That is to say, five million dollars. How soon could you realise as much as that?"

"Oh!" he answered, "in about a month, if I went about it neatly enough. I could unload as much as that in a month without scaring Wall Street and other places. But it would want some management."

"Useless!" she exclaimed. "Couldn't you do it quicker, if you really had to?"

"If I really had to, I could fix it in a week, but it would make things lively, and I should lose on the job."

"Couldn't you," she persisted, "couldn't you go down town this morning and raise a million, somehow, if it was a matter of life and death?"

He hesitated. "Look here, Nella," he said, "what is it you've got up your sleeve?"

"Just answer my question, dad, and try not to think that I'm a stark, staring lunatic."

"I rather expect I could get a million this morning, even in London. But it would cost pretty dear. It might cost me fifty thousand pounds, and there would be the dickens of an upset in New York—a sort of grand universal slump in my holdings."

"Why should New York know anything about it?"

"'Why should New York know anything about it'!" he repeated. "My girl, when anyone borrows a million sovereigns the whole world knows about it. Do you reckon that I can go up to the Governors of the Bank of England and say, 'Look here, lend Theodore Racksole a million for a few weeks, and he'll give you an I O U and a covering note on stocks'?"

"But you could get it?" she asked again.

"If there's a million in London I guess I could handle it," he replied.

"Well, dad," and she put her arms round his neck, "you've just got to go out and fix it. See? It's for me. I've never asked you for anything really big before. But I do now. And I want it so badly."

He stared at her. "I award you the prize," he said, at length. "You deserve it for colossal and immense coolness. Now you can tell me the true inward meaning of all this rigmarole. What is it?"

"I want it for Prince Eugen," she began, at first hesitatingly, with pauses. "He's ruined unless he can get a million to pay off his debts. He's dreadfully in love with a Princess, and he can't marry her because of this. Her parents wouldn't allow it. He was to have got it from Sampson Levi, but he arrived too late—owing to Jules."

"I know all about that—perhaps more than you do. But I don't see how it affects you or me."

"The point is this, dad," Nella continued. "He's tried to commit suicide—he's so hipped. Yes, real suicide. He took laudanum last night. It didn't kill him straight off—he's got over the first shock, but he's in a very weak state, and he says he means to die. And I truly believe he will die. Now, if you could let him have that million, dad, you would save his life."

Nella's item of news was a considerable and disconcerting surprise to Racksole, but he hid his feelings fairly well.

"I haven't the least desire to save his life, Nell. I don't over-much respect your Prince Eugen. I've done what I could for him—but only for the sake of seeing fair play, and because I object to conspiracies and secret murders. It's a different thing if he wants to kill himself. What I say is: Let him. Who is responsible for his being in debt to the tune of a million pounds? He's only got himself and his bad habits to thank for that. I suppose if he does happen to peg out, the throne of Posen will go to Prince Aribert. And a good thing too! Aribert is worth twenty of his nephew."

"That's just it, dad," she said, eagerly following up her chance. "I want you to save Prince Eugen just because Aribert—Prince Aribert—doesn't wish to occupy the throne. He'd much prefer not to have it."

"Much prefer not to have it! Don't talk nonsense. If he's honest with himself, he'll admit that he'll be jolly glad to have it. Thrones are in his blood, so to speak."

"You are wrong, father. And the reason is this: If Prince Aribert ascended the throne of Posen he would be compelled to marry a Princess."

"Well! A Prince ought to marry a Princess."

"But he doesn't want to. He wants to give up all his royal rights, and live as a subject. He wants to marry a woman who isn't a Princess."

"Is she rich?"

"Her father is," said the girl. "Oh, dad! can't you guess? He—he loves me." Her head fell on Theodore's shoulder and she began to cry.

The millionaire whistled a very high note. "Nell!" he said at length. "And you? Do you sort of cling to him?"

"Dad," she answered, "you are stupid. Do you imagine I should worry myself like this if I didn't?" She smiled through her tears. She knew from her father's tone that she had accomplished a victory.

"It's a mighty queer arrangement," Theodore remarked. "But, of course, if you think it'll be of any use, you had better go down and tell your Prince Eugen that that million can be fixed up, if he really needs it. I expect there'll be a decent security, or Sampson Levi wouldn't have mixed himself up in it."

"Thanks, dad. Don't come with me; I may manage better alone."

She gave a formal little curtsey and disappeared. Racksole, who had the talent, so necessary to millionaires, of attending to several matters at once, the large with the small, went off to give orders about the breakfast and the remuneration of his assistant of the evening before, Mr. George Hazell. He then sent an invitation to Mr. Félix Babylon's room, asking that gentleman to take breakfast with him. After he had related to Babylon the history of Jules' capture, and had a long discussion with him upon several points of hotel management, and especially as to the guarding of wine-cellars, Racksole put on his hat, sallied forth into the Strand, hailed a hansom, and was driven to the City. The order and nature of his operations there were too complex and technical to be described here.

(Concluding instalment next week.)

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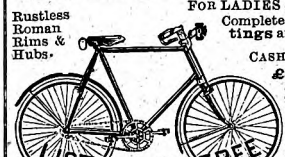

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Results of a Mistake

"SID" is worried. His girl lately went for a holiday, and, while away, wrote to him. He happened, in his reply, to copy the address wrongly, not putting the county, so the letter was returned. There has been a little mistake over the matter, to which neither of them will own, and the result has been that she now goes out, not with "SID," but with "SID'S" friend. Should "SID" write and apologise?

* * * * *

It is always well, "SID," to apologise, especially if, in a dispute with a lady, she happens to be in the wrong. Somebody once said that there is no Pope so infallible as a woman who knows she is in the wrong. She won't, of course, admit that it was her mistake, so why argue about it? It is such a trivial affair that it really doesn't matter. It seems a very little, though, to have severed you. Still I think she is only going out with the other fellow just out of a desire to probe you.

Would It be Cruel?

"PATRICIA" writes to tell me that she is engaged to a man who was formerly very handsome, but who, having met with a serious accident, is now disfigured for life. She asks me whether it would be very heartless and cruel of her if she were to throw him up.

* * * * *

It would be very heartless of her. To like a man solely because he is handsome is a very debased sort of attachment. She must remember that love can overcome all obstacles, and that if she has really been in love with the man she will find that she will learn to love him still in spite of his disfigurement, and perhaps even more truly than heretofore.

Waiting for Trains.

"I AM walking to the station with a young lady," writes "B. T. E." "My train goes at 9.5, hers at 9.15. If I miss mine, I have to wait half-an-hour for the next, and am late for my engagement. Should I wait the ten minutes with the young lady, or would it be pardonable for me to leave her and catch my own train?"

* * * * *

If you have a pressing business engagement, and your engagement with the young lady is not pressing, then she would not expect you to wait with her. If otherwise, then you might spend the additional ten minutes looking after her on the platform. What, after all, would the remaining twenty minutes matter, seeing that you had spent the previous ten so sweetly? Perhaps, further, *she* might agree to wait until *your* train departed, and then you, in your turn, might agree to wait until her next one, and so on until, as a final result, you decided to lose all the trains, and yourselves, in the newly-aroused feelings of love.

Breaking the News.

"HAVING had a quarrel with my lover," writes "ROSA," "and having both agreed to break off the engagement, how had the affair better be announced to our various friends? Should I say nothing at all about it, and just leave it to them to find out, or should I tell everybody? Then, do you think it would be wise to tell the whole truth, or should I just say that he has gone away for a time?"

* * * * *

It is always better, in such cases, to blurt out the whole truth. People—the people we all love so dearly—always put the very worst conclusion on any mystery which may be sprung upon them, and if you only told half the truth, people would tell it doubled. So why not calmly tell all your dear friends that you have definitely broken off the engagement—make it quite clear that *you* have broken it off, not he—and you will save them the trouble of inventing the fact.

A Girl With a Temper.

"I AM engaged," writes "B. P.," "and have found my sweetheart so far to have a sweet nature, and very fascinating character. The other day, however, I saw her for the first time amongst her family. I then realised that she had a fearful temper, and spoke in the most snappy way to the others in the house. It has altered my opinion of her to some extent. Do you think I ought to break it off?"

* * * * *

I wouldn't do that. If so far she has shown herself to have a sweet character, and without any affectation, is not that enough for you? The temper she displays in home life, of course, might be in future turned on to yourself. But I rather think, had you been the kind of person to rouse her temper, she would have shown it before, unless, of course, she is a very practised actress, of which you are the best judge. Generally speaking, every woman should have some kind of temper, as the entirely sweet, amiable creature, is often weak-minded, and not best able to manage a home, a family, and a servant, or deal with tradesmen. A little temper on a wife's part, so far from spoiling married happiness, often acts as a check to her husband, and he has much more respect for a woman, occasionally aroused, than he would have for one who has never been known to get ruffled. Take your wife, temper and all. I don't suppose you yourself are entirely free from a bit of it, supposing you to be a man of average character.

Should She Go to the Wedding?

"LILLIE," and her sweetheart have had a quarrel, since which she has been asked to his brother's wedding. She wants to know whether she should go, as her sweetheart will be there. The cause of their estrangement was that the young man had been keeping company with another young lady, who had, however, since given him up.

* * * * * * *

I am sorry to hear of your little trouble; but I cannot suggest a more excellent preparation towards a reconciliation than your attending the wedding. The marriage ceremony is a splendid advertisement for the matrimonial state, and few men and women can attend one without turning their attention in that direction themselves. Now you and your estranged lover will both be there. You will both think of matrimony, and will both realise that the partner of your respective hearts is in that very place of worship. Could anything but a complete reconciliation come of such a thing, supposing, of course, that you still love each other?

Cynthia

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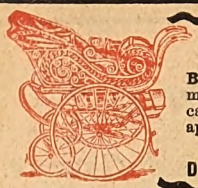

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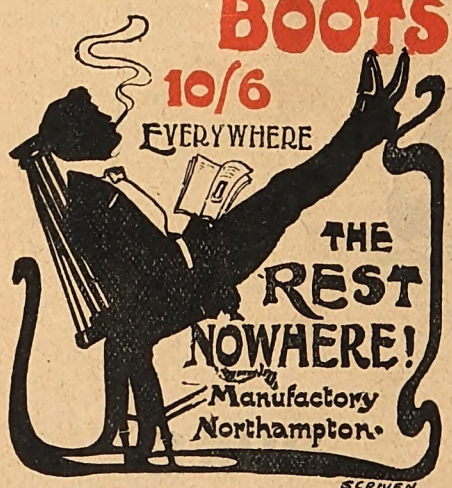

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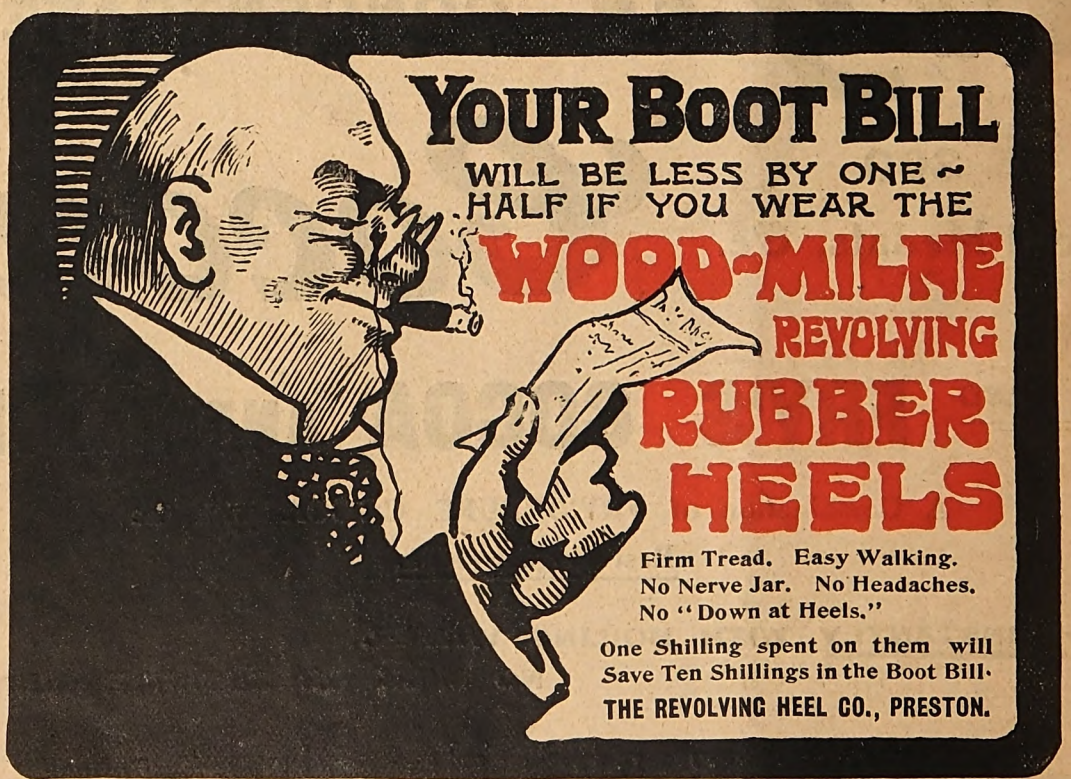

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SHORT STORIES

No. 807.] Week Ending June 18, 1904. [Price One Penny.

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At least a dozen capital articles will be found in the paper, each one of interest and written by an expert writer. A new feature will be introduced under the title of QUIET THOUGHTS FOR SUNDAY, and will contain the brightest bits from the brightest of the Sunday journals.

Besides this, there will be a big competition in which £500 and a huge number of beautiful silver brooches are offered in prizes to readers.

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Altogether you will find in SMITH'S WEEKLY all you found in SHORT STORIES, with the addition of an enormous amount of general reading matter thrown in free of cost.

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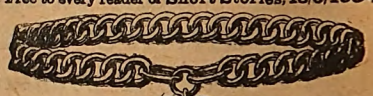

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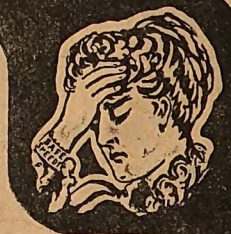

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Don't forget that the title of SHORT STORIES next Tuesday will be SMITH'S WEEKLY.

SHORT STORIES

No. 807.] [ONE PENNY.

Week Ending June 18th, 1904.

The Intervention of "Fluff."

TELLING THE LOVE STORY OF THE MAN WHO WAITED.

"So 'Fluff's' coming home?"

Rachel nodded. "Yes, she has had a long ramble through France, Germany, and Italy, with the Delameres. They have globe-trotted her to death nearly—but I fancy it has done her good. She will be home in time for her nineteenth birthday."

The man who had opened the conversation about "Fluff" was a clean-limbed, typical Britisher. His eyes were blue, his skin healthy, and his mouth well-cut and decided. In age he was nearly forty, though he did not look it, and socially he was the elder son and heir of Sir Charles Hastie—an all-round, good sportsman, a genuine friend—and—the despair of every mother in Society with marriageable daughters. Maurice Hastie was impervious to their wiles, and neither loved nor rode away. People called him at last an "incurable bachelor."

Only Rachel Vanbrugh knew why he had remained so long a bachelor. She herself was the elder daughter of the Vicar of Lullworth, and her beautiful, grave face, with its flashing, sombre eyes of velvet brown, and tender mouth, were enshrined in Maurice Hastie's heart, a talisman against all other charms.

"So you will have 'Fluff' to chaperon now, eh?" he said, after a pause, during which he had flicked carelessly at the long grass at his feet.

"Yes," she replied, with a wistful smile. "'Fluff' is nineteen—she is to come out, and I shall chaperon her."

He frowned. "You only are to blame for that, Rachel," he said quickly. "Years ago I asked you to be my wife, and I ask you again to-day. Darling, will you change your mind, and cease to wait for a man who by this time——" He stopped abruptly, and she finished his sentence with a slight smile—"who by this time has probably forgotten that I *am* waiting for him?"

Then she shook her head. "No, Maurice, I promised Guy Barrington to wait till he returned to England. He said it might be five or seven years before he made his fortune in Australia—but he left me his affianced wife, and he must find me the same when he returns."

He made an impatient movement. "You are too quixotic, Rachel," he said half-tenderly, half-ruefully. "The seven years Guy Vanbrugh prescribed as the limit to the period of waiting, are nearly over—what then? You were young seven years ago, and had hardly seen anything of the world, or of men; the promise you made then may now become a fetter. Suppose," he turned to her suddenly, "suppose you should find Guy Barrington had changed with the years, would it break your heart?"

For a moment she did not reply, then when her answer came it caused the blood in her veins to run riot.

She looked at him, then a slow colour stained her face, lending a deeper glow to her eyes.

"Guy Barrington," she began slowly, twisting and untwisting a spray of lilies in her hand, "took away with him what I thought was my heart—but now I know that it was only that portion of one's heart that is given to an esteemed friend or cousin. It—it would not be damaged if he dropped it."

He caught her hand. "Then—Rachel—your heart—the kernel of your heart—is in *whose* keeping?"

She raised her eyes and looked at him steadily. Her face was very pale now, and when she spoke her voice trembled.

"It is in my own keeping," she said slowly. "In honour bound, it can be in no other now."

"And for the sake of a principle you would spoil not only your own life, but someone else's too," he said bitterly. "You good women are very cruel."

"It is you who are cruel," she answered. "You think only of yourself. You don't consider my position. I want help for I am weak, and it is hard to always put one's chances of happiness on one side, but I gave my word—my honour must at least be clear from contumely—and when Guy Barrington returns, I shall redeem my promise and marry him."

"If he does not return?" he breathed hoarsely.

Her eyes flashed into his with a sudden light. "Then I can give my hand where I have perhaps already given my heart."

He rose and crossed over to her. "Rachel—this must not happen. If only Guy Barrington——"

He stopped suddenly. The maid had come down the steps that led across the lawn to the summer-house, and

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in her hand there was a salver on which two letters lay.

Rachel took them up carelessly, then she started as she looked at the handwriting on one of the envelopes. The letter had been addressed to the old vicarage they had left years ago, and had been forwarded from place to place.

She opened it with trembling fingers, and read the few lines hurriedly.

"My Dearest Rachel," they ran, "*I left Australia by the P. and O. 'Asia,' and as I was seedy I vacated the boat at Marseilles and came on to Nice to recoup. I shall soon, however, be in England, and then shall hope to return to Australia with you as my wife.—With love, yours in great haste,*

"Guy Barrington."

She crushed it in her hand, then glanced at Maurice Hastie. He was pale and his mouth was set in a grim line.

"He is coming back," she said simply. "He is at Nice now. We shall return to Australia when he is better."

He winced. The possessive pronoun hurt him.

"Then I shall go away," he said, after a pause. "I cannot stay here." He took her hand in his. "Tell me, Rachel—must your honour rooted in dishonour stand? Must you marry Guy Barrington?"

She bowed her head. "I must. He has come for me!"

He raised her hand to his lips. "Then good-bye. I shall not see you again."

He turned and walked down the wide velvet lawn, out through the little white gate, and Rachel, standing where he had left her, watched his head disappear over the top of the high hedge that skirted the road. Then she sat down to think. She was a woman of twenty-nine—and she knew that she had sent away her life's happiness for the sake of honour!

Suddenly she remembered the second letter. It was from "Fluff," whose real name was Rosamund, but from her babyhood she had always been "Fluff." Rachel had taken the place of the mother who had died when "Fluff" was a tiny thing, and she regarded the little winsome sister, who was ten years her junior, in the light of a sacred charge from the mother she had adored.

"My Dearest Rachel," "Fluff" wrote, "*We are having such a splendid time here. Nice is filling up now for the carnival season, and everything is very gay. We are going to have a carriage in the procession of the first Battle of Flowers. I wish you were here, dear. Mrs. Delamere has met a lot of friends at the Hôtel des Anglais—one man I specially like. He is a rich Australian squatter, but doesn't look a bit like my idea of a person who 'squats,' being very English, and handsome. I shall come home next month with the Delameres. Give my love to father and Maurice Hastie, if you see him. Your loving,*

"Fluff."

Rachel sighed—then smiled. "Happy 'Fluff'! She has just to gather the rosebuds of life now—the thorns have not yet touched her fingers."

The month had come and gone. "Fluff" was home once more, and after the first flush of sisterly greeting, and the usual flood of rippling nonsense from the younger sister, Rachel noticed a change in her little charge. A change not so much of manner or appearance, but one that left her sometimes pensive when others laughed, or sent a vivid colour into her rose-tinted cheeks at the sudden sight of the letter-bag, leaving it pale again as the petals of a creamy *gloire de dijon*.

Rachel noted all these signs in her little sister, and wondered whether she had left her frivolous, butterfly heart on the Riviera. She hoped not. She was fearful of losing too soon the gay, lovable little creature, whose moods were as variable as an April sky.

Of her own pain she never spoke. Maurice Hastie had left Lullworth, and gone abroad. She had not seen him since that day in the summer-house. And she had not heard again from the man to whom her word was plighted. She did not speak of the letter she had received from Marseilles; her father was ignorant that Guy Barrington was again in Europe, and as for "Fluff," she only knew that for years her sister had been writing letters to a man abroad. She did not even know his name.

The sisters were sitting together one morning when the post came in. "Fluff" sprang up from her chair, and took them in her hand. Her eyes were sparkling and her cheeks flushed.

"Two for you, Rachel—and"—she stopped suddenly, gazing at the third letter with dilated eyes. "I wonder," she said slowly, "is this for you, Rachel—or for me? It is addressed to 'Miss R. Vanburgh,' and has been re-directed from the old vicarage and from auntie's on to here. But the writing seems familiar to me. I thought it might be for—for me."

Rachel rose, and took the letter in her hand; one glance told her that it was from Guy Barrington. He had evidently imagined that she was still in the old vicarage, where they had first become engaged seven years ago.

"It is for me, dear," she replied quietly. "From the man whom I promised to marry when you were a little girl years ago. He is back in England after being away seven years."

"Fluff" buried her face in a vase of deep-crimson roses. "I forgot," she murmured. "What is your *fiancé's* name Rachel? Fancy my not knowing my future brother-in-law's name."

"It is Guy Barrington, dear," Rachel began, opening the letter with reluctant fingers.

A little cry came from the girl bending over the flowers.

"Have you pricked yourself, 'Fluff'?" her sister said absently.

"Fluff" turned a white, quivering face to her. "Yes—only a thorn," she replied, with a faint laugh. "I forgot that such a beautiful thing as a rose had thorns!"

Rachel sighed. A line from some poet ran in her head. "He who wakes to love, must needs wake to pain." Surely she had met both the rose and the thorn in *her* love! And perhaps even little "Fluff." She glanced up quickly, but "Fluff" had vanished.

The letter she had received from Guy Barrington informed her that he would be with her the following evening to dinner. So it was with a sense of reluctance that she wrote, and, at her father's request, invited him to make the vicarage his headquarters while in Lullworth.

When he arrived the following evening, it was the half-hour before dinner, and Rachel, dressed in a gown of crimson chiffon, that made her resemble some graceful lotus flower, waited in the drawing-room to receive him. Her hands were icy cold and she shivered like a criminal in the dock expecting to hear the dreaded sentence. She hated herself for feeling like that, when the poor man who loved her, and who had worked for her sake, was returning to claim only what was legitimately his.

The door opened and the servant announced "Mr. Barrington." A tall, dark man with a brown skin and keen, blue eyes came towards her. "Well, Rachel," he said, when he had touched her cheek with his moustached mouth, "you see I have turned up after all, dear. You have altered a little—not much though," he went on, as though eager to make conversation. "Perhaps a little graver and more dignified—but then we are both getting weighed down by our responsibilities to be too gay."

"Are you better now?" she said quietly. "You don't look as though you had been very ill."

He flushed. "No. I was a bit chippy at first, but then I bucked up wonderfully when I got to the South of France. Met a lot of friends there."

He rose and strolled across to a table, on which stood a lot of photographs. There was the latest of "Fluff" taken at Nice. It was a panel, and she looked a very lovely little Dresden china sort of figure—her yellow hair framing her dainty head like an aureole.

"Who is this?" he said abruptly.

"My little sister 'Fluff,'" she answered. "You will see her at dinner."

He put the photograph back silently, and when he spoke again it was in a preoccupied manner.

At dinner, a message came from "Fluff's" room to say she had

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a bad headache, and wished to be excused, and Rachel missed the bright, racy chatter of her little sister.

The following morning she was not present when "Fluff" met Mr. Barrington, but was pained and surprised to see that, as the days went on, "Fluff" grew paler and thinner, and Guy Barrington moody and taciturn. She was sorry they did not seem to hit it off. She had hoped that "Fluff" would have helped her with her burden of entertaining, but since they seemed to shun each other's society, the effort of appearing bright and sociable fell upon her own shoulders. And it was a burden heavier than she had anticipated, for she was informed by a friend that the rumour was going about that at last Maurice Hastie had become a convert to the fascinations of femininity, and was shortly to be married to an American beauty whom he had met abroad. Though it was ignoble to resent his finding happiness elsewhere, while she could never be anything to him, yet she felt a twinge of pain shoot through her, as she thought of that other woman being the wife of the man she loved — yes — loved — while her word was given to another.

It was one morning in such a mood that she sought the quiet of the summer-house, where Maurice Hastie had said "Good-bye!" She had left her future husband writing letters, and "Fluff" of late had been strangely prone to seeking solitude.

As she sat thinking on the events of the past few weeks, voices at the back of the summer-house roused her from her reverie. They were those of Guy Barrington and "Fluff."

She rose to call them, then a word fell on her ears, freezing the blood in her veins, and making her powerless to move.

"Darling," said the voice of her affianced husband, in tones of passionate love, such as she had never heard from him, even in the early days of their engagement. "This *can't* go on 'Fluff,' sweetheart! How did I know that *she* was your sister when we met at Nice? The similarity of the names did not even strike me. I met you and loved you at first sight. I could not help it—it just came to me, and I forgot Rachel till afterwards, when it was too late. I loved you, and you only, desperately, passionately!"

"Hush," said the low, sobbing tones of "Fluff's" pretty voice, "you have no right to speak like that. It was a cruel mistake that we met; we must forget it, that's all. Rachel loves you—and trusts in your honour. You must not betray her! We must forget everything!"

"And you?" said the man. "Are you to be sacrificed, 'Fluff,' to an empty principle?"

The listening woman in the summer-house started. Those were, the very words that Maurice Hastie had said to her, "An empty principle." And now another man—her future husband—was saying them to her sister!

"I shall go away," answered "Fluff" unsteadily, "when you and Rachel are married."

Maurice peered through the French windows and saw Rachel looking infinitely weary and sad.

"Oh, sweetheart!" groaned the man, and then Rachel softly left the summer-house, and made her way to her bedroom. She could not listen to any more. The words of love she had heard burnt into her brain, and seared her heart with the rod of humiliation. For this—she thought bitterly, she had flung away the substance for the shadow! In sticking to a principle she had brought misery upon four people—Maurice Hastie, Barrington, "Fluff,"—and —herself. They were all victims beneath the Juggernaut of "Honour." And now the only thing "Honour" could do was to let her at least make two of the victims happy!

After dinner—at which meal "Fluff" did not appear, and Barrington forced himself to make conversation—Rachel said:

"I want to have a chat with you, Guy; come into the library."

He followed slowly, listening for the sound of another skirt, the thrill of another voice.

Rachel faced him calmly. "I have been thinking," she said slowly, "that the years have changed us both, Guy. And what we fancied love was only the attraction of propinquity. I want you to let me give you back this ring—I think it will fit someone else."

"What is the meaning of this, Rachel?" he said unsteadily. "What do you know?"

"Enough to be quite sure that our marriage would be a great mistake," she answered quietly. "I think you would fail in making me happy, but would succeed with—'Fluff.'"

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"Rachel!" he broke in hoarsely, "you must think me a blackguard."

She smiled. "No, only very foolish not to have been quite frank with me. It would have spared a great deal of pain that cannot be undone."

He flashed a keen glance at her. Somehow her dark, southern beauty had never appeared so alluring. "This will not hurt you, Rachel?" he said quickly. "There is someone else——"

"There is no one else—now," she answered, then added quickly, "now go to the drawing-room; you will find 'Fluff' waiting."

With a shame-faced air, yet a gladness in his eyes, he stole out of the room, and Rachel was left alone.

Six months later a tall, tanned Englishman turned into the Hotel Paris at Monte Carlo. He engaged a room, then scribbled his name in the visitors' book. As his eyes scanned the page before him, they fell upon a name that sent the blood throbbing through his veins, and left even his lips pale. The name was "Mr. and Mrs. Guy Barrington," and maid.

That was all, yet the sight of that simple announcement was an unexpected blow. He had heard of the marriage of the Rev. Cyril Vanbrugh's daughter, but had read no more, and after wandering from place to place, had come to Monte Carlo to dispel his thoughts at the tables.

"Rachel here," he muttered. "I can't stay and meet her. I dare not. It would undo all the good resolutions I have made, and I should forget everything except my love for her. I must get away as soon as possible, and put the seas between us."

Old Sir Charles had died only two months before, and now Maurice was "Sir Maurice Hastie," but his accession to wealth and position had not driven from his memory the vision of that proud, beautiful woman whose lofty ideals had sent him from her side. He wondered feverishly whether she ever thought of him! Whether, as "Mrs. Guy Barrington," she remembered him—the lonely man—sacrificed for honour; a mistaken sense of honour, while she had lent herself to a loveless marriage!

He played recklessly at the roulette table, and curious eyes watched him, as his very recklessness seemed to bring him good luck, and a few superstitious *habitues* began to place their money on his number.

Suddenly a voice—a clear, girlish voice—fell upon his ears.

"Maurice—you here! Oh, I am glad to meet you!"

He turned quickly and looked down into the fair, fragile loveliness of "Fluff"—Rachel's sister.

"Why, 'Fluff,'" he stammered, "I am surprised to see you—are you—are you with your sister?"

She stole a quick glance at him. "No, I am with someone else," she answered demurely. "You have not congratulated me yet."

"On what?"

"Why—my marriage!" she exclaimed, in surprise. "I am Mrs. Guy Barrington!"

A light seemed to dance before Maurice's eyes, and a thousand drums to beat in his ears.

"You—you!" he said hoarsely. "Why—then—where is Rachel? What does this mean?" he stammered.

"Rachel found out that Guy and I loved each other," "Fluff" said softly, "and not loving him herself, she gave him to me. She was noble and self-sacrificing, and—and"—she whispered suddenly—"I want to do her a good turn, Maurice—I have learnt a lot since then. She thinks you are engaged—we were told so—but I know you are not so, just hurry back as fast as you can, and make Rachel Lady Hastie!"

"I engaged?" he said. "Why I only loved Rachel—no one else."

"Then go and tell her so," she retorted. "She's longing to hear it!"

He took her hand in his.

"'Fluff,' if this place were not what it is, I would take the kiss I missed on your wedding-day."

* * * * *

Within twenty-four hours Maurice was again in England. He arrived at the vicarage one evening, just before the blinds were drawn in the drawing-room. He paused outside the long French windows, and saw Rachel alone, and looking infinitely weary and sad. His heart contracted. He—he—was the cause of that sadness.

He pushed the window softly; it yielded, and he stood in the room.

"Rachel," he whispered. "Sweetheart! I have come back!"

She turned startled eyes upon him—her colour paling with terror.

"What do you mean?" she faltered. "You must not come here, Maurice—*you* are bound now."

"No—no—that is all false," he answered quickly. "There is no barrier between us, beloved—I have come to you for my reward!"

He drew her into his arms and kissed her.

"For seven years Jacob served for *his* Rachel," he whispered. "How long must *I* serve for mine? Not twice seven, darling. I have done that already."

She raised her face to his.

"Just so long as you wish, Maurice."

Blanche Eardley.

. . READ "YOUR EDITOR CHATS" ON PAGE 783 . .

FOR FULL PARTICULARS ABOUT THE SPLENDID NEW PAPER "SMITH'S WEEKLY."

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THE - - - BLIND ARTIST.

Telling of the Frightful Revenge He Contemplated, and of the Manner in which He was Frustrated.

"WILL someone be good enough to take me across the road?"

The question was asked near one of the great London thoroughfares, and the speaker was a tall, well-set-up man whose most striking feature was his freely-growing grey beard; in his right hand he carried a stout stick, and one glance at his face was sufficient to show that he was totally blind.

"Yes, certainly; take my arm," replied a fresh-looking young girl, transferring the portfolio she carried to her left hand as she spoke.

The blind man started a little, then took her arm and submitted to her leading him across the busy street.

"Thanks," he said, when they reached the kerbstone.

"Oh, don't mention it," she said brightly, and was going on when he stopped her by a question.

"One moment, if you can spare it. What is your name?"

"Evelyn Grey," she replied, willing to humour one so afflicted, strange though the inquiry might be.

"Evelyn Grey," he repeated slowly. "And are you very busy just now, Evelyn Grey?"

"Not very."

"Not too busy to walk with me a hundred yards to where I live in Sandport Street?"

Evelyn considered. It was an odd demand on so short an acquaintance; indeed, the whole thing was as curious an experience as she had had, but the place he mentioned was much frequented, and there seemed no harm in gratifying his whim. She consented to accompany him if it would give him any pleasure.

Accordingly they walked on together, the blind man tapping the pavement kerb with his stick as they went.

"You are quite young, by your voice," he observed, "and I so seldom fall in with young people that their presence affords me great pleasure."

They talked for the remainder of the short distance on indifferent subjects. Presently the blind man stopped at what appeared to be his own door. He lifted his broad-brimmed felt hat very courteously and thanked her again for her kindness.

"I daresay we shall meet again sometime," she said as she took her leave; "I live near here myself."

"I hope that may be the case, and that if you should see me—you have the advantage of me there, you know—you will not fail to speak to me."

She promised him and went on home, feeling peculiarly happy under the consciousness of having performed a kind action.

Meanwhile the blind man mounted the stairs to his lodgings with an ease born of long habit. He seated himself in an armchair, rested his head on his two hands, and heaved a deep sigh.

"At last!" he murmured. "After I had given up all hope, spent all I could possibly afford; and now, by sheer chance, the game falls into my hands. From to-day I can order things as I wish. I must think. It won't do to bungle it now. One thing is clear, I must have another interview. I think I can count upon that; she's young, she will rejoice in the idea of doing good to a poor blind wretch—ha! ha!" He laughed mirthlessly, and the sound was not pleasant to hear. "She'll come again, she'll come again; I'd have frightened her if I had asked more questions, or I'd have liked to learn more. Never mind." Here he rose from his seat and leant against the chimney-piece. Anyone coming into the room would have said he was looking at his own reflection in the glass above it. He passed his hand across the mirror and continued his monologue in an undertone.

"There you are, Alphonse Gerard, there you are, though these eyes cannot see you. Much changed you must be since I last saw you in a looking-glass. Your hair is nearly white, they say, and your face is lined with twenty years' suffering—mental and physical suffering. Suffer you must, my friend, till the end of your days, but those who made you suffer shall not escape, long though they have eluded me. Take comfort, Alphonse Gerard."

Two days after Evelyn Grey was in the park when her new acquaintance passed quite close to her. She called out "Good morning," in her cheery way; and the blind man turned, came up to the seat where she was taking a short rest and sat down upon it.

"This is kind of you," he said, removing the felt hat.

"Only the terms of the compact," she replied. "Do you often walk here?"

"Very often. I like to hear the trees rustle and the birds chirping in them. I wish they let us walk on the grass. I can't see it, but I should like to feel it under my feet."

She looked at him with intense pity in her big blue eyes. "And to think that is all you have of these things," she said, half to herself.

"That's all; but this is a depressing subject. Let us talk of something else. Tell me what you do all day."

"I paint as long as it is daylight, and in the evening I draw."

"Oh, you are an artist, I perceive."

"Trying to be one, that is all. I came to London a few months ago to study."

"Do you live alone in London? Surely you are rather young for that?"

"I'm nearly twenty," she said, laughing.

"Not more? It's too young, I say."

"But I don't live alone; I live with my cousin near the Art School. We share rooms; she is a great deal older than I am; but we get on very well together."

"What made you think of being an artist? Have you to get your living?"

"I expect I shall have to some day, but I'm afraid I shall never paint well enough for that. My mother is down in the country; she is a nurse and her present case is away in Devon."

"And your father?"

"He was an artist, too, but he died many years ago. And I cannot let mother work to keep me for ever, you see."

"I wish I could see some of your painting, I should soon be able to tell," he murmured; "but there, it is useless to talk of it."

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"Do you—used you to paint?" asked the girl earnestly.

"I was an artist when I was your age."

"An artist—and you have lost your eyes!" she cried.

"Yes," he said, "that's the story. *You* can see these trees, these colours, these lights and shades, shapes and forms; you live by the sight of them as I did once; while I—well, you see what I am."

"Oh, I *am* sorry for you!" she said, and emboldened by heartfelt sympathy, ventured to lay her hand on his shoulder.

"I think you are; there are tears in your voice," he replied. "But, as I said, it's a depressing subject. My mood is depressing to-day; I have no right to intrude upon you with these things."

"Oh, don't say that," she said. "If you like talking to me, please go on. I should be so glad to help you pass the time if I could."

"You could, indeed, if you chose. Supposing we were to meet here once or twice a week and talk; it would give me the greatest pleasure. Do you think you could manage it?"

"Certainly I could, and I should be delighted."

Thus the acquaintance grew and strengthened. They met at least twice a week, and had half an hour's conversation. Alphonse Gerard's great desire seemed to be to talk of art. He made his young companion tell him all she could about the latest pictures, the latest gossip, the latest developments in the artistic world; and if she sometimes, in giving a glowing account of some sketch or painting, checked her enthusiasm through fear of paining him, he always encouraged her to go on.

Thus passed some weeks, and then Gerard found the seat empty several days in succession. He wondered what the reason of it could be, and at last one day, hearing Evelyn's step on the gravel, he went to meet her.

"I fear you must have been ill, Miss Grey," he said.

"Because I have not been here lately. No, I have been quite well, thank you. I——"

"Something has happened to keep you indoors; of course I cannot expect you should be constantly coming here on my account. But, indeed, I have missed you sorely."

"I am very sorry, but—— Let us sit down for a little and talk. I want so much to tell you about my new picture. I really do think it is going to be a success this time."

"I hardly think it will be wise to sit now, it is getting late for sitting out of doors; suppose we walk about and discuss it."

She was quite willing, for the day was inclined to be misty and raw, being late autumn. Up and down they walked for a considerable time, and then Evelyn said:

"Well, I think I must be getting home; it is getting so foggy."

"They tell me fog is predicted in the forecast for to-day," said Gerard. "Does it seem to you to be getting thick?"

"Very," she replied. "I was so interested in what I was saying I hardly noticed it. I am not quite sure really which way the gate is. We have turned round so many times."

"Is it as bad as all that?" he said kindly. "Well, I think we shall find this the right way."

They reached the gate, the fog thickening every moment. In the streets the lamps were lighted, but they made scarcely any impression, and the traffic was completely disorganised. Evelyn turned to her companion, who alone seemed unconcerned.

"What shall I do, Mr. Gerard? I don't know how I shall ever find the way home."

"Suppose you trust yourself to me. I shall be able to get you there all right. We blind men don't mind the fog, you know."

"Oh, it would be kind of you; I really am frightened. Will it put you out much?"

"Not at all. This will be the way. Now, keep close to me and don't lose sight of me, or we shall never find each other again."

With sure and firm step did Alphonse Gerard thread his way through the maze of streets, the only man collected and calm in the desperate confusion that reigned all over that quarter of London. In complete confidence the girl followed him. It seemed to her that the way was long, yet she never for a moment doubted but that she was being led aright.

He asked the number of her house as they turned down one street; she told him. He went a few steps farther and turned deliberately up a flight of steps leading to a front door. Evelyn followed him up. The steps seemed unfamiliar, but the fog and darkness rendered everything strange. The door opened, a strong hand was laid on her shoulder, and before she had time to grasp what was taking place she was forced into the house and the door fell to heavily behind her.

She was in darkness, utter darkness; not a streak or point of light was visible. Her eyes tried vainly to pierce the gloom in order to catch the outline of some familiar object.

"Where am I?" she asked, a sensation of terror coming over her.

"You will learn soon. Come this way," replied the voice of her guide; and the strong hand was laid on her again. Convinced that something was wrong, the girl tried to slip from under it and reach the door; but the darkness confused her so hopelessly that escape was impossible. She cried out; her pitiful cry echoed noisily through the house, and by her side she heard a harsh, mirthless laugh.

"No use, my dear; no one will hear you. The place is empty and the walls are thick. Better come quietly. Give me your hand."

"But what does it all mean? What do you want with me?"

"That you are shortly going to hear. Come this way."

The hand caught her wrist; helplessly she followed through the darkness up the stairs, her companion leading the way without hesitation. They stopped on the next landing, paused before a door, as she guessed; he opened it and led her through it.

"There's a chair for you; sit down," he said, and put her down into an armchair as he spoke. Immediately afterwards she heard the key turn in the lock. She was now thoroughly frightened, but made an effort to keep collected; perchance, she might still get away.

"Well, and how do you like the darkness?" asked the blind man.

"I expect I shall get used to it presently. Are there no means of lighting this place?"

"None. There is a gas fitting, but the gas has been disconnected. You may as well begin to accustom yourself to darkness as soon as you can, for you've seen the last of light in this world."

"What *do* you mean?" she asked, trying to keep her voice steady.

"You'll see presently. Now I am going to tell you a story." As far as she could judge he seated himself as he spoke. "It's an old story, it began more than twenty years ago. In those days I was a student living in the Latin Quarter of Paris. I had life before me, and talent to develop, a brilliant career was predicted for me.

"One day a woman arrived in our midst. She was an English student, her name was Evelyn Collet. I don't know how old she was, or what her position might have been; all I can tell you about her was that she was the most beautiful creature I had ever looked upon, and that we one and all worshipped her. I can see her now," his voice softened as he went on, "with hair like burnished gold, movements as graceful as an Arab's, and a face, well, indescribable in words, walking amongst us like an empress among her slaves. For she evinced no interest in any one of us with the exception of me, and that, I now believe, solely because I painted better than the others. Still I was flattered, and cherished hopes of one day making this beautiful, inaccessible being my own.

"Soon after there was another new-comer who was destined to have a great influence on my life. This was a young student, also English, by name Wilfred Grey. His talent soon bid fair to rival mine, and he was likewise intimate with Evelyn Collet. Whether she was a consummate coquette, or whether she really did not care one way or the other, I never knew, but she divided her attention between Grey and

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myself with wonderful impartiality, disregarding everyone else.

"Now, that year Grey and I were both going in for the Nemo prize of two thousand francs. Others were entering for it too, but it really lay between us. Both of us were hard up and anxious for the money as well as the glory. We worked assiduously at our rival pictures, and being fairly intimate through our mutual acquaintance with Evelyn Collet, sometimes showed each other the progress we were making.

"One day, very shortly before the competition, I was at Grey's studio and examined his painting. He had chosen a classical subject, mine was an allegorical one. I acknowledged his picture was good and that his chance was excellent, but even while I said so I knew that I must beat him. Fool that I was, I asked him to come to my studio and inspect my attempt. He willingly did so. My painting was not so far advanced as his, yet it was sufficiently so to startle him by its promise alone. I remember how he looked into it, silently and regretfully, even though he could not but praise it. This was pretty late in the day and there was no light to get on with the work that evening. We spent the time in the usual manner and something past midnight I got to bed.

"And now it is difficult to explain to you what happened next, though it is most essential that you should understand it. I passed a night of such intense agony that I shudder to think of it to this day. Intense, scorching, racking pain in my eyes as if they were being burnt out, and I could not move! I simply had to lie in dull agony, unable to cry out, to lift myself up, alive to nothing but the most frightful suffering. And when at last motion returned and I could turn and moan in my pain, I found myself—*in darkness!* My sight was gone.

"I felt terribly ill and weak, and there was a strange and unusual smell in the room, as of some potent drug. I was only half in my senses, and allowed myself to be removed to the hospital without any protest; my pain was so acute I could not even think. I remained for some time in the hospital, and was cured, as far as could be, of my injuries; till at last one day I walked forth to face the world again—a blind artist!"

There was a pause. Then the speaker suddenly gave vent to something like a cry.

"Child, do you know what it means to lose your eyes! Do you know what it means to love all things seen, to live in that love, and to have it taken from you! To have all that makes life worth living taken away and know it is for ever! To be imprisoned in darkness when it is your nature to worship light! But no, of course you can have no idea of any such thing. Let me go on.

"I soon found that Grey had won the Nemo prize, left the Latin Quarter, and gone they knew not where. Evelyn Collet had gone with him. I had been discovered late one morning several weeks ago, just recovering from the effects of chloroform, under the influence of which I had been blinded with sulphuric acid. Who had done the deed the police had not been able to trace. The incentive which Grey had for it was all they could go upon, and he proved beyond a doubt that he could not have done it. But upon Evelyn Collet there fell no suspicion, except mine. There was but one possible conclusion, namely, that he had told her he had no chance against my picture, and with or without his help and connivance, she had done this thing.

"But for her sake, because I had not yet got over my infatuation, I made no further attempt to find them. I resigned myself to my fate, and Providence sent me a friend. When I was still comparatively prosperous I had been acquainted with a little seamstress, who always went by the name of Mimi. She was the plainest woman I ever came across, even French taste could not redeem her. I once saw her in Evelyn's company, I never shall forget the contrast. Well, this little woman came to me in my trouble and offered to devote herself to me. Helpless as I was and unable to work, I accepted her offer, which she put as a petition, and from that day forward I verily believe she thought of me before everything. She worked like a slave, poor little woman, to keep herself and me; and, strange though it may sound, we were happy together. She became all in all to me, and I know I was the same to her. After a time she had an offer to come over to work in an English house, and things being bad with us just then, she accepted. We came to London. Here we lived for some months, and then Mimi was taken ill. Her sickness was dangerous and infectious; she was removed to a fever hospital, and there she died.

"Now I was utterly alone again, though not so helpless as heretofore. Soon after her death I inherited a small income, more than sufficient for my wants. But I missed her sorely. And in my loneliness and darkness I fell back upon my past life, and I became filled with one idea, namely to be revenged on those who had taken from me all that made existence worth living.

"I spent a good deal looking for Evelyn Collet and Wilfred Grey, but all to no purpose. Then by accident *you*, their daughter, fell into my hands. You, representing both by your very name, you with Evelyn's voice and Grey's turns of speech, you through whom it is easiest to injure that traitress, your mother, on you shall my vengeance fall! You have heard my story, you know my determination, what do you say to it?"

"I say that you have utterly misjudged both my mother and my dear dead father, and that if you inflict any injury on me you will suffer for it to your life's end!"

"Well spoken, but what proof have you of your words?"

"Only conviction."

"Ah! That is all I have, it wants nothing more. Now, are you ready?"

"What are you going to do with me?"

"What was done to me, exactly as I have told it you."

"To give me chloroform and burn out my eyes!"

"Yes, just as you are getting on with your picture, as I was; just when you want them most. You have seen the last of daylight; when you recover from the sleep you will fall into you will find yourself in darkness blacker than this, darkness that can be indeed felt."

"Oh, you cannot mean it," she wailed piteously, her courage forsaking her. "Oh, Mr. Gerard, what harm have *I* done you; I, who only meant to show you kindness? Take pity on me, Mr. Gerard; where are you? Oh, this darkness, if it were not for this darkness perhaps I could do something. What shall I do, what shall I do?"

"Yes, we are on equal terms for once," he said grimly, and she shuddered to hear him approaching her chair. Instinct of preservation made her spring up as he came nearer. A strange scent began to spread itself over the room; deadly terror paralysed her, she shrank back against the wall, fancying for a moment that he had lost any idea of her whereabouts. But at once she knew it was not so, for his steps were coming straight in her direction, the heavy scent increased in strength, in another moment she felt his hand on her shoulder, his breath on her neck, the strong, overpowering drug was close to her nostrils. She put her hand over her face and dropped on her knees.

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"Mr. Gerard, have pity on me!"

For all answer her hands were forced away from her face and the chloroformed handkerchief thrown over it. For a few minutes she struggled faintly, then the drug began to take effect, and very soon she fell senseless on the floor.

He opened the door and stood for a moment in the fresh air of the passage. Then he took a small bottle from his pocket and returned to the room, leaving the door behind him unlocked. It would not be a long business, and as soon as it was done he meant to leave the house with all the doors open, and put himself into safety before she should have regained consciousness and told the story to others.

He knelt down by her on the floor and uncorked the bottle. He knew he must be careful with it. He passed his hand over her face and located her eyes. And then——

There came a sound of footsteps and voices, the door opened violently, and a rush of fresh, if fog-laden air made itself felt as the intruders entered.

Next came the sound of a match being struck, and a woman's voice cried:

"Ah, I am right; look here, doctor."

Gerard rose from his knees and turned instantly in the direction whence the voice had come.

"You, Evelyn!" he cried.

"Yes, I, who have kept a watch on your movements ever since my daughter there told me of her acquaintance with you. I warned her quite lately against having anything more to do with you."

"Is there no light in this place?" said a man's voice impatiently. "Will you take this box of matches, Mrs. Grey, and go and see if you can find light in any of these rooms. I'll stay here."

Mrs. Grey went, and Gerard heard the door locked behind her. The doctor knelt down by the girl without paying any further attention to him. Very soon Mrs. Grey returned and was admitted.

"Do you think she is very bad?" she asked anxiously. "What has he done to her?"

"Given her chloroform, but that is all as far as I can see."

"I've lighted the gas in the room across here; shall I come with you?"

The doctor looked at her and glanced in the direction of Gerard. She saw what he meant and took the key out of the lock. Gerard heard her and laughed.

"Go with your child, Evelyn," he said, "I've no intention of running away."

"I hope not, I want to speak to you."

A look of fleeting surprise passed over his face as he noted the absence of resentment in her tones. He stood with folded arms leaning against the mantelpiece while the girl was removed. After they had gone he slowly and laboriously began to open the shutters of the room. She re-entered while he was doing this, and rolled back one of them for him.

"Can you see now?" he asked, "or is the fog too thick?"

"It is lifting; yes, I can see quite enough. How changed you are, Alphonse!"

He laughed his bitter laugh. "It is appropriate for you to say so," he rejoined. "So you have outwitted me again, as you think?"

"If you mean that I have had you watched so that I knew you had engaged this room in this house, and that you two days ago contrived to buy a certain quantity of chloroform and sulphuric acid, yes, I have. I arrived in London this afternoon and drove straight to my daughter's home. They told me she had been missed for some time, whereupon I engaged a doctor's services, telling him to bring the needful restoratives for chloroform, and drove here. I was only just in time, it seems. She is better now, and the doctor has taken her home."

"And now you are going to have me arrested, I suppose?"

"No, I do not wish to do that," she said thoughtfully, and as she looked at him standing leaning against the mantelpiece, a look of bitter indifference on his face, something like pity was to be read in her eyes. "But I have to disillusion you."

"What about? Ah, you are going to lie to me about the wrong you inflicted on me; well, you can pare yourself the trouble, I cannot see you now, and you cannot deceive me with your angel face."

She said nothing, but sat looking straight in front of her, as if considering something in her mind.

"Whom did you love better in the end, Mimi or I?" she asked.

"The two cases cannot be compared, since you ask the question. But why? Is it anything to do with this matter, beyond the fact that one of you acted like a saint towards me and the other like a fiend?"

"It is everything to do with this matter; and I think, if it were only myself that were concerned, I would let it alone. But there is Evelyn. With a man of your temperament she will never be safe if she should ever cross your path again. No, it must be done. You think I burnt out your eyes."

"I am certain of it."

"It was not I, it was Mimi."

He gave a great start and just caught the table in time to save himself from falling.

"Impossible," he cried. "It is a lie, another of your wicked inventions! She loved me, she could not do it."

"She did it for that very reason. She loved you desperately, and you cared nothing for her. Perhaps if I had never crossed your path she would have let things take their course, but your friendship with me fairly maddened her. Apart from your obvious delight in my society, she realised that as long as you could see there would be no hope that she should win your affection. *I* saw it all though you didn't, but, of course, I never thought she would act as she did. Your eyes were her enemies, and she resolved to be rid of them. Wilfred Grey's picture afforded her an excellent cloak for her machinations. She lived in the same house as you did, and continued to do so after the outrage. She had nerves of iron and the determination of a Bonaparte. Then, when you returned, she repented of her crime, and devoted herself to you for the remainder of her life."

"And how do you know of this?" he asked, and his voice shook.

"I will tell you. After my husband's death I took to sick nursing to earn a livelihood for myself and Evelyn. For a time I was in the fever hospital in which she died. I nursed her and she recognised me. She was sure she would not recover, and she chose to make me the confidante of this story before she died. She feared, knowing your character, that some such thing as this might happen, and she told me this that I might make use of the information if necessary, begging me not to do so unless the necessity was absolute. To make it incontrovertible, I wrote out a statement of the facts, which she signed, and her signature was witnessed. Here it is. You can have it read to you by anyone you please, if you do not believe me."

He shook his head.

"No use," he replied sadly. "My life is done. I have lost my last illusion, through my own fault. I feel you speak the truth.

His trembling hand sought for a chair, fell on the back of one, he sank on to it, and dropped his head on his hands.

There was a short silence. Then he asked wearily:

"What are you going to do next?"

"Next?" she echoed. "Why, what more is there to be done? When it has been proved to you that your resentment was misplaced you will have no further cause for attempting to injure me or Evelyn. That's why I told you."

"Then you don't mean to prosecute me?"

"No. If I had I should have sent for more assistance. There is really no harm done—except to yourself," she said, for the man before her looked so utterly broken down and despairing that she had no heart to reproach him further.

There was silence. Then at last she came near to him.

"Is there nothing I can do to comfort you?" she said.

"Say you forgive me," he murmured.

She took his hand, pushed back his hair from his forehead, and kissed it.

"I forgive you, Alphonse," she said. **Dorothy Riley**

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"BABS."

Relating How Providence, Aided by a Little Girl, Reunited Two Parted Lives.

"I LIKE you," said Babs seriously.

The man to whom the five-year-old girlie said this smiled encouragingly.

"Thank you," he said, equally seriously.

"I will give you a kiss—if you like," said Babs, with just the suspicion of a smile creeping over her baby face. The kiss was at once accepted and given—several times over. "You finded me," said Babs, "when I was lost. And mummy always tells me to be polite."

Gerald Challoner had hard work to keep a smile from coming upon his handsome face; but the little maid was so solemn and so serious that he felt he dared not let her see how amused her dear self-confidence made him.

'So you are home now, Babs, and not lost any longer," he said, "and now we must say 'Good-bye.'"

"Good-bye," said Babs, "and thank you. Mummy always tells me to say 'thank you.'"

"You dear little mite," cried Challoner, bending down to kiss the sweet little upturned baby face yet once again; "I wonder if I shall ever see your dear little face again. It reminds me so strangely of one I once used to know."

But Babs did not hear. She had fled up the garden path of the cottage, and was lost to sight. Challoner closed the wicket gate, and went on his way, musing and trying his best to remember.

It had been a strange meeting, that of Babs and Gerald Challoner. He, on a walking tour, alone, and with knapsack on shoulder, had found Babs sitting by the wayside, with big tears in her baby eyes, and being tenderhearted, had essayed to comfort her. All she could say was that she was lost. But a very brief walk, during part of which Gerald Challoner carried Babs in his arms, contrived to bring the little maid into recognisable regions, and she soon found "home."

"Home" was a tiny little cottage, with a quaint, old-fashioned garden in front, and a wicket gate—the gate through which Babs had run so quickly—and, when the full summer came, the promise of sweet and scented summer roses clambering all about the old-world porch. It was nearly dusk on this June afternoon, but Challoner had both time and opportunity—he made them—to observe the quaintness of the cottage, the white curtains at the windows, and the neatness of the tiny garden.

It is strange sometimes how one's whole life can be affected by a minute's hesitation. Gerald Challoner hesitated quite that space of time outside Vine Cottage, in the centre of the village of Winterton; and all his future life was altered by that sixty seconds of hesitation. Instead of walking on to the town of Stanworth, where he had intended to put up for the night—it was barely two miles further on—he decided, in that minute, to remain, if he could find decent accommodation in the place, in Winterton. Upon such little trifles of decision sometimes do our destinies lie!

Challoner, walking on a little way, came upon the "Green Lion," which offered everything that he desired. A cosy room, a bright and plump landlady, a fire which seemed to suggest ox-roasting, lavender-scented sheets, and a supper that was most welcome, served in an old oak-panelled room, that might have been existent since the days of Cromwell. "Better," thought he, "than the Royal Hotel, beloved of commercial travellers, at Stanworth!" And he felt sincerely obliged to Babs for having detained him on his journey.

Before seeking the lavender-scented sheets, he went into the smoking-room of the "Green Lion," where he speedily made himself very much at home. The worthies of the little village were smoking and drinking in the warmth of a blazing fire, and, though at first a little shy at the intrusion of a stranger into their select village circle, when they discovered that he could tell a good "yarn" and was not averse to being friendly, he was heartily made welcome.

He frankly avowed, even in the portly presence of the landlord, his intention to have gone on to Stanworth; and after certain discussions of purely local interest, in which he was compelled, perforce, to join, he contrived to lead the conversation to other matters.

"It is curious, gentlemen," he said, at last, "but a strange incident has made me a visitor here to-night. I happened to meet with a little maid of five, who lives at Vine Cottage, close at hand, if I remember right; and dusk coming on, she had wandered rather farther than she knew, and was lost."

No one spoke for a few moments. Then the burly landlord took his pipe from his mouth.

"That's Mrs. Summers' little maid," he said.

"She was so tired that I carried her home to the gate of the cottage," went on Challoner, "and then she knew she was at home once more."

Again that strange silence fell upon the room. This time Gerald Challoner noticed it.

"Can anyone tell me," he said, "who her mother is? Is she——"

"Better not ask," interrupted a voice from the far end of the room. It was that of the village schoolmaster and organist. "Nobody knows," he went on, oracularly, "and so far as we're concerned nobody wants to know."

"But I should like to know," said Challoner quietly; "if any of you will tell me." But nobody vouchsafed him a reply, except the burly landlord.

"She came here a twelvemonth ago, took Vine Cottage, and nobody knows where she came from or who she is."

"The vicar don't call on her," said the organist.

"Nor do his wife," chimed in another.

"She's got no friends," said the organist.

"Not in this room," thought Gerald Challoner to himself, and he could not help feeling a strange sort of pity for the mother of Babs.

"But her husband?" he queried.

"Ah!" said the organist. And the simple exclamation conveyed volumes.

"She's a widow woman," said the landlord, in explanation.

"Perhaps," said the organist, unkindly.

* * * * *

Gerald Challoner, barrister, out on a walking tour for the benefit of his health, slept in the lavender-scented sheets at the "Green Lion" splendidly. But his first waking thought in the morning was of Babs and her mother. What did it mean? What was it to him if Mrs.—what was her name?—Summers was looked upon by Winterton village with suspicious eyes and was not even visited by the vicarage people? Personally, Gerald Challoner said to himself it did not matter

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a jot. But all the same, he could not help but confess that he was interested. Of course it was Babs, the dear, sweet little mite—who could help being interested in her! He had fully intended going on his way to Stanworth at nine in the morning, but he did not. Something—he did not know what it was—seemed to persuade him to remain in Winterton—and see Babs again.

* * * * *

Of course he stayed—and he saw "Babs" the very next morning. She was in the garden, and he spoke to her, called her by her name.

The little mite came running to kiss him—it was a happy and pleasant trait in Gerald Challoner's character that all children loved him at first sight.

"Mummy is not well," said Babs most solemnly.

"I am so sorry," said Challoner.

"Is you?"

"Of course I am," responded Gerald, with a smile that he could not quite repress; "I don't like to think that anyone is ever not well."

"You is laughing!" exclaiming the little maid. And forthwith she ran up the garden path and left him. But half a moment later she turned again with a smile on her little face. "Here's mummy!" she said. Hearing voices, "Mummy" had come out, and was standing, a lattice-framed picture, at the threshold of the cottage.

"Come, mummy!" said the little voice. And "Mummy" came down the garden path.

"You!" said Challoner, lifting his hat; "of all people in the world——"

And then he suddenly recollected several things. That he had seen a likeness in Babs' face to someone he had known; that he had been interested in the previous evening's talk about Mrs. Summers; that he had been led somehow to the very garden gate where he was now standing. And his old sweetheart, who had jilted him for a richer man, was facing him!

He put out his hand, and Lucy Summers took it.

The garden gate, closed, was between them. Babs watched most interestedly. Again Challoner was the first to speak.

"You are well and happy?" he said. As he looked at the rounded form and sweet face, he felt in his heart that he had suffered.

"Yes, came the calm reply; "and you?"

"Oh, I am all right now."

It seemed to him that his old sweetheart's eyes looked at him reproachfully.

"I mean," he said, "that I am better off and not so worried by the cares of existence."

"And you forgive me?" murmured Babs' mother, more softly; "you know why I did it?"

"No, I know nothing."

"But surely you heard? My mother was ill, dying, and I—I—what could I do? Stop! Chance has brought this meeting about, and I will tell you, I must tell you, why I——"

"Threw me over!" interpolated Challoner.

"Yes. You had no money, no prospects. Gordon Summers offered to marry me, and take the mother I loved away."

"Please don't be cross wiv him, mummy," said Babs' childish voice, but her mother patted her shoulder with tender fingers.

"There was a hope," she went on. The scent of the early June roses came wafting to him on the summer breeze. Gerald Challoner looked at his old sweetheart's face, and thought—just as one thinks at times in an infinitesimal part of a moment—that she looked sweeter than ever; spiritualised by sorrow, trouble, and the world, and yet more lovely than of old.

"There was a hope," she repeated, "but, alas! a forlorn hope. She died three months after, in Italy."

"I am deeply sorry," said Challoner, "because I loved her. I heard nothing of this. No. one could tell me anything about you, Lucy."

"No one knew. Gordon was very good to me, and—and you know how I loved her"

"I know," said Challoner, simply. At this very moment Babs, who had got tired of listening to what was to her an uninteresting conversation, came dancing up gaily with a rosebud in her tiny hand.

"Flower from garden," she said, with a beaming smile. Gerald Challoner took it from the uplifted baby hand, and slipped it into the button-hole of his coat. He turned to the mother.

"I hope you are happy," he said; "and I am glad to have seen you again. Your little maid, strangely enough, brought us together again. I think, if I go with her rosebud in my coat, it will be a symbol of my forgiveness of any happenings in the past."

"You do forgive me, Gerald?"

"Why not? I could not until I knew, and now that I do know the true reason, I give you my full and complete forgiveness. But—good-bye."

"You do not blame me?"

"How can I—now I know?" He stooped to take Babs' hand in his.

"Is you going?"

"I must, little woman!"

"Oh, please no!"

But Gerald Challoner, with the love of seven years ago surging passionately back into heart and mind and memory, set his teeth and bade himself be strong.

"I must," he said.

"Oh!" And Babs began to wail pitifully; "I wanted you to come and play wiv' me in the garden, and give me swings. Mummy can't, she's so tired, and dere's no one else!"

"Hush, Babs: Mr. Challoner has to go a long way—all the way to London," said the mother.

"London?" said Babs; "is that where daddy is?"

"Perhaps!" answered Babs' mother. Gerald Challoner caught a strange expression upon Lucy's face, and his heart seemed to stand still. What did the word mean? Had Gordon Summers deserted her—and was that the meaning of the village gossip he had heard overnight?

"Did you not know?" she said, turning a strained face to him. The sudden meeting with her old lover had tried her.

"Know what? I know nothing but what you have told me."

"My husband died—three years ago!"

"Then you are alone in the world?"

"Except for Babs."

"Me?" said that youthful person, hearing her name spoken.

"When my husband died," continued her mother, "it was found that he was not so rich after all, and when things were finally wound up, I had about a hundred a year to live upon. So I came here, and have been here over a year—with Babs."

Gerald picked the child up in his strong arms.

"Babs," he said, "would you like to have me ever and always to play with you whenever you wanted me to?"

"Yes," said Babs; "I like you so much."

Gerald Challoner turned with a smile to Babs' mother.

"Shall the angel in a pinafore give your answer for you," he said softly. "I love you as much as ever, Lucy, even more. Will you marry me?"

Lucy Summers looked up in his face lovingly.

"You have forgiven me?" she said.

"I have forgotten," he replied, putting Babs down.

"And I have been so alone, so lonely, in the world!"

"Never again, Lucy," said Gerald Challoner, taking her into his arms, with Babs a highly interested spectator; "never again. Fate, Providence, Chance—never mind which—has brought us together again, sweetheart, and I shall never part with you now."

"It was Fate," murmured Lucy, as her old lover kissed her upon the lips.

"He finded me and brought me home to you," put in Babs.

"I think it was Babs, after all," said Challoner.

Clifton Bingham

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The Keeping of a Promise.

The Story of an Unfaithful Lover and an Inconstant Friend.

THE course of the river was between great hills, whose sides were dotted with villas, while at their feet nestled little hamlets and more pretentious villages. There was one spot at which it broadened into a lake-like expanse, with little inlets where the rushes fringed its edges, and where large, white, odorous lilies floated on its softly undulating waters.

Clarice Reeves always felt grateful that her ancestors had chosen an elevation near this spot to build their home—a great rambling house, with bay windows and terraces overlooking the river, and commanding a view of the country for miles.

"I always thought," she said one morning to Hugh Valincott, who had ridden over to spend an hour on the wide terrace, "that the ideal life was to be lived on an eminence, from which one could see the action and turmoil of the world, and yet not be in it."

"The ideal life for me," he returned, "is—where you are, whether on a hill or in a valley."

And he stopped trailing his whip for the amusement of the leonine-looking poodle, Tiny, and, looking straight into Clarice's eyes, possessed himself of the dainty little hand lying idly on the arm of the chair.

"If I could only be sure!" she said in a half-aside.

"Of what?" he exclaimed. "Of my love?" And again he brought the magnetism of his glance to bear upon her sweet face.

"No," she returned, with a quick, proud little motion of her head; "but sure that the gown I have ordered for the next dance will arrive in due time; sure that Cousin Lucie will be here by the evening train; sure that I shall always have the same relish for chocolates."

Then she daintily treated herself to one from the bon-bon dish on the wicker table, and held out another for Tiny's delectation.

There was an angry flush on Valincott's dark handsome face, and he rose and picked up his gloves and his riding-whip, which he had just dropped.

"One thing I am sure of," he said; "that you have no faith in me."

"'Who never doubted, never half believed?'" she quoted with a tantalising smile

"Clarice," he said, with a little gesture of remonstrance, "do you think you are using me kindly? I came this morning because I could not remain away from you another moment; and yet you treat me only to flouts and jeers. Come into the drawing-room and play for me—my perturbed spirits need soothing."

"As you like," said Clarice; and, with a grave little air of acquiescence, she led the way into the wide hall.

Valincott watched the slight, graceful figure with eager eyes. She wore a simple dress of white, soft cambric and a bunch of cinnamon-pinks was carelessly thrust in her belt.

"A peace-offering," she said, selecting one and giving it to him. "Now, what shall it be?" she asked, seating herself at the piano, after an adroit movement in which she eluded Valincott's too evident intention of beguiling her into the corner of the drawing-room for a lover-like demonstration.

"Whatever pleases you," he replied, with an air of mock resignation; "for you seem not to care to please me much this morning."

"Schumann?" he asked, as she played a soft, dreamy air.

"Yes. Did you ever hear Schumann's music likened to the lace-like network of delicate rootlets?"

"No, I don't think I ever did; I shouldn't have appreciated it if I had. I am not equal to such intricate comparisons. Let me ask you, in turn, if you ever heard your hair compared with a shining, wavy mass of bronze-brown? Or if," and he bent over and put his hand gently under the dimpled chin and raised it a little, and looked into the beautiful hazel eyes, "anyone ever told you that yours were the sweetest eyes ever seen?"

A few moments after Clarice stood watching him ride up the river-road.

"I wish I could be sure," she was again saying wistfully.

"Of what?"

"Oh! is it you, Aunt Amy?" And she turned her lovely perplexed countenance towards a middle-aged woman who had just entered the room. "Why, sure of anything," she continued. "Is there such a thing as certainty? Life, love, friendship, wealth, health, happiness—everything seems unstable to me, this morning."

"Clarice," returned her aunt brusquely, "your liver is out of order. A pill night and morning will rid your mind of such fancies."

"I do not believe there is a woe in the whole world, from a broken heart to the slightest ailment, that you haven't a panacea for in the shape of a pill," laughed Clarice. "And now tell me one thing; do you suppose Lucie will be in the least like I expect?"

"Nothing is as we expect. Sometimes it is better, or—

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sometimes worse," she added sententiously; for, in her inmost heart, Mrs. Reeves—who was Clarice's aunt by marriage, and filled the place of companion and chaperon to the orphan heiress—doubted the wisdom of her niece's latest caprice of sending for an unknown second cousin to spend the summer with her in her country home.

"It will be something for me to do," Clarice had said. "Her life is dull; I will give her a pleasant summer. You say she is pretty, and I am anticipating much pleasure in seeing the dear little rosebud make her *début*."

So she dispatched the invitation, and, when it was accepted, sent a delicately worded letter with a generous cheque; for Lucie Dayton's father was a country clergyman in rather straitened circumstances.

"I was never so surprised," announced Clarice to her aunt the next morning after her cousin's arrival. "My rosebud has resolved itself into some strange tropical flower. Lucie is simply beautiful; she dresses in exquisite taste, and has, although she is barely nineteen, the aplomb of a shining beauty of several seasons. She quite outshines me; but I am delighted with her all the same."

"I am glad you like her," returned her aunt drily.

Two hours later the girls were on the broad terrace; Lucie had been for a short drive with Mrs. Reeves, and was resting for a moment before going to her room.

She had been looking down the river, watching a distant steam-launch and some small boats that were setting sail, but had thrown herself gracefully into a chair, and was contemplating the ranges of hills covered with masses of evergreens, and the fleecy, white clouds which floated across the bright blue sky and seemed entangled among them.

"You like my home?" questioned Clarice eagerly, watching the dreamy, satisfied expression.

"It is Paradise to me—who have spent my days in that little old parsonage, with its barren outlook."

"I am so glad if you are going to be happy here," returned Clarice warmly. "But I beg you to tell me if country clergymen's daughters are usually like you, with your grand air and almost Parisian taste in dress?"

Miss Dayton smiled in a slow, inscrutable manner, which might mean anything or nothing, and said: "It is the Reeves' blood, I suppose; for I certainly haven't acquired a grand air in that remote country village."

So Lucie sat watching the ever changing scene, while Clarice looked at her furtively.

She was tall and slender, and carried herself with exquisite grace; her eyes were velvety black, with delicate arched brows, while her hair was pale golden—a contrast which Clarice thought would lend itself perfectly to some effective costumes she had in mind. For she meant her to be the belle of the next ball and to captivate Doctor Darrell.

Hugh Valincott rode up before Clarice had quite made up her mind about the wonderful gown that was to accomplish so much, and she greeted him warmly; she was so eager to introduce him to her cousin, that she quite forgot the vague doubts of the day before, which all his tender words did not entirely remove, and which had caused her much hurt.

"Now, you two are to be the best friends in the world," she said in her imperious, pretty way. "I want Cousin Lucie to have the happiest summer of her life; and you, Hugh, are to help."

Valincott bowed low over the slim hand in its long, black glove, and looked with admiration at the beautiful, fair face with its soft, black eyes and frame of golden hair.

"If we are going to sit here, I will go for my hat," said Clarice.

"Let me ring for it?" offered Hugh.

"Don't trouble; I have to see Aunty Amy a moment."

"What do you think of her?" she asked, finding her aunt in the pretty morning-room, busy with her knitting. "Isn't she a wonder?" she continued eagerly. "Can you imagine how she made the cheque I sent her go so far? Oh, yes—Hugh is here; I mean to ask him to stay to luncheon."

Mrs. Reeves' nose was aquiline and her features sharp; and she looked unusually grim and forbidding at that moment, when she prepared to sit in judgment on the new cousin.

"Do you know what I think?" she said. "I think," and she spoke the words with deliberation, "that you are laying a scheme to destroy your happiness. I hate to see a person approaching a fuse with a match, when the explosion will involve ruin."

Meantime Hugh, who was never so much at home as when saying soft nothings to a pretty woman, was looking into Lucie's fair face with that air of devotion which made him adored by the sex.

"Of course, I am delighted to know you," she was saying in her low contralto voice. "I have heard your praises so sounded that I regard you already as a perfect model of a man." Then she looked at him with a glance which seemed to say: "And I find you to be all that you were described." While her words left a sound in his ears of Clarice's having talked too readily of her affairs to the new cousin.

Clarice came back, wearing a grey dress and a broad hat.

"I find I have to leave you," she said. "An old lady, in whom I am much interested, has sent for me to write a letter for her."

"Are you the scribe for the indigent old women of the vicinity?" asked Lucie with a little laugh. "Don't you want a secretary?"

"Yes," gaily assented Clarice. "Will you come with me?"

"No, thank you. I have unpacking to do."

"May I come?" asked Hugh.

"Oh, no; you are to stay and talk to Lucie."

"How can he talk to me when I am unpacking my trunk? I am going this moment."

And she bowed gracefully to Hugh and went into the house.

"You have planned so that we shall have but few uninterrupted hours this summer," grumbled Hugh, as they went down the river-path. "Don't walk so fast—let us be leisurely this morning."

So they loitered in the soft, bright sunshine, and watched the shadows of the floating clouds mirrored in the calm surface of the river.

"Here are roses—will you have some?" asked Hugh as they passed a great bush of wild roses in the perfection of bloom.

He cut a spray, which was a luxuriant mass of pink fragrance, carefully trimmed the thorns, and held it for a moment close to Clarice's cheek, scarcely less pink than the flowers.

"The roses suffer by contrast," he said, and with a tender little smile he placed them in her hand. "And now, tell me if your doubting mood has passed away?" he said, as they resumed their walk.

"Yes—entirely. I have perfect faith in you," she answered, turning her lovely, flushed face towards him.

"You may have," he said gently; "for I shall love you for ever and for ever——"

"That is an indefinitely long time," she returned, with a

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shy little smile. "Measure it by earthly duration—as long as the roses bloom, for instance."

"No," he said gravely; "but 'as long as the river flows.' And you?"

"Let me echo your words: 'as long as the river flows,'" she answered with tender solemnity.

Then that silence born of perfect content fell upon them, and they went on to the little cottage with again but few words; while the river whispered to the rushes and sedges at its borders that it was accepted as a type of fidelity; then all its broad, swift surface broke into a thousand ripples and sparkles, which might or might not mean that it was laughing at any confidence which might be reposed in it.

Valincott rode over oftener than ever, to idle away his mornings at "The Reeves," as the old mansion was called.

"Now that there are two attractions instead of one, one may be pardoned for coming twice as often," he would gallantly declare. And Clarice would give a pretty grateful look, while Lucie would smile softly.

"Subtly," Mrs. Reeves would say. "For that girl is nothing if not subtle!" she would declare angrily. "And totally devoid of feeling, too. She would button her gloves, organise a gunpowder plot, or assassinate a Tsar with equal calmness. Only the other day, she coolly asked me which was the richer, Dr. Darrell or Mr. Valincott!"

All this Mrs. Reeves would confide to an intimate, adding that Clarice's blindness drove her to desperation, and that so much duet-practising and boat-rowing was only a pretext for flirtation.

Dr. Darrell, however, refused to transfer his allegiance to the new-comer, or be more than barely polite to her.

"There are no friends like the old friends," he would say, when Clarice accused him of his defection. "Your cousin is very charming, but I have no time for small-talk."

And the stalwart doctor, with his fine, straightforward face and earnest grey eyes, was very tender in his manner to Clarice, as if he would shield her from impending harm.

That very morning, Lucie and Valincott were on the river. There had been a pretence of learning to row; then they had drifted into one of the secluded, rush-bordered inlets, where Lucie was idly trailing an oar in the water, and telling Hugh in a low, tremulous voice a pathetic story of the barrenness of her life in the old parsonage.

There were tears in the dark, beguiling eyes, and a sad downward droop in the corners of the lovely scarlet mouth, while the pliant, exquisite figure was inclined slightly towards him.

Hugh had been struggling for days against the spell she was weaving around him, and at that moment was struggling with his better self.

She had been looking down, but she slowly raised her eyes and looked at him through the long lashes, with a semblance of shyness which only half concealed the passion that lay behind it.

Hugh's handsome, dark face grew pale with emotion, and, when he spoke, it was with a husky voice:

"Let me make your life beautiful," he said. "There are far countries where existence passes like a dream"

"But—Clarice?" she murmured

He placed her carefully in the boat, then loosened it from its moorings.

Valincott made no answer, but took the oars from her and rowed home in silence.

There had been several dances at the neighbouring houses—dances at which Lucie had received plenty of attention and admiration; but the gaieties of the season were to culminate in a ball to which most of the residents in the vicinity were to be invited.

When Lucie made a show of protestation against the lovely dress ordered for her, Clarice would only laugh and say:

"It is so little for me to do. Then just think how fine it will be for you to be the bright particular star of the evening!"

But, the very morning of the ball, Lucie was saying to Valincott: "I am simply a fad of Clarice's. She tired of her district-visiting, wore her gaieties out, and wanted to be amused; so she sent for me. And now she has been devising a costume for me, in which I am to reflect credit on her."

They were in the dim, fragrant drawing-room, and had been singing together; but Lucie was then touching the keys lightly, and looking up into his face with her wonderful eyes.

Having made this audacious speech, she smiled in a slow sweet fashion which showed her lovely teeth, struck a few minor chords, and added: "I am nothing if not frank."

"It is refreshing!" warmly declared Valincott, with a half angry feeling towards Clarice for patronising such a glorious creature.

It was the universal verdict that Miss Reeves and her cousin were the most beautiful girls at the ball.

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"Almost in bridal white," whispered Hugh, as he whirled down the long room with Clarice in the first waltz. "Nothing could be more lovely!" he added, looking with admiration at the gown of dead-white silk, ropes of pearls, and a great cluster of creamy roses; while she looked up at him a moment with a shy, tender look in her soft hazel eyes, then blushed divinely.

However lovely Clarice was, Lucie that night was the cynosure of all eyes.

"A symphony in pale gold," declared one of the leading society men.

When the pretty speech was repeated to Mrs. Reeves, she only shrugged her shoulders, substituted "sinner" for "symphony," and whispered it to her intimate. And then, dowager-fashion, the two nodded and talked earnestly behind their fans; for, just at that moment, Lucie passed by on Valincott's arm, in her pale gold silk, just a shade darker than her hair, which had its luxuriance confined by a curiously wrought golden dagger set with yellow stones, while she wore a necklace and bracelets of the same stones, and at her corsage a bunch of pale-yellow roses with amber hearts.

"And you do not even admire her to-night?" Clarice was exclaiming reproachfully to Dr. Darrell, as the couple passed them.

"Less to-night than any time. She is Lilith—if we could find her dead lovers, there would be one of her golden hairs round their hearts."

"She has no lovers," laughed Clarice; "I doubt if she ever had one. She doesn't seem to care about them."

"No?" returned Darrell with an equivocal inflection. And again he looked down with a sad, grave air at the lovely head, with its masses of shining bronze-brown tresses.

Later in the evening Valincott and Lucie had gone out on the balcony—for "a breath of air," as Lucie said. They had turned one of its corners and were in a sheltered secluded nook.

"It is cold even here; the breeze comes this way—let me protect you!" and he placed her in front of him.

But she suddenly wheeled and stood so near to him that the roses she wore were crushed against him and filled the air with perfume; her dark eyes were glowing, and her beautiful bare arms gleamed white. She bent her head so that the fragrant golden hair just brushed his cheek and sighed softly.

"You sigh—are you unhappy?" he asked tenderly.

Then she softly raised her bewildering eyes and he saw in them what men saw in Lilith's eyes, in Circe's eyes, in Cleopatra's eyes—and drew her head to his breast, and held her close to his heart for a moment; then he released her, and they stood looking down the river, where the full moon made a long, shining pathway on the water.

"See!" said Lucie; "a golden roadway, leading where?"

"To bliss, if you will go with me. Let us row down the river," he said, in a low, constrained voice.

And she silently followed him down to the boat-house.

"In the boat-house are rugs," he said; "they will serve for protection against the dampness."

He wrapped her in one, but not before she had put both soft, white arms about his neck and clung to him, and he had covered her face with kisses.

Then, placing her carefully in the boat, he loosed it from its moorings, and, with long, steady strokes, sent the frail craft out into the narrow, glittering track of the moon.

* * * * *

An hour and a half later, Mrs. Reeves came up to Clarice with an anxious air.

"Everybody is going home," she said. "Where is Hugh? And where is Lucie? They have been gone from the ballroom a long time."

"I thought perhaps they were in the cardroom. Will you kindly speak to them, Dr. Darrell, and ask Mr. Valincott if he will please order our carriage?"

Darrell returned with a grave face.

"I cannot find him," he said. "He has not been seen for an hour or more."

"Undoubtedly Lucie has been taken suddenly ill, and he has gone home with her.'

"Possibly," assented the doctor; "I will see if your carriage has gone." And he hurried away.

"It is here," he said, returning shortly after. "Shall I order it for you?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Reeves with decision. "Come, Clarice!"

"Say something to people," implored Clarice, with a white face, when they reached the dressing-room. "Say that Lucie is ill and has gone home. I think we shall find her there, do not you?" And she looked at her aunt with pitiful intreaty.

"Oh, very likely," returned her aunt evasively.

"Permit me to accompany you," said Dr. Darrell, who stood waiting for them with his overcoat on and his hat in hand. "My man will drive over after me."

Clarice could not join in the conversation on the way home, for her heart was like a leaden weight; but she eagerly ran up the steps and touched the bell, while the doctor was handing her aunt out of the carriage.

"Miss Dayton has come home?" she questioned the sleepy maid, who replied that she had not.

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, Miss Reeves."

"I do not understand it." And she turned to her aunt and Dr. Darrell, with a strained, anxious look in her lovely eyes.

Mrs. Reeves did not trust herself to speak, but turned away with set teeth and firmly compressed lips, while Darrell tried to reassure her.

"They have been unavoidably detained and will undoubtedly soon be back." Then he looked at his watch. "It is after three now. They may be waiting for daylight.'

Clarice was deathly pale and her teeth were chattering as with ague-chill.

"Here, child—drink this," said her aunt, who had sent the maid for wine. Then she wrapped her in a fur-lined cloak and stood with one arm protectingly round her, while the doctor said that he would go in search of the truants.

"You must try and get some rest," was his parting injunction.

But Clarice only walked backwards and forwards from the drawing-room into the great hall, while Mrs. Reeves bemoaned the day that Lucie Dayton, with her beautiful face and false heart, entered the house.

"I never trusted her," she said. "And she has enticed Hugh to his ruin."

"Don't—don't say that; you hurt me!" exclaimed Clarice putting out her hand with a gesture of intreaty. "Do not condemn him until there is proof."

Then the day dawned, showing pallid streaks of sky between great dark rifts of clouds; and a slow, drizzling rain set in, and dripped, dripped, from the roof in mournful accompaniment to the river's sullen murmur.

Clarice still paced the floor, her face wearing the pallor of death, while great dark circles were under the beautiful eyes. The roses hung from her corsage, crushed and faded, and their petals were strewn over the carpet, and seemed to her typical of her blighted hopes.

Her aunt tried to comfort her, and her maid followed her about with an extra wrap, and urged her to take some light refreshment; while Tiny even offered his dumb sympathy, and whined dismally and got himself rolled up in the train of her dress.

There was an hour of dreadful suspense, and when at last footsteps were heard outside, Clarice hastened into the hall.

"I told you they would come soon," she said; "now we shall know all about it."

But the door opened only to admit the doctor, who came up to her with a grave face.

"You have something to tell me!" she exclaimed. "Say it quickly, and tell me all—even the worst. Anything rather than this uncertainty!"

"Some men found an empty skiff——" He paused, shocked by her ghastly face. "Can you endure the rest?" he asked gently.

Her lips were dumb, but she bowed her head and went up to him and clasped her hands round his arm, as if for support.

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"The bodies of your cousin and Mr. Valincott were washed ashore and have been carried to the boathouse. His friends have been telegraphed for," he continued, "and will be here by the next train. I await your directions regarding Miss Dayton's remains. One thing more," and Dr. Darrel bent low over the slight figure and laid his hand protectingly on the cold little fingers that were interlaced on his arm. "It is thought that, on their way down the stream, their boat was overturned by the wash of a steamer."

Clarice bowed her head on Darrell's arm in mute agony.

"Lean on me," he said tenderly. "Let me comfort and protect you, as if I were your father or brother."

Mrs. Reeves came close to the doctor's side and said, in a low voice: "As for this matter upon which you wish Clarice's decision, I will take it in my own hands. Now, will you help me to get this poor child to her room, and leave a prescription for her?"

To Clarice, whose life hung in the balance for weeks, the tragedy became like the memory of a terrible dream. Her illness spared her a keen realisation of the facts; she did not see Lucie's brokenhearted father, or hear Hugh's mother deplore his inconstancy.

But she did realise more and more, as time passed, the unfaithfulness of her lover, and the treachery of her friend, and it required all the strength of a resolute will to prevent her sweet nature from turning to a bitter misanthropic one. She clung to Mrs. Reeves, who, with all her grimness, had a warm motherly heart, and confided in Dr. Darrell.

After a time—a long time, in fact, the doctor ventured to plead his cause.

"No," answered Clarice, "I have no heart to give. And then, would you have me be unfaithful, too? I promised Hugh, that, as long as the river flowed, I would love him."

The doctor said no more, and time passed—on wings, to most people; but to Clarice so slowly. For Darrell's visits were less frequent, and she missed them more than she cared to own; then rumour connected his name with that of a fair young widow, and, when he did come, she met him with restraint and a wholly changed manner.

"I do not see," he said to Mrs. Reeves, "why my little friend has so changed towards me."

"Do you not?" she returned, with a shrewd little smile.

It was drawing near Christmastide and the month had been the coldest December known for many years.

Clarice stood, late one afternoon, looking out at the snow-crowned hills and dreary, dismal landscape; at the bare brown branches of the trees outlined against the cold grey of the winter sky; at the leafless shrubs and utter absence of life; and she felt that the scene repeated itself in her heart—so barren and desolate, its summer hopes all fled.

The revivifying finger of Spring might touch Nature and give it sunny skies and green fields and leaves and flowers, but what could bring back her lost joys? And now the faint new hope that had begun to awaken in her heart was dead, too!

She sighed deeply and came back to the fire with a shudder.

Then she crouched over the fire dejectedly, and sat lost in reverie until a voice at her very side caused her to start.

"Building air-castles in the coals?"

"Oh, is it you, doctor?" And she sprang to her feet.

Then she shyly glanced at him, standing there so stalwart and erect,

"Will you come to the window with me? I have something to show you," he said. "Do you see the river?"

"Yes; it is frozen over. Is not that uncommon?"

"Has it no significance to you? To me it is a symbol that I may hope; for, as it no longer runs visibly on its swift course, are not you absolved from that old promise? Will not you come to me?" he said.

She stood irresolute a moment; she had felt herself so bereft, so forsaken, so buffeted by the waves of sorrow, that she could not seem at once to grasp the idea that she might sail her storm-tossed boat into the safe harbour. Then, with a shy smile and downcast eyes, she faltered: "I cannot help coming—because—I love you," and laid her head on his breast and began her life anew.

Albert Price.

In accordance with my promise made last week, I now propose to give you some information regarding the paper which comes out next Tuesday under the title of SMITH'S WEEKLY.

In the first place, you will find in it the two features which have made SHORT STORIES so popular in the past—viz.: "IN CONFIDENCE" and "YOUR EDITOR CHATS." A portion of the paper will also be retained for the publication of short stories of a similar nature to those which you have enjoyed in this paper. Beyond this the paper will be built up on quite new and, I venture to think, popular lines. It will contain a complete novelette of some ten or twelve thousand words in length. These novelettes will be written each week by popular authors, and I have decided to include it in the new paper in deference to the continually expressed wishes of the readers of SHORT STORIES.

At least a dozen capital articles will be found in the paper, each one of interest, and written by an expert writer. A new feature will be introduced under the title of "QUIET THOUGHTS FOR SUNDAY," and will contain the brightest bits from the brightest of the Sunday journals.

Besides this, there will be a big competition in which £500 and a huge number of beautiful silver brooches are offered in prizes to readers.

Finally, we come to the serial story written by Arthur Applin, the famous author of so many great serials, entitled: "THE CLATTER OF THE CLOGS." This serial will deal with life in a factory town, and is full of human interest.

Altogether, you will find in SMITH'S WEEKLY all you found in SHORT STORIES, with the addition of an enormous amount of general reading matter thrown in free of cost.

Remember that when you go to purchase next week's number of this paper you must not ask for SHORT STORIES, but for SMITH'S WEEKLY.

YOUR EDITOR.

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Telling of the Mistake that Hilda Latimer Made.

Hilda Latimer stood before the glass in her pretty dressing-room and surveyed herself complacently. Then she put on her hat, secured it dexterously by means of two pearl-headed hat-pins, and called her maid.

"If anyone asks for me," she said, "I have gone into the village."

"Yes, miss."

Hilda hesitated.

"If Mr. Stanhope should ask," she added, and paused again.

The maid waited. Hilda tapped her dainty little foot upon the soft carpet in impatience at her own indecision.

"You may tell him the same," she said at last.

"Yes, miss."

Hilda went out of the house into the glorious beauty of a summer's afternoon. But she did not turn her steps in the direction of the village.

She had never intended doing so, but she went along the broad gravel paths of the beautiful park until she entered the wood that fringed the lake.

There was a little rustic seat near by, and upon this she seated herself with a sigh of relief. She wanted to be alone, and her recent little deception had been practised with a view to achieving this end.

She was a lovely girl—not more than two-and-twenty—with large, lustrous eyes and a wealth of rich, brown hair that shaded as sweet a face as one need wish to look upon. Her figure was tall and slender, and she moved with a grace that was pleasing to see.

She was just the sweet, womanly woman Nature designed her, and in only two things did she differ very materially from the normal girl of her age.

She was a little—just a little—over-inclined to wilfulness, and she was—or she thought she was—ambitious.

The first of these characteristics was perhaps due in part to the way in which, from her very infancy, she had been spoilt. The second was attributable to no particular cause, and being a woman, was therefore of paramount importance.

She had inspired the belief that she was the possessor of considerable literary ability, and was determined to show the world that her conviction on this head was not without foundation. She began by writing short stories, which she submitted to various magazines, with the result that two had already appeared in the glory of print to gladden the heart and budding ambitions of this charming young authoress.

There is always a rift in the lute, and hers lay in the fact that the journals containing her stories were but fifth-rate publications.

But then she was only a comparative beginner. She was not at all disheartened by her frequent failures. She had a high opinion of her dormant abilities, which, she said, merely wanted developing, and this kept her up when others would have despaired.

But she found the work a little harassing. It prevented her from enjoying herself in the way she had been accustomed to do. There was no earthly need for these self-imposed tasks. She was rich, very beautiful, and the constant centre of genuine admiration. Most girls would have been satisfied with Hilda's lot, but she had other and more important considerations to claim her attention. And now—within the past few days—a new and wonderful idea had come to her that made her tingle with growing excitement.

She would write a novel!

"Let me see," she said, as she sat in solitary state, "there must be a man in it—and a girl. They must love each other, of course, but somehow I must work in a lot of obstacles—a misunderstanding or a quarrel or something of that sort—to keep them apart. And then, in the last chapter, I shall have to clear it all up and marry them off. Yes, that will do splendidly! Oh, how glad I am I've really got genius for this sort of thing!"

She paused and looked doubtfully at the lake. She had a vague feeling that the plot she had contrived had been adopted before. It didn't sound very original. But perhaps she could work in a few side issues which would take off the lack of novelty in the main plot.

Her pretty brows contracted as she compelled herself to think. She was right in the middle of it when she heard a step behind her and a voice said:

"Good afternoon, Miss Latimer. I heard you had gone to the village, so I came down to the lake."

Hilda came out of her meditations and looked sharply at the new comer. She didn't quite know what he meant. It almost sounded as if he had guessed from the outset that she had *not* gone to the village, and the funny little smile that played about his mouth gave weight to the suspicion.

"I changed my mind," she said coolly. "A lady is allowed to do that, you know."

Edgar Stanhope made her no reply, but, seating himself on the rustic bench beside her, gazed thoughtfully out over the lake. He was a tall, handsome man of about thirty, with close-cropped, auburn hair and dark, flashing eyes. The face was genial and the expression that now distinguished it would have been eminently attractive to any but an irritated authoress whose flow of literary inspiration had been rudely interrupted. So she too looked straight before her over the broad lake and beat a little impatient tattoo on the ground with her feet.

But it was obviously impossible to prolong this sort of thing, so Edgar Stanhope had resource to commonplaces.

"What a splendid day this is!" he said. "It makes one glad only to be alive."

"It's too warm for my liking," responded Hilda.

Edgar Stanhope glanced round at his companion. There was an amused twinkle in his eye as he regarded her steadily.

"I trust my presence is not annoying you, Miss Latimer," he said.

Hilda raised her pretty eyebrows in affected amazement.

"Not in the least," she said freezingly.

Edgar laughed. Try as he might to restrain it, the laugh would come.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said apologetically, "but I really couldn't help it. I'm afraid I disturbed you in some way by my unseasonable arrival. Perhaps you were occupied with some plan for a future story—perhaps even a novel—and I have unwittingly interrupted it."

He levelled the shaft at a venture and stopped to watch its effect. He knew quite well that she had not desired his company and he wanted badly to discover the reason. He knew, too, of her little weakness, and his hint concerning a "future story" had sprung from this knowledge. But the mention of a novel struck the girl as remarkable, since she had told no one of her intention.

"What makes you think," she said slowly, "that I—that I'm going to write a—a novel?"

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Edgar Stanhope observed the partial admission and made the most of his stray shot.

"That's telling," he said. "Say I guessed it."

Hilda regarded him critically. She liked this tall, strong, handsome young man—liked him a great deal better than she did anyone else. If it had not been for her art—well, she wasn't going to think about *that*. He was a nice man—a very nice man—and she, Hilda Latimer, liked him very much. But that was all—absolutely and positively all. He grew conscious of her scrutiny, and turned his eyes to meet hers.

But she was too quick for him, and he found her calmly studying the lake again.

"I wonder," he said after a brief pause, "if I could be of any service to you in the building up of this—er—projected novel."

For a moment Hilda's eyes kindled, but she gave him a swift glance to see if he were in earnest or merely teasing her. The glance, however, somewhat reassured her.

"I don't know," she said, still a little loftily. "You've had no experience, you know."

Edgar sighed regretfully and looked helplessly down at the toes of his boots. The assumption of humility was not ill advised, for it effectually concealed the tell-tale twinkle in his eyes.

"I know," he said sorrowfully. "But—but I could learn, couldn't I?"

Hilda considered.

"I don't know," she replied, with the authority of genius. "It isn't all acquired, Mr. Stanhope. It's a gift."

"Well," persisted her companion, "who knows but what I, too, possess the same gift."

Hilda pondered thoughtfully for a moment, and then said:

"Well, it isn't impossible. Let's talk about it. If you'll listen, I'll tell you what is in my mind."

Edgar did as he was desired, and listened patiently to her already explained plot for a new and wonderful novel. The corners of his mouth twitched once or twice as she ticked off the items about "the man," and "the girl," and "the obstacles," and "the happy ending," but she was too absorbed in her subject to notice it. When she had finished there was a long pause, after which she asked him:

"Well, Mr. Stanhope, how does the plot strike you?"

Edgar fidgeted uneasily on the seat.

"I don't know," he said, thoughtfully stroking his chin. "I'm no authority, you know, Miss Latimer. But it'll have at least one merit."

Hilda looked up interestedly.

"What's that?" she asked eagerly.

"It very often happens in real life," replied Edgar with a funny little screw to his countenance. "So I suppose one might call it 'true to life,' you know."

Hilda flashed him a look of gratitude and appreciation, and the two lapsed into silence. Presently, however, Edgar Stanhope cast a furtive glance at his companion's face, and, seeing there no further trace of her former resentment at his presence, turned to her abruptly and said:

"Miss Latimer, I came here this afternoon to ask you a question which concerns my whole future life."

Hilda started, flushed, and made as though to check him. But he went on, heedless of the gesture, in a voice that told all too plainly of the emotion within.

"I love you, Hilda, with all my heart and soul, and my dearest wish is to make you my wife. I am not a poor man, dear, and I think—or, at least, I will try to make you happy. Will you have me, Hilda?"

A whirl of emotions crowded in the girl's mind.

Two things stood out pre-eminently among the rest—first the thought of her work, her art, her novel—and second the realisation that she liked—only liked—she would own no more than that—she liked this Edgar Stanhope very much indeed.

"Oh, I am so sorry," she said, while little pink blushes chased one another across her cheeks. "But it can't be—oh, it can't be! I must think of my work, Mr. Stanhope. If I mar—I mean, if I were so silly as to let such things enter my life, I should never be able to devote all my energies to art and the gifts I unquestionably possess. I must do like the man in the parable, you know, and render up a worthy account of my talents."

Edgar Stanhope seated himself on the rustic bench beside Hilda.

There was silence for a minute or two, and then Edgar said:

"Nature has endowed you, as she has endowed all true women, with an inexhaustible capability for loving. Is this talent to be neglected because of your conscientious realisation of the responsibilities of others?"

Hilda was becoming a little impatient.

"Oh, why didn't you choose Maud or Evelyn?" she said impetuously. "I believe either of them would have accepted you. *They* haven't any higher responsibilities. Why didn't you ask them?"

"Because," replied Edgar simply, "I didn't happen to fall in love with either of your sisters."

Hilda sighed.

"It's very worrying," she said with emphasis. "I'm sure Evelyn would have made you a splendid wife."

Again there was a short silence, at the end of which Edgar asked:

"Don't you love me a little, Hilda, ever so little?"

Hilda shook her head.

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"I like you awfully," she said. "But—but I don't love anybody."

Edgar Stanhope looked searchingly into her face. Her eyes met his, and a deep blush swept over her cheek. In an instant she had averted her eyes, and Edgar Stanhope turned away his head. He sighed, but there was a light in his face that certainly did not look like failure or hopelessness.

"Well," he said at last, and he spoke the words slowly, "I think I'll take your advice, Miss Stanhope. I'll make myself agreeable to Evelyn, and, at the end of a month, if I feel justified in doing so, I will propose to her. Allow me to wish you a very good afternoon."

He rose as he finished speaking, and, with a low bow, left her alone on the rustic seat by the park lake.

It seemed so strange when he was gone. There was a sense of loneliness in the air.

Hilda Latimer tried to shake off the feeling, and once more returned to her meditations concerning the forthcoming novel. But somehow the current of her thoughts had been interrupted, and, try as she might, they would not resume their former course. With an exclamation of impatience she got up and returned to the house. And all the way she was thinking of her sister Evelyn.

"She'll be very happy," she said, and then added: "I'm glad my work demands all my attention. It's ever so much better than this everlasting love-making and marrying, and all the rest of it."

But the thought didn't appear to afford her much real consolation after all.

The next day Hilda Latimer sat down before a little table in the seclusion of her own private sitting-room and wrote the title-sheet for her forthcoming novel.

Before beginning, she chanced to glance out to the park beyond, and had caught a distant glimpse of Edgar Stanhope and her sister Evelyn.

The sight seemed to disturb her. It was very absurd, particularly as she herself had recommended it. She wrote half a chapter, and then, her disgust deepening, she tore the whole to ribbons.

A solitary walk through the woods brought her no relief, and she sat down to dinner in a state of inward perturbation. Outwardly, however, she was frigidly self-possessed.

Edgar Stanhope, who was her guest, devoted himself with marked attention to the fair Evelyn, who smiled upon him graciously. Already it seemed as if some definite, though as yet unspoken, understanding existed between them, and Hilda frowned as she watched him wait upon her, anticipating her wishes even before they could be uttered. It was clear Edgar Stanhope had taken her suggestion seriously, and, as she herself had predicted, her sister Evelyn was in no way averse to the attentions of their handsome guest.

It was all just as Hilda had proposed it, and yet she was growing unaccountably miserable at the sight. He didn't even look at her.

And so the days went by, till at the end of a month Hilda had discovered the root of the whole matter and asked no further questions of herself.

A month! He had said he would devote himself to Evelyn for a month, and then, if he felt justified in doing so, ask her to be his wife.

She counted the days and the weeks since that meeting by the park lake. It was just a month ago this very day, and her heart almost stood still as she remembered it. What would he do? Ah, she knew that well enough! She had surprised them more than once, and, though their attitude had scarcely been that of recognised lovers, it had been enough to show Hilda what must be the inevitable issue of their obvious attraction to each other.

He was going away to-morrow—going back to London and his chambers in the Temple, and she knew he would put his question before he went. She stood looking out of the window, a drawn, sad little look on her lovely face, and caught a glimpse of him as he entered the house from a stroll in the park.

There was a look on his face that sent a quick pang to her heart

Evelyn was in the drawing-room, sitting there alone, and she heard him go in that direction. With a little gasp that was curiously like a sob, she put on her things as she had done a month ago and wandered down to the park lake. It was the same scene, the same rustic seat, and yet how different everything seemed.

Art? It had turned to ashes at her touch! Her great novel? She had burnt even the title-page!

What was the matter with her? Alas, she knew now, and the knowledge had come too late! Two big tears trembled on her long, dark lashes, but she brushed them away with an angry gesture. Evelyn was happy—that ought to afford her some consolation. Yet it didn't do even that. She was very miserable, and her heart ached and yearned for what it could not have.

"Good afternoon, Miss Latimer.'

Hilda gave a little start, and looked round in undisguised astonishment.

"Oh," she said, a faint tinge coming into her cheek, "I thought you were indoors, Mr. Stanhope."

"I don't know if you remember," he said slowly, "but it's just a month to-day since we sat on this seat together and you counselled me to think of your sister Evelyn in the light of my—my future wife."

He paused, and looked swiftly at his companion. But she never spoke, and he continued:

"I have spent the month, Miss Latimer, in acquainting myself with the disposition and qualities of your fair sister, and the task has afforded me more pleasure than I can ever express."

Again he paused, and glanced quickly at the girl at his side. Her face was very white, and there was a suspicious tremour of the lips.

"I'm so glad," she said, in a low, strained voice. "Evelyn is a splendid girl, and—and I hope you will be happy, Mr. Stanhope."

Edgar smiled and looked away. When at last his eyes returned to the white face at his side a great, happy light blazed up in them, and he put out one hand towards her. She flushed painfully as she saw the action, but did not move.

"Hilda," he said gently, "have you found out yet that there is more in love than in art?"

"What—what do you mean?" she gasped.

"What I have always meant," Edgar said earnestly. "I have always loved you—and only you. Won't you have me—now?"

Hilda looked up in helpless bewilderment.

"But—but Evelyn?" she said protestingly. "You—you love her—now!" The words seemed to choke her, but she must voice them.

"Evelyn is a dear, good girl," Edgar replied, with a smile. "She knew I loved you, and, like me, she thought you might grow to—to care for me. So we put our heads together and evolved a plan which would stimulate your love, if any existed at all, by means of your jealousy. And she has sent me to you now, dear, to ask you once more to be my true little wife. You don't love me now, don't you, darling?"

She nodded her head, for her lips were trembling too much to speak the word he wanted. But he stopped their trembling by touching them with his own and kissing them passionately.

"What about the novel?" he asked banteringly.

"Oh, bother the novel!" she pouted.

"Let's see," he said teasingly. "There was a man—and a girl—and an obstacle—and, in the end, complete understanding and—and happiness. Wasn't that it?"

Hilda nodded.

"Well," he said, "if we aren't novelists, we're dramatists, for though we have not written the story, we've acted it to perfection."

And then they went back to Evelyn, who met them with a laughing, mischievous face, and then ran away again before Hilda had time to scold her for her innocent little part in the deception which had been practised upon her.

So Art was routed by Love, and when Edgar Stanhope returned to town the following day, he left behind him the happiest girl in all England.

W. J. Mowbray.

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A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIMENT.

Telling How a Tyrant was Out-Tyrannised.

"I COULD get along with him, I'm quite sure," cried Minnie Roberts.

"Nobody could get along with him!" chorussed the three other Misses Roberts in unison.

Uncle Henry was the personage of whom they spoke—a crabbed, ill-tempered, little old man—who lived in a superb old country seat in Suffolk.

He had money to leave, but his nieces and nephews secretly believed that it would be a deal easier to go to Klondyke and dig fortunes out, nugget by nugget, than to stay at home and earn them by making themselves acceptable to the old gentleman.

Emma Roberts had tried it first.

"No one can help loving Emma," said Mrs. Roberts, as she kissed her daughter good-bye.

But in three weeks Emma came back, half-frightened out of her wits.

Madge Roberts went next, but Madge, although a fine girl, with a spirit of her own, was cowed by Uncle Henry's savage eyes in less than a week.

"I'd sooner sweep crossings for a living," said she, "than be his heiress."

Rhoda Roberts, in no wise abashed by the successive failure of her sisters, was the third one to try Black Grange and its possibilities. But she also succumbed before the terrible scourge of her uncle's savage tongue.

"It's scold, snarl, snarl, scold, from morning till night!" said Rhoda, as in three days' time she tearfully related her experience to her parents.

But here Minnie, the youngest, tallest, and prettiest of the four girls, spoke up:

"I could get along with him, I'm quite sure," she said.

It was sunset—a red, flaming sunset—when she came up the terraced flight of steps that led to the house. Uncle Henry stood on the steps.

"So you are Minnie?" said he, surveying her with little twinkling eyes, like glass beads.

"Yes, I am Minnie," said the bright-cheeked girl, giving him a kiss.

"You're late," said Uncle Henry.

"I am late," said Minnie. "I thought the old carriage never would get here. The horses fairly crept and the roads were horrid."

"It's a dreadfully warm day," growled Uncle Henry

"I'm almost baked," sighed Minnie.

"The whole summer has been rather warm," said the old gentleman.

"We might as well be in the tropics and be done with it," retorted Minnie, flinging off her jacket and fanning herself vehemently.

Uncle Henry gave her the keys that night, just as he had three times before given them to her three sisters.

"I shall expect you to take charge of the whole establishment," said he. "The servants are miserable——"

"No more than one might expect," interrupted Minnie, with a deprecatory motion of her hand. "Servants are mere frauds nowadays!"

"And nothing goes right about the place."

"Nothing ever does," said Minnie.

At breakfast next morning Uncle Henry began to scold as usual.

"Fish again!" said he. "This makes four mornings this week we've had fish."

"I detest fish!" said Minnie, pushing away her plate.

"And the bread stale again!" growled Uncle Henry, breaking one open.

"Please give me the plate, Uncle Henry," said Minnie, and she rang the table bell sharply.

Betty, the cook, a stout, good-humoured woman, made her appearance.

"Betty," said Miss Roberts, "be so good as to throw this bread out of the window."

"But what am I to eat for breakfast?" bewailed Uncle Henry.

"Biscuits, of course," said Minnie. "Anything is better than imperilling one's digestion with such stuff as this! And, Betty, if you send up any more fish in a month you may consider yourself discharged—do you hear?"

"But, my dear, I am rather fond of fish," put in the old gentleman.

"One can't eat fish the whole time," said Minnie imperiously. "Here, Betty—this coffee isn't fit to drink, and the toast is burnt, and you must have put the cooking butter on the table by mistake! Let these errors be rectified at once."

"My dear," said Uncle Henry, "Betty is a very old servant, and——"

"I don't care if she is the age of Methuselah," said Minnie; "nobody can be expected to put up with such wretched cooking as this!"

"I really think she is not so bad, if——"

"Oh, pray don't apologise for her, Uncle Henry," said Minnie. "They are all lazy creatures, who must be discharged promptly if they don't do their duties."

Uncle Henry began to look frightened. He had kept Betty, Jane, and old John for ten years. Was it possible that he had scolded at them for ten years, only to have Minnie Roberts outscold him now?

"My dear," said Uncle Henry, "Betty is generally very excellent, if——"

"Dear uncle," interrupted Minnie, "pray permit me to be the judge of these matters."

Old John, the gardener, was not exempt from his share of the general turmoil. Miss Roberts chanced to hear her uncle reproaching the old man for some fancied neglect in the flower-beds, the pride of his horticultural heart, and she promptly came to his aid.

"Gardening, indeed! Do you call this gardening?" she said. "Uncle Henry, I'm astonished that you keep such a man as that about the place!"

And the torrent of taunts and reproaches which she showered upon the luckless head of poor old John was enough, as that individual observed, "to make one's flesh creep."

"My niece is a young lady of spirit and energy," apologised the old gentleman, when Minnie had gone back to the house.

"Verra like you, sir, verra like you!" said old John.

"Like me!" said Uncle Henry slowly.

And he stood full five minutes, quite speechless and motionless. And at the end of five minutes he spoke two other words, and only two:

"Like—me!"

"There's no knowin' the master, he's that changed," said Betty in the kitchen a week or two later. "He's as mild as a lamb and as peaceable as a kitten."

"Well, isn't that what the young lady told us," said Jane, "when she came down into the kitchen, the first morning after the fire was lighted, and told us she was goin' to try an experiment? We wasn't to mind a word she said, 'cause it was all by contraries. 'He don't know what his temper has got to be,' said she, 'and I'm going to show him.' And, bless her sweet heart, her plan has worked like a charm."

But Uncle Henry took all the credit to himself. He never knew that Minnie had taught him a lesson. And Minnie was his heiress and darling after all—for he will always believe that it was he "who formed her character."

T. B. Handell.

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WON BY MISTAKE.

Telling of the Curious Dilemma in which Dick Hervey Found Himself.

"THIS is getting on my nerves!" muttered Dick Hervey, pacing up and down the little room which was an offshoot, so to speak, of the private office of Mr. Roger Markham, the head of the firm of Markham and Company, wholesale commission agents. "There's no doubt that the chief is very fond and very proud of his two daughters, but it's a bit hard on a fellow to—to have to put up with as much of it as I do!"

Dick Hervey was his employer's confidential assistant, and as such was intrusted with a good deal of private work as well as office work. He was a go-ahead young fellow, and had risen by sheer ability from the post of errand boy to his present position. He had brains enough to acquire the kind of knowledge which would be useful in that line of business, and in that office in particular, and he was reaping the reward of intelligent and faithful service.

"He would be jolly wild, I expect, if he had any idea of—of——" There Dick stopped and reflected. "I don't see why I shouldn't risk it!" he mused, half audibly. "I believe she rather likes me, you know, and she's just the kind of girl who would make a fellow so happy that he didn't know where he was! 'Faint heart never won fair lady,' so they say, and a girl likes to think that a fellow has done something bold in order to get her!"

He allowed his thoughts to wander again for a few seconds.

"If the chief hadn't had those photos stuck up there I might have got over it, although I was a bit smitten when I saw her and her sister; but when you are brought face to face with a girl's photo every day, and you are half in love with her into the bargain, and you have to mix up with the private business and learn what they are doing this day and that day and hear their praises sung constantly, why it adds fuel to the flame! I am always hearing about them, and they are always hearing about me, because they continually ask the chief to get me to do this and that for them. In fact, we are almost friends without knowing it! Dash it! I'll risk it!"

This resolve taken, Dick's face assumed a determined expression, and he stole in the empty room of his chief and gazed at the two photos. The girls were just budding into womanhood; one was decidedly pretty, the other was plain. There was a charm about both, but the appearance of the pretty one was far more calculated to attract than that of her sister.

"That's my choice!" muttered Dick Hervey, gazing fixedly at the photo of the more attractive girl. "That's Lizzie; I suppose it's really Elizabeth. I'll begin to-day! The chief himself has opened the way by leaving me to send this packet home for him as he is going to stay in town to-night to attend a dinner. 'Address this to my daughter Lizzie,' he said, just as if I knew whether she had been christened Lizzie or Elizabeth. I will add something to the parcel, and that will set the ball rolling."

He had to write a note with the parcel, at the request of his employer, explaining why the parcel was sent instead of being taken home by the proud father, and Dick had the temerity to add a postscript, begging the girl's acceptance of a curiosity which he had "come across" in the city. This was a small book, sold for sixpence, a miniature edition of Handel's "Messiah," with music and words. Lizzie Markham was fond of music, he knew, and the book would arouse her interest.

"I shouldn't be surprised if the chief thought I was trying to woo his daughter in order to get a lift in life; but I don't think that Lizzie will have the same bad opinion of me! I don't care a snap for his money; I can work, and I'll get on in life just as he has done. *I* don't care if he cuts her off with a shilling, and I fancy that she will be of the same mind. She looks as if she had some go in her!"

It must be confessed that Dick Hervey waited in some trepidation for the result of his first step; he was self-reliant, ready to stand up for himself, but he expected to receive an angry summons from Mr. Markham two mornings later. "I'll own up straight off!" he muttered to himself as he heard the chief enter his private office. "I'll tell him candidly that I am in love with her, and take my chances!"

The bell rang, and Dick entered with a pretended air of nonchalance.

"Just help me through this correspondence, Hervey," said Mr. Markham cheerfully. "Oh, here, before I forget it. Lizzie wants this book changed at the library; see to it, will you!"

He handed a parcel over the table, and Dick Hervey felt a thrill as his hands touched the paper. There seemed to be something magnetic about it; the very knot with which the string was tied suggested a lovers' knot; he longed to cut the string and open the parcel, but he had to control himself.

So far his first step had not been altogether unsuccessful, because Mr. Markham had received no complaint from his daughter—that was evident!

That correspondence seemed endless. At last it was done, and Dick retired to his own apartment. In an instant the parcel of books was opened. A cold chill had swept over him during this rapid process; suppose that Lizzie had deliberately returned the "curiosity" without a word! No! There was a note on the top of the book and it was addressed to him.

It was a pleasant, simple note with a ring of genuineness in it. Lizzie Markham thanked him prettily for the "curiosity," which had greatly interested her. She supposed that he, too, was fond of music. Would he be good enough to send the office boy to the library in order to change the book sent for another?

"Good!" Dick nearly forgot himself and began to shout. She was not only not displeased; she was quite friendly over it. If she had not been interested in him, as well as in the book, she would not have said anything more than a few words of thanks, stiff and formal, whereas she had ventured to say that she supposed he was musical! The book she

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wanted in exchange for the one returned was a book of poetry, and Dick saw another opportunity.

That evening he handed to Mr. Markham the exchange book, neatly packed in brown paper, and the unsuspecting chief took it home without the least notion that he was being made the medium of a love correspondence. Yet in that parcel was a note from Dick Hervey to Miss Lizzie Markham, in which he replied to her inquiry, spoke of the pleasure which certain poems in the new book had given him when he had read them a few days previously, and artfully started an exchange of letters that was to end in undying affection.

"I'm going on with this, and will bring it to a head as soon as I can!" was Dick's comment when, two days later, he found another note in a parcel. "I don't want Mr. Markham to think that I am doing anything underhand. Perhaps he won't be so much annoyed, because Cissie, the plain one, seems to be his favourite."

In answering the second note, Dick grew more bold, and the contents of his reply necessitated a rejoinder that settled for ever in Dick's mind the question whether or not the girl entertained for him a feeling warmer than that of mere condescending friendliness. Within another fortnight a regular correspondence was going on, and the tone of the letters was growing more and more affectionate.

As the correspondence ran its course, the lovers saw each other's character unfold in a manner that surprised and delighted them. Lizzie discovered that the young confidential clerk had qualities which would have been suspected by very few; it was not till one obtained an intimate knowledge of him that these qualities became visible. He was manly, affectionate to a degree, and of sterling worth in every respect. As for Dick, he had not conceived that the girl upon whom his affection had been centred would have proved so womanly, so lovable, so noble. It was a contradiction to the general belief, an exception to the rule, that those who have been gifted with a charming exterior should not be so well endowed with the inner graces.

"Take her, my lad," said Mr. Markham, "and make he happy."

At the end of six weeks there was no longer any question of uncertainty; both had expressed themselves in a way that left no room for doubt that they loved one another.

"I am sending you a photo of myself, dearest," wrote Dick in one letter, "and I should like one of yours."

Lizzie replied that she had not one solitary photo left, but that she would have one taken especially for him.

Having arrived at this stage in their distant courtship, it was but natural that the lovers should cast about for some means of effecting a meeting. Dick longed to take the girl in his arms and kiss the original of the photo in Mr. Markham's office, and he boldly told her so in one letter. He suggested various ways of bringing about a meeting, but all savoured of the clandestine and did not commend themselves exactly to Lizzie.

"I wish it could be arranged that papa would bring you home to dinner one evening," she wrote in the letter in which she gently rejected his schemes. "I will try to engineer it. It seems to me that you might come with him one Saturday and stay till Monday, helping him to make up arrears during Saturday afternoon and evening and then having Sunday free!"

"Splendid!" ejaculated Dick. "I wonder if it can be worked?"

If the lovers had been more cool-headed, they might have considered that this was working matters a trifle under the board, but they saw nothing against it. "We shall soon have to own up, so I want to see her and settle how and when we shall do it!" muttered Dick several times during the next few days.

He waited for some sign of Lizzie's contriving, and he had not long to wait. Mr. Markham jerked it out on the Friday morning, in his spasmodic style.

"I say, Hervey, I don't seem to get even with some of these things this week. How would it suit you to come down to Elstree with me to-morrow and stay till Monday morning? You could help me during the afternoon, you see, and then you'd find it pleasant round there on Sunday at this time of the year. What do you say? Any appointments on?"

"No, sir! That will suit me quite well!" responded Dick. He spoke deferentially, taking care not to show too much readiness.

"Then that settles it!" said Mr. Markham, looking pleased.

The head of the firm rather liked the young fellow, who did not take a yard when he was given an inch, as some up-to-date young fellows are apt to do. It did not occur to Mr. Markham that Dick might take Cupid as a companion.

Dick's heart beat high at the prospect of meeting his beloved; in fact, it did not resume its ordinary rate of motion for the rest of that week. He went about like one in a dream till the moment arrived when he was to accompany Mr. Markham to the train *en route* for Elstree, and then the nearness of his happiness had the effect of sobering him.

They were nearing Elstree when Mr. Markham introduced the subject of his daughters.

"You have seen them, haven't you? Yes, of course; they have been to the office two or three times—not lately, though. I expect you young fellows have smiled at me for having their photos in my office, but they are very dear to me. Especially—well, I ought not to make invidious distinctions, for they are both very good girls, but Lizzie takes the place of her dead mother more naturally than Cissie, somehow. Lizzie's photo is the left-hand one, you know—the one nearest the door."

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"You mean that that is the photo of Miss Cissie, as you call her, sir?" corrected Dick quietly.

"Cissie?" said Mr. Markham, looking up questioningly. "Did I say——. What did I say? I thought I said Lizzie! That's what I meant, at any rate! Her photo is nearest the door. Some people think she is decidedly plain, and I admit she has but a modicum of good looks to help her; but Lizzie is my favourite! Only you mustn't say anything of what I have said to you, young man! I fear that I have been telling tales out of school!"

Dick Hervey turned and gazed out of the window, lest Mr. Markham should see the trouble in his face. What did it mean? He was dazed, but he realised that it meant that he had made a dreadful blunder! He had mistaken the names, and had been paying court to the plain girl! He had fallen in love with one girl and had declared that love to another! The plain one! He remembered now that she was just the least bit lame; very slightly and many persons would scarcely notice it. His soul revolted at the thought that he had been binding himself to this girl in words, while in his own heart he had given himself to her sister! He dimly heard Mr. Markham saying that Cissie was away for the week-end so he would have to face Lizzie alone!

It was a terrible dilemma; he shut his teeth hard and tried to think it out. The charm which had pervaded her letters appeared to vanish. How could he take this girl to his heart when he had believed that he was winning her sister?

Could he get out of the dilemma? He thought of pretending to be ill or something, and insisting on taking the train back to town. That would not help him ultimately, he remembered. No; the only thing to be done was to meet her and decide. He could take her aside, on the Sunday, and tell her the truth, asking her to release him. Or, and this was the alternative, he could meet her and say nothing of his mistake! In the former case, Lizzie would be happy, while he—what would that be for him? He could not tell! In the latter case he would be free, and Lizzie—would break her heart!

"What shall I do?" he groaned as the train stopped at Elstree.

As his feet touched the platform, his mental vision appeared to be extended. His whole being changed. Like a flash the many sentences and sentiments of Lizzie's letters passed through his brain.

"She will make a good wife," he murmured. "I will say nothing for her sake! If any one must suffer, it must be I! So I will meet her and let her continue to believe that I have never been thinking of the other. And perhaps—who knows?—I may afterwards be glad that I am acting thus!"

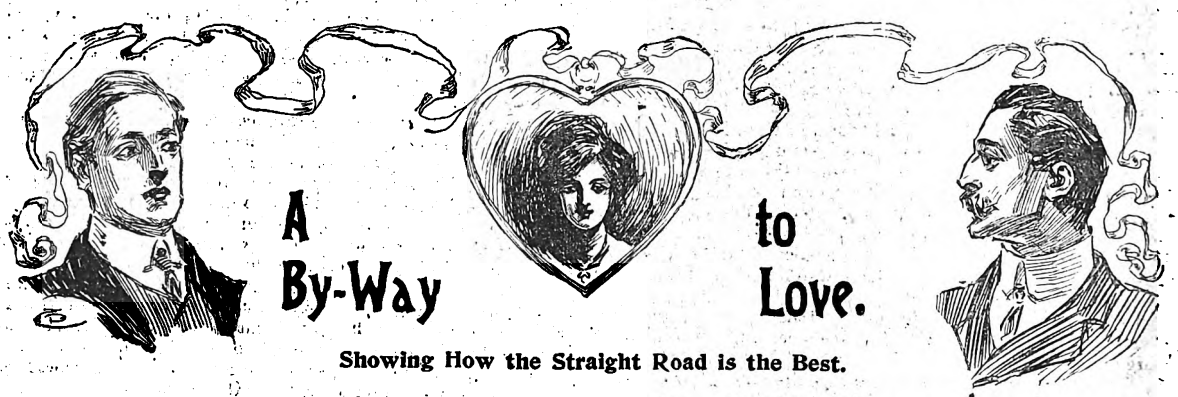
In that frame of mind he met her; and, without even asking for Lizzie's consent, he made a confession to Mr. Markham and requested the hand of that worthy gentleman's daughter in marriage. Mr. Markham was taken completely by surprise, but he promised to think it over.

It was on Sunday morning that Mr. Markham came up to Dick, leading Lizzie by the hand. The girl was blushing and her eyes were downcast.

"Take her, my lad!" said Mr. Markham with a tremulous voice. "And make her happy!"

"I will!" replied Dick Hervey fervently, as he kissed the girl he had wooed and won by mistake.

Lester Muscott.



A By-Way to Love.

Showing How the Straight Road is the Best.

"I can't get the girl's face out of my mind since I saw her a fortnight ago!" murmured Ralph Sothcott. He dropped his pen on the large blotting pad and leant back in his chair. "The fact is, I now discover that I have actually portrayed her—in physical appearance at least—as the heroine of my last short story. Phew!" He grew warm as he thought of the possibility. "I hope she won't read it and recognise herself!"

Ralph Sothcott was a rising young author; he was not conceited, rather the reverse, but it was not extraordinary that he should imagine that most people round about him should read his productions. This girl, whose name he did not even know, was a neighbour, although she apparently resided at one end of the long street and he lived at the other; it was highly probable that she would know about his writing and look out for his stories, and then——!

"I hope to goodness she won't!" he breathed fervently. "If I hadn't sent that manuscript in, I would re-write the story and cut her out! Yet I'm positive that I couldn't find a better character to substitute!"

Ralph Sothcott was conscious that he had spent a good deal of his time since that morning in watching for that girl to pass his window; he had been rewarded several times, and each time he liked the girl's appearance more, so that he had ended by discovering that he had fallen in love with her. He felt that he had committed an absurdity, but he could not help it. He had scrutinised her figure, her bearing, her features, and he had been satisfied with them and had deduced therefrom that her disposition was a loving and a lovable one. If it were not, he argued, her demeanour, the expression on her face, would all have been different from what they were. Yet, after all, it was mainly conjecture on his part!

"I don't care!" cried Ralph, rising and pacing the room restlessly. "I'm in love with her, and I cannot rest till I know more about her, till I come in contact with her. How can I manage it?"

That was a puzzle. Most other young men would have found little difficulty in carrying out some scheme whereby to effect a speaking acquaintance with this young lady, but Ralph was different. He could write love passages, he could evolve schemes and carry them out in fiction, but when it came to practice he was at a loss. He was too bashful to attempt any bold plan, such as some of his own masterful heroes had done.

"I believe that a girl likes a masterful man," he mused sorrowfully, "but I can't carry out anything so bold. I can think of any number of plans, but I couldn't carry them out to save my life!" And just then a horrible thought

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flashed across his mind and he felt an icy chill go slowly down his back. "Perhaps she is already engaged!"

Ralph Sothcott's feelings at that moment were not to be envied. He felt cold in the spine, but very warm in the head, while in the region of the heart there was such a strange sensation that even he, with his experience of describing the sensations of lovers, could not define. It was as if someone were clutching at that organ, preventing it from doing its work properly.

"Suppose she is engaged? I shall never know another happy minute!" he groaned, repeating the very last sentence he had set down on paper. The thought nerved him as nothing else could have done. "I must get to know her somehow, I *must!*"

Mrs. Peters, his landlady, could tell him about this dainty young lady, but he must be careful. Mrs. Peters looked after him well enough, but she was something of a dragon, and, moreover, she would not wish to lose her lodger, which would certainly happen if he married. He thought the matter over, and he went farther and farther into it till he had excogitated a plan whereby he might find out what the girl was like, if she were engaged, and, if not, whether she liked him—all without betraying himself. "It is so horrid," he told himself, "to lay your heart bare and then find that the object of your affection doesn't want it!"

Laura, his sister, had informed him on one memorable occasion that he would never marry because he was too timid to mingle with the other sex and to make love; and for the same reason, according to the same candid authority, he would never make a great name as a novelist, because a man who cannot make love will certainly not be able to write love passages and describe love scenes, as they should be written and described.

"I think I have succeeded fairly well at the writing," mused Ralph reflectively, "so I may falsify Laura's prediction in the other direction. Yet," he added suddenly, "I believe I succeeded better than ever in that last story, and—and I wrote that while I was falling in love!"

Ralph set to work immediately, and fortune favoured him.

"I have seen a young lady pass here day after day, Mrs. Peters," he mentioned innocently when she brought his tea. "Seems to me that she hasn't any work to do! I distinctly disapprove of girls idling away their young days just because they are too high and mighty to go out to work! It isn't right. It robs a girl of her independence to know that her parents will provide her with all she wants without her raising a finger to help herself!"

His tone was slightly indignant. Glancing askance at Mrs. Peters, he saw that worthy lady's face assume an expression of indignant protest.

"I'm sure you can't know what you're saying about Miss Effie Wallis, Mr. Southcoat!" she said haughtily. She found a difficulty in pronouncing his name as softly as it ought to be uttered, and she usually broadened the vowels and called him "Southcoat." "She is as nice a young lady as you'd wish to speak to—always so pleasant, so good-tempered——"

"I was sure of it!" cried Sothcott triumphantly. "I mean, I am pleased to hear it, Mrs. Peters," he corrected hastily.

Mrs. Peters looked at him with a puzzled air; she inwardly remarked that "them orthers are curious persons," and went on with her defence of Miss Effie Wallis.

"She is a right-minded girl in every way, as I happens to know, Mr. Southcoat. And the reason why she isn't doing nothing just now is as simple as can possibly be. She was in an office, doing shorthand and typewriting, and she hurt her hand. Then the manager wanted to get someone of his own into the place, so he said as he was sorry, but he couldn't wait till her hand got well, and he'd have to fill her place. And so she's been at home, but I do hear as she is looking out for a situation now, or going to."

Sothcott tried to hide his exultation by hastily taking a sip of tea, with the result that he nearly scalded his throat. Things were working in the very way he desired. The fact that Effie Wallis was a typine simplified matters considerably.

"How strange!" he remarked, as soon as he could speak. "I am even now advertising for a young lady to work here. I always have to get my copy typewritten, as most editors insist on it, and I rather fancy that I am suffering from writer's cramp; so I have decided that it will be best to employ a typine and dictate. Girls are best for such a position, and such a lady assistant will save me a lot of time, you know. Wouldn't it be curious if Miss Wallis were to answer the advertisement?"

Mrs. Peters admitted that it would, and even went so far as to say that if she knew the name of the paper in which Mr. Southcoat had advertised, she might contrive to turn Miss Wallis' attention discreetly in that direction. Either Mrs. Peters was dull, or she did not fear losing her lodger.

Sothcott had to be evasive; he had to say that as soon as the advertisement appeared for the second insertion he would let Mrs. Peters see it. And then he had to go out for a walk and take that advertisement straight to the office of a daily paper and arrange to have it appear on the following morning.

The result of that manœuvre was that Miss Effie Wallis made a personal application, which ended in mutually satisfactory terms being settled. Sothcott ordered a second-hand typewriter at once, and Miss Wallis thought that he was very easy to please—he agreed to everything so readily.

The commencement of the following week saw Miss Wallis installed in her new position; it also saw Sothcott more in love than ever and deeply embarrassed concerning his plan of work and his plan of a love campaign. How on earth was he going to dictate love passages of stories to her?

However, after the first morning they settled down fairly well. During the first day the work was prosaic, mainly consisting of collecting data for an article; the embarrassment almost vanished, and Sothcott noted with satisfaction that she wore no engagement ring!

Ralph Sothcott found that Effie Wallis was not a mere slip of a girl, but in reality a woman; she was twenty-three (he was three years older, he remembered), and she was sensible and would not laugh at this or that when he dictated it, like a giddy schoolgirl.

She took the endearing sentences in a matter-of-fact way that set him at ease; it was all business, nothing more.

It was sweet to have her near; she was so helpful that he caught himself wondering how he could have got on without her. In fact, it was so pleasant to have her with him that he postponed from day to day the further execution of his plan, lest she should leave him, as she would be bound to do if he made his love known to her and she did not return it.

Then the perversity of human nature began to manifest itself; he had hoped that she would not prove embarrassing, that she would take things in a matter-of-fact way; and now that she was doing so, he was cross. Why, if she acted so coolly, he would be quite unable to make any further headway with his scheme of love-making! It was too bad!

He flattered himself that it was rather an original idea; he intended to write a story, in which he would make use of certain remarks. Those sentences would be really intended for Miss Wallis herself; if she betrayed any emotion, he would understand that she was in love with him, and if she showed no perturbation, then he would assume that she did not care for him. In that way he would spare himself the pain of rejection, and she would not be forced to withdraw.

It was nearly a month after her first appearance when he made the venture; he could not delay any longer.

"Miss Wallis," he said, as she settled down at her table, ready for work, "I should like to give you an outline of the story I wish to commence this morning. It is rather strange, but I feel doubtful. That is rather uncommon with me, I think. I should like to know what you think of it."

"Certainly, Mr. Sothcott!" she replied with alacrity. Her face showed pleasure at this action on his part. "I don't know that I am a very competent judge, but I will do my best!"

"Oh, yes! You see, you are a woman, and you can tell me if I have judged them aright! I am afraid that my heroines are not always very human. I make the lovers talk a lot of rot to them, I fear. Do you think so?"

"They appear to like it!" answered Effie Wallis demurely.

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That was not encouraging; there was nothing in that answer to show whether Effie Wallis liked it or not. Sothcott felt awkward, but he plunged into an outline of his story, while the woman he was longing to fold in his arms sat as still and unmoved as a marble figure.

"Looks as if my case were hopeless!" thought Sothcott. "If she thought anything of me, I fail to see that she could have sat there and given no sign of having recognised that I have woven a story round two characters which are none other than she and myself! Yet she hasn't moved a muscle!"

"The idea is good enough," pronounced Effie Wallis critically, "but it seems to me that you do not work it out clearly. I think that you should make it plainer to the heroine that the hero is in love. A woman wouldn't think that she was being treated fairly, perhaps, to have it conveyed to her in such enigmatic fashion!"

"Oh, wouldn't she?" asked Sothcott apprehensively. "Then you think I had better make him convey it more plainly? All right! We can do that in the writing!"

Sothcott's heart was heavy; Effie had not blushed charmingly and given him the sign for which he was waiting. He must make some of his allusions in the story more pointed, not only for the edification of the heroine, but also for the benefit of the typine!

So he began to dictate the story. He described the feelings of the young man when he first saw the girl passing through the street, and told how he watched for her and wondered how he could get an introduction.

He grew quite eloquent on this portion of the tale; he was describing his own feelings, his own hopes and fears, and he could do it to perfection. In the depths of his own emotion, he surpassed his previous literary efforts and drew a really grand picture. He came back to himself with a start and glanced quickly at her for an indication that she had divined his secret; she looked a little warm, probably because he had been dictating at a quicker rate than usual, but otherwise she was perfectly self-possessed.

The next stage was to relate how they met, and in this particular he departed from actual fact; the hero and heroine met in a very conventional manner at a ball, and, in a quiet corner, the hero began a conversation in which he timidly tried to convey to the heroine the fact that he loved her without actually saying so outright. In the dictation of this portion, Sothcott was distinctly flat and hesitating. It was not at all on a par with the pathos of the first portion.

It was the dialogue that gave him the most trouble; he could not find the proper words, either for the hero or for himself. He wanted to tell Effie that he loved her—he desired to make her understand it, rather than tell her—and to gain a clue to her own feelings, but the flow of thought and expression would not come right.

He would first dictate something which had no actual meaning; then he would tell her to strike that out and begin again, only to dictate another sentence which appeared to have no relation to the subject. Or else he would say something which was too plain to fit in with the tenour of the story, and he would stop abruptly in the middle of it for two reasons; firstly, because it was out of keeping, and, secondly, because he was afraid that his own thoughts were showing themselves to Effie in too plain a manner.

The poor fellow was in a dilemma, and it must be conceded to him in palliation that a part of his trouble was due to a chivalrous desire to spare Effie the vexation of rejecting him if she did not love him and of leaving her present post and finding a new one. If Effie had manifested any irritation at the frequent erasures and "let us begin again on a fresh sheet of paper," it would have relieved him, but she worked on quietly and patiently, as a good typine should.

"I think I must give it up for to-day!" he cried at last. "I'm making rather a mess of it!"

"I am afraid you are!" returned Effie sympathetically, yet unequivocably. "I don't think the second part of the story is good, if I may venture to say anything."

"Certainly!" cried Ralph. "I shall be glad to hear your views; perhaps you can help me out!"

"That idea of meeting in the ball-room is so commonplace; it ought to have come about in a more original manner."

"It did, in reality!" said Ralph quickly, eager to maintain his reputation. "But go on!" he added. "I interrupted you."

"It seems to me," pursued Effie Wallis calmly, "that the hero is giving himself a lot of trouble for nothing! Why couldn't he have told her straight out that he loved her?"

Ralph's breath came hard; in his agitation he paced the room with uncertain steps. He was so full of himself that he forgot that the idea of the story was not in agreement with the fact, and consequently he uttered words which had no bearing on the fiction. He did not notice that he was betraying himself.

Effie stooped to pick up her eraser, which she had dropped while toying with it. Perhaps that was why her face was so red when Ralph glanced in her direction.

There was an awkward pause. Effie appeared to have caught some of Ralph's agitation, for she rose from her chair and stood on his side of the table, her fingers nervously playing with the eraser.

"You think we had better not go on with it?" asked Ralph sadly. He was hopelessly mixing the personal with the fictitious.

Effie did not answer for the moment, but when he glanced at her, in a quick, appealing manner, she roused herself.

"I don't think it is fair to her!" she exclaimed, her voice trembling just a little with emotion. "You are sparing yourself rather than her. I mean the hero, of course! The girl would sooner or later jump at what he meant, and she would really be refusing him! But suppose she did not intend to reject him? See what a position she is placed in! It isn't fair! Why not say it straight out and take the consequences? But in that case," she added, turning away to hide her burning cheeks, "I suppose there would be no story, because it would be the usual commonplace."

"You are right!" cried Ralph Sothcott warmly, "and I feel that I have not acted properly, under a mistaken notion. No story? Bother the story! What do I care about the story? I don't want it! It's *you* I want, Effie—there, I've said it straight out! Effie!"—he took her gently by the arm and compelled her to turn and face him, which she did with hot cheeks and a half defiant, half appealing air. "I want you, Effie; may I have you?"

Effie said afterwards, when she had smoothed her ruffled hair, that he didn't give her time to answer, but just took possession of her willy-nilly, to which Ralph retorted that he read her reply clearly enough in her lovely eyes!

"And you gave yourself such a lot of trouble to accomplish what might have been attained by going straight to the point," laughed Effie. "Oh, please don't! No, I cannot say exactly when I began to love you, Ralph, so don't bother! I shall have to reflect and trace the sentiment back to its origin! Now, are we to do any more work to-day?"

"Work?" echoed Ralph in surprise. "How can I work to-day?"

"You mustn't grow lazy!" she admonished, holding up a warning finger with mock severity. "You have assumed larger responsibilities!"

"That may be, but the story is a failure and we must tear it up!"

"Not entirely! The first part is grand, because you felt what you were writing. The second part can be torn up, and it can be written in a different strain. I think that will be quite easy with the help of recent experiences, don't you, Ralph?" she asked boldly, and with a merry light dancing in her eyes.

There was more confusion, and then Effie discovered that it was time she went home to lunch. She did not return because, as Ralph informed Mrs. Peters, it was arranged that she should remain at home till the wedding, and he would work alone. Left to himself that afternoon, he took up his pen and finished the story in a way that enhanced his reputation and made Effie supremely happy as she read it.

J. Hartley.

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PHANTOM SHADOWS.

A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

TWENTY-NINTH CHAPTER.

Theodore is Called to the Rescue.

WHEN Nella returned to the State bedroom both the doctor and the great specialist were again in attendance. The two physicians moved away from the bedside as she entered, and began to talk quietly together in the embrasure of the window.

"A curious case!" said the specialist.

"Yes. Of course, as you say, it's a neurotic temperament that's at the bottom of the trouble. When you've got that and a rigorous constitution working one against the other, the results are apt to be distinctly curious. Do you consider there is any hope, Sir Charles?"

"If I had seen him when he recovered consciousness I should have said there was hope. Frankly, when I left last night, or rather this morning, I didn't expect to see the Prince alive again—let alone conscious, and able to talk. According to all the rules of the game, he ought to get over the shock to the system with perfect ease and certainty. But I don't think he will. I don't think he wants to. And moreover, I think he is still under the influence of suicidal mania. If he had a razor he would cut his throat. You must keep his strength up. Inject, if necessary. I will come in this afternoon. I am due now at St. James's Palace." And the specialist hurried away, with an elaborate bow and a few hasty words of polite reassurances to Prince Aribert.

When he had gone Prince Aribert took the other doctor aside. "Forget everything, doctor," he said, "except that I am one man and you are another, and tell me the truth. Shall you be able to save his Highness? Tell me the truth."

"There is no truth," was the doctor's reply. "The future is not in our hands, Prince."

"But you are hopeful? Yes or no?"

The doctor looked at Prince Aribert. "No!" he said shortly. "I am not. I am never hopeful when the patient is not on my side."

"You mean——"

"I mean that his Royal Highness has no desire to live. You must have observed that."

"Only too well," said Aribert.

"And you are aware of the cause?"

Aribert nodded an affirmative.

"But cannot you remove it?"

"No," said Aribert. He felt a touch on his sleeve. It was Nella's finger. With a gesture she beckoned him towards the ante-room.

"If you choose," she said, when they were alone, "Prince Eugen can be saved. I have arranged it."

"You have arranged it?" He bent over her, almost with an air of alarm.

"Go and tell him that the million pounds which is so necessary to his happiness will be forthcoming. Tell him that it will be forthcoming to-day, if that will be any satisfaction to him."

"But what do you mean by this, Nella?"

"I mean what I say, Aribert," and she sought his hand and took it in hers. "Just what I say. If a million pounds will save Prince Eugen's life, they are at his disposal."

"But how—how have you managed it? By what miracle?"

"My father," she replied softly, "will do anything that I ask him. Do not let us waste time. Go and tell Eugen it is arranged, that all will be well. Go!"

"But we cannot accept this—this enormous, this incredible favour. It is impossible."

"Aribert," she said quickly, "remember you are not in Posen holding a Court reception. You are in England and you are talking to an American girl who has always been in the habit of having her own way."

The Prince threw up his hands and went back into the bedroom. The doctor was at a table writing out a prescription. Aribert approached the bedside, his heart beating furiously. Eugen greeted him with a faint, fatigued smile.

"Eugen," he whispered, "listen carefully to me. I have news. With the assistance of friends I have arranged to borrow that million for you. It is quite settled, and you may rely on it. But you must get better. Do you hear me?"

Eugen almost sat up in bed. "Tell me I am not delirious," he exclaimed.

"Of course you aren't," Aribert replied. "But you mustn't sit up. You must take care of yourself."

"Who will lend the money?" Eugen asked in a feeble, happy whisper.

"Never mind. You shall hear later. Devote yourself now to getting better."

The change in the patient's face was extraordinary. His mind seemed to have put on an entirely different aspect. The doctor was startled to hear him murmur a request for food. As for Aribert, he sat down, overcome by the turmoil of his own thoughts. Till that moment he felt that he had never appreciated the value and the marvellous power of mere money, of the lucre which philosophers pretend to despise and men sell their souls for. His heart almost burst in its admiration for that extraordinary Nella, who by mere personal force had raised two men out of the deepest slough of despair to the blissful heights of hope and happiness.

"These Anglo-Saxons," he said to himself, "what a race!"

By the afternoon Eugen was noticeably and distinctly better. The physicians, puzzled for the third time by the progress of the case, announced now that all danger was past. The tone of the announcement seemed to Aribert to imply that the fortunate issue was due wholly to unrivalled medical skill, but perhaps Aribert was mistaken. Anyhow, he was in a most charitable mood, and prepared to forgive anything.

"Nella," he said, a little later, when they were by themselves again in the ante-chamber, "what am I to say to you? How can I thank you? How can I thank your father?"

"You had better not thank my father," she said. "Dad will affect to regard the thing as a purely business transaction, as, of course, it is. As for me, you can—you can——"

"Well?"

"Kiss me," she said. "There! Are you sure you've formally proposed to me, *mon prince?*"

"Ah! Nell!" he exclaimed, putting his arms round her again. "Be mine! That is all I want!"

"You'll find," she said, "that you'll want dad's consent, too!"

"Will he make difficulties? He could not, Nell—not with you!"

"Better ask him," she said sweetly.

A moment later Racksole himself entered the room.

"Going on all right?" he inquired, pointing to the bedroom.

"Excellently," the lovers answered together, and they both blushed.

"Ah!" said Racksole. "Then, if that's so, and you can spare a minute, I've something to show you, Prince."

THIRTIETH CHAPTER.

Conclusion.

"I'VE a great deal to tell you, Prince," Racksole began, as soon as they were out of the room, "and also, as I said, something to show you. Will you come to my room? We

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will talk there first. The whole hotel is humming with excitement."

"With pleasure," said Aribert.

"Glad his Highness Prince Eugen is recovering," Racksole said, urged by considerations of politeness.

"Ah! As to that——" Aribert began.

"If you don't mind, we'll discuss that later, Prince," Racksole interrupted him.

They were in the proprietor's private room.

"I want to tell you all about last night," Racksole resumed, "about my capture of Jules, and my examination of him this morning." And he launched into a full account of the whole thing, down to the least details. "You see," he concluded, "that your suspicions as to Bosnia were tolerably correct. But as regards Bosnia, the more I think about it, the surer I feel that nothing can be done to bring their criminal politicians to justice."

"And as to Jules, what do you propose to do?"

"Come this way," said Racksole, and led Aribert to another room. A sofa in this room was covered with a linen cloth. Racksole lifted the cloth—he could never deny himself a dramatic moment—and disclosed the body of a dead man.

It was Jules, dead, but without a scratch or mark on him.

"I have sent for the police—not a street constable, but an official from Scotland Yard," said Racksole.

"How did this happen?" Aribert asked, amazed and stagtled. "I understood you to say that he was safely immured in the bedroom."

"So he was," Racksole replied. "I went up there this afternoon, chiefly to take him some food. The commissionaire was on guard at the door. He had heard no noise, nothing unusual. Yet when I entered the room Jules was gone. He had by some means or other loosened his fastenings; he had then managed to take the door off the wardrobe. He had moved the bed in front of the window, and by pushing the wardrobe door three-parts out of the window, and lodging the inside end of it under the rail at the head of the bed, he had provided himself with a sort of insecure platform outside the window. All this he did without making the least sound. He must then have got through the window, and stood on the little platform. With his fingers he would just be able to reach the outer edge of the wide cornice under the roof of the hotel. By main strength of arms he had swung himself on to this cornice, and so got on to the roof proper. He would then have the run of the whole roof. At the side of the building facing Salisbury Lane there is an iron fire-escape, which runs right down from the ridge of the roof into a little sunk yard level with the cellars. Jules must have thought that his escape was accomplished. But it unfortunately happened that one rung in the iron escape-ladder had rusted rotten through being badly painted. It gave way, and Jules, not expecting anything of the kind, fell to the ground. That was the end of all his cleverness and ingenuity."

As Racksole ceased speaking he replaced the linen cloth with a gesture from which reverence was not wholly absent.

When the grave had closed over the dark and tempestuous career of Tom Jackson, once the pride of the Grand Babylon, there was little trouble for the people whose adventures we have described. Miss Spencer, that yellow-haired, faithful slave and attendant of a brilliant scoundrel, was never heard of again. Possibly to this day she survives, a mystery to her fellow-creatures, in the pension of some cheap foreign boarding house. As for Rocco, he certainly was heard of again. Several years after the events set down, it came to the knowledge of Félix Babylon that the unrivalled Rocco had reached Buenos Ayres, and by his culinary skill was there making the fortune of a new and splendid hotel. Babylon transmitted the information to Theodore Racksole, and Racksole might, had he chosen, have put the forces of the law in motion against him. But Racksole, seeing that everything pointed to the fact that Rocco was now pursuing his vocation honestly, decided to leave him alone. The one difficulty which Racksole experienced after the demise of Jules—and it was a difficulty which he had, of course, anticipated—was connected with the police. The police, very properly, wanted to know things. They desired to be informed what Racksole had been doing in the Dimmock affair, between his first visit to Ostend and his sending for them to take chrge of Jules' dead body. And Racksole was by no means inclined to tell them everything. Beyond question he had transgressed the laws of England.

The inquest upon Jules aroused some bother; and about ninety-and-nine separate and distinct rumours. In the end however, a compromise was arrived at. Racksole's first aim was to pacify the inspector whose clue, which by-the-way was a false one, he had so curtly declined to follow up. That done, the rest needed only tact and patience. He proved to the satisfaction of the authorities that he had acted in a perfectly honest spirit.

One afternoon, a fortnight after the recovery of the Hereditary Prince of Posen, Aribert, who was still staying at the Grand Babylon, expressed a wish to hold converse with the millionaire. Prince Eugen, accompanied by Hans and some Court officials whom he had sent for, had departed with immense pomp, armed with the comfortable million, to arrange formally for his betrothal.

"I wish to tell you," said Aribert, "that it is my intention to renounce all my rights and titles as a Royal Prince of Posen, and to be known in future as Count Hartz— a rank to which I am entitled through my mother. Also that I have a private income of ten thousand pounds a year, and a chateau and a town house in Posen. I tell you this because I am here to ask the hand of your daughter in marriage. I love her, and I am vain enough to believe that she loves me. I have already asked her to be my wife, and she has consented."

"You honour us, Prince," said Racksole, with a slight smile, "and in more ways than one. May I ask your reason for renouncing your princely titles?"

"Simply because the idea of a morganatic marriage would be as repugnant to me as it would be to yourself and to Nella."

"I suppose it has occurred to you that ten thousand pounds per annum, for a man in your position, is a somewhat small income. Nella is frightfully extravagant."

"Nella must reform her ways," Aribert said.

"If she is content to do so," Racksole went on, "well and good! I consent."

"In her name and my own, I thank you," said Aribert.

"And," the millionaire continued, "so that she may not have to reform too fiercely, I shall settle on her absolutely, with reversion to your children, if you have any, a lump sum of fifty million dollars—that is to say, ten million pounds—in sound, selected railway stock. I reckon that is about half my fortune. Nella and I have always shared equally."

Aribert made no reply. The two men shook hands in silence, and then it happened that Nella entered the room.

That night, after dinner, Racksole and his friend Félix Babylon were walking together on the terrace.

"I suppose, Racksole," Félix said, "you aren't getting tired of the Grand Babylon?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I am getting tired of doing without it. A thousand times since I sold it to you I have wished I could undo the bargain. I can't bear idleness. Will you sell?"

"I might," said Racksole, "I might be induced to sell."

"What will you take, my friend?" asked Félix.

"What I gave," was the quick answer.

"Eh!" Félix exclaimed. "I sell you my hotel with Jules, with Rocco, with Miss Spencer. You go and lose all those three inestimable servants, and then offer me the hotel without them at the same price! It is monstrous," The little man laughed heartily at his own wit. "Nevertheless," he added, "we will not quarrel about the price. I accept your terms."

And so was brought to a close the complex chain of events which had begun when Theodore Racksole ordered a steak and a bottle of Bass at the *table d'hote* of the Grand Babylon Hotel

The End.

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THE MISSING CLUE.

Telling of an Adventure at an Old Well.

"THANK you, Miss Hensley!" There was a world of bitter reproach in Basil Cartwright's voice, and his handsome face emphasised the bitterness by the expression of deep pain that overspread it. "I love you, and I imagined that you were learning to return that affection; it did not occur to me that you were using me as a plaything, that you were amusing yourself with me in the absence of the man to whom you are secretly engaged!"

Macie Hensley started as if he had struck her; her lovely face grew as pale as death and then the colour came back to her cheeks and flooded them with crimson. Her eyes flashed, and her whole frame quivered as she straightened her tall, exquisitely-moulded figure to defend herself; but something seemed to stop the torrent of refutation which rose to her lips. For a few seconds she could not speak; when she did find her voice, the indignation had changed to something akin to an appeal.

"Why do you think so badly of me, Mr. Cartwright?" she asked with quivering lips. "I have never encouraged your attentions! I liked your society"—the crimson hue became a trifle deeper here—"but I had no idea! Yes, it is true—I am engaged! The engagement was not to be made known yet, and the revelation made to you just now through a slip of the tongue, places you in possession of information which I ask you, on your honour, to keep secret for the present! The engagement was not hidden by me to deceive you, as you have unjustly hinted!"

"Then why is it a secret?" he asked, forgetting that it was really no concern of his. "Are you not proud to let the world know that you have allied yourself to a man much older than yourself because he is rich?"

The girl shrank from him and raised her hands after the manner of one parrying a blow. That movement brought Basil Cartwright to his senses; his wounded feelings had got the better of him. In a moment the gentleman within him had triumphed.

"I beg your pardon!" he said humbly. "Whatever I feel, I have no right to upbraid you in that fashion! I will leave you now; I do not suppose that we shall meet again; I will try to keep out of your sight! I have not been drafted here long, so I can tell the head office that the place does not agree with me, and ask them to send me to a branch at the opposite end of the country."

He bowed and turned away. He stood motionless, gazing out of the window and apparently unconscious that he was standing with his back to her; he had lost himself in bitter memories. After a few moments he went slowly out of the room, talking audibly to himself, and she caught the name of John Poole, the man to whom she was engaged.

If Basil Cartwright could have seen Macie Hensley after he had left her, he would have modified his opinion concerning the real character of the engagement, and the whole course of events would have been changed. Life is full of those "Might-have-beens!"

So Basil Cartwright went on his way, uttering his thoughts half-aloud—went on his way to disaster!—and Macie wept in her trouble, knowing not of the greater trouble that was coming!

She learnt of that trouble very early on the following morning, when the news spread through the town like wildfire that John Poole had been found shot on the moor; and scarcely had she recovered from the first effects of this blow when she was told that Basil Cartwright was in custody on a charge of having shot John Poole and wounded him in a manner which was almost sure to prove fatal.

Some people said that the police had their hands full of work just then, for they were still in the midst of their task of unravelling the mystery of the many burglaries which had alarmed the surrounding gentry; or, perhaps, it would be more correct to say that they were only on the threshold of their task, for they had not made any headway. And now here was another burglary and an attempted murder on the self-same night!

Other people said that it was a good thing that the evidence in the case of attempted murder was so clear. It was true that nobody knew that John Poole had returned from his journey south, but that was not of importance, that seeing he *was* there, and badly wounded; but there was very little doubt that Basil Cartwright was the guilty party. Of course, Cartwright himself stoutly denied the charge; but his denial did not count.

The facts were simple. Poole was found lying on the moor, bleeding from a wound in the side; that was quite early in the morning. His watch and chain, his purse, with money in it, and other things (such as a gold pencil-case) were untouched; this pointed to some motive other than robbery, and revenge was the best motive to settle on. Now Basil Cartwright had been seen late at night not a long way from the moor, and he was heard to mutter the name of John Poole together with a remark that Poole had already done him one injury, and now was doing him another by taking Macie from him. The man who overheard this muttering was surprised at Cartwright's behaviour; the young man appeared to be a "bit looney-like." What had Miss Hensley to do with Poole? Poole had certainly paid her some attention, and the same remark applied to Cartwright himself; so—what? It did not take long for the inhabitants of the town to put two and two together, aided as they were by Macie's own incoherent words and her insistence on seeing the wounded, unconscious man.

Cartwright had been on the moor late at night; he admitted

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that, and it would not have been useful to deny it, for he had been seen on the edge of the moor, and near O'Grady's cottage. The curious thing was that a pearl was found near that cottage—a pearl which formed part of the property stolen by the burglars, who had entered Sir Richard Grenby's residence before midnight!

Then, Cartwright was confused when seen coming off the moor, and there was a bloodstain on his coat sleeve. He did not pretend that he had scratched his finger, or anything of that kind; he simply said that he couldn't account for it.

It did not take the inhabitants of the quiet town long to sum it all up. Macie had given the confirmation of the clue uttered by Cartwright in his muttering. Macie was secretly engaged to Poole; Cartwright also wanted her, and had been refused; in his jealous rage at this discovery, Cartwright had shot his successful rival, perhaps in a quarrel. Poole was not conscious, so he could not give any information whether there had been a quarrel or not, but as he had plainly been fired at from a point almost in front, it was quite probable that there had been some words between the two men.

The wound had been inflicted by a bullet from a revolver, but the revolver was not to be found.

After having attained her object in visiting the wounded man, who lay motionless and at death's door, Macie declared that she must visit the prisoner. Again she was so insistent that, through the influence of her uncle, her only relative, she was granted permission to visit Cartwright.

"She don't carry on much!" said one woman to another, as Macie left the house in which the wounded man lay. "Happen she don't care much for him after all. Queer affair, that engagement, eh? Wonder why she should hit on a man like Poole? She's as pretty a girl as you'd find anywhere, and it's no wonder that so many of the young fellows run after her!"

Yet the sight of the white, set face impressed them. Within that slight, girlish frame was an indomitable spirit; she was a girl who would do much.

They were granted a private interview, Macie and Cartwright, after the former had given a positive assurance that she carried no weapon or other instrument that could serve the prisoner. Macie repressed a shudder; it was not so much the question of an attempt at escape as the possibility of suicide, against which the police felt bound to take such precautions.

As Macie entered the cell, Cartwright, who had been seated with his elbows resting on his knees, and his face buried in his hands, looked up wearily. His face had grown very haggard in that short time. He stared at Macie as though he could not believe the evidence of his senses; then he sprang to his feet and faced her. Thus they stood for a full minute, gazing steadfastly at one another without speaking.

"Well," he exclaimed at length. "Why have you come here, Miss Hensley? To upbraid me for shooting your lover? Of course you believe me guilty, like all the rest?"

He spoke drearily; there was no trace of bitterness in his voice, only blank despair.

Macie's eyes had been fixed upon him with a penetrating gaze. As he finished speaking she held out her hand to him.

"No," she declared steadily. "I do not believe you guilty! I had my doubts at first, that is partly why I came here—to see if my doubts were justified. I am satisfied now that they are not!"

"Do you really mean that?" he demanded quickly, his whole demeanour changing. "Do you mean it?" he demanded again, seizing her hand with both his own, while his eyes looked searchingly into her, which withstood the scrutiny unflinchingly. "Heaven be thanked!" he added gratefully. "At least one person believes in my innocence!"

"I do!" confirmed Macie decisively. "And now, I wish to do what is possible to solve this mystery. The pistol must be found! You were on the moor somewhere about the time that the—the attempted murder took place. Did you see anyone or anything?"

"I passed two men near the edge of the moor," returned Basil, striving to collect his scattered thoughts. "One was O'Grady, I vaguely remember his voice. I had forgotten about the other man; that must have been just before I saw O'Grady. I brushed against him near that clump of bushes, you know the place better than I. You are not so new to the moor as I am. I apologised for brushing against him I recollect now, and wished him 'Good night' after the usual fashion, but he only growled."

"You brushed against him?" asked Macie eagerly. "Which side?"

"He was on my right," answered Basil, regarding her with some surprise.

"The bloodstain on your clothes—is that on the right?" was the further eager query.

"Yes!" came the swift response, as a light crept into the eyes of the accused. "Miss Hensley! Can it be——"

He was alive now; roused from the lethargy into which he had fallen, his eyes danced with intelligence.

"It means that you brushed against the murderer!" she declared positively. "It will be difficult to make the police believe that, especially if no trace can be discovered of the man, but we must try. I think I will visit the spot first, before the fact is mentioned to the police. I wonder that you did not tell them——"

"Because the events of yesterday upset me too much!" he said frankly. "I do not wish to rake up old troubles, Miss Hensley, but that is the truth. I am better now, and I can give all the known facts to the solicitor whom my friends will engage to defend me. If you can help me——"

"I must seek the key to this mystery, for Mr. Poole's sake, if for no other reason!" she replied slowly. "I will ask for another interview with you later. Perhaps not till to-morrow, though!"

They shook hands like old friends in mutual distress, and Macie left the prison. Cartwright fell back on his seat with a sigh; he was more deeply in love with Macie than ever. Miss Hensley wondered what the feeling was that disturbed her heart as she left the gloomy prison, but she refused to probe it. She was afraid, although she did not confess her fear.

"That clump of bushes," murmured Macie as she went along the town in the direction of her home in company with her uncle, a gentleman of some means, and much less ability. "The police are searching for the revolver, but they will not go so far as that clump of bushes yet. And those bushes hide a deep well, unused because the water became foul. Is it possible?"

With that extraordinary determination that comes to many of the seeming frail girls and women in times of trial—with the determination and courage that have made the name of the British women resound throughout the world in the troublesome times of war and the equally great dangers of peaceful cities—Macie went to work. She might have told the police and let them do the work, but she was possessed by an indefinable desire to do it herself, if it did not prove to be beyond her strength. That actuating desire was born of a sentiment which she recognised later.

She deemed it advisable to wait till dusk before venturing on her hazardous mission, but so soon as the daylight began to fail, she was off. Her easy-going, somewhat simple-minded uncle left her much to her own devices and she was often out at parties, so there was no difficulty. When well on her road, she began to reflect that it would have been better to have brought Jim, the odd man, or have told someone.

"No matter!" she told herself impatiently. "I have set out on the errand now, and I'll go through with it!"

It was quite dark when she came within sight of the clump of bushes; or, more correctly, it would have been within seeing distance if there had been a moon, but it was very dark. Macie knew where she was and made her way cautiously and unerringly to her destination.

"The old rope was still hanging from the stiffened windlass a few weeks ago," she muttered, "so I hope it is there still! Will it bear my weight, I wonder? If it hadn't been for the superstition of the people about here, that rope would have been appropriated before it reached its present condition, but the belief is that it is risky to have anything to do with the old

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well. It is a fact that three men lost their lives in the attempt to purify it!"

Superstition is not good in a general way, but Macie was grateful for the prevalence of that sentiment in the minds of those who lived in the neighbourhood, for it gave her the chance she desired. She penetrated the clump with unusual caution, for she fancied she might light on some other evidence in connection with the attempt on John Poole. Arrived at the well, she felt along the broken wall that surrounded the mouth and passed her hand along the windlass; the rope was still hanging!

She had dressed herself in a short, tight-fitting skirt, which she wore for gymnasium exercises and this left her tolerably free. In a moment she was seated on the crumbling wall and was pulling up the rope to ascertain if it were long enough to reach the bottom. This fact was ascertainable by examining the lower end of the rope; if it were frayed to any extent, it would suggest that it had been worn away. To her delight she found that the hook was still attached to the end, proving that it was entire.

"It remains now to prove whether it is strong enough to bear me or not!" she soliloquised. "It feels rather rotten, but it may hold. H'm! I shall have to risk it!"

It was a curious scene, this night scene in the clump of bushes! Some of the shrubs had grown to a length which made them bow over towards the well, thus forming something in the nature of a shelter.

Macie realised the risk she ran; if the rope snapped, she would fall a terrible way into the hollow that yawned below her, she would be so injured that she would lie at the bottom and drown or, if the well chanced to be dry, she would lie there huddled up till death came to release her from pain! Nevertheless, she set her lips firmly and prepared for the descent into the depths!

She had allowed the lower end of the rope to fall down the shaft; there was nothing more to unwind from the windlass; so she gripped the decaying line and gently swung herself off the wall that protected the mouth of the well.

It was a queer sensation, that of finding herself dangling between sky and earth, so to speak, but she resolutely banished all uncanny thoughts from her mind and went down, hand under hand, and feet twined loosely round the rope for support. When about half-way down, her heart gave a great bound; her hands had passed over a weak spot in the rope, where the strands were half worn through, and she realised that as she went lower and consequently increased the weight on this weak point, it might break!

At length, however, her feet touched something liquid and cold, and she knew that she had reached the water. Was it deep? Was there any ledge on which she could rest? At the same time she became conscious of an odour that might well prove stifling before she could accomplished her task.

"I must lose no time!" she cried, half aloud. "I must search quickly for the missing revolver and ascend, or I shall remain here for good!"

She swung her legs about and was rewarded by feeling a ledge to the right side of her; in a moment she was standing on it, holding the rope gingerly as a slight support. She unhooked from her belt a small acetylene lamp, but to light it she was forced to release her hold on the rope and seat herself on the ledge, with her feet in the water. In less than a minute she had the lamp alight, showing a bright glare wherever she directed its rays.

There was no trace of a weapon on the ledge which, as she could now see, ran along the side and round to the opposite end of the well, where a hollow cavity, big enough for two persons had been scooped out either by the hand of man or the action of the water.

"That will be a far better position from which to make a search!" she cried joyfully. "I must get there!"

It was not a matter of much difficulty to shuffle round to that side. There she was able to lie nearly flat on her face and grope about in the water with her right hand. She felt the bottom; there was only a foot of water—if the loathsome

The Wisdom of Gladstone.

THE late Mr. Gladstone used frequently to remark how careless his friend, John Bright, was of his health. It was generally believed that Mr. Bright never sought medical advice; but this was not quite correct, for the great Liberal orator one day astonished Sir Andrew Clark with his presence in that well-known physician's consulting room.

And yet Mr. Bright lived to be seventy-eight; so that we see, in spite of his alleged carelessness in matters of health, he lived to be an old man, and overlapped the average term of life. Mr. Gladstone almost climbed up into the nineties—but then Mr. Gladstone was all his life keenly watchful of his health and wisely safeguarded it. Even if Mr. Bright had made a better record than Mr. Gladstone, still the latter's practice would have been right and the former's wrong. It is the general average that tells the story.

In the autumn of 1889 (the year Mr. Bright died) Mrs. M. A. Bathurst, of Yelden, Higham Ferrers, began to realise that her health was failing. She felt low and weak without knowing why. She lost all relish for food, and often after her meagre meals endured much pain at the chest and sides, a tendency which increased until eating changed from a pleasure to a dreaded necessity. After a year this misery was intensified by an attack of acute rheumatism. "My legs, ankles, and knees were stiff and painful, and the joints swollen," wrote Mrs. Bathurst on October 5th, 1898, "so that I had great difficulty in getting about. I tried many medicines, internal and external, but obtained no more than slight temporary relief from the best of them until my attention was called to Mother Seigel's Syrup. That remedy completely rid me both of indigestion and rheumatism, so that I now live and work in comfort."

As it is sometimes alleged against rapid cures that their good effects are not lasting, we would again refer to the case of Mrs. Bathurst in proof that, however true this may be of many other medicines, it is certainly not true of Mother Seigel's Syrup. "Six years have now passed," writes Mrs. Bathurst, on March 24th, 1904, "since I was cured of indigestion and rheumatism by Mother Seigel's Syrup, and there has been no return of either complaint. My appetite is good, and I have no need to exercise special care as to what I eat. In fact, my general health is excellent, though I still take a dose of the Syrup now and again as a safeguard against a return of the rheumatism."

Mrs. Bathurst's precaution would have commended itself to Mr. Gladstone, who, in matters of health, would leave nothing to chance.

INDIGESTION

AND SLEEPLESSNESS

"Indigestion reduced me from a strong, healthy man almost to a shadow," says Mr. Alfred Clapham, of Windmill Lane, Cheshunt.

Dispelled by

"There was always a feeling of oppression at my stomach; and I suffered much from headache, want of appetite, and sleeplessness. From this wretched condition Mother Seigel's Syrup rescued me, after numerous other medicines had failed."

MOTHER SEIGEL'S SYRUP.

Price 1/1½ and 2/6 per Bottle.

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fluid could be so called !—in the well, and she was able to pass her hand over the greater part of the bed.

Nevertheless, the search was a long one ; she had to crawl along the ledge on hands and knees and place herself in several awkward positions before she could be sure that she had groped over the whole of the bottom of the well. She was feeling faint from the odour, and still no result !

It often happens that, just as we are giving up in despair, we attain our object ; it was so with Macie. Her hand struck something at the very moment that she was withdrawing it from the water after the final attempt. She drew it forth and saw a neat six-chambered revolver !

" Are there any marks on it ? " she asked herself.

Quickly she examined it in the bright light of the lamp. She uttered an exclamation of surprise and disappointment ; the revolver bore the initials of John Poole ! His own revolver had been taken from him and used against him ! This weapon afforded no clue to the would-be murderer ! Unless John Poole spoke, Basil Cartwright might suffer, and there was no certainty even that Poole could have recognised his assailant !

" The man he brushed against in the darkness must be the man who threw this in here," she murmured. " But who was it ? In the absence of Poole's evidence, Basil Cartwright will be regarded as the perpetrator. Oh, if I could find out who it was ! "

Had she been able to pierce the darkness which veiled the mouth of the well, she would have seen that man peering down at her, an evil light on his face. He was invisible to her, while he could see a figure with a lamp in the depths without being able to recognise it.

Macie hooked the lamp, still burning, to her belt and, gripping the rope, began the ascent. The fateful weapon was stuck securely in her belt close to the lamp, and the evil-faced man at the top saw it as she came nearer and nearer to the outer world. He smothered a horrible oath and drew a large jack knife, with a formidable blade, from an inner pocket.

" I ain't going to have no meddling with my business ! " he muttered savagely. " I don't want to send any more people home afore their time, but this one has got to go ! "

Leaning over the mouth of the well, he cried down it in a brutal tone :

" You needn't trouble to climb any higher, 'cos you're going down again, sharp ! I'm going to cut the rope, and serve you right for interfering ! I come here to get the swag, and I heerd yer down there. Well, down yer go again ! "

He slashed at the rope and his knife cut it through at the second slash. He chuckled fiendishly as he heard the fall, after which he listened intently for a while. It seemed to him that he waited five minutes, but it was in reality scarcely one. He heard nothing, he could see nothing ; satisfied that his work was well done, he moved off, muttering that he would leave the swag there for another day, as it would be safer not to have it in his possession.

And what had happened in the old well? Macie's heart had stood still with horror on hearing the voice, which she recognised as that of a suspicious character in the neighbourhood ; then the exact position flashed upon her mind and she slid down the rope again with alacrity. If the rascal had cut through the rope at the first slash, Macie would have been killed, but the short interval between the two slashes saved her ; she was near the bottom when the rope was severed and she fell into the water. Her lamp knocked against the ledge, and that was the noise heard by the man at the top.

Macie clutched the ledge and remained quiet, lest the ruffian should hurl something down on her. She waited for several minutes before daring to move, but at the expiration of that time she dragged herself to the cavity at the side and scrambled on it.

She was in darkness, the lower half of her body was drenched and she was helpless at the bottom of the well. What hope was there for her ? She might lie there and die ! She had been foolish to undertake such a task ! Yet, no ! As she lay there she understood why she had done it ; she loved Basil Cartwright and if he were to die—— But what was life to her in any case ? Marriage with Poole would be odious ; he had forced her to this engagement by the unmanly use of a threat to reveal what was only a tomboyish piece of fun but which might prejudice her in the eyes of others if it were made known in the manner hinted at by Poole ! She detested him, but she had been frightened into it. She blamed herself now for not having had more courage. And if Poole died ?

For a moment the idea seemed to give her pleasure ; she was only human, and it must be remembered that Poole had treated her shamefully by using this threat to tarnish her name ! However, she crowded back the unworthy thought, and she also remembered that Poole's death might be Basil's undoing.

" I must get out of this ! " she cried desperately. " Poole must live and he must say who his assailant was. He will know ! I am sure that Basil is innocent ; this adventure proves it, and I will use my influence over Poole if he once recovers consciousness ! "

Macie had found a piece of iron hooping, and with this she began to scoop out hand and foot holes in the side of the well-shaft. This was far more easy than she had anticipated, and she made good progress. She often had to descend to the ledge and rest, and she had to tie a handkerchief round her mouth and nostrils to insure air of slightly greater purity ; but at last, after working nearly all night, she was able to grasp the top of the wall at the mouth and drag herself out.

She lay on the ground near the well for nearly an hour, recovering strength ; it was daylight. As she rose to her feet she touched a paper, and an examination showed that it must have been dragged from the miscreant's pocket when he pulled out his knife. That paper made her brain reel, for on it were written a few lines which proved that John Poole and this ruffian, Dennis Carter, were in league and that they were the authors of the burglaries committed in the district !

She saw it all ! By reason of his social position, Poole could get the desired information and plans of houses ; in fact, more than one burglary had been committed while he was a guest at the house ! His income was largely derived from the proceeds of these robberies ! Carter was his tool, and they had probably quarrelled over the division of the booty. Carter had wrested the revolver from Poole and shot him ; he, Carter, had thrown the weapon down the well and had hidden the " swag " near by, but in some way he had dropped that pearl close to O'Grady's cottage !

Notwithstanding her condition, Macie went straight to the police headquarters and lodged her information ; even while the inspector was wondering whether it could all be true or Macie was suffering from mental derangement, a messenger brought the further information that Poole had recovered consciousness sufficiently to make a brief statement ; that statement was rather disconnected, but it confirmed Macie's story.

" Thank Heaven ! " cried Macie, and then she fainted.

The denouement followed quickly. A police officer hunted for the swag in the clump of bushes and found it. Carter was arrested and Basil Cartwright released. Poole having relapsed into insensibility again, died two days later without ever recovering consciousness again.

Carter was sentenced to a long term of penal servitude for manslaughter, for his counsel contended that he had shot the other in a struggle and without premeditation. Macie was the heroine of the town, and when she married Basil Cartwright the inhabitants made a general holiday of the wedding day.

G. Brewster.

SHE : " But if you say you can't bear the girl, why did you propose ? " He : " Well, her people have always been awfully good to me, and it's the only way I could return their hospitality."

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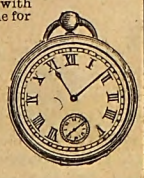

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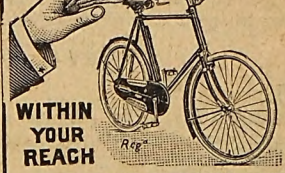

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Seeing a Lady Home.

THERE is no offence, whatever, "A. J. S. W.," in your seeing a young lady home, and, therefore, nothing to apologise about. The surest way to admit that you have done wrong would be to send such an apology, whereas your position should be that you have merely acted in a courteous way. If you have been in the habit of seeing her home rather too regularly, then, perhaps it is time you ceased to do so, as her parents do not seem to approve. Above all, do not get her into trouble over it.

Impressing Her Parents.

So, "EDWARD," you want to know the best way to make a good impression on your *fiancée's* parents on visiting them for the first time shortly. Of course, I shall be most happy to aid you. You say there is a father and mother, and several children, boys and girls ranging from twenty to two. Well, first of all, lay yourself out to make a good impression on the mother. This you will do in several ways. Let her see how devoted you are to the youngest child—the baby—and play a little with it, even if it does involve some loss of self-respect. Help mother lay the tea-table, and also, if necessary, to remove its contents after the meal. Cut the bread, hand the tea-cups, and pass things nicely. Manners are the first things an average mother looks at in a strange young man.

* * * * *

Having won the good graces of mother, give a look at father. Find out in what he is specially interested. If it is bagatelle, or whist, make out that it is one of your favourite hobbies, and implore him to give you a game. If you are wise you will contrive to let papa just beat you, after an exciting struggle. Don't play too well. If father gardens, you go and do a bit of gardening with him. Implore the elder of the young ladies to play the piano or sing, and express yourself in admiring terms. If you do either yourself, modestly offer to perform. On politics, slightly disagree with papa, but let him bring you round to his opinion in the end. That will impress him that you are an intelligent young fellow, with ideas of your own. Give little Tommy at least a penny, and be interested in his stamp collection. Don't take too much to eat or drink, or smoke more than a reasonable number of papa's cigars. Be devoted, finally, to your sweetheart, but don't monopolise the sitting-room, and ignore everybody else, in order to spend a while with her alone.

Too Young.

"A. McD."—The girl's parents are evidently against you because of your youth generally, and not merely because you are eighteen months her junior. I should advise you to accept matters for awhile, keeping on friendly terms with the family. When you get a little older, try again.

The Threatening Lover.

WHAT is the best way to deal with a suicidal lover? "MAUD" has grown very tired of a young man who has been trying to pay attentions to her for some time. She never really felt that she could love him, as her love is really in another quarter. This young man, now, has taken to threatening to kill himself. The other day he said: "If you refuse me I shall either drown myself, or go right to the bad. It is for you to decide."

* * * * *

That kind of young man must be dealt with very carefully. He would not in all probability carry out the more serious part of his threat, but it is quite possible that he might, for a little while, at any rate, go part of the way to the bad. You should save him from going even part of the way, and the best thing to do is not to refuse him with any suddenness. Allow him to continue his visits, and be as nice to him as you possibly can. If you can educate him by slow degrees into realising that your love for him is not of the extreme kind, and that by continuing to press his suit he is making himself rather foolish in the eyes of other people, and then take a long holiday yourself, not giving him any special address, the shock of rejection might be broken, and the distance he went towards either suicide or the bad might be not very far.

Cool Jealousy.

"My lover," writes "KITTY," "treats me coldly, and pays rather too much attention to my friend when she is with me. But if I speak to another man, he is very jealous. Does this show that he is tired of me? Is it well to let him know how much I love him, or should I act otherwise?"

* * * * *

I do not believe that a girl should make herself a slave to any man, "KITTY." If he pays too much attention to your friend, and is annoyed at your taking any notice of another young man, he is evidently trifling with your affections. Your best way to bring him back to you, would be to show yourself rather cool to him as long as he continues to pay attention to your friend. Let him see that flirtation is a game at which two can play, even if, on your own part, it is only a game.

Old Acquaintances.

"TEN years ago," writes "P. Q. R.," "I used to walk out with a young girl who lived in a cottage near my home. We were very great chums, and told each other everything we knew. Then I left the district, and though we corresponded at first, we soon got quite out of touch with each other. The other day, I was passing a concert hall, and my attention was attracted by the name of a singer—it was identical with that of the girl I had known. I went to the concert, and realised that it was she and no other. Now, would you advise me to claim her acquaintance again? While she has risen much in the world, and, perhaps has many admirers, I remain only a poor clerk."

* * * * *

Why not claim her acquaintance? She may have risen in the world, but if her heart was good when you knew her, she will not have altered now. She may, for all you know, have never met a man she really loved, as in such circles as those she moves in a woman may have many admirers, but no one lover. Ask to see her next time she performs, in the artists' room after the concert. And, take my advice, and don't talk over old times too much. It is a mistake old acquaintances too often make on meeting again, as little incidents of the long ago are sometimes best forgotten.

Cynthia

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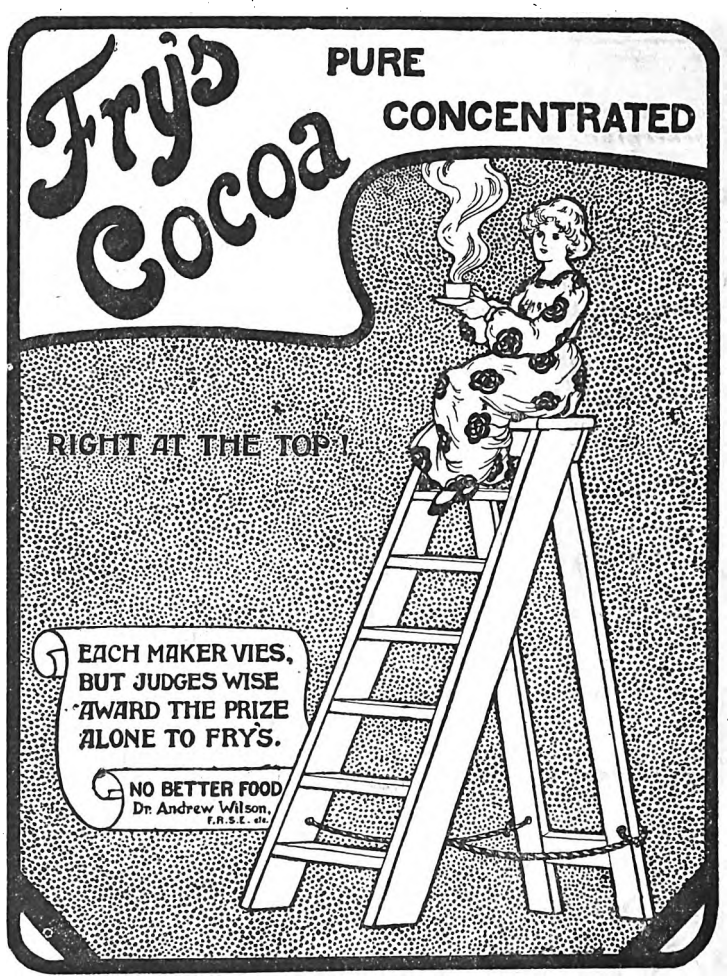

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